

**"Death does not concern us, because as long as we exist, death is not here. And when it does come, we no longer exist."**

—Epicurus

**The Shillong Times**

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**SC green light to ED**

IN an far-reaching decision, the Supreme Court has refused to accept arguments to clip the powers of the Enforcement Directorate in investigations into money laundering cases — cases that involve huge piles of unaccounted wealth in the hands of vested interests. Justice AN Khanwilkar, who retired as judge of the Supreme Court on Friday after a six-year-stint, passed the order shortly before his exit, affirming the discretionary (special) powers vested in ED under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (2002). This was a keenly watched judgment as over 200 heavyweight petitioners had engaged themselves in an epic battle against the central law.

The main argument against the law was that unchecked powers vested in an investigation agency meant a denial of the citizens' right to fair trial. Justice Khanwilkar rejected the argument. Under the special provisions, obtaining bail will be difficult. The onus is on the accused to prove he's innocent; not for the probe agency to prove he's guilty. As is usual here, the legal fight against the central law has passed through phases. In 2018, the apex court struck down the bail-related harsh provision etc., by saying that these were "unconstitutional". Thereon, the Centre passed a Finance Act, which retained the strict conditions for bail. Justice Khanwilkar ruled in favour of, this. Notably, the Modi government has, ever since it took charge in 2014, activated ED and unleashed it on a whole lot of people accused of amassing wealth through foul means. Nearly 4,000 such cases have been filed and pursued in the past eight years though most of these cases are dragging as is usual with cases in Indian courts. During the UPA periods, ED had pursued only around 200 cases. Question now is, will the SC order ensure speedy trial of the cases and fix the guilty.

Prima facie, it could appear that the army of well-heeled vested interests failed to get the law on their side. There is some hope now, but the proof of the pudding is in its eating. The common man's faith in the system is progressively eroding. Vested interests including those who engage in looting of the public exchequer and banks generally get away with their acts. While cases are dragged unendingly in the guise of investigations and trial, several loopholes surface for criminals to laugh their way out. Courts going on a merry-go-round in matters of serious national interest is both unacceptable and reprehensible. That Justice Khanwilkar understood the seriousness of the situation and took the case to its logical conclusion before his retirement is itself a soothing thought.

**Letters to the Editor**

**MeECL a milching cow?**

A letter to the editor by one Banshanlang Lyngdoh published in the Shillong Times on the July 14, 2022 had raised a serious issue of illegally allotting of energy billing for consumers of our State to one outside firm M/s Inventive Software Solutions Pvt Ltd also known as UGO Billing without inviting tenders. In addition, I have also heard that no Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) was signed between MePDCL and M/s Inventive before providing them the consumer data which could result in serious breach of privacy and also lead to manipulation of energy auditing. This is no doubt a very serious matter if true. As rightly pointed out by leader of opposition Dr Mukul Sangma, the government has made MeECL a milching cow, it has been made evidently clear from this instance.

The Government which stood guarantee for Rs. 1345 crore through Atmanirbhar loan to the MeECL which has been followed by an unconditional grant of more than Rs 700 crore from the state exchequer in the last 10 months is clearly resulting in the siphoning (milching) of all this amount through such illegal contracts. This amount could easily have

been used for paying of salary arrears of Adhoc and SSA teachers or payment of terminal benefits to former MeECL employees. Now, despite it being more than two weeks, we have not seen any clarification or statement from the Power Dept/MeECL on this matter. Plato once said "Your silence means consent". We the citizens of the State expect that the Power Dept/MeECL should not do anything that general consumers are affected financially in a negative manner. In this case we the citizens of Meghalaya feel a deep sense of betrayal.

Yours etc.,  
Khrav Sutnga  
Shillong - 1

**Is India ready for 5G technology?**

Editor,  
First, we need to know what the 5G Network Technology is. It is the 5th generation mobile network. It is a new global wireless standard after 1G, 2G, 3G, and 4G networks. 5G enables a new kind of network that is designed to connect virtually everyone and everything together including machines, objects, and devices. 5G wireless technology is meant to deliver higher multi-Gbps peak data speeds, ultra-low latency, more reliability, massive network capacity,

Are the 2024 general elections done and dusted already? A loaded question that hints at the ascent of a single party electoral democracy is now being increasingly answered in the affirmative. Recent political developments suggest that a 'Modified' BJP is on a roll even as the opposition remains in a state of utter disarray.

The toppling of the opposition coalition government in Maharashtra is the most dramatic example of the BJP's build up to 2024. By seizing the state with the second largest number of Lok Sabha MPs, the BJP has demolished a key citadel around which the opposition might have hoped to mount its 2024 challenge. The near-total implosion in the Shiv



Sena is not just a power struggle within the party but a coup orchestrated in Delhi by the top BJP leadership and only executed at the state level. The ruthless manner in which the operation was carried out with the full might of state power — from partisan central agencies, especially the Enforcement Directorate, to local police machinery in Gujarat and Assam to a pliant Raj Bhavan in Mumbai — it would seem that every opposition ruled state is on notice: even where the BJP is not in power, it will not lose an opportunity to turn the tables through a mix of inducements and coercion. Jharkhand reportedly could be the next target.

Coincidentally, in the week where the Uddhav Thackeray-led government was on its way out, the BJP was holding a national executive meeting in Hyderabad. Telangana, where assembly elections are due next year, is clearly on the BJP's radar, and the no holds barred attack on K Chandrashekar Rao and his family is designed to build a familiar 'party' versus 'parivar' narrative.

**Towards a Single Party Electoral Democracy**

By Rajdeep Sardesai

A similar grassroots leader versus privileged dynast storyline has been used to justify the coup in Maharashtra: now, the BJP is looking for an Eknath Shinde like disgruntled figure in other states who can challenge family run regional parties in Telangana and beyond.

That the south is a future target for the BJP is also clear in the fact that all four of the presidential nominees to the Rajya Sabha are from southern states, a move awash with political symbolism. In the 2019 general elections, the BJP won just 29 of its 303 seat tally from the five southern states, 25 of them from Karnataka alone. The

party is battle ready. With no clarity on its tangled leadership issue, it seems that the party is drifting in choppy seas without a captain at the helm. The lack of fighting spirit was visible in Maharashtra — once a Congress bastion — where the state party leaders appeared resigned to the fate of their coalition government from the very outset.

So is there an inevitability to a Narendra Modi hat-trick in 2024? Twenty months is a long time in Indian politics but it is hard to see what can change political fortunes. Yes, there isn't a level playing field in the contest: the BJP has access to enormous resources, media and institutional power that makes a mockery of the concept of

southern push reflects an ambition to expand the party's footprint into uncharted territory, — seats that the party has never won — even if the rewards may not come overnight. Having almost reached saturation point in the Hindi heartland, the south is seen as the next major growth area.

Not just a geographical expansion, the BJP is deepening its social base: the presidential nomination of Draupadi Murmu, an Adivasi woman from Odisha, is part of this conscious strategy. In the 2019 elections, the BJP dominated the scheduled tribe reserved constituencies with a 40 per cent vote share, a gain of more than six per cent. In fact, the BJP did much better in rural India than in urban pockets by engineering an OBC-SC-ST alliance that has gone well beyond the traditional upper caste Brahmin-Bania stereotype of the party's support base.

Interestingly, the BJP has also won the recent by-elections to the Rampur and Azamgarh Lok Sabha seats in UP, both with large Muslim populations and traditionally

floundered because of internal contradictions. A few key parties including the Aam Aadmi party chose to stay away from the initial meeting called by West Bengal chief minister, Mamta Banerjee to evolve a consensus on a name who might offer a real challenge to the BJP nominee. Octogenarian Yashwant Sinha was eventually only a fourth choice. Now, Draupadi Murmu's nomination has widened the faultlines: not only has the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha decided to support a tribal woman but even the Shiv Sena (Uddhav faction) is backing her.

The predicament of the main opposition party, the Congress is even more glaring. The post 2019 hemorrhaging that has seen several high profile exits shows no signs of ending. Every week, the political bazaar of Delhi is rife with rumours on who will be the next leader to leave a beleaguered party. A Chintan Shivir in May was designed to lift the morale after the assembly election rout but barring a re-energising of its communication team, there is still little sign that the

'free and fair' elections. But for a fractured opposition to merely lament the 'capture' of the democratic process without even offering a viable counter-narrative or leadership model is to only make the BJP's route to absolute power that much easier. A One Party Dominance (OPD) system may seem like an inescapable reality for now, its implications for democracy are deeply regressive: a 'one nation, one leader, one photo' trend could become dangerously entrenched.

Post-script: The BJP's latest 'Operation Lotus' is playing out in Goa. Even in a small state where the BJP won an election just months ago, the party seems determined to create an 'opposition-mukt' Goa. The Congress alleges that its MLAs have been offered Rs 40 crore each to switch. Pre-election, these MLAs had been taken to a temple, mosque and church where they vowed not to defect. Even God appears powerless before the BJP's blooming lotus.

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

**Ministry making in Maharashtra in limbo as Fadnavis tries to corner Shinde**

**Governor Koshiyari makes ground slippery for CM by comments on Mumbai**

By Sushil Kutty

It's a month since the Maha Vikas Aghadi government fell and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis took over replacing the Uddhav Thackeray alliance. They haven't yet started governing Maharashtra in earnest as there is no ministry formation. The two appear to be enjoying the honeymoon while keeping both BJP and Shinde MLAs in tenterhooks.

Don't know about Devendra Fadnavis, but how's it that Eknath Shinde can't take a step without the BJP central leadership giving its nod? The more Chief Minister Eknath Shinde delays ministry formation, the more Shinde will lose credibility. Shinde is no fool, he should know by now that his government is hanging by its shins, with feet dragging in the mud.

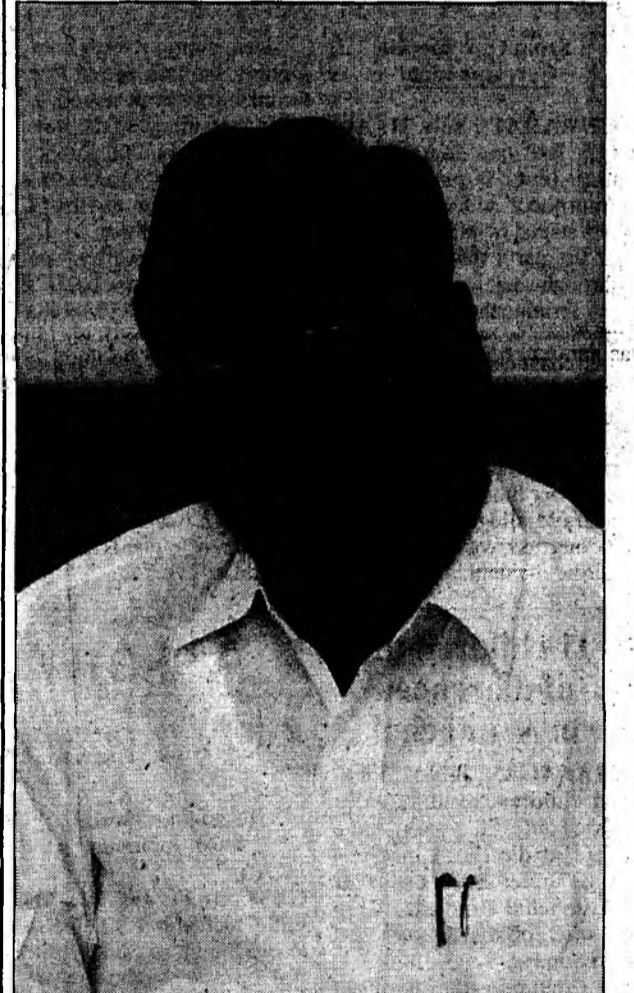
To add insult to injury, Governor BS Koshiyari cannot stop laughing at his own comment that Mumbai wouldn't be the financial capital of India, if the Gujarati and the Marwari took their businesses to Gujarat and Rajasthan. Now, the

speaking at a road-naming function in Andheri West, Mumbai. For all we know, this must not be an off-the-cuff remark, this must be commonplace koshiyari-speak when Union Home Minister Amit Shah calls when nobody is about.

This isn't even a foot in the mouth, this is an entire leg in the mouth. Koshiyari is a prime example of the typical BJP governor. For reasons unknown, BJP appointed governors cannot rest unless they are stirring the communal pot. Now, you'll have, for a perfectly uncalled for reason, Gujarati and Marwari smirking at the sight of a Marathi mannos.

One of those governors will soon become the Vice President. Guv Jagdeep Dhankar beat guv Koshiyari to the VeePee appointment. The surprising thing is, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde can't complain to the BJP high command, which is now also the Shinde group's high command. The searchlight is now on Shinde and his group of Shiv Sena MLAs who jumped the ship.

Koshiyari is a serial of-



Marathi mannos are fuming, ready to go to battle.

It cannot be that Koshiyari is a child who doesn't understand the power of words to stir up trouble? From what's being heard and told in Mumbai and Pune, Shambhujinagar, Nagpur and Thane, the 'BS' that Koshiyari spoke will not be tolerated. The Marathi mannos will not take it lying down.

Besides, much to Shinde's disgust, Koshiyari has given the Thackeray clan a reason to live. And that includes cousin Raj Thackeray, who was ready to go slow on Marathi chauvinism, but cannot ignore it any longer after Koshiyari's bloomer! The MNS strongman is once again back where he always used to be, ready to defend Marathi and Maratha.

Koshiyari could do with a political teacher. The man isn't even Gujarati or Marwari, he is an Uttarakhandi! This is what he said, "Sometimes I tell people that if Gujarati and Rajasthan leave, there will be no money left in Mumbai and Mumbai will not be the financial capital. Gujarati and Marwari communities have contributed a lot in the development of Mumbai and Thane."

Haven't we been hearing off and on, intermittently, that the BJP harbours a grandiose dream to sever cash-cow Mumbai from Maharashtra's grasp? Koshiyari was in fact

embarrassing chief ministers. He did it to the non-BJP chief minister and he is not beyond doing it to the chief minister toying the BJP-line, hook, line and sinker. Shinde and his deputy Fadnavis could do without such distractions, they already have too much on their plate, wishes unfulfilled thanks to the overbearing BJP brass.

It's a month to the day, Uddhav Thackeray quit and the MVA alliance government fell, but there still isn't a Shinde-Fadnavis government in place. All the ministries and all the portfolios with nothing to show! And Koshiyari played along, not asking the Chief Minister to do his duty to the state and its people instead of belittling Mumbai and Maharashtra.

Previously, Koshiyari never let go a chance to embarrass Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray. Perhaps, being BJP at his core, he doesn't think much of Shiv Sainik Eknath Shinde, too. Let's not forget Devendra Fadnavis and Guv Koshiyari were a team throughout UT's aborted reign. Guv Koshiyari was in cahoots with Fadnavis when the latter was installed Chief Minister in alliance with Ajit Pawar's NCP. Sharad Pawar cut that alliance short, and Fadnavis cannot fake Alzheimer's, neither can Koshiyari amnesia! (IPA Service)

**Upright leaders needed in democracy**

Editor,  
Is politics synonymous with sleaze? If someone doubts this then the person has not updated himself. The current special article by Patricia Mukhim — "Stop politicising crime: Let the law take its course" discussed what very few have spoken out. I personally do not wish to point a finger at any individual and hurt him/her. It is not my intention either. But it certainly hurts the citizens when democratic values are ruthlessly trampled upon. How could our leaders who rule this democratic country of the people, for the people and by the people be so morally depraved? Ms Mukhim rightly points out that in the country these days many people have been known to fight and win elections from inside a jail. I think this is totally outrageous. Allow-

ing devious people to sit in the chair of power will hurt the integrity of the nation. All cases of corruption that the country is beset with are because we elected the wrong people to govern the country. Look at how certain leaders directly or indirectly incite such forces that pose a threat to the nation. I wonder where we are heading towards. What message are we sending out to our new generation?

Thank God, Ms Mamata Banerjee sacked Partha Chatterjee for his involvement in the teacher recruitment scam. This uprightness of the Bengal CM has won high appreciation this time. But will she also disown those violently riotous cadres in TMC who have robbed the peace of certain people who disagree with them? Let's raise our voices to preserve the sanctity of democracy and social harmony.

I also wish to express my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family of our beloved leader - RG Lyngdoh who was a paragon of integrity and stood his ground against corruption. We lost him but his moral rectitude and intellectual strength will continue to inspire millions.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
Shillong

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"Worry is the interest paid by those who borrow trouble."

— George Washington

## The Shillong Times

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### Election-oriented development

AS Meghalaya inches closer to the election scheduled for February 2023, every scheme is aimed at winning elections and not to meet the real exigencies of the people. Some roads falling in the constituencies of opposition MLAs are left unrepaired. A good example are the roads and lanes in Mawlai which have not been repaired in a long time despite the area seeing heavy traffic diverted from the Mawlai junction towards Polo. Several other roads across the state are in a dilapidated condition in Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills, Garo Hills et al. The fact that roads have to be repaired annually suggests that they have not been made according to specifications. The engineers that certify the road-worthiness of such roads don't have an inbuilt code of ethics. All have compromised; all engineers give completion certificates knowing fully well that the roads are meant to last only one season. Climate experts suggest that the present road engineering model is not sustainable and we are seeing how landslides have occurred due to poor earth-cutting or because the geological study of the area about to be cut was by-passed without ascertaining the carrying capacity of the roads. Why have a Department of Mining and Geology if the Department is only meant to prospect for minerals? Should there not be a convergence between the Department of Mining and Geology and the PWD (Roads)?

People of Meghalaya are inured to bad roads and bad governance. Very few do RTI to find out how much was spent on a certain road project and if the quality of the road is commensurate with the money spent. Several parts of this country have the propensity to flood during the monsoons. Road-making with bitumen and asphalt or chip seal is so far the only common way in road construction and because of the compromise in quality and content used, such roads don't last beyond a season. Cement concrete are rarely being used. If used they are only for small link roads inside localities even though concrete roads are able to handle both heat, floods and loads better without need for frequent maintenance. Another important aspect is the absence of drains on both sides of the road thereby allowing the heavy rain water to erode the bituminous roads. Meghalaya might be the only State that has roads without drains. In neighbouring Assam road projects are being aggressively taken up and completed within short deadlines. Not so in Meghalaya! The reason? People don't seek accountability. There is no mechanism for holding the Government to account for corruption at every level. The public has only one route for addressing corruption; they have to knock on the doors of the courts. Too much public money in Meghalaya is diverted to private pockets. This has to end!

### Letters to the Editor

#### To gamble or not to gamble

Editor,  
When the State Government proposed to set up a casino in Meghalaya, there was a hue and cry against the proposal from certain quarters. But let us recall that gambling in different forms was very much there in our state even before Meghalaya was created.

There was betting on horse racing in the Polo grounds and even archery betting (then it was illegal). But one of the main reasons why betting on horse racing died out was because it could not compete with the high dividends the public got from archery betting on a daily basis. When Meghalaya was created, archery betting was legalised, lottery was introduced and jackpot machines were allowed to be set up. However archery betting with a daily double betting together with forecast betting offering one of the highest returns became more popular and became a source of revenue for the Government which gave employment opportunities to many.

I have come across many tourists from outside the state visiting the venue of the archery shooting in the afternoon, enjoying themselves while moving around from one betting counter to the next betting on several numbers, after different interpretation of their dreams by the many dream merchants present at the venue; feeling elated when they hit

a lucky number which adds to their spending money covered from a one evening of archery betting.

What I'm trying to point out is that gambling in several forms has been here in our State even before Meghalaya was born, but for the State Government to promote Meghalaya as a Gambling destination is wrong and I totally disagree with the idea. Meghalaya is and should always be promoted as a Tourist destination, a Rock capital an Educational hub but surely not a gambling state. But for us to protest that gambling is taboo in Meghalaya is sheer hypocrisy. In fact, casino betting is very much online today and I'm aware of quite a number of people who are in to it.

With the high dividend that archery betting provides on a daily basis, it would be advisable for our 'cash starved' state to expand this revenue earning industry to the national and international market as well, with the consent of concerned states and countries, to increase our revenue generation. Improving and expanding the venue of the archery shooting with proper sanitation facilities, sitting galleries, souvenirs and local food stalls, a spacious parking lot besides giving a facelift to the betting counters will turn the arena into another everyday thriving tourist spot besides generating revenue and employment. Beaming the activities live worldwide via the latest technology will generate additional revenue through selling of advertise-

# The "Idea of India": Is there need for a debate?

By Jaideep Saikia

Of late there has been discussion in informed circles about what constitutes the "Idea of India". While it is both academically sound and sensible to "revisit" a concept every so often and ground it in newer garb, the fact that a debate has suddenly come to the fore about the need to "define" a civilisation that has watered a multitude of contemplation since the existence of time is leading to some puzzlement. After all, even the immortal Indologist Max Mueller under whose scholarly direction the magnum opus Sacred Books of the East was prepared had stated over a century ago that "If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered over the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India."

It was, therefore, with some bewilderment that the author of the article had wondered about the need to "reinvent" India. Indeed, he had grown up to the fascination of the Brhadaranyaka and the Chandogya Upanishads which among other enduring aspects decreed that the notes of the drum have no existence apart from the general note of the drum. Yet—presently—a debate has begun about a realm that had spawned the very nature of existence! But perhaps there was—as aforesaid—a need for a re-visit. After all recapitulation had been the way of even the seers of yore. Approval, not derision, has always accompanied repetition of the consecrated and aspects that have been considered to be hallowed.

Another question that is also being asked along with the quest for the "Idea of India" is what determines "Inclusive India." Indeed, in these trying times when custom is more honoured in the breach than the observance, the question has gained in prominence and needs to be answered. However the question that has not escaped the author is the fact that the notion of "Inclusive India" is an inherently loaded concept. Is India a nonconforming receptacle endowed with only specificities of ingredients, albeit in exclusion of the other?

Inclusiveness entails that an aspect has to be broad, comprehensive and all-encompassing. Therefore, when one speaks about "Inclusive

India" one must perforce refer to every single facet that makes up the nation. These must range from features incorporating the entity that is termed as India from the moment Indic civilisation—in all its manifestation—came to be used in scholarly parlance to characterise an expanse within which the broad geographical contours of Bharatavarsha is referred to. However, there must be clarity about not only what constitutes the physical boundaries of India, but also the emotional shape and component of that colossal confine.

There has been sage mention of the "inherent strength of pluralistic India". It primarily speaks about the array that characterises India's religious diversity. The Muslim community of India, for instance, constitutes almost 15% of the country's population leaving no doubt about the shaping contribution it has made to the nation's growth. In Assam, for instance, the Muslim population—by way of even a liberal decadal growth projection of the outcome of a possible census that has not yet taken place—could be close to 45% of the total population making them an expanse that would decisively determine every aspect of the state's fortunes—from economy, to politics, to traditional security. The fact that the state abuts an ever-changing socio-cultural landscape that makes up Bangladesh so closely is also a geo-political reality as is the fact that there have been—and will continue to be—economic and climate migrants from the country in the future. However, the reality is also that the "transformative moment" which Islam is passing through has willy-nilly led to a "clash of civilisation" and the narrative is leading to suspicion about an entire community. Agent saboteurs alien to the Indian ethos are aplenty in a "conflict zone" (especially after the Talibanisation of Afghanistan and the manner in which the Taliban has "reneged" on the Doha Agreement with the United States) and there is a distinct possibility that sinister forces may engineer and convince the Indian Muslim that the quom is in danger and has to be protected at all cost. Prejudiced statements about exclusive radicalisation of the Muslim community, too, have not helped matters. Indeed, such pronouncements seem to have been geared not only towards "manufacturing consent" but ones which are premeditatedly conspirator-

ial. In this context it must also be underscored that radicalisation per se is not peculiar to any faith. History is testimony to the fact that almost all religion has exhibited radicalisation in one form or the other at different times of human existence. Indeed, it may seem to be a contradiction in terms, but even Buddhism—a belief system known for its inherent pacifism—have displayed radical conduct in the past.

A debate is also raging at present about the attribution of value or otherwise to two contrasting concepts. Deradicalisation is a concept or rather the preferred methodology for law-enforcers all over the world, especially in the backdrop of 9/11. However, a different manner of addressing the problem had been fine-tuned and fashioned by the author around 2015 for the Special Branch of the Assam Police. It was termed Counter Radicalisation.

The simple stratagem seeks to prevent radicalisation from manifesting itself in the first place and one, if properly calibrated, can even co-opt the services of the Muslim community which indeed the Special Branch did with success! Moreover the "Cost-Benefit-Analysis" of Counter Radicalisation is far more rewarding than Deradicalisation which has been seen in the past can relapse into recidivism. Counter Radicalisation also has the merits of halting the progression of a process that could invariably lead to violence before it is even contemplated. If a comparison has to be drawn with the "prevalent" but non-existent notion of Deradicalisation that most countries (law-enforcers) including India continue to grapple with then it would be analogous to "shutting the stable gates after the horse has fled". As aforesaid, radicalisation is a phenomenon that has come to be an accepted norm—one that is being waged against puritanical Islam. Proclamation of a counter narrative—primarily by the state—that Islam has within it varying strains that can ideologically and successfully combat the Wahabi or the Salafi school of thought in Islam was the recommendation that was made by the author. Indeed, this is the only way out of the dilemma of the present.

The syncretism that has guided Assam is unique. The nearly 600 year rule of the Ahoms who regardless

of religion provided employment to Hindus and Muslims ascertained this distinctiveness. Therefore, there were Saikias in both communities who were in the service of the Ahom rulers. Assam is, therefore, the correct laboratory for the Counter Radicalisation experiment, the success of which can be extended to other parts of India which is facing radicalisation.

In any event it is Islam that is passing through the aforesaid "transformative moment" and as a result is being held responsible for the "Clash of Civilisation". Radicalisation is, therefore, one way or the other inextricably intertwined with Islam. To that end, the discourse of Deradicalisation and Counter Radicalisation has to be examined within its greater ambit. It is a great pity that the merits of Counter Radicalisation have fallen on deaf ears. This is despite the fact that the author had produced a manual for the establishment six years ago.

But to return to the narrative of inclusiveness and the "Idea of India", it has been witnessed that recent events that have overtaken the country have only sought to widen the divide when there should have been clear-headedness in the manner in which unfortunate events could have been managed. The easiest way out of a situation that has gone awry is to blame it on a "foreign hand". Indeed, this may well be the case. But the fact of the matter is that both nation building and defending the nation is the duty of both the state and the citizenry. To that end, it is time to take stock of the situation and get down to the business of correct national "house-keeping". A "broad-brushing" exercise that seeks to colour every Muslim as a suspect is dangerous. It would only result in alienating a constituency that clamours to be heard. The realistic way to combat an agenda that seeks to perpetuate "us and them" should be to calibrate a course of action that has pragmatism and imagination in its ambit. More importantly it should be the bounden duty of every Indian—irrespective of caste, creed and religion—to take upon themselves the task of thwarting the alien design and ensure that not only has India always been an inclusive one, but the debate about the "Idea of India" has long been resolved.

(Jaideep Saikia is a conflict analyst and author. He is also the sole Asian Fellow in the Irregular Warfare Initiative, West Point, USA)

# Will history repeat itself?

By Barnes Mawrie

"The strength of a civilization is not measured by its ability to fight wars, but rather by its ability to prevent them." (Gene Roddenberry)

There is a saying that "history repeats itself." I do agree with this statement because human beings act similarly in similar situations. Many man-made events which happened in the history of human civilization, are indeed being repeated in recent times although in different degrees and in a more contextual manner. One of the man-made events that have often been repeated in history is war. Wars have always resulted from human ambition and greed. Let me list down a few examples from history.

King Agamemnon of ancient Greece, was an ambitious man and hearing of Troy's glory and pomp wanted by hook or by crook to capture that kingdom. Finally he got a pretext for an invasion through his brother's wife Helen who had eloped with Paris the prince of Troy. When he got an opportunity, he razed that great city to the ground in the 12th

Allies against the Axis; the ambition of Emperor Hirohito of Japan who started an invasion of East Asia and finally the bombardment of Pearl Harbour in 1941. This terrible war caused the loss of 70 to 85 million lives both soldiers and civilians (3% of the world population) and an untold destruction of property.

Now coming to our present time, undoubtedly we are witnessing a repetition of the 1940s. Once again we have two ambitious nations, Russia in the West and China in the East, just like Germany and Japan prior to World War II. What those two nations did, namely, bulldozing weaker nations and capturing territories, we see Russia and China doing the very same thing. Just like those two nations were ruled by dictators, Hitler in Germany and Hirohito in Japan, so too today's Russia is controlled by Vladimir Putin and China by Xi Jinping who are both dictators by a general definition. The ongoing war in Ukraine betrays the ambition of a country led by one man who behaves like a psychopath. Similarly, the

*"The constant threat of Putin against NATO and the western world and his readiness to even deploy nuclear weapons, are clear indications that Russia is being ruled by a maniac. Again, China's threat to the US, if Speaker Nancy Pelosi should visit Taiwan during her coming Asian visits, proves that China is in the hands of another maniac. Therefore we will not be surprised if World War III would be triggered by these two dictators. History has shown that whenever such psychopaths are at the helm of state affairs, wars are imminent."*

or 11th Century BC. Another example from Greek history, is Alexander the Great (356-323 BC). He was a king of great ambition and wanted to conquer the world not being satisfied with his kingdom of Macedonia. This led him to march with his army through Persia up to India. But on his death bed he lamented that he had "no more world to conquer." The renowned and mighty Roman Empire that ruled the known world at that time for more than a thousand years (625 BC till 476 AD), was a highly ambitious empire. Through its mighty war machinery it did manage to expand its empire like no other kingdom had done earlier. Its history is marked by innumerable battles resulting in countless deaths and suffering. Coming to medieval history we have the Ottoman Empire (1520-1566) which expanded its territory to a large part of Asia and wanted to swallow Europe as well. Then we have the great dictator Napoleon Bonaparte (1804-1815) who ruled France and made many military exploits in order to gain control over the whole of Europe. In the history of all these ambitious rulers and empires, we witness wars and battles being perpetrated whereby untold suffering was brought upon innocent people and massive destruction was effected.

Now coming closer to our millennium, we once again witnessed the result of human ambition during World War I (1914-1918). About 30 nations and more than 65 million men were engaged in the war. The global war was brought about by territorial, economic and military ambitions of some nations. The consequence of the war was the death of 16 million soldiers and civilians and massive destructions of property. Again when we come to World War II (1939-1945), once again we witness the consequence of human greed and ambition. The war started on two fronts - the ambition of Adolf Hitler which led him and his Nazis to invade Poland in 1939 thereby leading to a declaration of war by the

constant Chinese incursions into India's territory and their continuous threat of invasion of Taiwan reveals the ambition of a sick mind and another psychopath. It is the existence of such ambitious dictators that poses a great threat to world peace.

The constant threat of Putin against NATO and the western world and his readiness to even deploy nuclear weapons, are clear indications that Russia is being ruled by a maniac. Again, China's threat to the US, if Speaker Nancy Pelosi should visit Taiwan during her coming Asian visits, proves that China is in the hands of another maniac. Therefore we will not be surprised if World War III would be triggered by these two dictators. History has shown that whenever such psychopaths are at the helm of state affairs, wars are imminent. Recent developments in world politics indicate that two power poles are emerging which are at odds with each other. This is a matter of concern for humanity itself. Should UNO fail in its mandate to curb aggressive nations, then the world is heading towards another terrible disaster. What we can do today is pray to God that such things will not take place and that rogue nations may come to their senses and realize the futility of wars. Let me conclude with the inspiring words of the Father of our nation, an epitome of peace and reconciliation who said "I appeal for cessation of hostilities, not because you are too exhausted to fight, but because war is bad in essence."

*When will we learn from history,  
That war and violence are a futility?  
When will humanity ever learn  
That love and respect are earned?  
When will we value peace and harmony  
As the only way to save humanity?  
When will we learn from Mother Nature  
To let God take control of our future?*

ment rights.

Therefore the question is, should we not properly package and sell this dream based enterprise into another money making industry for the benefit of our State or do we allow this opportunity to go to waste and let it remain as it is today?

Yours etc.,  
Michael N. Syiem,  
Via email

#### Need for an upright leader in Rambrai - Jyrngam

Editor,  
As the elections are approaching, there is need for the people to contemplate as to who they should choose as their leader. The election of a good leader and thus a prosperous constituency does not depend entirely on political parties. This is discernible from the fact that even though Rambrai - Jyrngam constituency has been under the leaderships of leaders from dominant and reputed parties there has been very little to zero development in the areas under the constituency. Founded in 2012, the Constituency is one of the most backward and underdeveloped constituencies in Meghalaya and this is due to the incompetence of its leaders.

The areas which fall under this constituency, do not have proper roads. The roads in the entire constituency are dilapidated and no serious action has been taken to repair them. Thus, this affects

the well-being of the people as well as the economy of the area. Travelling, commuting and trade are hampered. Then there is another serious problem that has not been taken care of - the constituency does not have its own C&RD Block, it does not have its own police station, no CHC and no post office. The people still have to go to Nongstoin if they have grievances and problems. When there are cases of petty thefts and when the people need medical attention, they have to travel all the way to Nongstoin or to Mawshynrut block.

Hence the existence of the Rambrai-Jyrngam constituency is not beneficial for the people but only for those holding power over it. Promises were made by the leaders before and at the time when they were winning the elections but these promises have not been fulfilled. The agenda created for the development of the Constituency are being stacked under hundreds of other promises made by the leaders. Recently, the Deputy Chief Minister of the state visited the constituency and promised the people that if his party (NPP) wins, the dream of having a C&RD Block in the constituency will be made possible. These types of promises had been made in the past about bringing or creating C&RD Blocks in the constituency. The leaders had once said that they see the C&RD block in the "gastrulation period" that after some years it will exist in the constituency. However, it had been years

and we have not witnessed the birth of a C&RD Block. Perhaps it is still stuck in the gastrulation period. It is ridiculous and it is a great burden that the Constituency has to carry this dream of having a C&RD Block in its womb for such a long time. The same promises are being made now and it rests on the people to decide for the development of their Constituency. The people should be on guard and should not let themselves be fooled again like they had been in the previous elections.

There is a need for change; a need for the people to understand the problems that exist in the area and a need to understand how as voters they can choose better leaders for the betterment of their own constituency. People need to choose good statesmen and not only businessmen, if they want to see development in their area. The Constituency needs a competent leader who is capable of bringing change and new initiatives for the Constituency. We need a leader who understands the real problems of the people; one who is not all words but who has the capability of taking real action as well.

Yours etc.,  
Lurshai Kharbani,  
Via email

#### Tribal President with an eye on 2024

Editor,  
India is well known for its caste and religious poli-

tics. Droupadi Murmu was nominated by the BJP to the office of President of India. Droupadi Murmu, a Santhal tribal being elevated to the post is touted as a concern for tribals and their empowerment and upliftment by the BJP. The fact is that, elevation of a tribal to any high office of the country does not fulfil their dreams, considering the actual position of the tribals in India's politics, society and economy. BJP chose a tribal for the post of President of India to score political points keeping in mind the upcoming 2024 general elections. Shobhaa De in her recent article had raised a pertinent question on political netas who keep alluding to Murmu as the 'first tribal President'. She also questioned why constant reference is made to her 'poverty'. Was she elected solely on that basis - for being poor and a tribal?

Elevation of a tribal to the post of President or any other constitutional post will not alleviate the problems of the oppressed tribal, nor will it change the mindset of the mainland Indian towards the tribals. This has been happening in our very own State of Meghalaya. The mainland Indian carries the impression that tribals are inferior to non-tribals.

Yours etc.,  
Marbianglang K. Rymbai,  
Via email

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"Peace of mind comes from not wanting to change others."

— Gerald Jampolsky

## The Shillong Times

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### Politics as powerplay

SENIOR central minister Nitin Gadkari is feeling uncomfortable in the government. Politics, he says, has become cent per cent sattakaran (powerplay). At an event in his home-turf of Nagpur, Gadkari said he's thinking a lot as to when he should quit politics. This sounds odd. At age 65, Gadkari is not only young but he has always been highly energetic and hyper-active when it comes to handling assignments — be it as BJP president since 2010 or previously as a state minister in Maharashtra or as Union Minister in the two Modi terms. Currently engaged in the gargantuan task of building 60 km of highways per day, he has made a major mark in roads and highways development via a well-laid network that cuts through the length and breadth of the country. While serious efforts at NH development started during the AB Vajpayee term, the Modi government took this forward in spectacular ways, with Gadkari powering the nation's dreams on this count. He's promising electrification of the Delhi-Mumbai highway and is also making a strong pitch for large-scale introduction of electric vehicles.

Gadkari, like Modi, came to politics from the RSS stable. He faced corruption allegations as a minister in Maharashtra but nothing could be proven against him. It is common knowledge that he had PM ambitions though the likes of Amit Shah wield more clout in the Modi ministry. Gadkari's equations with the PM might not be excellent. He however is seen to carry with him the freedom to take decisions without interference from any side. He has as much clout and will power. Gadkari is an ideas factory in himself, innovative to the core; a rare presence in politics today, not just within the Modi government. Had he been simultaneously heading the railways too this ailing sector might also have gained the much-needed fresh steam.

Politics has several sides to it. Admittedly, wielding power is now integral to political pursuits. When India won Independence, politics meant an avenue for service to the society. Progressive degradation of the political sphere over the past several decades meant the 'service' component is today palpably missing from politics and public life. Self-interests guide each and every politician. One who is committed to a cause, and not to oneself, is bound to be edged out as politics is straddled mostly by selfish sharks. It is a debatable point whether the two terms of the Modi government have been able to effect any change to this worsening scenario. Worse, several states are ruled by regional leaders whose first priority, sadly, is their own family.

### Pvt Coaching Centres

# Govt must halt unholy nexus

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education has recently recommended to the government to curb the growing unholy nexus between colleges and coaching centres, a trend academics attribute to centralised entrance tests. The Committee highlighted other challenges with higher education such as cheating in examinations, leakage of question papers and student-examiner connivance, which too need the government's urgent attention.

In its report, it has referred to the "disturbing trend of many colleges associating with coaching centres to prepare their enrolled students in certain cities, making the learning process a farce through this unholy nexus". The committee recommended that the government develop a mechanism to curb this trend and derecognise the institutions involved. It also suggested the 'establishment of a study group to assess the ground realities'.

The report also stated that certain State and deemed universities and local colleges are engaged in a tough competition to attract students and has asked the government to bring a halt to it. This practice, said the report, has led not just to crass confusion but a feeling of being cheated amongst the students and their guardians. Experts are of the opinion that students are no longer interested in serious study and attending classes regularly and instead are interested to get admitted into 'dummy' schools that collaborate with coaching centres to receive suggestions and/or question papers. The House panel underlined that question paper leaks, student-examiner collaboration were vitiating the examination process in many State universities.

Going deeper into the matter, it is quite discernible that the very motive of coaching institutes or coaching centres has only promoted 'commercialisation of education' in the country. It is well-known that students need to cough up huge amount of money in the form of fees to get into such institutes. At the same time, whether the student can pay such a huge fee is of no concern to those who are at the helm of affairs in such

institutes. In this way, money motive guides such institutes in its day-to-day affairs. Education, which is considered to be a right of every individual, has unfortunately turned out to be a commercial product. In such a scenario, imparting education is in the grip of commercial coaching centres thereby, making a mockery of the very divine nature of attainment of education insofar as India is concerned.

With the commercialisa-



tion of education, it has been seen that such coaching centres are mostly located in the vicinity of government aided educational institutes. This lures both the teachers and the pupils/students of such educational institutes to turn to these coaching institutes instead of developing their own educational institutes. There are hoardings/banners of the coaching classes near schools and colleges. In the long run, such commercialisation instigates both the teacher-student combine to coaching classes. Coaching it could be said has become an addiction and the spread of qualitative education an eventual casualty.

Presently, situation has come to such a pass that, in most cases, class rooms in the educational institutes, mostly government, are empty as the pupils/students are busy in house-packed coaching institutes. In some coaching classes, the number of pupils/students is even more than the regular classes of schools or colleges. Experts believe that in such coaching classes there is little scope for doubt clearing and personal attention and emphasis is paid on to rush through various academic

avoid making the effort to make up on their learning process by attending regular classrooms only.

The astute teachers, finding an opportunity to exploit and make a buck, run or teach in private shops or tuition centres at their homes or big coaching institutes, influence students they would be provided with ready-made notes and suggestions which they have to memorize or rote learning for the exams. This is blocking the independent thinking abilities of the students in different perspectives as they concentrate solely on the written notes sold & supplied to them.

Thirdly, teachers too get enticed and deviate from their basic paid responsibilities of teaching and training students in schools and colleges. Most of these teachers do not take the pains to teach properly in their institutions and may also not be punctual in their attendance. Clearly, their attention is diverted to the coaching centres where they spend time teaching and earning extra money. Thus private coaching centres do roaring business by turning normal dedicated honest teachers to wealthy

elites 'educationists'. These so-called 'elite-teachers' have converted education into a purely commercial activity that is harming our society.

The upper echelons of society find it a lucrative business to invest in this booming sector where they spend money on infrastructure, quality teachers and aggressive marketing with sole objective of reaping enormous returns on the one-time investment, like true businessmen. Through a specially crafted network, they get the best teachers who are used to attract students to the coaching centres. The urge of the rich and middle class as also a section of the lower income groups send their wards to coaching centres in the hope that their children will get more marks and qualify for a medical, engineering or pure science seat in a reputed institution.

Educationists have expressed concern over the lack of regulations in the coaching industry. It has been stated that while there are unmet regulations that govern schools like classroom size, teacher-student ratio and teacher qualification, there is nothing set for a coaching centre. In fact, in response to a RTI, the CBSE admitted that it had no jurisdiction over coaching centres or 'dummy schools' as it had no jurisdiction over these. It needs to be mentioned here that schools have found a way to survive by running collaborations with prominent coaching institutes.

Coaching may be necessary for students after Class X but the recent trend and the unholy nexus between certain schools and coaching centres does not augur well for advancement of education and knowledge. The tendency to get notes and suggestions from these centres does not ultimately help students in their careers. Therefore, it is critical that the government strictly ensure that in all classes, the stipulated syllabus be completed to the satisfaction of students. Only then the importance of private coaching centres may come down.

More importantly, the Government must study the Parliamentary committees report thoroughly and act upon it. For it is the educated youth which is to take the future of the country forward.—INFA

## Mamata has botched up chances of playing a national role Education scam will haunt TMC in Bengal for a long time

By Amulya Ganguli

Mamata Banerjee's latest troubles mean that her challenge to the BJP at the national level is petering out. After the scandal involving a formerly top-ranking minister who has now been sacked, few will credit her with being a person who can give the BJP a run for its money in 2024.

Her difficulties stem from her failure to keep her party under control in West Bengal and an inability to understand the ways of the modern economy. To start with the lapses concerning her party, it is well known that two things have plagued the Trinamool Congress from the beginning. One is its inherent lawlessness and the other is its inbuilt corruption. The result is Mamata's failure to earn the kind of respect which is necessary for a politician who wants to play a national role.

The link between the rowdy conduct of the Trinamool cadres during local

Sikri. Nearly all her attempts to induce industrialists to invest in the state have been infructuous.

Mamata's stumbles in the political-organizational and economic fields explain her inability to extend the Trinamool's spheres of influence by securing a foothold in Goa or even in Tripura, whose large Bengali population should have been amenable to her political appeal.

Considering that West Bengal at one time was a magnet for labourers from Odisha, Bihar, and eastern U.P. who flocked to the state for employment while some of the schools, colleges and Kolkata university attracted students from far and wide, West Bengal's present sorry plight reflects poorly on the political class.

While B.C. Roy's successors as Congress chief ministers failed to continue with his industrial development programmes and the



polls and after the national-level elections, and the corruption associated with them, was perhaps only to be expected. The so-called "cut money" phenomenon is a manifestation of this malaise. It involves the harassment of property owners by party goons if a part of the money transactions during the real estate deals is not given to the cadres.

It is anybody's guess whether the piles of cash as well as gold and jewellery found in the flat of an associate of the former minister who is under the enforcement directorate's scanner is related both to the "cut money" transactions and the school jobs scam. For once, therefore, the directorate, which has generally come to be seen as the government's political tool against the opposition, has hit the right button.

Slaze and unruly cadres are not unknown in Indian

CPI(M)'s Jyoti Basu never fulfilled the hopes that he had initially aroused, Mamata has taken the state further downhill to the latest scandal proving to be the nadir of her tenure.

For all practical purposes, therefore, her all-India ambitions have turned to dust. Yet, the BJP is mistaken if it believes that it can fill the breach. The reason is the albatross round the party's neck of its Hindu-Hindi background which has little appeal for the Bengalis who are rooted in their culture centred on the language.

For them, the BJP's vegetarianism, communalism and focus on Hindi, not to mention the fetish with cow's urine, are anathema. For the average Bengali, the Hindi heartland or the so-called cow belt is an area of intellectual darkness.

It will be extremely difficult, therefore, for the BJP to make any headway in

*It is anybody's guess whether the piles of cash as well as gold and jewellery found in the flat of an associate of the former minister who is under the enforcement directorate's scanner is related both to the "cut money" transactions and the school jobs scam.*

politics. But among the roadblocks on Mamata's path to a national role is her inability to make West Bengal relive its past glory as an industrial centre. The CPI(M) under Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya tried to undo the damage caused by the "revolutionary" rhetoric of the Marxists leading to the flight of capital by inviting the Tatas to build their Nano cars in West Bengal. Had the project continued, it might have led to the state's industrial revival.

But Mamata scuttled it with her petty politics because she couldn't see the bigger picture. As a result, West Bengal has remained mired in backwardness, making Nobel laureate Amartya Sen compare the empty Kolkata airport to Mughal emperor Akbar's abandoned capital, Fatehpur

this region which has more linguistic, musical, culinary and now also cinematic affinity with Bangladesh. The popularity of the Prime Video channel of "hoichoi" is testimony to this cultural closeness which is markedly secular. Since the ongoing scam marks the lowest point in Mamata's career, how she extricates herself from the mess will be watched with interest, not least by the non-BJP parties.

Among them, the CPI(M) may sense an opportunity to recover lost ground. But it appears to have lost much of its earlier appeal in the wake of the collapse of communism worldwide. The condition of the Congress in West Bengal is even worse. With the Trinamool having shot itself in the foot, the state's political future is palpably dark. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Goings-on in Food & Civil Supplies Dept

Editor, Like every other Government Department, the Directorate of Food Civil Supplies is in charge of the Technical Management Division. What surprises me is that the Division is run by the Officer on Special Duty (Non-Regular Employee) who was then a Contractual Project Manager and was recently designated/nominated as an OSD by the Department based on his request. The question here is, "Are there no regular officers deserving of that position? What about the Joint Directors, Deputy Directors etc in the Department? As far as I know the OSD has been working on contractual basis for 9 years now and has been pushing the Government for regularization of his post. Is this fair? There are many casual employees in many Government Departments who have been working for 10 to 15 years and are yet to be regularized. If the Government is ready and holding meetings to regularize him for such a big post why not look out for the casual employees in each and every Department and regularize their posts as well, as they really deserve it.

The appointment of staff under the Technical Management Division is another

issue that merits discussion. I met some staff working at the Districts/Sub-Divisions and asked them about the Technical Division. As expected it appears that the OSD is running the Division like his own private company where casual employees who have been working for only 6 months to 1 year are on-boarded in the Division at high salaries touching 27,000 and without any interview whereas the salaries of the staff at the Directorate under the Division and at the Districts/Sub-Divisions who have been working for 7 to 8 years are fixed at a mere Rs 12,000, which is less than the daily wage fixed by the Labour Department.

When asked how they manage to run a family with that salary, the answer I got is that they have had a talk with the OSD about this issue and he told them a proposal for increase of salary has been sent to the Government since December, 2021 and awaiting approval. Now the question here is, "Why is the Government delaying the approval for increase of salary of the staff which has been proposed 7 months ago whereas the Government was quick to hold a meeting to regularize the OSD?"

How I wish the Government was more concerned about the needs of the staff and not only of the officers.

Yours etc.,  
Melvin Kharnoh,  
Via email

#### A tearful adieu to RG Lyngdoh

Editor, It was the most shocking news to learn that former Home Minister RG Lyngdoh had passed away. I have known him personally and his passing is an irreparable loss to the state! A great soul has left this earth untimely!

I vividly remember R.G Lyngdoh, a High School going boy while I was his next door neighbour at Laitumukhra near Ramakrishna Mission. I just joined service as a Government School Teacher and used to rush for the city bus daily at 9 am. Bob would cross me almost every day, and would smile and salute me in the manner of a 'Scout'. It was his respect towards a teacher. After long years, during his tenure as Home Minister, Meghalaya, in a public function at U Soso Tham Auditorium, he was invited as Chief Guest and I was also one of the invitee guests.

While we were called to the podium to light the lamp at the opening ceremony R.G. Lyngdoh saw me and just like his school going days with a hearty smile offered me a big salute before the audience! I felt embarrassed, but he requested me to go first to the dais, I hesitated and said, 'You are the Chief Guest here, you go first please!' He replied, 'But you are a teacher!' Such was his simplicity and respect

towards teachers.

Another incident I can recollect vividly was the XVIIth AIPC (All India Poetess Conference) Mega National Convention, hosted by the Meghalaya Branch and held in Shillong in February, 2016. On that occasion too R.G. Lyngdoh was invited along with V. Shanmuganathan, the then Governor of Meghalaya, to grace the valedictory function. Fortunately I was called to the podium to receive a Literary Award 'Lopamudra Puraskar' for one of my published books. As soon as he saw me R.G Lyngdoh welcomed me with his habitual salute and embraced me very affectionately. I was so touched with his warm gesture! Language fails to express my respectful feelings for the great soul! He was much junior to me; but left an indelible mark in my heart. I repent that I could not visit him to have a last look at this beautiful soul! His 'Salute' will be everlasting in my memory! May the Almighty grant him eternal peace!

My warm Salute to you my Beloved Bob!

Yours etc.,  
Uma Purkayastha,  
Via email

#### People's faith in the judiciary!

Editor, Since 2014 with the as-

sumption of powers by the Modi-led BJP government the dynamic role of the judiciary in the country has assumed a new avatar. In my cross interactions with some discerning citizens, they too have more often than not echoed the same views expressing that the core power of the courts has significantly been watered-down. They reiterated that we go to the courts for pursuance of justice and relief but justice is inordinately delayed. Pre-eminent petitions like the revocation of Articles 370 and 354 in Jammu and Kashmir is yet to be heard in the Supreme Court. Cases challenging CAA are also lying in cold storage. Contrastingly, cases favouring the dispensation like the recent Maharashtra's dramatic political upheavals had been passed in a jiffy, thereby prompting one of the opposition members to aptly dub: faster than Rafael! Hence the hoi polloi don't know where to go.

Judicial luminaries too have adopted attitudinal change. Iconic legal personality like our ex-Chief Justice of India, Justice Ranjan Gogoi post the judgment of Ayodhya Ram Janambhoomi Babri Masjid title dispute case in 2019, retired on November 17, 2019. Within a span of four months he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha reportedly with the blessings

of the BJP. Subsequently, Justice Gogoi has had to face unpleasant comments from a well-known parliamentarian Mahua Moitra. Lately on July 16, 2022, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot while delivering a lecture on the occasion of the 18th All India Legal services meet at Jaipur in the presence of the Chief Justice of India NV Ramana and Union Minister of Law and Justice Kiren Rijju had articulated the fact that judges, bureaucrats etc. ought to serve the nation with holistic passion instead of being concerned about their post-retirement ambitions.

Incidentally, in the course of his speech, Gehlot referred to the nomination of former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi as Rajya Sabha MP and recalled that Justice (Retd.)Gogoi was one of the four apex court judges who had asserted that Democracy in India is in danger. Gehlot concluded with this punchline. "I had asked the President of India if Mr Gogoi was fine before or is he fine now?"

Yours etc.,  
Jerome K Diengdoh,  
Via email

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*"There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness."*

—Josh Billings

The Shillong Times

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**Rajya Sabha questions on Meghalaya**

BJP Rajya Sabha MP, Rakesh Sinha has for the second time raised questions on Meghalaya's coal mining and transportation. Each time the Union Minister for Coal and Mines, Prahlad Joshi peremptorily reads out the answers as fed to him by his Ministry which in turn is fed by the State Department of Mining and Geology. As expected, the answers are not debated in the Rajya Sabha because the other members have little interest in what is going on in Meghalaya. The question asked was the estimated coal resources as per coal inventory of India as published by the Geological Survey of India - which is 576.48 MT. The Minister answers that as per information received from the Coal Controlling Organisation (CCO), a body overseeing coal mining activities in India there has been no coal production in Meghalaya in the last four years in deference to the National Green Tribunal order dated June 6, 2014 which stated that there has been serious air, water and environmental pollution caused by 'illegal', unregulated and indiscriminate rat-hole mining being carried on in different parts of Meghalaya.

In July 2019, the Supreme Court of India had ruled that the Mines and Minerals Act 1952 have to be mandatorily followed before working a mine. The Coal Mines Regulation Act 2017 also contains several regulatory provisions while working a mine by a mining lease holder. The apex court had categorically stated that the Mines and Minerals Act 1952, the MMDR Act 1957, the Regulations of 2017 and the Environment Protection Act 1986 have to be strictly adhered to by the State, in public interest. Interestingly, the reply of the Minister is that in the, "Hill Districts of Meghalaya for carrying coal mining operations in privately owned/community owned land, it is not the State Government which shall grant the mining lease under Chapter V of Rules, 1960, but it is the private owner/community owner of the land, who is also the owner of the mineral, who shall grant lease for mining of coal as per provisions of Chapter V of Rules, 1960 after obtaining previous approval of the Central Government through the State Government. Where are the District Councils in this?"

The answer from the Minister ends with a convenient, "Central Government has not done any social auditing in the State of Meghalaya." This means the Central Government relies entirely on feedback from the State Government which has been misleading it. The Department of Coal and Mines should read the Meghalaya High Court orders from time to time on illegal mining and transportation of coal which has been brought to the notice of the Court by different litigants. Overall, asking questions that rely on answers based on "lies" should amount to perjury. Moreover, the BJP in Meghalaya should have given its own feedback based on ground realities to the Rajya Sabha MP. As of today, asking such questions that do not yield the correct answers is simply a waste of Parliament's time.

**President Biden should have not allowed it**

**U.S. House Speaker's visit to Taiwan at this time provocative**

By Ian Goodrum

United States House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi is under immense scrutiny for her family's incredibly profitable stock trades as the U.S. Congress considers a ban on its members, their staff, and families from swapping securities. She is presiding over what could be her last term as Speaker, if Republicans get their way, with historic unpopularity ratings. And to top it all off, she has seemingly decided on a whim to pay a visit to the island of Taiwan.

The trip, which makes her the highest-ranked sitting U.S. official to travel there in a quarter-century, has generated considerable

controversy and escalated the fraying of ties with China. As the U.S. does not recognize "Taiwan independence" and Pelosi is second in the line of presidential succession, the move has been viewed by many on both sides as a dangerous step toward open conflict between the world's two biggest economies.

First, some background. The "one-China policy"—which is to say the mutual recognition of one political body that is "China"—is the bedrock of U.S.-China ties. It is the only reason the two countries have a diplomatic bond, and it is an unshakable bottom line which if violated would constitute grounds for the complete dissolution of the relationship. Whatever talking points the U.S. likes to trot out to equivocate on the subject, the necessity of holding to the policy remains unchanged.

And make no mistake, the official U.S. position is one which de facto and de jure supports the People's Republic of China as the sole representative of China, not the government in Taiwan that calls itself the Republic of China. "Strategic ambiguity," "acknowledgment" of the PRC stance rather than acceptance, non-commitment to Taiwan's military defense—none of these U.S. wordplays matter. The PRC

pushes the world across the Rubicon grow. With Pelosi going through with her plan and setting foot on the island, what now? She has singlehandedly created a hair-trigger moment where any momentary lapse in communication could mean an escalation that spirals beyond anyone's control.

China has not been in armed conflict with another nation for years, and there's no reason that should change anytime soon. As the world's economic axis turns eastward and China becomes the major trading partner of most of the globe, the need to rush the inevitable process of unification through forcible means is not growing; if anything,

it shrinks exponentially by the day. As for the U.S., it is not in its best interest to pile a world-ending conflagration on top of the myriad issues it already faces. This of course begs the question of why a U.S. legislator is fanning the flames with China as her own country is looking down the barrel of recession, flailing against waves of inflation, and struggling to keep its people employed, housed, educated, and in good health.

Perhaps the answer is that legislators, and the class she represents, don't have an interest in solving those problems. Maybe they can read the writing on the wall as well as we can and have concluded the only way to prevent China from breaking up the hegemony of U.S. capital is through a devastating war, one where victory is far from guaranteed.

If that's what they've decided, they are in for a rude awakening. The peace-loving people of the world, representing the vast working majority, won't stand idly by and let themselves be marched into the meat grinder to sustain the profits of a tiny few. They will fight back against these absurd incitements and demand a system that actually represents their interests, a real democracy. (IPA Service)



billions of dollars of war materiel provided by every U.S. presidential administration since, no matter which party held the White House. The U.S. has regularly hosted military drills in the South China Sea and "freedom of navigation" exercises through the Taiwan Straits; each time it does so, China responds in kind and the corporate press dutifully reports on it as if China was the one being provocative entirely without cause. If they mention the context at all, it will be buried deep in the story well past the point when most people stop reading. This, among many other troubling phenomena, is demonstrative of the U.S.' cavalier attitude toward the principle underpinning relations with its biggest trade partner.

But one can hardly describe the domestic reaction to Pelosi's trip as unanimous support. The White House doesn't seem happy to have to deal with this amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict and mounting economic crises. President Joe Biden himself said the Pentagon has called it a bad idea. Scholars and commentators typically among the first to call for blood against any imagined offense from China have expressed mild skepticism, which in their circles might as well be outright condemnation.

standing since before our progenitors crawled out of the primordial ooze. She has never missed an opportunity to showboat, provoke, or otherwise sabotage relations in geopolitical climates both warm and icy cold. Recall that she was one of the first U.S. lawmakers to openly support the protests in Hong Kong and was a staunch opponent of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing as well as this year's Winter Games in the same city.

We can see by the recent call between Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping that the former's administration has been attempting to mend ties to some degree, rightfully wary of a two-front conflict against both China and Russia. With her background, and her tenure as Speaker possibly on the wane, could it be that Pelosi timed this visit to force the White House into a more aggressive posture? This is a far more intriguing—and disturbing—motive than the almost juvenile explanation of an ego-stroking farewell tour, as it would provide yet more evidence of the intrinsic momentum of the U.S.' campaign of encirclement against China. It's a worrying trend, and likely will only get worse in the years to come. Without any space for rational dialogue, the chances of a crisis which

him dedicating two days or at least a day to hold a press conference? When was the last time our PM addressed the media? Since entering office in 2014, PM Modi has participated in just one press conference without answering a single question, instead deferring to the erstwhile party president, Amit Shah, India Today reported in January 2020 that it had filed a Right to Information (RTI) request with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), asking for the number of press conferences delivered by the PM so far, along with the details of their dates and locations. However, the PMO said that it does not have this information "available on record."

Why don't the Central and State governments come up with different policies every day for every sector which will further benefit the citizens starting from August 2 to August 15. If only our Prime Minister allowed all Indians to live a life as promised in the Constitution of India—the so-called world's largest democracy. We dream of that day, and we look forward to celebrating the 75th Independence Day with the PM not setting any conditions

**Al Qaeda Chief Zawahiri's killing by U.S. is a symbolic act Islamic State outfit may be down for now, not out**

By James M Dorsey

President Joe Biden was not wrong when he declared that "justice has been served" with the killing of Al Qaeda leader Ayman Zawahiri in a US drone strike.

The problem is that's only half of the truth; the other half is that Zawahiri was more a has-been than a power to be reckoned with on the jihadist totem pole. In death, he may have scored his most significant achievement since becoming head of Al Qaeda as the symbol of the failure of decades of war in Afghanistan.

Zawahiri's presence in Kabul in a house owned by Sirajuddin Haqqani, Afghanistan's de facto deputy head of state, will be touted as evidence that Afghanistan has reverted to being a base for terrorist groups. Haqqani's son and son-in-law are believed to have also died in the drone strike.

In addition, the killing will likely become a partisan issue in domestic US politics, with Republicans pointing to Biden's bungled withdrawal a year ago of US troops from Afghanistan.

In anticipation of the criticism, Biden said the killing demonstrated the United States' post-withdrawal ability to protect Americans without "thousands of boots on the ground."

Even so, the withdrawal resulted from a war that the United States and its allies could not win and a fundamentally flawed US-Taliban agreement negotiated by the administration of former President Donald J. Trump that helped the Taliban regain power.

Since succeeding Osama bin Laden after the United States killed him in 2011, Zawahiri, the man who helped shape Al Qaeda from day one, could not garner the stature of the group's former leader. Nor was he able to impose his will on Al Qaeda franchises in Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere in Africa.

Researcher Nelly Lahoud argues in a recently published book based on computer files confiscated in the US raid that killed Bin Laden that Al Qaeda had lost much of its operational capability in the immediate years after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

The Islamic State, the foremost jihadist organization locked into a bitter fight with the Taliban, increasingly overshadowed Al Qaeda, showcasing Mr. Zawahiri's inability to fill Bin Laden's shoes.

In fact, the Islamic State today poses a greater threat to the United States than Al Qaeda. Equally importantly, the Islamic State also constitutes a more significant threat to Central Asian states like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as Russia and China.

If Zawahiri's presence in Kabul raises questions about the Taliban's willingness and determination to prevent militant groups from operating from its territory, repeated Islamic State attacks on domestic Afghan targets, and the firing of rockets into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan call into question the group's ability to do so.

To be sure, granting Al Qaeda leaders shelter does not by definition amount to Taliban acquiescence of the group launching attacks from Afghan soil.

The questions are particularly acute given that Zawahiri was killed days after the Taliban engaged with representatives of 30 countries at a conference in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent in a bid to unfreeze some US\$7 billion in Afghan foreign currency reserves.

hosted foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO), who had Afghanistan high on their agenda. The SCO groups India, Russia, China, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

The Taliban regime has yet to be officially recognized by any country. Countries across geopolitical divides have insisted that the Taliban first demonstrate their willingness and ability to control all of Afghanistan and curtail militant groups.

The international community also required the Taliban to form an inclusive government and ensure women's rights. The Taliban have yet to deliver on any of its promises.

Reporting to the United Nations Security Council in January, UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons noted that "the existence of numerous terrorist groups in Afghanistan remains a broad international and especially regional concern. The desire of the de facto authorities to take on this threat across the board remains to be convincingly demonstrated."

Lyons' remarks have seemingly gone unheeded in Kabul. In response to the Islamic State attacks on Tajikistan, home to Russia's largest foreign military base, the Taliban are building a watchtower on the two countries' border with the help of a Tajik group bent on changing the regime in Dushanbe.

Adding insult to injury, graffiti near the tower celebrates Muhammad Sharipov, aka M. Arsalon or Mahdi Arsalon, a Tajik national wanted by authorities for the past eight years on terrorism charges.

During talks last month, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon cautioned his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, against a possible recognition by Moscow of the Taliban regime. Putin insisted that he would consider Tajik concerns about ethnic minority rights in Afghanistan.

While ethnic minority rights may be a Tajik concern, the opposite may be true for China. China fears that the militant Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), also known as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), hardened by the war in Syria, may want to use Afghanistan as a launching pad for attacks in retaliation for China's brutal crackdown on the Uyghur Turkic Muslim minority in the northwestern province of Xinjiang.

A United Nations Security Council report said last month that the group had built strongholds in Badakhshan near the Chinese border in northeast Afghanistan, where it had "expanded its area of operations and covertly purchased weapons, with the aim of improving its capabilities for terrorist activities."

The Taliban suggested that they had moved the estimated 1,000 Uyghur fighters away from the Chinese border to other parts of Afghanistan last October. China has long pressed the Taliban to curtail the group's activity.

Creating distance between Uyghur militants and the Chinese border may not be good enough. The Islamic State sought to make that clear when it employed an Uyghur as a suicide bomber in an attack last October on a Shiite Muslim mosque in the Afghan city of Kunduz.

The message was: Uyghur militants have alternatives. The Taliban may not be their best bet. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**Is Al Qaida expanding in NE India?**

Editor, Northeast India has always been under the radar of splinter groups belonging to Al-Qaeda and the recent headline from The Times of India, "Al-Qaida chief Aymenn al-Zawahiri's 'go to Assam' call disturbing: Cops" is one which should draw the attention of the intelligence services.

In an age of globalisation we need to have good relations with our neighbours but with the growing use of the internet, radicalisation has climbed newer heights attracting foreign fighters who are seasoned in the Arab wars, Chechen conflicts and the Afghan theatre sowing the seeds left behind by Late Sheikh Abdullah Azzam eventually becoming a catch-22 situation.

The Al-Qaida in Indian subcontinent (AQIS) is hooked to expand its services in the Northeast. Coupled with the help of brainwashed elements from Bangladesh (Bangladesh: Treading the

Taliban Trail by Jaideep Saikia) the expansion of individual targeting cells are ready to destabilise the economy. The death of Ayman al-Zawahiri in a recent CIA drone strike will not stop the resurgence of jihadist movement, but thwarting future strikes using high-tech tools combined with community focused counter radicalization is the need of the hour.

Yours etc., Christopher Gatphoh, Shillong-10

**What can a tricolour profile pic do for India?**

Editor, On the 91st edition of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly radio programme, Mann Ki Baat, last Sunday, he suggested that people put the tri-colour on their social media profile pictures between August 2 and 15 under the 'Har Ghar Tiranga' campaign to celebrate the 75th year of India's Independence. Will this bring any change in the political system or education system of the country? Will

this bring any development in the most remote areas of the country? Will this small act of our participation abort all scams and corruption? Will it feed the mouths of billions of Indians? What do the rank and file of the country gain from changing their social media profile pictures? What is the reason behind this motive of the Prime Minister?

How aware is the PM of the state of this country and its citizens? Is he informed that not all citizens have access to smartphones? In India, only 22% of adults own smartphones, with 51% owning feature phones. A staggering 26% of Indian adults do not own any phones at all (2018 data). If this motive of his is to show patriotism towards the country, is he addressing only those sections of society who have access to smartphones and to social media accounts? What about the other segments of society that have no access to smartphones or social media accounts? Does it mean that these sections have no love for their country? Wouldn't they be counted as Indians and are they not patriotic?

On the other hand, if we keep our DP (Display Picture) of a tricolour, what does

it imply? And what about the others who have social media accounts and choose not to do this, thinking that it is a very absurd thing to do considering the situation we are in, in India today? Where are we placed? Are we being anti-Indian? Or are we not at all patriotic?

The Prime Minister should instead make a strategic plan from August 2-August 15 and allow a debate on inflation, the rise in prices of LPG gas cylinders; the rise in unemployment; lack of developmental activities in every sector etc. The country should revisit the importance of education and seek suggestions from the learned individuals of the country and also discuss many issues of concern such as eradicating diseases, better access to health, hospitals and better road transportation to the remote villages, better planning and development of towns and cities, etc. Instead our PM chose to turn a blind eye to this and is focusing instead on our social media accounts. Is the 75th anniversary of our Independence reason enough to change our DP? Isn't this absurd? When we are not living the 'acche din' that the PM promised, how about

for us citizens. If Indians do not replace or change their DP to a tri-colour, that doesn't signify the absence of patriotism in each one of them. Jai Hind.

Yours etc., Emidao Shylla, Via email

**Major banks missing from Tynrai,**

Editor, I am a subscriber for products from the Tynrai Co-operative society. While making payments I am unable to use the net banking facility as major banks such as SBI, Bank of India and HDFC are missing from the list. The list ironically says all major Indian banks.

I would like to request the Tynrai Co-operative Society via your good offices that it should rectify this problem.

Yours etc., Dr. Tridib Kakoty Shillong -14

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

"If you change the way you look at things,  
the things you look at change."  
— Wayne Dyer

The Shillong Times

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China the bully

BULLIES cannot be handled with kid-gloves. India must take note too. The visit by Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, to Taiwan on Wednesday created history. This is the first time in a quarter of a century that a high-profile US dignitary visits Taiwan, the breakaway republic that China says is its very own. Threats from China to the US about retaliation were ignored by the Joe Biden Administration, which boldly gave the green signal to Pelosi's visit as part of her Asia tour. It was time to show China its place – and the Biden administration has asserted itself. China is threatening to take action against Taiwan. In the immediate aftermath of the Pelosi visit, China sent in a couple of drones in another violation of the Taiwanese airspace – just as Pakistan occasionally does with India. The formation of fighter jets that provided the security cover for Pelosi's aircraft on Wednesday demonstrated the US resolve to take on China.

India in recent years has experienced the bullying of China and its president Xi Jinping, across Ladakh as also in the north-eastern sector in attempts at nibbling away more of Indian land. China and Xi attempted the same with Bhutan, marching PLA into territories owned by the kingdom. Timely help from the Indian army in Doklam thwarted the Chinese design on Bhutan and further advancement was halted. China sought to encircle India in the seas through unacceptable maritime alliances with Sri Lanka and Pakistan and it tried to court Bangladesh as well. The red nation is seeking to establish supremacy over the seas and the US is resisting this with help from India as well. The evil designs of China are fairly well-known to the world at large.

Mao Zedong's Communists defeated Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) nationalists in a civil war in 1949 and took power in China. KMT fled to the southern island called Taiwan and set up its government there. A year later, it won recognition from the US. In later years, diplomacy required the US to accept the One China policy that encompassed Taiwan too, yet Americans maintained military and trade relations with Taiwan. While China also eventually started trade relations with Taiwan, the present government of the Democratic Progressive Party, which works for an Independent Taiwan, has distanced itself further from China. Xi is threatening to unify Taiwan with China. However, with strong US and Western military backing for Taiwan, this is easier said than done. The misadventure by Vladimir Putin in Ukraine might tempt Xi to think twice before acting.

# Education: Cosmetic reforms not enough

By Patricia Mukhim

On August 3, Dr Sonali Nag, Professor of Psychology and Education and Education Fellow, Brasenose College, Oxford University, gave an oration at Martin Luther Christian University on the theme, "The Learning Continuum: Home, School and Beyond." Listening to Sonali speak and based on the kind of research work from different countries, one realises that in India and closer home in Meghalaya we still have a long way to go as far as understanding what 'teaching' means and how a child brings learning from the home (what the child has already learnt) and combines that with school learning and then takes back learning to the home and society she belongs to. Learning happens throughout a person's life and not just when the person is in a school, college or university. Perhaps our problem is that we are only concerned with learning within the confines of a school, college, university and believe there's no learning beyond those. Sonali emphasized that new learning stands on the foundation of prior learning inasmuch as new learning also stands on the barriers of old learning.

Cogitating on education in a state with so many poor people and with poverty just spiralling is a conundrum. The latest poverty figures provided by NITI Aayog shows Meghalaya standing at 32.67%. Imagine the education that can happen in such homes where the parents have to make choices on whether they can spare money for the education of their children by compromising on the quality of food for instance, or giving up some other need. And there are far too many such homes in our country. Whereas in urban elite households a lot of learning has happened at the pre-school level through interaction with a host of relatives at home or in a gated society for instance, no thought is given to the rural child from a poor background. It's not as if that child is not learning anything but is what that child has already learnt at home being captured and built on when that child enters school?

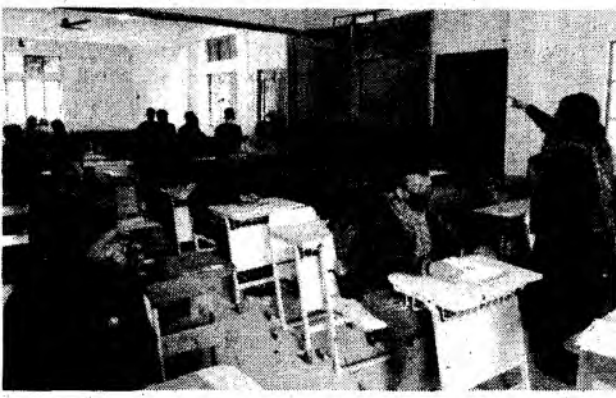
Sonali also spoke on what exactly our education system captures or does not capture. Indeed over decades we have seen that tests and exams only capture what is memorised. There is little leeway to capture comprehension and the other intangibles of a child's learning. We will agree that the examination system in

India assesses learning by rote but does not bring out the hidden facets in the child which could have been built and improved upon. Hence the Oxford Professor says she does not believe in marking a child zero because she does not believe anyone deserves a zero and nor does she believe in anyone scoring 100% for what exactly is being assessed is the key point. Examinations are intended to map the mind but are the tests designed in India really capable of mind-mapping?

Prof Sonali Nag touched on a key point that we in this country have not given adequate attention to and that is teachers' training. Sure, we have the B Ed course and Montessori or primary teachers' training but as someone who has completed the B

correctly! How awful is that! Yet that has happened and continues to happen in many of our schools.

In the B Ed course there was much stress on how to deal with 'gifted' and 'backward' kids but that's one hell of a generalisation. What if we are neither of the two categories and we are 'backward' in what the system has spawned to be the opposite of 'gifted' and we are somewhere in between but we are good at something that the teacher or the system has not discovered yet? Isn't that one reason why we have so many drop-outs? Those who don't fit into a category are forced to drop out of the system completely or are pushed to take up some trade. But the intrinsic intelligence that has perhaps not been discovered



Ed course, I would say that there's very little in the B Ed curriculum that really sharpens our teaching skills. In fact, even today I can only recall what a Psychology teacher taught us. I recall being told that Education boils down to this – "The teacher teaches JOHN English." The critical factor here is the child; not the subject; not the teacher. But in a class of 40-45 students where is the time to really give undivided attention to John or any other child that needs special attention?

I completed B Ed in 1988 and until then we had not learnt what Dyslexia is. In fact, I had some students who just could not spell correctly. One of them would write 'hte' instead of 'the' and garble up her spellings and I would wonder why this child could not place the alphabets in the right order. It was only many years later when I took an avid interest in understanding autism and other learning disabilities that I learnt what Dyslexia is all about. Imagine a Dyslexic child in a class where the teacher would punish her for not being able to spell words

yet lies dormant simply because someone, somewhere designed a system that measures only a limited idea of intelligence, will remain buried forever. What a loss of a genius!

For the large section of our underprivileged kids there is no one at home that they can test their questions against or engage with on the lessons they learnt at school on a particular day. Our education system takes for granted that all kids get help at home and if parental help is not available then kids can take the help of a private tutor. The second option is for urban parents that can afford tuition, not poor kids who don't have elder siblings to answer their questions, because parents are illiterate.

Prof Sonali Nag pointed out very correctly that illiteracy and malnutrition are the worst forms of deprivation. In low-income countries like India where there is low professional development of teachers and no one to teach kids at home, education is fraught with grave uncertainties and consequences and then we wonder why poverty replicates itself many times

over.

In Meghalaya there has not been adequate research on why there are such poor outcomes from education (not that there has been adequate investment) and such disparities in the quality of education between the urban centres and rural outback and between government funded institutions and private schools. Prof Sonali Nag pointed out that 23.5% of rural households in India had no adults above the age of 25 who are literate and more than 1/5 of the rest had not completed primary school. The statistics would be the same or worse for Meghalaya.

Despite the poor educational outcomes as published regularly in the ASER Education Report which shows that about 50% students from class 5 and 25% students from class 8 cannot read a simple text which has a difficulty of class 2 level, the State has not bothered to conduct a study on where the problem lies. Is it the teacher? Or the teaching method? The ASER report also says students cannot read letters, words, or a simple paragraph or a textbook story of the lower level class. Such reports don't seem to bother governments that are more interested in completing a 5-year tenure. The bureaucracy too is busy completing its day to day tasks to be able to give due attention to these educational deficits.

Meanwhile, Meghalaya's educational indicators continue to dip and there is no attempt to evaluate the teachers. It is this permanency of tenure of teachers that ails education in Meghalaya. I know this will not go down too well with the teaching fraternity but facts have to be stated upfront. The problem with education is the lack of continuous evaluation of teachers to assess the learning outcomes of children in their class or subject. Too often students are labelled "weak" in mathematics but it would take the principal to sit in the Maths teacher's class to understand whether the students that don't understand Maths are incapable of dealing with numbers or is it the teacher's method that is faulty.

There is so much that is wanting in our education system because there is a push to reward conformity and to punish non-conformists. Why do we fail to understand that a large number of students don't conform because they are wired differently? When will we ever learn?

## Shiv Sena battle in SC between Uddhav and Shinde may be prolonged Apex court and election commission will have to look into some unique issues

By Indira Jaising

At the hearing of the Maharashtra political stalemate before the Supreme Court bench comprising the Chief Justice of India ('CJI'), N.V. Ramana, and Justices Krishna Murari and Hima Kohli on August 3, arguments commenced with senior counsel addressing the court on the questions of law arising for consideration in the Sunil Prabhu batch of petitions under Article 32 of the Constitution.

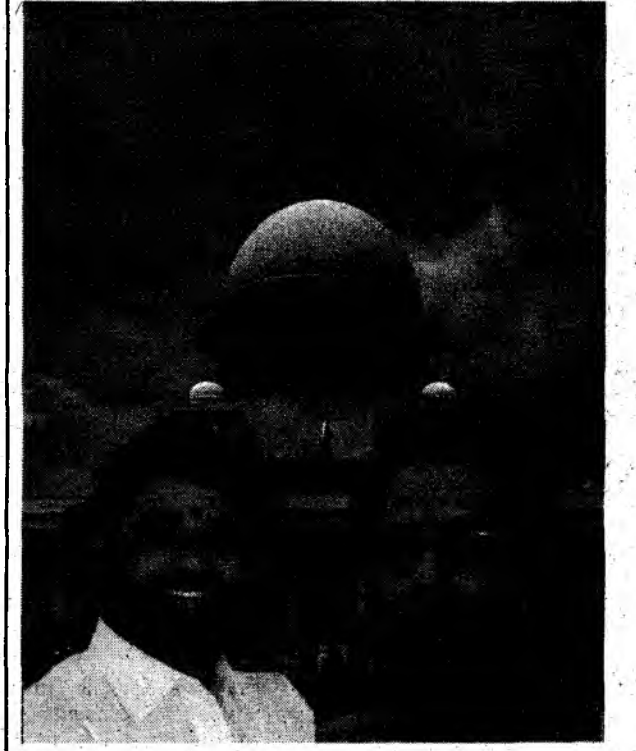
The issue squarely posed for decision by the Supreme Court by senior counsel, Kapil Sibal is whether the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution recognizes only two grounds to invite disqualification, namely, Paragraph 2(a) read with the explanation, that is, voluntarily giving up membership of the original political party, which is the political party on which the elected legislator stood for elections, and Paragraph 2(b), that is, voting contrary to the party whip.

At the outset, it is worth reiterating that the object of the Tenth Schedule is to prevent defections during the five-year tenure of an elected legislator, and not

Court in this case, is something different. He told The Leaflet: "In my opinion, the only question for a decision by the Supreme Court is who has the power to issue a party whip? There are two whips, one issued by the Eknath Shinde faction and one by the designated party whip of the Shiv Sena. The speaker has no power to decide the question; only the Supreme Court can decide."

In other words, this promises to be a two-stage hearing: the question of law is to first be decided by the Supreme Court, and once the power to issue the party whip is decided, then the question of disqualification will be decided by the incumbent Speaker.

Although the Solicitor General, appearing for the Governor, stated that this is not an extraordinary situation, according to Achary, "it is extraordinary as for the first time we have two whips. The Speaker cannot decide this issue; it is unprecedented." In such a situation, the Supreme Court will decide what the speaker is expected to do. It remains to be seen how the SC frames



the other way round, namely to find ways and means of defecting, and avoiding disqualification.

In the facts of this case, given that we now have two whips, which one is the Speaker bound to follow for the purpose of Para 2(b)?

The Solicitor General of India, Tushar Mehta, presented his questions of law on behalf of the Governor of Maharashtra. He agreed with senior counsel Harish Salve that disputed questions have to be decided by the Speaker and not by the court.

The bench requested Salve to reformulate his questions of law for clarity. His main argument appeared to be that the petition filed by Shiv Sena legislator Prabhu of the Uddhav Thackeray faction was not maintainable.

To this, the CJI asked, "Who approached the court first?" The answer was obviously Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who first invoked the jurisdiction of the court and obtained an order granting his faction time to reply to the show cause notices issued by the Deputy Speaker. This delay enabled the Shinde camp to make a round trip from Mumbai to Surat to Guwahati to Goa back to Mumbai. It was thereafter that Shinde and the Bharatiya Janata Party's ('BJP') former Maharashtra Chief Minister and current Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis staked a claim to form a government. The rest is history.

The former Lok Sabha Secretary-General, P.D.T Achary, explains that the issue before the Supreme

its own questions.

One thing is clear: the case is headed to a five-judge bench, as it undoubtedly involves a question of interpretation of the Constitution. It is equally clear that given that the current Chief Justice is retiring on August 26, it will not be decided by a bench presided over by him.

The Shinde government will survive, if it does politically, on the orders of the court with an uneasy uncertain status quo. The pendency of the petition partly explains the inability to form a full Cabinet.

The Thackeray camp has asked for a stay of proceedings before the Election Commission as any decision will impact the pending case, and the decisions may become irreversible.

The Election Commission is faced with a unique situation where there are no two factions, and Thackeray continues as the President of the party. As no one has staked a claim to be the President of the party nor is it claimed that there are two separate parties claiming the election symbol, it is unclear what the Election Commission is expected to decide and how.

These, and other related issues, will have to be decided before Shinde gets the stamp of legitimate Chief Minister of Maharashtra. He does, however, continue to be the de facto Chief Minister until another intra-party fight breaks out this time between the BJP and the Chief Minister over the spoils of office. (IPA Service)

Courtesy: The Leaflet

Letters to the Editor

### Being mean or average, not the way to go

Editor,  
I've been thinking about this hypothesis for quite some time now. Suppose Mukesh Ambani and his family live in one colony with nine other families, according to the hypothesis I had in mind, Mukesh Ambani earns 80,000 crore per annum while the other 9 families earn between Rs1-5 lakh per annum. A reporter for the New York Times goes to the colony to survey it. He then publishes a report with the caption: So & so colony where Mukesh Ambani resides has an average family income of 1 billion dollars per annum. Either something is wrong with the Times or something is wrong with "Average." Take the simplest measure of dispersion, The range and analyse this hypothetical situation and you will know that there is an inherent flaw with the law of averages. I will choose a simple measurement like the Range any day over Average. The flipside is that an excellent sophisticated tool like the Standard Deviation wouldn't have been invented had it not been because of the flaws of Average.

A transitional phase should be part and parcel of human existence too. In normal human conversation, if someone is average or me-

diocre it means that person is easily forgettable. Being bad yet excellent is celebrated and remembered in the modern world; being average is contemptible. As a community, we're just about 0.114 percent of the total population in the country. We're a microscopic community but so are other communities in North East India. The palpable difference is that some communities like the Meiteis and the Mizos have learnt to compete at the national level in sports and other fields of life too. The Meiteis in particular have leaptfrogged other communities in the region in almost all socio-economic parameters while we're still stuck in the past. The fact that our brethren from another part of the state are behind us particularly in education doesn't mean that we can breathe easy. There's a saying, "If you want to be the best you'll have to beat the best." To acquire and harness a competitive attitude, the easy-going laid-back attitude must go.

Yours etc.,  
Gary Marbaniang,  
Via email

### A clarion call to the youth of our state

Editor,  
The sad reality is that we live in a very competitive world, hence we cannot remain complacent and wait

for the government to provide us jobs. It is true that the government must work for the welfare of its people and the state-but it doesn't mean that we have to totally depend on it. We must work hard for our self-sustenance. Allow me to share my views on the realities in our state.

The majority in our state hail from the villages and poor families but with a strong determination, we can succeed. Unfortunately some things hold us back. For instance we could start a small business with Rs Rs.10000 but many of us we don't have the money. However, when it comes to buying a new smart phone costing Rs 10000 we seem to have no problem to find the money for the same.

Sometimes learning new things from a workshop does not cost more than Rs 500 but many give the excuse that its too expensive and it is beyond their reach. But the same people will not think twice about going on a sight-seeing trip and drink and enjoy life with friends. Many young people pay money to watch

Netflix or play games or engage on Facebook or Instagram or Twitter for hours together but when it comes to learning a new skill for two hours, that will be of advantage to them they complain that they have no time.

My simple suggestion to the youth is that they should prioritise their lives and their

spending habits. They ought to learn to do the right thing and stop blaming the lack of opportunity. Opportunities are waiting for those who are sincere and ready to work hard and learn new skills in life.

Yours etc.,  
PSR Kharkongor,  
Via email

### The great 'Herd Mentality'

Editor,  
Borrowing the phrase "herd instinct" from what the outgoing British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson had reasoned for his resignation, in the recent past, the same can be attributed to a more remote issue here in our town vis-à-vis the traffic congestion on its roads. The survey conducted by the Office of the East Khasi Hills Deputy Commissioner found a whopping 68 per cent of the parents in Shillong using their vehicles for dedicated school trips. In case of Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, he had said, "In the last few days, I tried to persuade my colleagues that it would be eccentric to change governments when we're delivering so much... (but) the herd instinct is powerful and when the herd moves, it moves." Now the same herd instinct can be seen in wide display at the Pine Mount ridge road (Greater Laban), old Jowai

Road (adjacent St. Edmund's School), Dhankheti – Don Bosco – Laitumkhrak (adjacent Loreto Convent & St. Anthony's School) and Nongmalki Road (adjacent Seven Set School) every morning and afternoon hours with the sea of students and their vehicles flooding every inch of these roads. All the parents/guardians of the students are seen moving in herds towards the respective gates of each of these schools and when the herds move, they also blocks other moving vehicles and pedestrians on those roads.

Looking at the acquiescent attitude of the state government here, it would be better to reserve these roads only for the parents and guardians in the morning and afternoon hours or else one runs the risk of being trampled by the moving herds there. At a glance, it appears that every child of these elite schools own either a four wheeler or a two wheeler and all these vehicles are parked right on the main road beside these schools with seeming traffic personnel scampering and trying to grapple with the situation. This is the scenario despite the fact that each of the above-mentioned schools have large campus spaces – which can easily accommodate the vehicles of parents and guardians. It is an unusual plight when one has to give in to the herd in the manner that the pedestrians and traffic cops are doing

every day in these roads.  
Yours etc.,  
BC Paul,  
Shillong-4

### Har ghar tiranga

Editor,  
It is good that the Government of India has issued a directive that the 'Tiranga' or our National Flag should be hoisted at each household on the occasion of celebration of our 75th Independence Day. The Government is also arranging for widespread distribution of flags at a certain amount. However, it is pertinent to mention here that due care must be taken for proper disposal of the said national flags once the celebration is over. One can imagine the ugly scenario if the flags are littered everywhere after the Independence Day celebrations. On this august occasion of our 75th Independence Day let us pledge that we will carry forward the spirit of Patriotism and Nationalism throughout our lives and not limit it to a particular occasion or celebration. Jai Hind.

Yours etc.,  
Sadiq H. Laskar,  
Guwahati.

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"Redemption is not perfection. The redeemed must realize their imperfections."

— John Piper

## The Shillong Times

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**Meghalaya's low credit-deposit ratio**  
AT a meeting organised by the National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Meghalaya Regional office in March 2021, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong had expressed his disappointment with the low credit-deposit ratio of Meghalaya which stood at 42.57%. This means that about 60% of the deposits raised from Meghalaya are lent to borrowers from other states. An analysis of where the 43% of loans are parked would also inform that it goes to big business houses and very little actually goes to the agricultural or the small and medium business sector. It must also be said that some banks, more than others, have been very circumspect about lending in Meghalaya. The crux of the matter is that those who really need financial assistance to scale up their agriculture/horticulture also don't have collateral to offer. If they had collateral they might not need credit.

Interestingly, this crucial subject is never raised in the Assembly even when nearly 75% of the population of Meghalaya are rural farmers. One of the reasons why farmers find it difficult to access credit is their lack of collateral. Most are farming on lease held land and therefore own no land for mortgage. But even where loanees have mortgaged land, it becomes difficult for the banks to recover costs since according to the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act, land can only be auctioned off by banks to other tribals. It is said that some banks are holding land confiscated from defaulters and those have become non-performing asset (NPA). Last year NABARD has estimated a credit potential of Rs 2,593.99 crore for Meghalaya under priority sector lending for the year 2021-22. The credit estimation for Agriculture, MSME and other priority sectors, including Housing Loan, Education Loan etc, have been pegged at Rs 1,333.86 crore (51 per cent) Rs 930.97 crore (36 per cent) and Rs 329.16 crore (13 per cent) respectively. But these are projected figures that hardly get translated into reality.

One area where Meghalaya is rather weak is the co-operative sector. There are not too many successfully run co-operatives. Even those that thrived for a while have winded up their businesses. Of late however, self-help groups, farmers and rural artisans have come up in a big way with state assistance and they can upscale their activities with adequate bank financing. In fact, banks are there to enable such small and medium enterprises to scale up their economic activities and in turn create employment. Overall the Report of the State Level Bankers' Committee states that credit flows to the Agriculture sector is still very poor in spite of availability of a sizable number of Government recognized farmers under PM-Kisan. Banks have to scale up their activities and must have more outreach in rural Meghalaya.

# What is Education? Overcoming the Noetic Factory!

By Deepa Majumdar

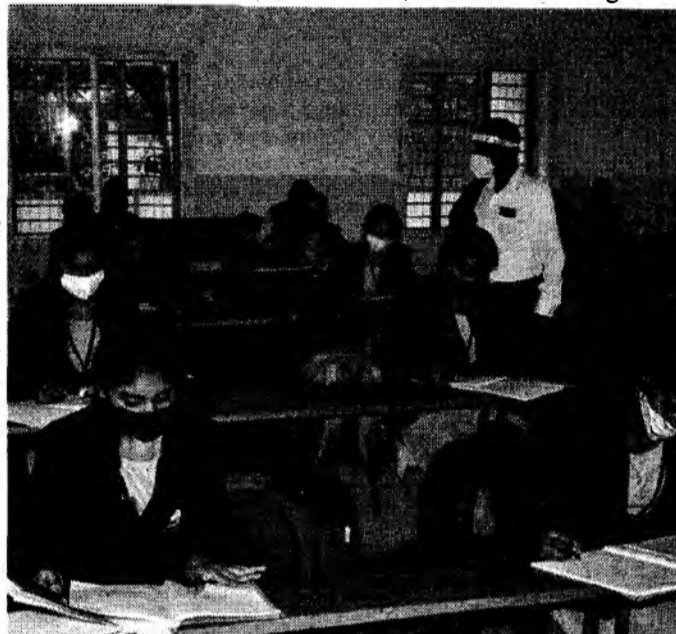
One sign of the extraordinary turbulence of our current historical moment lies in what we have come to accept as education. Ideally education should uplift the mind of man, serving as a herald of what ought to be – not what actually is. This means education should lead the mind of man – not the other way around. But today universities and school systems meekly follow the drifting waves of a collective consciousness that is floundering in the open sea of human desires. Subject to the dictates of modernity, formal education is honing in on the "I," that modernity forges. The world today is divided between the extremes of the west and the rest.

Here in the western world I am personally witness to the crumbling of higher education, as teachers are coerced more and more to pander to creativity and the needs and opinions of the "I" – at the cost of basic skills and altruism towards the "we." Given the sad self-indulgence endemic to modernity – students now declare themselves to be this or that kind of learner – as if learning styles are inflexible and the individual student has no will of her own. Moreover, given the worldly nature of higher education, colleges and universities have become noetic factories that process students with no interest at all in a life of the mind. Increasingly bereft of wisdom and reflection, curricula are drenched in the utilitarian and the sensate. If at one end we have the dark amoral corporeality of the sciences, then at the other extreme, we have the sensuous floundering of the humanities. God is not dead, as Nietzsche claimed. God has fled higher education!

The first casualty of this money-making education has been text-mastery. Accustomed to their egos being stroked for doing the minimum, and their opinions being sought eagerly, as if it were priceless knowledge – students no longer read. And if they do, they often confuse their own views with those of the authors. If you add to this debacle, the realities of grade inflation, plagiarism, and over-liberal constant saccharine-sweet narcissistic sympathy for students, then the results are even more disastrous. The writing is clear on the wall. We are teaching in a climate of literate illiteracy! Critical thinking has degenerated to bashing authors and trumping

one's own ego. The final nail on the coffin of higher education are teacher evaluations rated by students. Not only disrespectful, these ratings compromise seriously the quality of classroom teaching, with teachers pandering to spoil youth for the sake of a good evaluation.

In non-western nations like India, the opposite has been true – with excessive emphasis on text-mastery and little to no attention on developing the student's intellect – by asking her to reach beyond ordinary critical thinking, to engage in thoughtful and reflective exegesis of text materials – an activity that



presupposes a prior text-mastery. If we add to this, the draconian exam system Indians inherited from the British, but imbued with their own authoritarianism, then the noetic factory in India becomes all the more formidable. I belong to a generation still

*"The first casualty of this money-making education has been text-mastery. Accustomed to their egos being stroked for doing the minimum, and their opinions being sought eagerly, as if it were priceless knowledge – students no longer read. And if they do, they often confuse their own views with those of the authors. If you add to this debacle, the realities of grade inflation, plagiarism, and over-liberal constant saccharine-sweet narcissistic sympathy for students, then the results are even more disastrous."*

traumatized by its experiences of the Indian education system, where "coming first" was a matter of family honor. Instead of excessive liberal sympathy, we saw a transition from our parents' generation, in which, teachers were like

family members, to a harsher system that focused heavily on exams and marks and very little on cultivating the mind of the student.

But today, things are perhaps far worse, inasmuch as education has left the moral for the utilitarian. The noetic factory now is more literally a factory that reifies knowledge to information and data, focusing unduly on the practical, at the cost of moral ideals, contemplation, and reflection. But this brings us to the whole question of what "external" knowledge means. Clearly knowledge is to be distinguished from information, and data. Knowledge is

fair share of scoundrels with Ph.D.'s!

How then do we sublimate the harsh utilitarianism of the curriculum, converting the noetic factory to a garden that nourishes young minds? The first step is to remember that external knowledge is no more than a propaedeutic to true knowledge – which means Self-knowledge through unitive knowledge of God. This inner meditative knowledge cannot be prostituted for money-making purposes, the way external knowledge can. Small wonder then that Sri Ramakrishna refused this bread-winning external knowledge – "bundling of rice and plantain" as He called it – plunging, instead, into the deepest depths of contemplation and meditation. For Plato, this higher notion of education, which eludes the noetic factory altogether, meant orienting the entire soul, away from the world of becoming, and turning it towards the changeless Good (his God). The best external knowledge is that which heralds and inspires this deepest contemplation that not only redeems us, but serves a salvific purpose, by reminding us of our own highest universal divine Self.

For such a lofty purpose, the noetic factory will not do. It must be scrapped radically and upon its tomb, we must rebuild the human mind, paying exquisite attention on character formation. Making the utilitarian a servant of the moral, we must use education to enable individual students to become ethical citizens, selfless leaders, and thoughtful servants of humanity. Here it helps to hearken these words of Swami Vivekananda – "We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet" – meaning external education must be man-making – not money-making!

Imagine walking into the classroom one day to find the grave stone of the noetic factory, now adorned with the fresh flowers of a garden of minds. Imagine finding students who are so eager to learn, they cannot wait to return to class. Imagine teachers teaching for the sake of a higher principle – not as workers in a noetic factory, shining with ideals – leaving their schools and colleges to go out into the world as humble servants of humanity, ever ready to serve others.

(The author teaches at Purdue University, USA. Email: dmajumda@gmail.com)

## Teaching: Bread and butter or society's backbone?

By Emidao Shylla

Teaching has and will always be the most noble profession of all, and the greatest act of optimism. It is a delight for someone to be an educator. The entire nation, and the world as a whole, functions because of the education and knowledge gained from schooling. The prime people behind this are the teachers and educators. Not everyone can be a teacher, but only a select few. Each one of us have our favourite teachers, whether from KinderGarten, schools, colleges, universities, etc. What makes a teacher our favourite teacher? A definition of "favourite teacher" will vary from one individual to another. Teachers are the backbone of society, and it is a universal truth that teaching is one such profession that creates all other professions.

Who is a teacher? Why does an individual choose to become a teacher? What is their ultimate goal? Are they destined to work in this field for the rest of their lives? Are they the chosen ones? How do they know if they are the chosen ones? What makes one a good teacher? What are the qualities needed to become a teacher? What are the skills required to do the same? Are the said skills inculcated or inborn? What is most important? Qualifications, teaching skills, the ability to impart knowledge or all? Can we answer these questions? Evidently, everyone can come up with answers, and we might even have uniform or varied answers to each question put up. Our opinions on the same questions can be different. A debate on this should be conducted. Perhaps research should be done.

One may wonder if this article can act as an eye-opener or impact our leaders, our fellow citizens, our educators, and each and every concerned citizen of the state of Meghalaya or the country as a whole. In the affirmative, we believe it will make the thinkers think and the doers take action. We have all grown up and graduated from various schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions, and have also left a mark on each institution whether for good or for ill. Similarly, our teachers have left an indelible mark on our lives for reasons we can never forget. Who are those teachers who have impacted our lives, such that we remember them and talk about them every time we meet a mutual friend? To answer this question, we might come up with multiple reasons. In the aforementioned, it is mentioned that not everyone can be a teacher. This is a debatable question. In the modern world, magnifying the state of Meghalaya, the scale of unemployment is so high that we all end up being highly qualified just to sit within the four walls of a room, either in the kitchen, scrolling reels on Instagram, or hooking ourselves up playing pub-g and doing all kinds of unproductive activities, and for some even getting into illegal tournaments. Should we blame the government? Should unemployed youths be blamed? Who is to blame? Someone has to own this, but who will? Why must one be accountable for this? Is society to blame or the individuals themselves?

On the other hand we have another group of qualified, smart but unemployed youth who fail to get a job in the courses they mastered, such as engineering, nursing MBA graduates, etc. These people have tried their best but due to a lack of job opportunities in the state, they resort to teaching. In the event of job openings in educational institutions, especially in private schools, these youths will hop and apply for the vacancy for the sake of being "employed." Most of them will successfully clear the interviews and get the job. A happy

moment for them and for the family, but a sad moment for the students and the future. Intellectuals and concerned individuals will pose a series of questions. Are these young people really qualified to be teachers? Have they ever thought in their younger days that they wanted to be teachers? Do they have a passion for teaching? Or do they have the ability to impart knowledge? How patient can they be with the kids? Can they mould the students the way we were moulded by our great teachers? What made them choose this profession?

For this series of questions different answers will be given by different people but one answer is common "Unemployment." To blame these "newly recruited teachers" for joining the teaching fraternity is absolutely wrong. They have no options and they have a livelihood. They have families to feed and, most importantly, a life to live. Hence, a job, however big or small, is important. With their qualifications and education, they have no option but to resort to the last profession, the teaching profession. If these youths are not blamed, who should we shoulder the blame on? Four or five years of intense studying to graduate as an engineer or an MBA has done nothing good for these students because their investments in these years have gone down the drain. Someone is responsible for that, but who? It could perhaps be a mysterious organisation or an individual.

To ask everyone to do their B.Ed or their DI.El. Ed is nothing but a waste of time. These degrees, are merely certificates. How much of their B.Ed or DI.El. Ed lessons are actually practised within the four walls of a classroom? We are bound to answer unanimously that such activities are barely exercised in real teaching. For some, these degrees can be helpful, but not for all. These degrees are a ladder to a higher salary or to qualify for the post of Principal in the future. Other than that, they're a waste of time. Why should teachers with ten or fifteen years of experience go for this course? These teachers have vast experience, and most of them are good teachers, even if they are not qualified. Being a good teacher and being a qualified teacher are totally different.

If an individual with higher qualifications chooses to become a teacher, that is an advantage. But if the same turns out to be someone who lacks teaching skills or the ability to impart knowledge, is this not a disadvantage for the school and students in particular? Will this not affect the future of the country and the state in general? On the other hand, we have a handful of people who have teaching skills, are passionate about teaching and can impart knowledge, but they lack qualifications such as B.Ed, DL.Ed etc. Where do such individuals go? Shouldn't these people be in the teaching profession? We have all come across such teachers in our lives. We have had great teachers with minimum qualifications but who are passionate towards teachings. We have also had highly qualified teachers with no skills whatsoever and most of their classes turned out to be monotonous. Can we still entrust our children to teachers who have no interest in or skill in teaching? If so, what will the future of the state be? Where will our younger generations stand? What will happen to the education system? If this is not analysed now, when will it be? We are concerned about the future of our children and we must wake up from our slumber, especially the concerned department: the Education Department. The main reason behind this debate is "Unemployment." To conclude, let's leave this for an open debate.

### Letters to the Editor

## H. Elias - A forgotten poet and patriot

Editor,

It is with a note of concern that I bring to the notice of the people of the State regarding the partial treatment perpetrated both by the political as well as the academic fora. I am speaking here of our great poet and writer as well as a freedom fighter, Fr. Hopewell Elias Khariang SDB. Without disrespecting our great poet laureate Soso Tham, I wish to reiterate the fact that the state has not given due justice to this great son of the soil. Elias was an accomplished Khasi poet as well as a great prose writer. His classical epic poems contained in his renowned book Ka Hamsaia ki Por, are a proof of his poetic genius as well as his sense of history. His many primers which are still being used in primary schools as well as his prose books used in secondary and higher secondary classes, should be seen as an expression of his love for the Khasi language and his commitment to the promotion of education in the state. In fact when it comes to the volume of literature, he surpasses Soso Tham. In the words of J. S. Shangpliang "Fr. Elias ranks with Soso Tham as a

poet and a critic. Much has been said and written about the latter, but Fr. Elias has not been given the attention he deserves as a writer by our critics and fellow writers." It is reported that before his death in 1966, he had said, "I wish to write some more books if God permits me some more time, because I am very concerned about our students and the backwardness of our people." H. Elias was also a freedom fighter and while he was studying at St. Xavier's College in Kolkata, he joined the Quit India protests led by Mahatma Gandhi and it was there that he was fired with the spirit of freedom. This led him to compose a poem Hail Mother India in 1947, the very year of independence. Significantly, he was the first Khasi poet and writer to have composed a patriotic poem. It is my humble opinion that the Khasi Authors' Society should have promoted this great poet and writer as much as they did Soso Tham. Unfortunately, many decisions that were taken by some of our leaders to honour this great son of the soil during the fiftieth anniversary of his death in 2016, have all come to nothing. Even the government has failed to honour this great son of the soil. While we see monuments of other eminent personalities in public places, there is not

a single bust or statue of H. Elias in any public space.

I fail to understand why this selective treatment of our great personalities. The criteria for state recognition seems to be partial and arbitrary. In this year of the golden jubilee of our state, on the part of all Catholic authors we would request the Government to give due recognition to Fr. H. Elias by way of installing a bust or statue of his in any prominent public location, perhaps at Fire Brigade point or at Police Point. Being himself a scholar and an eminent educationist, these places would be more meaningful than anywhere else. I hope the Khasi Department of NEHU will do something to honour this great Khasi literary figure by way of encouraging more scholars to research into the deep thoughts of this poet and writer.

Yours etc.,  
Barnes Mawrie sdb  
Via email

## Are MeECL Smart Meters really manufactured in China?

Editor,  
We the citizens of Meghalaya are surprisingly curious

to see the interest shown by certain groups including a political party leader from outside the State on the implementation of the ADB funded Smart Meter project in Meghalaya. To the best of my knowledge, ADB is funding not only the Smart Meter project but also the System Improvement project which involves construction of distribution lines and substations (which is surprisingly invisible to the eyes of the learned Political Leader).

The vocal (occasionally) Opposition Chief Whip of Meghalaya Legislative Assembly has slammed the State Government over the smart metering project in Meghalaya. He has questioned the wisdom of the Government for not implementing the smart meter under Smart Meter National Programme. This seems reminiscent of the attack on a former Chief Minister on the Meghalaya House deal. He even raised the question of increasing the fiscal deficit of the state by implementing the smart meter project. However, as rightly reprimanded many times in the Assembly for not doing his "homework", in this instance also he is not in the know about the fact that the Smart Meter National Programme is in a BOOT Model which would unfortunately pass on the cost to

the consumers eventually. Whereas the ADB funding is a grant extended by the Government of India without burden on the consumers and the Government.

We as laymen (practically being non-smart people) would request the Hon'ble Deputy CM in-charge Power to simply explain in detail the reason for implementing the Smart Meter project in Meghalaya. This is essentially required to clear the misgivings about Smart Meter in the minds of citizens of Meghalaya since the public should not be made pawns in a political game of accusations and counter-accusations.

Frankly speaking this is getting very banal and repetitive. However, we should remember proudly that Meghalaya was one of the first States in India to introduce pre-paid meter technology in 2014. There was a huge opposition from the public even at that time which resulted in it being introduced only in Government quarters. MeECL could not explain the benefit of this technology to the public then and it continued to purchase digital static meters till 2019-2020. It is rumored that even now more than 1,00,000 digital static meters are still lying un-utilized in MeECL stores.

Now to the question of Chinese origin of the

Smart Meters. Are they really manufactured in China? Have Engineers from MeECL inspected the factory where these Meters are manufactured as part of due diligence? Were the Factory Acceptance Test and Site Acceptance Test done? Whether relevant guidelines prescribed by Central Electricity Authority (CEA) for cyber security and smart meter were followed by MeECL? These are the questions that the Govt. should simply answer and this would clear the air for the public like me. In fact we all can recollect that there was an Independent Commission of Enquiry set up to check the working of MeECL. What was the outcome? Why has this report not come out yet despite it having completed its mandate 4 months back? The public has a right to know the facts. It is better to bring clarity on these issues clearly being played out for political gains and certain vested interests.

Yours etc.,  
Banshanlang Lyngdoh  
Shillong - I

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# Why is the world still obsessed with Marilyn Monroe?



For some, death can be a smart career move. Quite how smart a move depends a lot on who you are and how you die. As we approach the 60th anniversary of the death of Marilyn Monroe, we can learn a few lessons about the art and implications of dying a huge public personality.

As with any icon, the brand of Marilyn Monroe far transcends Marilyn Monroe the person, and even more so Norma Jeane Mortenson, as she was until 1946. The Wikipedia page "Marilyn Monroe in popular culture" has entries for almost every year since her death, charting a posthumous career that extends across most media forms.

She has been referenced in adverts for cheese, cars and whisky, and in multiple music videos. She lends her name to a Christian metalcore band, a jewellery collection and a pair of skyscrapers in Ontario. She is the subject of countless pieces of visual art, including caricatures, collages and digital prints.

Her visual image has been a recurring theme for artists, notably Andy Warhol, who produced several pieces using images of her face, and who channelled Marilyn herself in photographs by Christopher Makos. In turn, Warhol's representations

have become a touchstone for subsequent artefacts including a 70cm-high plastic figurine, a Nike Warhol/Monroe custom AirMax shoe and a 3,000-piece Lego reproduction.

And now she is the subject of a US\$22 million (£18 million) Netflix biopic, *Blonde*, starring Ana de Armas, based on Joyce Carol Oates' fictionalised account of her life, published in 2000. Why does this fascination endure so many decades after her death?

## Perfect storm

Monroe made her name as a "blonde bombshell," a glamorous pin-up model and Hollywood actress/singer who was a favourite focus for the voracious mid-century male gaze. But she was by no means the first, following in the high-heeled footsteps of Mae West and Jean Harlow. Nor was she the last: Anita Ekberg, Jayne Mansfield, Kim Novak and Doris Day all came after. So what elevates Monroe above mere celebrity into the status of icon?

In her lifetime, Monroe was exalted as one of the most bankable stars of the day, essentially guaranteed to attract an audience to any event. Famously, she used her own appeal to help boost the career of

Ella Fitzgerald, bribing the reluctant owners of the Mocambo jazz club to take a chance on the gifted black singer with the promise of a front-row appearance every night.

Monroe achieved such popularity due to a perfect storm of biography and cultural context, a potential that she managed to capitalise on with shrewd image management.

Indeed, it is the radical reinvention of her image that helps explain her appeal. In the shift from Norma Jeane to Marilyn, from girl-next-door brunette to blinding-peroxide blonde, and from stammerer to vocal seductress, she also moved from victim to agent.

structured also mattered, as her white-blond hair was a startling reassurance of American-ness at a time when American identity was itself being fiercely protected.

The height of Monroe's popularity coincided with the intensification of the US civil rights movement, with the 1954 landmark Brown vs Board of Education decision (which ruled that the segregation of black and white children in schools was unconstitutional), swiftly followed by Rosa Parks' famous refusal to yield her bus seat in 1955.

The brutal lynching of Emmett Till the same year, and particularly his mother's insistence on an open

Barbie, the intersection of mass production and idealised femininity, essentially Marilyn in US\$3 plastic form. Monroe epitomised all that was carefree and enjoyable about western popular culture, everything that needed protecting against the advance of communism.

## An icon in death

Ultimately, though, it may be the circumstances of her death at just 36 that assured Monroe of a place in the pantheon of 20th-century icons. The unexpected and untimely nature of her death is crucial, meaning her stardom works differently from, say, Aretha Franklin, Dolly Parton or Madonna (the latter two still alive, but distinctly post-menopausal).

Crucially, it was a tragic death that spoke of inner demons, not one resulting from "an act of God". Monroe's story therefore aligns with those of Amy Winehouse, Judy Garland and Whitney Houston, rather than Patsy Cline (plane crash), Jean Harlow (kidney failure) or Jayne Mansfield (car crash). Because if there's one thing more appealing

than a rags-to-riches story, it's the rubbernecking joy found in a riches-to-ruins tale.

It was arguably the way in which the circumstances of her life fed into those of her death that keeps us revisiting Monroe. For her sexual expression, she has been claimed by both feminism's second-wave (as a cautionary tale), and its third-wave (as a poster-girl for bodily self-determination).

The glutinous media consumption of Monroe in life has been reconfigured as a story of being eaten up by her public, much like Princess Diana. And the McCarthy-era obsession with uncovering secrets was surely mirrored in the question-mark-laden headlines reporting her death, inviting all sorts of unquashable conspiracy theories around it.

Marilyn Monroe may have died in 1962, but in that same moment a legend was born. And while her life laid the groundwork for legendary status, it is her death that catapulted her into iconic immortality. (*The Conversation*)



## America's emblem and sweetheart

The particular image she con-

Norma Jeane grew up in foster homes and orphanages, during which time she was sexually molested, and her mother was hospitalised with paranoid schizophrenia. As Marilyn Monroe, she took control of her brand, wielded her sex appeal to build her career and founded her own production company - a rare thing for a woman at the time.

Such transformation is one classic hallmark of the icon, including Elvis Presley, Maria Callas, Aretha Franklin and Dolly Parton. For Monroe, as with others, the capacity to overcome adversity was humanising and inspiring.

casket, further propelled civil rights issues into the public eye. In such a context, Monroe's whiteness apparently stood as unequivocally American, comforting those who would resist the advance of racial equality.

The other great theatre of identity wars was the cold war, where Monroe represented a celebration of everything that the American narrative insisted the Soviets wanted to destroy. The eager popular consumption of Marilyn was emblematic of the golden age of capitalism born of a post-war economic boom.

Broadcasting grew in importance as television ownership was on the rise. The fast-food industry flourished with the growth of franchising. And in 1959, Mattel launched



## Afraid to purchase refurbished gadgets?



Global supply networks have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic's attack, driving up the cost of new goods. Indian consumers are increasingly interested in reconditioned electronics as the cost of smartphones, laptops, and a variety of other electronic products continues to soar.

In recent years, there has been an exponential increase in demand for refurbished technology. In addition to the interruptions to the global supply chain, consumers have been persuaded to purchase refurbished technology due to pricing considerations, environmental concerns, and the availability of lifetime management services.

In India, the market for reconditioned electronics is anticipated to grow from \$5 billion in 2021 to \$11 billion in 2026. E-commerce businesses have entered this mostly unorganised market as a result of the increase in the sale of reconditioned electronics. Additionally, organised sellers made up only 1 per cent of the market in 2016, but that percentage increased to 8 per cent in 2021 and is predicted to reach 20 per cent by 2026.

## Make a difference in the environment

Due to inadequate waste management, 95 per cent of electronic garbage (or "e-waste") in India is not recycled at this time. In addition, 85 to 95 per cent of the carbon emissions produced by the ongoing production of smartphones are produced during that stage. Consumers and businesses must switch to sustainable products as waste streams and carbon emissions rise.

Customers can intentionally opt to prevent e-waste from ending up in landfills by using a refurbished device. Refurbishing electronics will also promote resource conservation, e-waste reduction, climate change mitigation, and the start of a circular economy.

## Pay only half the price

Even while purchasing new smartphones and electrical devices can be tempting, the ongoing pandemic has caused most customers to reduce their budgets. Refurbished gadgets let customers buy comparable goods for less money. It goes without saying that refurbished technology is much more affordable than new technology.

These electronic products have the same specifications and features as brand-new ones and are priced between 30 and 50 per cent cheaper than they were originally. Therefore, buyers don't have to lower their expectations when they can simply lower their expenses by purchasing used technology.

## Use gadgets for a longer lifespan

Contrary to popular assumption, reconditioned products actually have a longer lifecycle than brand-new ones. The longevity of an electronic device, such as a computer or laptop, can be virtually doubled by remodelling it. Electronic gadgets that have been reconditioned tend to last longer due to upgrading and repairs, preventing them from going to trash for longer.

Due to their longer lifespan, a number of prominent IT organisations actually invest in reconditioned desktops and laptops. Refurbished technology thus gives customers another way to conserve money and the environment.

## Reduce risk with added warranties

A variety of after-sales services are also becoming more readily available to customers as more organised actors and markets emerge in the market for reconditioned technology. These services include, among others, seller-backed warranties, accidental insurance, operational service centres, and devoted CRM assistance.

Sellers not only completely repair and update refurbished equipment; they also include warranties that can last anywhere from 90 days to a year. These devices also go through thorough quality inspections to guarantee top performance. As a result, consumers who purchase refurbished equipment benefit from cost savings and brand certainty.

## Get gadgets as good as new

Contrary to popular belief, refurbished technology is not always outdated or a waste of money. In actuality, they tend to be the items that were either marginally harmed while shipment, displayed at trade exhibits and in stores, or were sent back by buyers who had changed their minds.

These devices are thoroughly repaired when they are returned, updated to the most recent technology, and then offered for sale to consumers. The fact that refurbished devices are in superb shape and have a longer lifespan than new ones allows consumers to breathe a sigh of relief.

## The Bottom Line

Refurbished devices are a great method to save money in a time when technology is evolving quickly and new models and gadgets are released daily. Your risk and costs will be reduced if you buy from reputable retailers or tested manufacturers who provide warranties and after-sale services. (*IANSLife*)

## Friendship Day with coffee-obsessed pals

What better way to show your buddies how much you care than by whipping up some delectable coffee mocha recipes for their coffee-obsessed friends?

With delicious coffee mocha drinks, you can make your friendship day get-togethers lively.

Girish Chandra, Beverage Training Manager, Lavazza India, has provided some delectable coffee mocha recipes that you can enjoy while spending time with your friends:

### MOCHA

#### Ingredients:

- 2 espressos 25/30 ml each
- Foamed milk 160 ml (80% milk - 20% foam)
- Hot chocolate 75 ml
- Dark cocoa 0,1 g
- Whipped cream 70 g (Optional)

**Preparations:** Prepare the espresso in a large glass || Add the hot chocolate || Dust with bitter cocoa || Complete by adding the foamed milk ||

Option: Pour less milk and complete with whipped cream

### COFFEE VIENNESE

#### Ingredients:

- 2 long espressos 90 ml (40/45 ml each)
- Whipped cream 25 g
- Dark Cocoa 2 tsp
- Dark chocolate flakes preparations

**Preparations:** Prepare the espresso in a jug and add cocoa ||

Mix and steam || Pour it into the cup and top off with whipped cream || Decorate with choco flakes (Glass Size 160 ml)

### HAZELNUT LATTE

#### Ingredients:

- 2 espressos 25/30 ml each
- Foamed milk 170 ml (80% milk - 20% foam)
- Whipped cream 50 g
- Nougat crumbs 14 g (10 g bottom of the glass and 4 g on top)
- Caramel sauce 17 g (15 g bottom of the glass and 2 g on top)
- Cup Size 60/160 ml

**Preparations:** Set 10 g of nougat and the caramel sauce in a large tumbler || Prepare the espresso and pour over || Add foamed milk and whipped cream || Decorate with extra crumbs and a drizzle of chocolate spread (Glass Size 350 ml)

### CHOCOLATE

#### Ingredients:

- 2 espressos 25/30 ml each
- Foamed milk 170 ml (80% milk - 20% foam)
- Whipped cream 50 g
- Nut crumbs-1 g
- Chocolate spread 30g (+ drizzle)

**Preparations:** Decorate a large tumbler of chocolate spread || Prepare the espresso and pour over || Add foamed milk and whipped cream || Decorate with extra nut crumbs and a drizzle of chocolate spread. (*IANSLife*)

# Card games boost mental health



**W**hen it comes to spending a good time with friends and family, who doesn't love playing card games? Games like Monopoly Deal, and Monopoly Bid have always been top picks for weekend game nights, picnics, and parties.

Although most people consider card games to be just another pastime activity, studies indicate that playing card games can offer numerous educational, emotional as well as psychological benefits, ranging from improved math skills to an increased sense of self-esteem.

According to Dr Wilona Annunciation, MD, Consultant Psychiatrist & Founder, CATALYSTS, "Playing card games can help us rejuvenate and positively impact our mental health in ways more than one!"

Here are seven surprising mental health benefits of playing card games shared by Dr Annunciation:

## Pump up for the ultimate showdown!

Games are fun. There's no getting around it. They trigger the release of dopamine hormones, making you feel more upbeat and boosting your energy levels. Playing card games help you develop a positive attitude while leaving you energized to take on various challenges. For instance, in the Classic Card Game Clue, you are driven to connect the dots from the Evidence and Case files cards, narrow down your suspect lists, rule out people by carrying out investigations, and solve the mystery.

## Conversations over a game of cards?

Card games are an excellent way to foster relationships. Remember all those afternoons, playing cards with your siblings, cousins, or friends? These indoor games bring out some people's competitive nature while reflecting the helpful nature of others. Either way, the interactions that take place while playing games are helpful in strengthening relationships and reconnecting with your loved ones. Playing a card game can help people break the ice socially and motivate them to spend time with their peers. Building interpersonal relationships through games have always carried an organic and spontaneous element to it, instantly creating a relaxed, comfortable environment. Card games facilitate conversation, encourage teamwork, and foster a spirit of friendly competition. Games like Monopoly Deal or even Monopoly Bid - your trading, buying, and selling properties, lead to amazing moments of conversations, discussions, and even fights!

## Memorise details for improved brain function!

Many studies support the fact that engaging in fun, learning activities,



helps you retain learned information better. All kinds of fun and relaxing activities help you rejuvenate while grasping tasks at a faster pace. The concentration and focus, the investment in winning and the repeated activation of brain networks involved enable you to remember concepts better so that the learning is crystallised.

## Improve and Boost your observation skills

You must keep a close eye on your opponents while playing cards in order to predict their next move. To spot patterns and quickly grasp potential options for your next move, you must be vigilant and alert. These games are undoubtedly a fun way to improve your ability to scrutinise details and take in your surroundings. These games help get your creative juices flowing by honing your observational skills so that you are always ready and prepared for whatever comes your way. If you play the Classic Card Game Connect 4 you have to be attentive to identify patterns and work out your next move.

## The reason, Think, Act - Give it you're all to bag the win!

In addition to boosting memory skills and relieving stress, playing cards can enhance math, logical reasoning, and critical and strategic thinking skills. Pick any card game like ROOK and witness how it challenges you



to change your strategies and aim for the win even when the game takes an unexpected turn, and all the odds are stacked up against you!

## Interpret, Decide, Strategise - Learn to make the right moves at the right time!

Card games teach a lot about understanding and using cognitive functions. They help you observe, anticipate, make strategic decisions and learn how to take successful turns that help you win! In the 5 Alive card game, players maintain the face value of their cards under 21 in order to stay alive and score a win.

## Enhance life skills

Playing fairly, celebrating wins, losing graciously, working as a team, accepting different viewpoints, and engaging in respectful debates are some of the many advantages of playing card games. Especially when you play card games like Monopoly Deal where you're transacting, and trading - which is loads of fun and is exciting when playing with friends and family.

So, the next time you're looking for ideas to unwind, relax your mind and just enjoy the little things in life - pick up card games and play with your friends and family! (IANSlife)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Aja! Bhambi

Sunday, AUGUST 7, 2022

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart and it will give favorable results. With the support of you bosses you will find the going smooth. You will have challenges and difficulties, but you will face them with confidence. You will have to do a lot of travelling and you will also enjoy your journey. You will behave very calmly with children. You will be making efforts for children's higher education. You will make all human relations sweet and beneficial. You will have etiquette and modesty. Your income will grow. People will have hopes with you. You will expand your work. Time will keep you energetic and active. You will make continuous progress in business. You will have loving relationship with your life partner. You will be very engrossed in working. You will be undertaking lot of business related trips too.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

The time is favorable for you. Whatever work you do will bring you lot of luck and grace. The differences of opinion you were having with your bosses will come to an end. Your family members will be proud of your achievements. There will be a ray of hope for a bright future ahead. You will also avoid a direct face off with your neighbors. You will have monetary gains. There will be an increase in your income or earnings. You will be happy to spend time with your family. Business deals will be gainful. The obstacles of your partnership will end and there are chances of gains. You will share wonderful bonding with your spouse/partner. You will carry out plans according to the wishes of your family members. All your work plans will be successful.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It is going to be an auspicious week. You will enjoy a favorable time period. You will get happiness in your married life and the main thing is that you will be satisfied. All decisions taken by you in your business will prove to be successful. Matters related to money will be a cause of concern but it will not bother you much. You will get back money that you had given to somebody. A confusion that was there in your mind for a long period will come to an end. You will enjoy a wonderful love life. You will also understand the needs and aspirations of your partner/spouse. Your time will be spent in reading knowledge enhancing literature. This is the time to fulfill your dreams. You will make progress in your works and personal relations. You will get good news from somewhere.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

A period of hope and good time is indicated for you. Eating, fashion and finance will be the main three things in your life. You will have monetary gains. You will also make progress in your job/business. It will be a financially stable time for you. You will also plan to go on a travel trip with your family. You will also enjoy delicious food and dishes. You will also take care of your elders. They will give their blessings to you. A plan on which you were working and had got interrupted will get completed with the cooperation of your trusted ones. Take all investment related decisions carefully. You may get hurt due to the indifferent attitude of your brothers. You will get angry at slow pace of work at your workplace. You need to control your anger.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You will do some appreciable work. Your seniors will support your efforts and also encourage you. Those who are in jobs will get transfer. You will have to work with people who are having different opinions. You will also try to strengthen your relations with people. There will be expenses on material things. You will buy expensive items for your household needs. You will enjoy perfect understanding with your spouse. You will partake of happiness and leisure. Your family members will respect your views. One will be able to see determination in your eyes. Your importance will enhance. You will understand the difficulties of other people and will try and solve all types of problems by discussing them with those who matter.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

It will be a peaceful and happy week. You will experience joy, bliss and happiness in married life. Both will understand each other's feelings. The time is full of good tidings. Even those who are giving exams and interviews will give their best and get results accordingly. There will be marked improvement in your fortunes. You will make a good impact on your bosses and do well. Your life will get back on track and gather momentum. You will be careful in personal matters. You will also attend in some wedding ceremony where you will be very happy. You will get the results of your efforts. You will also make efforts in order to earn lot of money. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. Your efforts will gain fruit in your business. Some auspicious matter will be completed at home. Money that you had lent will be returned to you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The week will yield excellent results for you. Your official works will gather momentum and head towards completion. At this time, those works will be completed that were connected to your good luck. You will get full support and happiness from your wife. Something good will happen to you. You will share wonderful bonding with your love mate. Emotions will dominate. You will have a feeling of respect towards your elders and seniors. The time will be favorable. Your faith in God will also

increase. You will adopt a helpful approach in your family. There will be normalcy in your work. Your financial status will be strong. There will be some house related work. You might buy a piece of land or a vehicle. Money will be spent in the maintenance of costly articles. Money that you had given to someone will be returned to you.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It will prove to be an important week. You will receive an invaluable advice from someone close to you. As a result, your work will be completed very successfully and quickly. The work you used to think very difficult would seem too small. Your name and fame will rise and your bosses will be impressed with your attitude. You will be never sort of funds and money will keep coming. There will be happiness and peace in the family. Husband and wife will share good understanding. You will have a good time with your family members. You will be attending a party or ceremony. You will spend time peacefully there. You will settle all work on time. All will come true as per your expectations. The youth will be full of zeal and enthusiasm. Good news will be received.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Time will be perfectly suitable. The week will start on a good note. You will have lot of fun and happiness with your family members and friends. You will keep yourself involved in entertaining activities. Signs of money inflow will be there. Meeting an influential person will prove beneficial for you and it will open the way to progress. You will enjoy your work. Your business related activities will also gather speed. Love birds will have a wonderful time together. You will share perfect understanding with your mate. You will accomplish any pending work. The work will be done better and it will have far reaching future. You will shop for your home and buy valuable items. You will be very comfortable and your health will also be good. Good news related to a friend will reach you.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It is going to be a fantastic week. Relationship between husband and wife will be lovable. You will also make good progress in your job/business. You will get benefits from all sides. The relationship between father and son will become mellow. You will engage in social and creative work. Students will be determined and will make great efforts. They will be successful in accomplishing top position in any competition. You will desist from interfering in matters of others persons. You will feel great as you will welcome arrival of guests at your home. You will also work on new projects. Secret relations will be a cause of trouble. You will work wisely and carefully on many subjects. You will get favorable results.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

There will be applause around you. Success in matters related to land and property will be accomplished. You will present yourself in a very friendly manner. You will also get opportunities to meet your close friends. There is possibility of a pleasant event happening. Invest in business strategically. In the relationship of wife and husband, the atmosphere of the house will get better. You will pay full attention to home affairs. Cooperation of the elderly will provide you relief. The mind will be happy with work being done. You may get big order or some deal will be finalized. You will reap huge profits. You will be successful in removing obstacles. You will be confident about getting success.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The time will be spent on some happy occasions. There will be harmony in undertaking domestic tasks. By understanding your responsibility and duties intensively, you will open them completely. Some important work will be done. You will have monetary gains. Meeting an important person will prove beneficial for you. The efforts you put in any work, it will be completed. There is a possibility of fulfillment of desire in a person's mind as long as desire in a person's mind is restrained. Love mates will understand each other well. Your officials will be very happy with your performance. Happiness and prosperity will be attained. You will be able to finish your work in time. Government related tasks will be accomplished without any difficulty. You will try to fulfill the needs of your family.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Some additional sources of income will be created. It will be a beneficial week for you. Do not waste time in futile work. You can go on a tour for official work. You will be happy. Long distance travel will benefit you. You will learn from old mistakes. The atmosphere at home will be pleasant. You will find yourself in a better position. You will also come close to your family members. You will also meet your loved ones. The financial condition will be stronger than before. You will give full time to your elders. You will also receive their blessings. By using your intellectual skills, you will be able to convince everyone with your talent. You will also be able to solve the problems encountered. You will be successful in love affairs. The time will be magnificent.

## Emerging trend of Astro-tourism in India



**C**o-founder CEO of Confirmkt Dinesh Kumar Kotha said, "The juxtaposition of tourism and science piqued the interest of travellers of all backgrounds in the United States as a recent phenomenon. The Total Solar Eclipse of 2017 witnessed a participation of around 7 million people, which also marked the beginning of the upcoming big travel trend, Astro-tourism."

As the name suggests, Astro-tourism combines astronomy and tourism, allowing travellers to partake in stargazing under the skies free from light pollution. Lately, this latest trend in tourism is gaining tracking in a number of Indian cities as well.

But before you relish a vacation admiring the beauty of the universe, there is a list of things you might want to know to make the best of the vacation. Dinesh Kumar Kotha speaks to IANSlife to give us a complete picture of Astro-tourism, starting from what to expect to the best observatories to visit in India.

### Astro tourism in India: What to Expect?

**Dinesh:** Astro-tourism, a part of eco-tourism, thrives on sustainable travel and draws a chunk of travellers to remote communities. Such a

form of tourism not only parallels the existing popular forms like Adventure and Wildlife Tourism but also is more environment-friendly comparatively.

The emergence of Astro-tourism in India is driven further by the recent initiative involving the Ministry of Tourism to discuss and explore 'Nature-based Tourism.' The concept was promoted by the Ministry through the webinar series "Dekho Apna Desh".

With the joint effort of the State and Union, arrangements are being made to explore the untapped potential of rural villages as hotspots for Astro-tourism.

For instance, the Benital Village in the Chamoli District of Uttarakhand, located at 2,600 meters above sea level, is set to be one of the first Astro-villages in India. Astro-parks are also developing in Mandu, Madhya Pradesh and Jaipur, introduced by the State Department of Art and Culture.

Moreover, the Ladakh administration has launched initiatives to promote Astro-tourism in Hanle Village in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Astrophysics.

Certainly, the unadulterated atmosphere of rural India, coupled with the thrill of stargazing, sun observation, star parties and exper-

iential science activities, make the most of what one can expect while Astro-touring.

### Best Observatories in India to Visit for Astro tourism

**Dinesh:** Below is a list of the best observatories to visit for Astro-tourism in India:

**Jaipur Permanent Observatory:** The villages of Bhimtal and Kausani in Jaipur have permanent observatories for all astrophotography enthusiasts. The observatory is equipped with an 8 or 11-inch motorized Go-to telescope and other equipment like high-end DSLR cameras, planetary cameras and photographic mounts.

**Pangong Lake, Ladakh:** The Astrostay near Pangong Lake is not just a serene getaway for visitors during the day but also a spot for gazing at the constellations at night. The Astrostay has a five-member team of locals who narrate their traditions and folk tales while guiding the tourists toward the stargazing hotspots. Visitors can also access equipment like a Dobsonian telescope and stargazing mobile apps to fall in love with the night skies.

**Hanle, Ladakh:** The Hanle observatory offers a zero-pollution atmosphere for the tourists to stargaze through the night in the valley. The tourists also have access to several photographs taken at the observatory, which are transmitted to scientists in other parts of the country for research.

### What to Keep in Mind while Astro Touring?

**Dinesh:** Astro-touring is an overwhelming experience of a lifetime. Therefore, you would want to ensure that you are equipped to make your stay worthwhile.

It is important to check the weather forecast before you visit and dress accordingly, as temperatures may drop/increase significantly on most nights.

Astro-tourism is an incredibly fun activity that appeals to people of all ages. Therefore, Astro-tourism is here to stay and flourish as a popular tourist activity in the upcoming years. (IANSlife)

"Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding."

— Albert Einstein

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 357 SHILLONG, MONDAY, AUGUST 8, 2022

### Modi bachao, Beti padhao

LOOSE talk dominates the Indian political scene. The ground realities are often scary. Consider a report tabled this past week by a parliamentary panel that noted that around 80 per cent of the funds allotted for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's much-trumpeted 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' scheme was spent on media advertisements. Nothing goes to show even the balance 20 per cent benefited India's poor children in any way. What this goes to show is that the Prime Minister himself took little interest in the implementation of what was one of his most-touted welfare schemes. Worse, his minister Smriti Irani who runs the department of child development and the bureaucrats who implement the programmes couldn't care less. They together diverted the money meant for the poor and used it to buy media support for Modi and the NDA government.

From the pulpit, Narendra Modi as Prime Minister never tires of speaking up for the poor or presenting himself as the son of a chawal. Indira Gandhi raised the Garibi Hatao slogan and won the parliamentary election in the 1970s to retain power. Yet, India, now celebrating 75 years of Independence, left the poor to fend for themselves for most part other than in the introduction of a subsidized food grain scheme during UPA-II. The UN global human development indices often put India at the worst levels. The Global Hunger Index (GHI) last year put India at a low of 101 on a scale of 116 nations—a deterioration of its ranking from 94 the previous year. Only a few African nations fare worse than India. Pakistan's ranking was 92, Sri Lanka's 65, Nepal's 76 and Bangladesh's 76. India fares worst when it comes to wages and salaries, set against the levels in neighbouring nations. Yet, the Indian manufacturing sector is down in the dumps despite Modi's highly-publicised 'Make In India.' Another of Modi's projects, the Smart City, is more of a paper tiger.

Politics has degraded into a drama for fooling the poor and making vote banks out of them. The rhetorics must be treated with the contempt they deserve. The spending of almost the entire funds meant for uplift of the poor girls, to educate them and empower them, ended up in a heinous attempt at building the image of the government. When politics becomes an obsession to win elections and warm one's seat, democracy loses its essence. Democracy is defeated when people vote with their feet and re-elect pretenders to run a nation.

# Shillong and its Public Transport System

By Toki Blah

A friend who is also a concerned citizen of this city, who from time to time raises his concerns over the dismal civic amenities that we as innocent residents are suffered to endure, recently raised a post in his FB page with the remark that, apparently the powers that be are once again contemplating the re-introduction of Government managed city buses in an effort to ease public transport woes. To be candid about it, one is forced to admit that many who heard it were at a loss as to whether to cry in joyous relief or to cry in despair yet again. There was joy that finally by some twist of fate or the other, perhaps because of 2023 elections, this Govt has managed to hear the general public's cry of misery while there were an equal number of skeptics who, with abundant historical reasons to back up their skepticism, were suspicious of the real objective of those in charge of Urban public services. People cannot be blamed if they see a hidden agenda or a Government sponsored business behind the prospect—business to line the pockets of some political desperado out to make a few bucks to sponsor his/her political foray in 2023 than any genuine concern over civic services to the people. Well, whatever it may be lets assume that it will materialize and that it will do so with the benefit of the public in mind. If so, I guess a few observations will do no harm.

In the first instance the venture of the Government to provide viable public transport to the commuters of this city started with the introduction of 120 (JNNURM) red coloured buses in 2012. The buses under the JNNURM came as a vast relief to thousands of commuters, who were sick and tired of arrogant cabbies. In a short span of time the red JNNURM buses became the favoured means of city transport much to the chagrin and regret of resentful taxi drivers who suddenly found their merciless stranglehold hold over a hapless public vanishing. There was hope at last but like all other hopes in the Abode of the Clouds, this particular hope too soon bit the dust. Providing a sustainable and viable public transport service was too much of a burden; too high an expectation; too professionally ethical for MUDA or the Transport Department to bear. The pressure from the powerful taxi owners and

drivers' association too powerful to resist. Something had to give way and sooner than later the public was silently but forcefully eased back to accept shared taxis, as the most viable form of Public Transport. A voiceless public, so dependent and conditioned on powerful and authoritative Pressure Groups (ki sengbha lang) to speak on its behalf, found itself abandoned and forsaken on the critical issue of public transport. Not a squeak of protest was heard over this official indifference to public needs. So do we also keep quiet? I think not. I believe the time has come to ask and raise some very embarrassing questions over this humiliation of civic services. So lets begin.

First and foremost there has never been any rational official explanation as to the need to hand over the management and running of the JNNURM buses by Self Help Groups (SHGs). I hasten to add that I have nothing over the concept of SHGs. My personal experience with SHGs, especially women SHGs in empowering village communities has been a very happy and rewarding experience. SHGs are mainly responsible for changing and uplifting the whole economy of Bangladesh. We are however speaking of trained, capacitated and legally competent groups of individuals focused on developing themselves through efficient community service. They thrive and prosper because they swear by modern concepts of management based on transparency, accountability and good inhouse management. Profit is the last thing on the menu of development oriented SHGs. The SHGs to whom the fate of JNNURM buses were entrusted were anything but! In the case of JNNURM SHGs they were more of a business entity. Most of the SHGs were created simply to access the business opportunity offered by the Government. Almost all had no balance sheets and it is doubtful if any of them ever heard of one. There was a total absence of Government supervising, monitoring, checking, evaluating and assessing the performance of the SHGs in providing service to the commuters. Government simply discarded its role and responsibility in the project and blindly relied on the goodwill and sense of responsibility of its contracted

SHGs. It is now evident that the whole exercise was based on good faith, a very bad business model to depend on. Not surprising the whole exercise came crashing down around our ears.

I know that I am laying myself open to the accusation of being "wise on hindsight" and I willingly accept the charge and openly admit that's what is exactly happening. My only excuse for my most despicable anti-Government rant is the rumour that once again the Government is going to try to install a public transport service through Government buses but apparently without any attempt at introspection to find out what went wrong last time such an exercise was attempted. I justify my stand on that ground but I believe it's a perfectly sensible thing to do if we are to (a) prevent another stupid, sightless, politically motivated exercise at wasting public money and (b) not fail once again in our attempt to provide a harassed and utterly distressed public of a workable and sustainable public transport system.

In this writup I wish to raise the issue as to why an existing transport wing of the Govt, known as the Meghalaya Transport Corporation (MTC) was not considered on taking on the responsibility of providing Shillong with the efficient transport system it is crying for. The MTC of yore ran buses and provided service to commuters travelling to Gauhati, Silchar, Jowai, Tura and Sohra. It had workshops, parking lots, trained technicians, expert management in the shape of experienced operational plus administrative personnel, all the paraphernalia and basic infrastructure that no SHG was expected to have. Why was the MTC sidelined and inexperienced, green, dubious fly by night SHGs entrusted with the running and management of the JNNURM buses? My concern is based on the suspicion that we might once again fail to learn from our mistakes. If Shillong public transport is to be resumed and be successful through Government buses let us not ignore but learn from our past mistakes. At least let's try.

So what should we now do? First let's restructure, revamp, resurrect the infrastructure and restaff the human resources we already possess in the MTC. For this concerned health departments to take necessary steps with utmost seriousness. No matter what other health facilities may be provided to the people, citizens will not be safe and healthy unless the regular drinking water supply is "safe." So, now we should not hesitate to filter out what is causing the problem!

Yours etc.,  
Saili Gwal, Shillong

### Need for new approach road to Shillong

Editor,  
On October 14, 2019, I had written a letter to the editor, wherein I had expressed my apprehension regarding the Umiam dam and the bridge thereon. Now, I see my apprehension is changing to reality, which is a very scary prospect. However, I note with concern that the authorities are now trying to work out an alternate bridge, possibly downstream.

I wonder why we are flogging a dead horse, and still regurgitating on an old idea. The time has come to think out of the box, and come out with better options. My proposal is that a new road be developed circumventing the Umiam Lake. The route

to happen a committed no nonsense management must first be identified and put in place. Imperative to ensure that inward looking selfish political control over the management is prevented. Would an experienced, spirited and public minded MTC Chairman be so difficult to find? Well if not, let nominal Chairmanship can be with the Minister Transport but for heaven's sake no failed politician or political chamcha be foisted on the Corporation. We find that such worthies are entirely unfit to even run an LP school but certified geniuses in spending crores of Government money! It's the last thing we need. Get a good bureaucrat with proven track record in delivering results, with a proven record of saying NO to interfering politicians (perhaps hard to find among Yes Sir No Sir, spineless civil servants) as Managing Director, with qualified, experienced technical staff as support in the Administrative and Operations wing of the MTC. Let the Board of the MTC be technically strong yet with a token representation from the public (perhaps a Rangbah Shong) and possibly a representative of Shillong Schools be nominated. Routes, embarking and disembarking points be identified. New parking sites perhaps in New Shillong can be identified. It will also put a stop to the present covetous eyeing, by certain honorable and respected gentlemen, of current MTC stands as potential shopping malls. We need running buses. Shopping malls can wait! Set up a dedicated mobile ticket checking team to monitor day to day performance of the running buses. Check the passengers for holding valid tickets and those who fail to produce a ticket be punished with a hefty, on the spot, fine. No use punishing the ticket collector. Fine the commuter instead. It will have a resounding impact. The travelling public itself will then start insisting on tickets. No bus with a damaged ticket dispenser will be allowed to operate. The amount collected will be electronically recorded and pilfering of revenue will stop. Once this happens the MTC buses will then be run on a sustainable basis. It's what we need. It's what a desperate travelling public of Shillong must demand. It's a proven fact that with this Government only those who demand, who shout, who agitate will get their due! Sad but true.

Yours etc.,  
Sarad Bawri,  
Via email

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

## Govt in Rs 155 Tr debt Cash must for small business

By Shivaji Sarkar

The government must come out of the perils of the cycle of debts to ensure growth amid high multiple taxes and little corporate investment. The large business houses get the sweet pill of Rs 19.18 trillion loan write-off bonanza since 2013, even as the nation gets into a borrowing mess. India's inflation may not be just because of the rising prices. High national debt, loan write-offs and tax burdens may have contributed to it, indicating the second major Reserve Bank of India 0.5 per cent rise in interest rates.

Total borrowings at Rs 155 lakh crore (trillion) is set to add Rs 11.5 trillion more in 2022-23. Interestingly, as a percentage of GDP, the Centre's liabilities are set to increase to 60.2 per cent in 2023. An emerging view is that the government cannot be the driver of the economy and continue lubricating it for the benefit of big loan defaulters. The small, medium and tiny sectors are becoming restless. More cash use can reduce poverty and boost up small business. This would reduce dependence on shearing bank deposits, high NPAs and resorting to manage finances through large deficits.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently re-emphasised that India's long-term growth prospects are embedded in public capital expenditure at the meet of Finance Ministers and Central bank Governors at Bali in Indonesia. She was hopeful that this would spur private investments. The Bretton Woods bodies promote it.

Now it needs a review, as figures indicate that the Narendra Modi government's hopes are ditched by poor large-house investments. The government is being forced into a vortex of borrowings for too many high-funded infra projects, such as roads, high-speed railways and the power sector. It's borrowings are to rise to Rs 11.6 trillion from Rs 9.7 trillion in 2022-23. Since the 1950s different houses have enormously benefited from this approach.

The RBI has now moderated GDP growth to 7.2 per cent, Nomura to 4.7 per cent and expects inflation to remain at 6.7 per cent, higher than its tolerable limits. Interestingly enough, the Manmohan Singh government also did the same post-2008 the Lehman Brother meltdown by incentivising loans, most of which turned into NPAs and were written off.

Private Equity-Venture Capital (PE-VC) investments, contracting since 2012, declined 25 per cent during April-June 2022, at \$11.3 billion across 315 deals; 2021 had \$15.2 billion invested in 264 deals. The RBI, in May 2019, observed that 2017-18 was the seventh consecutive year of annual contraction in private sector capex. It was Rs 1,65,000 crore in 2016-17. The RBI found it declining from Rs 94227 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 68649 crore in 2021-22.

The government has taken the load off the private sector for spurring economic revival. The Union Budget 2022-23 has increased the capital expenditure (capex) target to Rs 7.5 lakh crore, a 35.4 per cent jump from the budget estimate of Rs 5.5 lakh crore in 2021-22. The revised estimate for capital expenditure in 2021-22 came in at Rs 6.03 lakh crore. Capex accounts for 19.02 per cent of the government's total expenditure at Rs 39.45 lakh crore for 2022-23.

The high government expenditure has not spurred job creation, domestic consumption and capacity expansion of the private sector for a decade. Instead, it has led to severe 7 per cent plus con-

sumer inflation and almost 15.9 per cent wholesale inflation, too much burden on a government that is extending free food to 80 crore poor. It has added a mere 7.2 lakh government jobs and the private sector, except IT, none.

The private sector though has large profits, benefitting from Rs 10.83 trillion lakh crore loan write-offs till 2018 and Rs 8.35 trillion after that, as per the Lok Sabha answer, cause high NPAs. Some individual houses alone have over Rs 2 trillion NPAs. This has impacted the rupee slide below Rs 80 to a dollar causing severe balance of trade issues. The trade deficit in April-July has surged to \$101.25 billion or Rs 7865 crore, says BVR Subramanyam. For stabilising the rupee the RBI is losing dollar reserves shrinking \$571 billion from over \$620 billion two months back.

This calls for looking at small businesses and SMEs for real economic growth. The SMEs need to grow independently and not as lackey of large business. A few years back the country's tiny sector, thriving on cash, is piqued by many curbs. Let people earn and spend transparently. It would lead to more inflow of money, more investments, spur other sectors and if they want to buy gold let them do it. Let citizens thrive and help the nation grow.

Cash circulation in six years has doubled to Rs 32.2 crore. But the small businesses are too much under constraints. Let these be removed, let them deposit in banks any amount they want without a demur. Explanations can be given at their annual return. Remember, cash has been the strength of this society.

Easy rules would revive the trades shut during the covid. This would help the government in many ways. It is not only the working classes who have been dependent on the enormous food dole but smallest businessmen as well. It would be a great boost to Prime Minister Modi's atmanirbharata, self dependence. The small sectors, if they have affordability, would not themselves seek free food, a great contribution to the government's effort at minimising expenses.

The small traders also are feeling the pinch with stringent GST rules and penalties that surpass the actual taxes due. Nobody listens to the reasons why they delayed tax payments. The 28 per cent rise in GST collection to Rs 1.49 trillion in July may have many sordid stories. The government has to make the rule humane and reduce the taxes on food and essential items. It would stop entrepreneurs' flight to become traders and spur growth. It may earn a few crore less but would add to the people's happiness. In a year's time, politically crucial for the government, it would bring in a sea change in the economic pattern of overall development, growth and happiness.

A government concerned with rising prices may have many easy solutions if it changes its approach to the commoners in different spheres. These need minor adjustments that would more than pay back for it. It would also provide opportunities on infra investments and many high-speed projects.

Like small touches through a painter's brush, the economy would change enormously. It does not need large efforts but a mere small Midas touch to change the Indian economy, may be as a harbinger of m(M)odification to the world economy.—INFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### Writing about education

Editor,  
There is much to admire in Deepa Majumdar's article "What is Education? Overcoming the Noetic Factory!" that appeared in the Shillong Times on Aug 6, 2022. The call to mastery of text is spot on and I wonder if the author would include in this, also mastery of skills and the acquiring of values. She is also right in decrying the privileging of the individual over the collective. She says the curriculum must uplift the mind, rather than being harshly utilitarian. My own view is that a balance is needed, though this may be difficult to attain.

She calls for thoughtful, reflective and critical thinking. Yes, these are skills and habits that must be inculcated in universities. As she does, most of us would affirm that the lofty purpose of education is to build human minds and characters and that "we must use education to enable individual students to become ethical citizens, selfless leaders, and thoughtful servants of humanity."

But some of the content and manner of writing was disturbing, even derailing. She overstates and undermines her own positions by

lurching towards impractical and untenable positions. Her stiff and starchy language actually becomes an unwitting demonstration of ivory tower education, which is elitist and even discriminatory.

It would be safe to assume that for most newspaper readers in India, English is not their mother tongue. I had to look up the dictionary for three words in the article: noetic, salvific, and propaedeutic. I have fortified my vocabulary with these words, but wonder if I will ever use them. (Having had my postgraduate and doctoral education in the US, I am conscious that imported pitfalls may trip me up in India.)

Here is a phrase of semantic overkill. The trend of undue sensitivity to students is described as "over-liberal constant saccharine-sweet narcissistic sympathy". The meaning is barely decipherable. Simple language can be persuasive, even eloquent. In one passage the word "prostituted" is used as a derogatory metaphor. This word is unwoke and gender-insensitive.

Sadly, the article seems contemptuous of students. She disparages the tendency of teachers to seek student views "as if (their opinions) were priceless knowledge".

She decries teacher evaluations by students, calling them "disrespectful" and "the final nail on the coffin of higher education". She makes the claim that teachers "pander to spoil youth for the sake of a good evaluation". Surely such teachers are a small minority. These views are undemocratic, and recall the hierarchical kind of education in India, in which worshipping the guru with unquestioned devotion is an ancient, but now outdated, value.

Teachers must be sympathetic and mindful of our students. The majority of India's students are from poor families, many are first generation university-goers. Very few will have had much intellectual discourse in their home environments, yet they may be eager learners. They also have the practical and admirable aim to provide for their families, so need skills to enter the job market.

Yours etc.,  
Glenn C. Kharkongor,  
Via email

#### PHE should not supply untreated water

Editor,  
What is it like to be supplied with contaminated

water in this 21st century? Yet disgracefully, it is the regular feature of many of the localities in the town. Residents having PHE water tap connections are often getting completely untreated water. The situation is worse during the "rainy season". Water supplied through the pipes may not even be safe to be used for washing and bathing purposes. It is too muddy and murky.

The sad part is that muddy water cannot be purified even with the help of normal water filters. Of course, many households are without any filter facilities since they cannot afford to buy and install one. It is a harsh reality. Well, the Public Health Officers know much better than the common people about the importance of drinking clean water. So who is to blame for the murky water that runs through PHE pipelines? This goes totally against the plans and policies of the present government that has envisioned and launched the Jal Jeevan Mission - to provide "adequate and safe" drinking water to every citizen. I think a thorough inquiry should be initiated to find out the discrepancy.

I also wish to draw the urgent attention of DHS, FSSAI, offices of Deputy Commissioners and other

"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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The Coal Ban Charade

MEGHALAYA must be a fit case for a study on the state being the worst offender as far as illegal coal mining and transportation is concerned which is virtually state-sponsored. No other state has violated the NGT and Supreme Court orders so blatantly. But with the Supreme Court not being in a position to oversee whether the orders it passes from time to time are actually implemented on the ground, things look bleak. Hence even the Minister for Coal and Mines, Prahlad Joshi who stated in Rajya Sabha that there has been no coal mining in Meghalaya since 2014 has been able to get away with the blatant lies. This can only happen in India and it shows how flawed democracy is when even the Upper House can be misled and there is not a single MP to counter these lies. What do we make of this charade? Can we take for granted that all answers to the questions raised by MPs in the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha are factual? Does this not reduce democracy to a farce then?

Since India has borrowed the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy the rules and principles are clear that MPs – and especially ministers – must not give inaccurate information to parliament, either deliberately or inadvertently. The ministerial code of conduct states that, "It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity."

These rules and principles are based on the idea that Parliament in order to effectively fulfil its roles of scrutinising the work of government, passing legislation, and facilitating debate, needs to work with accurate information – and have confidence that everything said in the House is accurate. This is not the first time that Minister for Coal and Mines has given inaccurate information to the questions on coal mining posed by Rajya Sabha MP, Rakesh Sinha. But if the MP who has raised the questions is true to the cause and concerned about the illegal coal mining in Meghalaya then he should have countered the false statements of the Minister. In the absence of a counter statement by the MP and no other attempts to call out the Minister, Prahlad Joshi for providing wrong information on two occasions, Meghalaya is left at the mercy of predators and the coal mafia. It now rests on the Lok Sabha MP from Shillong, Vincent Pala to correct these wrong statements made either intentionally or inadvertently so that the Minister is briefed of the facts on the ground. Meghalaya has two other MPs "representing" the people of Meghalaya in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha but since both belong to the ruling party -NPP their lips are naturally sealed. Woe betide Meghalaya!

Modi@22: Dreams that don't meet delivery

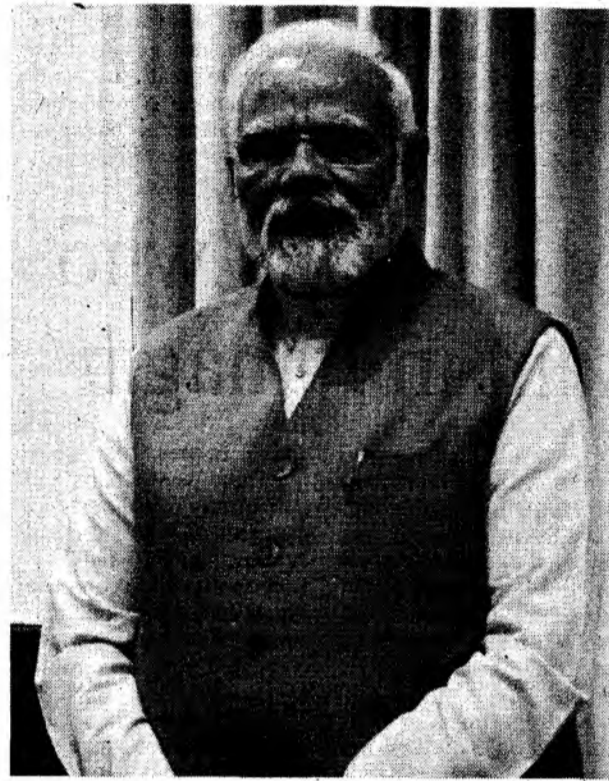
By H. Srikanth

While I was in Hyderabad during the semester break, I got a call from a former colleague working now in another central university in the northeast. He asked me to be the key speaker in a seminar organized by the university to discuss a little-known book titled, "Modi@20: Dreams Meet Delivery". I told the gentleman to ask their organizing committee whether it is alright with them if I take a critical look at Modi's achievements and failures. As expected, he did not call me again. Later, I came to know that Delhi has instructed all the central universities, including NEHU, to organize seminars to discuss the book and send the photos to Delhi as documentary proof.

What is so special about the book? The said book titled, "Modi@20: Dreams Meet Delivery" edited and compiled by one Bluekraft Digital Foundation, which is a publishing house of no academic repute. In the introduction, it declares that the book seems to unravel Modi phenomenon, account for legitimacy and popularity that he enjoys, and assesses the impact of his policies. The book includes contributions from persons from different fields of life. The contributors like Latha Mangeshkar, P.V. Sindhu, Shobhana Kamineni, Amish Tripathy, Anupam Kher, Devi Shetty, Saduguru, etc., are no doubt known names in their respective fields, but it is not clear how capable they are to make an objective study of a leader like Modi. As far as other known personalities like Amit Shah, Arvind Panigrahi, Surjit Bhalla, Ajit Doval, S. Jayashankar, etc., are concerned, we all know that they are all associated with Modi's government in one or the other way. Although the book is published only this year, it does not include a discussion on developments like the socio-economic impact of demonetization, handling of the Covid fiasco, abolition of Article 370, and controversial Acts such as CAA and Farm Laws. The book is more a propaganda piece, not any serious academic work.

This is not to say that Modi did nothing all these years. During his first tenure as the PM, Narendra Modi was indeed popular. Different sections of people had reposed faith in him and indeed looked forward to 'Ache Din' that he promised. Some of the programs such as Jan Dhan Yojana, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Ujjwala Yojana, and Beti Bachao, Beti Padoo were appreciated by many. Modi was then popular at home and also abroad. The people viewed him as a national leader capable of ending corruption and terrorism at home, and teaching a lesson to India's belligerent neighbors. They

lent support to his demonetization drive and then to his idea of Surgical Strike, as they felt that Modi's policies were targeted against India's internal and external enemies. Initially he was emphasizing on development, on making India a global power and on strengthening the national se-



curity. There has been a rapid development of infrastructure such as roads, bridges, airports, telecommunications and digital technologies during Modi's tenure as the PM. But alongside, Modi was also promoting the Hindutva agenda. He was eulogizing Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar in public platforms, simultaneously attacking, maligning and marginalizing the liberal, left and secular forces.

By marginalizing the Congress and the left in different states, the ruling BJP and its allies under Modi's leadership appeared to have blunted the opposition parties. However, Modi's first tenure as the PM faced stiff resistance, not from any political party but from the students and youth in different parts of the country, following the vilification of JNU and other politically active universities in the country. As the 2019 elections approached, Modi had to give up the development agenda and rely more on Hindutva plank to attract the Hindu voters. The Phulwama attack in February 2019 came as a blessing in disguise to Modi. He effectively used the terrorist attack to stir up nationalist sentiments across the nation and road his way to massive victory in the May 2019 General Elections.

BJP's victory in 303 parliamentary seats in the 2019 elections emboldened the Modi regime to pursue its Hindutva agenda with much more vigour. By abolishing Article 370, Modi's govern-

ment pushed ahead its Kashmir agenda. The Supreme Court verdict facilitated its electoral promise of building Ram Temple at Ayodhya. Declaring that the government has no business in doing business, Modi's government has speeded up the privatization of the PSUs. Taking advan-

more recently by the Russia-Ukraine War. The Modi government used the adverse situation to promote digital banking and online education. Its pro-corporate economic policies widened the economic inequalities in the country. According to the latest World Inequality Report, in 2021 the top 10% of the elites hold 57% of the national income, while the bottom 50% share just 13% of the national income. A study by Institute for Competitiveness shows that the top 1% earns more than the thrice of the bottom 10 percent. Between 2018 and 2022, the billionaires' fortunes multiplied, and their total wealth is more than the annual budget of the nation. The Adanis, Ambanis and ten other Indians corporate made it to the Forbes List of the richest persons in the world.

The meteoric rise of the Adanis and Ambanis did not benefit the Indians. It becomes clear from the fact that the number of poor and unemployed also multiplied during the period. In the 2021 Global Hunger Index, India ranked 101st position out of the 116 countries. Further, the Human Development Index 2020 placed India at the 131st position, much below the neighboring Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022 ranks India 135 out of 146 countries. Although the government has been talking about economic recovery, the recent World Bank report claimed that India's growth rate for the year 2022-23 cannot be over 7.5 percent. During the Modi's rule, the government has written off the NPA worth Rs. 10.7 crore in last seven years. The economic stagnation coupled with growing inflation, inadequate allocation for the social sector and increasing tax burden on the masses is making the lives of the poor and middle classes in India miserable. During this period, India's democratic credentials are also coming under the global scanner. The Economist Intelligence Unit placed India at a 46th position in the 2021 Democracy Index ranking. India's Human Rights Index is no better. India ranks 119th position out of 165 countries in the Human Rights Index and slotted the 142th position in Press Freedom Index 2020.

None of these dark spots of the Modi regime find any mention in the book, "Modi@20". It is the responsibility of the intellectuals to interrogate and question the leaders and their policies. But unfortunately, most intellectuals in India have allowed themselves to be tamed. When they run after power and positions, there is a very little chance of any truth coming out in the orchestrated academic discussions organized in the emerging Modi-fied India.

Unlike his first tenure as the PM, Modi's second term began experiencing the effects of the global capitalist recession, compounded initially by the after effects of the Covid pandemic and

to pursue these cases to their logical end. Apart from supplying murky waters which is a health hazard, there is also the question of our basic human rights as citizens being violated every single day. I was reading Toki Blah's article on the Red buses that are now parked in every dingy corner of the city beginning from Mawblei up to Mawiong. They are a grim reminder of how a project should not be run. The agony about such badly run projects is that the initiator who gives such grand ideas on the projects with the most non-viable business model is never made to pay for the losses made. And the loss must run into crores of rupees because if we recall, those city buses that were part of the Shillong landscape used to last at least 20 years because they were well maintained and they were run on a model that made profit and had a robust enough margin for repairs and maintenance. The poor red buses were run with no maintenance because no one was held accountable for that. The so-called SHGs ran the buses only to make

profit and to pay salaries to the driver and conductor. Nothing more than that! The buses were treated like sarkari assets for which the SHG running it had no responsibility whatsoever to lose sleep on. If there were to be a stock-taking of all the wastage that this and successive governments in Meghalaya have been witness to and add to that the corruption that has happened on a grand scale since the 1980s then Meghalaya might lead the way; much more than even Nagaland perhaps. But then who cares? The same people who allowed these scams to happen; the polluted water to come through our pipes etc., might be re-elected in 2023. The very thought is depressing but we are a helpless lot. Alas!

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Future of indigenous people in India International Day of Indigenous People

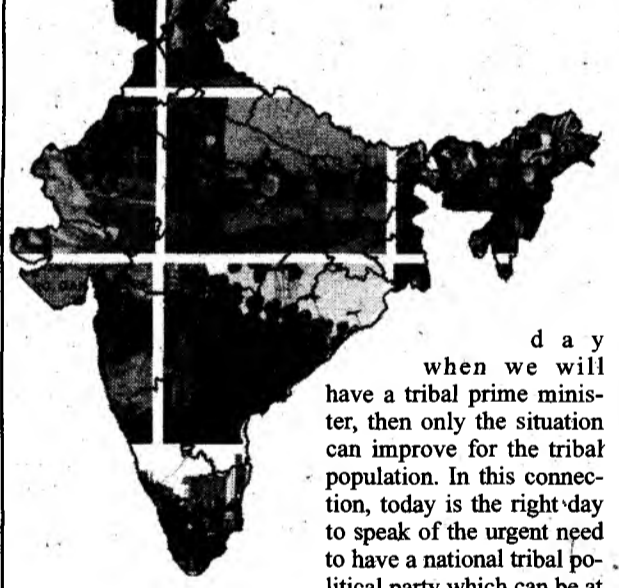
By Barnes Mawrie

Every year on 9th August, the world celebrates the day of Indigenous Peoples. This international day was first instituted in the state of California in 1992 to coincide with the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas in 1492. The purpose of this day was to replace the traditional Columbus Day which symbolized colonialism and slavery, with a day to celebrate indigenous people's power. It was on 23rd December 1994, that the UN adopted a resolution to institute 9th August as the International Day of Indigenous People, to be celebrated annually.

"Indigenous and tribal peoples" is a common denominator for more than 370 million people, found in more than 70 countries worldwide. Indigenous and tribal peoples have their own cultures, languages, customs and institutions, which distinguish them from other parts of the societies in which they find themselves." Indigenous people are native to the place and therefore they have absolute right of ownership to the land they inhabit.

In India the population of indigenous people usually referred to as adivasis or tribals, is 104 million which constitutes 8.6% of the country's population. The tribal people in India have been exploited for centuries and their land has been forcefully occupied by others or taken over by the governments with little or no compensation

when we will have a tribal prime minister, then only the situation can improve for the tribal population. In this connection, today is the right day to speak of the urgent need to have a national tribal political party which can be at par with any other national party. Keeping in mind that the tribal population is very large and spread out all over the country, such a party could become a reality not in the distant future. If this could be realized, the tribal communities would have a decisive political voice in the country. With a hundred or more tribal MPs in the parliament what a powerful pressure group we could build up. In a recent national conference of tribal scholars held in Shillong in June this year, there was a unanimous decision that academically, tribals in India should develop their own common full-fledged Philosophy and Theology which could become part of the academic curricula. This is already a positive step in the right direction towards unification of tribals in India. A national tribal political party would further enhance such unification and make the tribal communities a formidable force in the country. We look forward to the emergence of a true tribal statesman one who is universally accepted by tribal communities (someone like late P. A. Sangma) and who could bring all tribal politicians under one umbrella to fight as a unified force. The tribal people have been suppressed and ignored for a very long time. It is time that we rise up and claim our rights and privileges.



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ticians themselves become the culprits and traitors to the communities by shielding refugees and even settling them permanently, all for the sake of vote banks. If the population of non-tribals has risen so dramatically in some states of our region, the blame lies in the governments. Assam is an example, where for the sake of votes, political parties have permitted an endless flow of migrants from Bangladesh. Today Assam right from Goalpara up to Lakhimpur, the demography has tilted in favour of non-tribals. Tripura is a classic example of how tribal communities have become a minority in their own land due to the blunder of their rulers. We could imagine that Jaintia Hills would have met with the same fate had the king of Jaintiapur not been defeated by the British in 1835. The king who had become a Hindu was already bringing in a lot of Bengalee Hindus into his kingdom for many purposes just like what the King of Tripura had done. However, the attempts to change the tribal demography in Northeast India have not ceased but are still going on in clandestine and tactical ways.

On this International Day of Indigenous People, we as tribals in India rejoice at the fact that we have the first tribal president of the country in the person of Ms Droupadi Murmu. Yet knowing that the president is only a nominal head, she would not be able to bring about desired changes on behalf of tribal communities. We look forward to that

Letters to the Editor

Rs 45 lakh property tax and city college

Editor, Is there such a term as "Amused Outrage" in the English language, and if not then Shillong Cantonment Board through its most diligent, hard working and apparently out-to-entertain bent of mind Executive Officer must be congratulated on its ability to rouse such a feeling in our minds. I of course am referring to the news item titled "City College asked to pay Rs 45-lakh property tax", Shillong Times 8th August 2022. I mean is this guy serious? Is he really so officiously perturbed by the presence of this women's college, imparting knowledge and education to girls of this backward state, that he has to dig up his records in pursuit of his miserable property tax? If the Army is so desperate and fund starved then it should go all hog in collecting its rent and taxes being used by ungrateful civilians. The National Highway passes

through Cantonment land right from Lukier Road upto civil Hospital point. I strongly therefore recommend setting up Shillong Cantonment Board (SCB) tax collecting check gates at each end of this stretch of road. Please don't take my comments otherwise. I am simply assisting the SCB by drawing its attention to perhaps an overlooked and missed out source of revenue.

Oh by the way, may I also remind over zealous SCB officials that the Chinese are presently illegally occupying thousands of sq Kilometers of Indian territory both in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. We really need upright and courageous tax officials to send and deliver tax evasion notices to the PLA. Almost slipped my mind, there is also Pakistani Occupied Kashmir that urgently requires similar attention. Go for it Boy, tons of medals awaiting blinkered eyed babus who regardless of prevailing socio political realities, plod on to cause merry-hell wherever they can. Our Rule Book says so and therefore the ivory towers we built for ourselves

must be infallible! On a more serious note I earnestly request our Chief Minister, our MPs in Delhi and our elected representatives not to turn a blind eye to this unnecessary humiliation being heaped on one of our oldest and prestigious Educational Institutions. The Defence Ministry must be made aware of this uncalled for and totally unnecessary piece of red tapism. I frankly believe that even if the SCB had a genuine issue with the land Lady Keane College is situated on, the matter could have been handled in a more sensible and diplomatic manner than through a show of insensitive bureaucratic hauteur.

Yours etc., Toki Blah, Via email

Non-potable water in 21st century Meghalaya

Editor, Salil Gewali has rightly pointed out in his letter (ST Aug 8, 2022) that the PHED

still supplies muddy and murky waters to the residents in spite of charging water bills from the residents. Getting potable water is our basic right because it is the basis of our good health. If the Government in 50 years has not been able to provide the residents of the city with clean, pure water then what are we celebrating 50 years of statehood for and 75 years of India's freedom? However, those of us in our 60's remember the PHED scam that happened in Jaintia Hills in the early years of statehood. Later on the Greater Shillong Water Supply System in Mawphlang also became the centre of controversy. It was literally held to ransom by one single electrical engineer for many years. This has been Meghalaya's sordid history. Show me one project that is free from scams and has been completed on time. Every single project is limping along and the time and cost overruns when calculated on all the projects will be running into thousands of crores of rupees. But then who cares? There is no pressure group or civil society worth its name in this state

to pursue these cases to their logical end. Apart from supplying murky waters which is a health hazard, there is also the question of our basic human rights as citizens being violated every single day. I was reading Toki Blah's article on the Red buses that are now parked in every dingy corner of the city beginning from Mawblei up to Mawiong. They are a grim reminder of how a project should not be run. The agony about such badly run projects is that the initiator who gives such grand ideas on the projects with the most non-viable business model is never made to pay for the losses made. And the loss must run into crores of rupees because if we recall, those city buses that were part of the Shillong landscape used to last at least 20 years because they were well maintained and they were run on a model that made profit and had a robust enough margin for repairs and maintenance. The poor red buses were run with no maintenance because no one was held accountable for that. The so-called SHGs ran the buses only to make

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"All men who have achieved great things have been great dreamers."

—Orison Swett Marden

The Shillong Times

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Power and reforms

INDIA'S antiquated systems are standing in the way of speedier growth of the nation. At the same time, political will is lacking in the introduction of reforms; and in some cases, the reforms that were introduced were half-baked and failed to produce the desired results. Yet, change is in the order of things and reforms are the need of the hour. So too with the present move by the central government to introduce major changes in the electricity distribution sector. Amendments to the Electricity Act 2003 were introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday and the proposals were later sent to the Parliament's standing committee on Energy for a review. The hope is that this will end state monopoly over power distribution and private entities will have a level playing field.

Notably, the first set of reforms in the power sector was to allow private players to produce electricity and sell it to state electricity boards that did the distribution to consumers. This helped in ending the era of frequent load-shedding and nights of darkness. Today, state-owned power distribution companies are running in heavy losses and the governments are made to pay through their noses to sustain them. As per the present reforms, while governments are free to subsidize power, they must pay for it rather than burdening the discoms. From the existing distribution networks, consumers are free to choose the company they want to draw power from. This is bound to introduce competition and end monopoly that is the bane of any sector. The seriousness of the central government to set things right in the power sector — the principal promoter of economic growth — is evident from the Rs 3 trillion scheme it floated to inject strength to the power distribution segment. This is against the pitiable situation of rising dues of discoms to power generating companies of the order of Rs 1.12 trillion. This thus is time to act and act tough.

It should come as no surprise that employees in the state electricity boards under the banner of the Leftist unions have organised a nation-wide strike a day ago to protest against the government's reforms steps. Their main worry is their own vested interests will be affected once private players enter the distribution field. The Left, which has lost its mass base across India, survives and thrives by collection of crores from unions by way of levy and other fees. Policies must be decided by governments and not by unions. The government must keep people's interests supreme and take a tough stand when needed.

# NEP 2020 and Higher Education: Rationale and Strategy

By Bhagirathi Panda

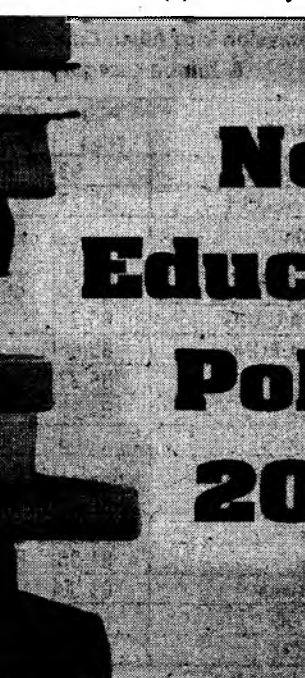
Of late, led by the Government and the Academic Community, a lot of interest is shown by different sections of our society towards the New Education Policy 2020, popularly called the 'NEP 2020'. The central government considers it as one of its pathbreaking initiatives and disruptions in the education space. To them, NEP 2020 envisages fundamental and structural changes in the abstraction, content, approach, evaluation and outcome dimensions of education at all levels. Unsurprisingly, the interest in the policy reflects both hope and apprehension. This write up is about examining some such aspects of the policy in the sphere of higher education in our country with special focus on the different rationales of its adoption and the encom-

worldwide in 2019. India as an emerging global power cannot afford to bypass it particularly in a situation when it has not yet been able to become the manufacturing hub of the world.

The indigenisation rationale is a corollary to the economic rationale viewed as an important initiative in creating factors contributing to USP making in education services. Because of its rich cultural heritage enriched by its plurality and diversity, its experimentation in democracy, its civilisational history, its indigenous power in software, space and digitalisation technology and its avowed interest in world peace etc., it remains a potential destination for international students

and researchers. However, this needs to be properly tailored in to our education service and marketed efficiently. The rationale of inclusivity is about improving access, equity and inclusion in higher education. Access is enabled through formulating and putting in place at the Government, Community and Institution levels proper policies and practices so that students have equal opportunities to take full advantage of their education in terms of enrolment and choice of subjects. Equity is more about fairness in treatment and opportunities in educational institutions so as to ensure that personal and social conditions do not act as stumbling blocks for students from achieving their academic potential. Inclusion refers to ensuring benchmarked and standardised education to each student regardless of background, personal, social and geographical characteristics. Important indicators of increased access, equity and inclusion in higher education are the improved Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Student Teacher-Ratio, Per capita availability of different educational infrastructures and measures to promote vertical equity through positive discrimination, reservation and fellowship/scholarship arrangements. Finally, the rationale of excellence as-

to form a firm resolve across stakeholders (Government, Market, Community and Civil Society) through calibration, mobilisation, synergization and synchronisation. This requires a serious situational and process analysis with hard data and facts. In our previous write up which this esteemed daily carried out on 29th March 2022, we have made a situational analysis of some of these critical indicators. The next step is to go beyond it and make appropriate process analyses. For example, if the GER in the country is low vis-à-vis many of the leading countries of the world or if it is low in the North Eastern Region vis-à-vis the country as a whole, what are the contributory factors responsible for it? Same would also be the case with low accreditation, high student-teacher ratio, sub-optimal quality of research, gender disparity in enrolment and faculty availability, faculty shortage, poor employability of the pass-outs and sub-optimal regulation and management etc.



passing strategy to realise it. We can list out five important rationales for the introduction of NEP 2020. These are the rationales of (i) contemporariness, (ii) economics (iii) Indigenisation (iv) Inclusivity and (v) Excellence. In an article published in this daily few months back, we had mentioned about the first two rationales.

The rationale of contemporariness presupposes the need to reform our education system in the light of the continuous changes happening in global societal institutions that include and manifest in the forms of arrival of the knowledge economy in scale, the seamless change in technology, the imperative of brand building through accreditation, autonomy, ranking, multidisciplinary liberal learning and innovative pedagogy in teaching and evaluation. The rationale of economics considers higher education an exportable service and to be used as a strategy of economic development of the country. Existing global powers such as USA and western European countries have gone for this strategy and continue to do so. Emerging global powers such as China have started aggressively pursuing this strategy too. USA, UK, Canada, China and Australia were the top 5 countries in the world hosting 56 percent of international students

and researchers. However, this needs to be properly tailored in to our education service and marketed efficiently. The rationale of inclusivity is about improving access, equity and inclusion in higher education. Access is enabled through formulating and putting in place at the Government, Community and Institution levels proper policies and practices so that students have equal opportunities to take full advantage of their education in terms of enrolment and choice of subjects. Equity is more about fairness in treatment and opportunities in educational institutions so as to ensure that personal and social conditions do not act as stumbling blocks for students from achieving their academic potential. Inclusion refers to ensuring benchmarked and standardised education to each student regardless of background, personal, social and geographical characteristics. Important indicators of increased access, equity and inclusion in higher education are the improved Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Student Teacher-Ratio, Per capita availability of different educational infrastructures and measures to promote vertical equity through positive discrimination, reservation and fellowship/scholarship arrangements. Finally, the rationale of excellence as-

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However, it would be unjust to dub NEP 2020 as unwanted or ill timed. Economist Albert O. Hirschman in his strategy of economic development advocates for deliberately unbalancing the economy by initially undertaking investment in leading sectors of the economy. He suggests that in a situ-

ation of limited capital, the economy can be unbalanced by either having excess of DPA (Directly Productive Activity) over SOC (Social Overhead Capital) or vice-versa. DPA includes investments in establishing firms/business units which produce increased goods and services. SOC includes investments on education, public health, irrigation, electricity, roads, railways etc. Applying Hirschman's analogy there could be two strategies to implement NEP. Strategy-I would be to create the necessary physical and human infrastructure and institutions first and then introduce NEP 2020. However we feel, this would be a time consuming exercise with the current institutional values and practices. We feel in a democratic society like India it is better

to implement strategy-II by introducing NEP 2020 first, which would in the next stage, bring out the required infrastructure and institutions through political and social pressure. For example, when the Government implements NEP provisions, there would be a lot of pressure exerted on it by citizens and groups to increase the allocation of GDP on education. Currently the central government spends about 3.5 percent of its GDP on education. With the kind of push and movement being made by the current central government on implementation on NEP, there would be constant pressure on the Government to increase the allocation on higher education to 6% level as recommended by Kothari Commission earlier. Similar pressure would also be there from different sections of society on state and local governments to provide for required infrastructure. We consider this approach playing out more positively in Indian context.

Hence, let us consider NEP 2020 as a journey. This implies that we need to implement NEP provisions incrementally and, in the meantime, allow for the complementing infrastructure and enabling global practices to emerge through pressure, conviction and partnership. (The author teaches at the department of economics, NEHU)

# The Maharashtra Governor and Controversial Comments

By Vidyadhar Date

The Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari's extremely divisive recent observation needs to be seen against the background of increasing arrogance of big money in economic and political life. It may be pertinent to begin with a short story written by the eminent Dalit writer Annabhau Sathe in the 1950s, the period of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement when there was tension between the Marathi and Gujarati speaking people.

Though Sathe was a leading member of the cultural troupe of the then strong communist movement, his story Adhunik Ashwathama sensitively portrayed the insecurity of a chawl dwelling, Gujarati speaking elderly man about his two young daughters. Although, in real life Gujarati girls faced no such threat, Sathe had the sensitivity to probe the psyche of the father. Writers like Sathe severely condemned capitalist exploitation but were sensitive to problems of all people.

Governor Koshiyari had made a statement at a function in Mumbai on July 29 that if Gujaratis and Rajasthanis were taken away from the city and Thane, there would be no money left in these cities, and Mumbai would not remain the financial capital of India. He issued an apology following his remarks which were seen as deeply insulting and even the Chief Minister and deputy Chief Minister distanced themselves from the utterance.

It is clear from the video of the speech that the governor's remarks were far from off the cuff, he is seen enjoying making the statement and is looking for applause. Before the formation of Maharashtra in 1960 there was a bilingual Bombay State which included parts of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Morarji Desai was the Chief Minister from 1952 and Y.B Chavan from 1957. Chavan later in 1960 became the chief minister of the present state of Maharashtra.

There were furious protests following the report of the Fazal Ali commission on the reorganisation of States and when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru announced that Mumbai should be made a union territory. The idea of the seceding of Mumbai from the Marathi speaking areas was widely resented by the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti which had become a major political force. The SMS was seen as a representative of ordinary, working class people while the Congress was seen as a party under the influence of capitalists.

Many since then fear that the capitalist class still harbours plan to cede Mumbai from Maharashtra and the feeling persists to this day. All suggestions in the past about a separate Bombay or Mumbai, have been vehemently opposed. Mumbai is eighth richest city in the world with 51 resident billionaires

Coming back to Annabhau Sathe he walked some 230 km from his village in Sangli district to Mumbai as he had no money for transport. He had little education, did petty jobs for a living and yet in his short life of 49 years he left a very rich body of work from novels and film scripts and lok natya, folk theatre, to poems and ballads. His work has been translated into some 27 languages including European ones.

He got his inspiration from the active Communist movement of the 1950s and 1960s. With Shahir Amar Shaikh and Gavankar he formed a powerful trio that thrilled audiences of thousands with militant songs.

Koshiyari with his cap and dhoti looks like the common man of cartoonist R.K. Laxman. But he is far from that. He has become extremely unpopular with his acts of commission and omission

and utterances. Also seen as outrageous are his recent utterances against the eminent social reformer couple of 19th century Maharashtra, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai. While inaugurating a statue of Savitribai Phule earlier this year he had mocked at her marriage at the age of ten. At that time child marriages were common. His remarks against Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule, who are revered in Maharashtra, were condemned by the Congress and other parties.

His statement on the economy betrays a typical upperclass bias and prejudice about wealth creation and there is a sinister ignoring of the contribution of workers who create the surplus. Additionally, there are a number of other factors including infrastructure, creative, artistic class and so on. To single out one or two communities for the success of an economy is to betray colossal ignorance of history and the present situation.

American capitalism owes its success in large measure to its exploitation of slaves, says the distinguished scholar Sven Beckert whom I heard at the Jaipur literary festival and in Mumbai sometime ago on this topic. He was widely quoted in the New York Times. Some of the observations from the newspaper in this regard are worth quoting.

Nearly two average American lifetimes have passed since the end of slavery, only two. It is not surprising that we can still feel the looming presence of this institution, which helped turn a poor, fledgling nation into a financial colossus. The surprising bit has to do with the many eerily specific ways slavery can still be felt in our economic life. "American slavery is necessarily imprinted on the DNA of American capitalism," writes the historians Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman.

A couple of years before he was convicted of securities fraud, Martin Shkreli was the chief executive of a pharmaceutical company that acquired the rights to Daraprim, a lifesaving antiparasitic drug. Previously the drug cost \$13.50 a pill, but in Shkreli's hands, the price quickly increased by a factor of 56, to \$750 a pill. At a health care conference, Shkreli told the audience that he should have raised the price even higher. "No one wants to say it, no one's proud of it," he explained. "But this is a capitalist society, a capitalist system and capitalist rules."

This is a capitalist society. It's a fatalistic mantra that seems to get repeated to anyone who questions why America can't be more fair or equal. In a capitalist society that goes low, wages are depressed as businesses compete over the price, not the quality, of goods; so-called unskilled workers are typically incentivised through punishments, not promotions; inequality reigns and poverty spreads. In the United States, the richest 1 percent of Americans own 40 percent of the country's wealth, while a larger share of working-age people (18-65) live in poverty than in any other nation belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (O.E.C.D.), the newspaper noted (NYT 14-08-2019)

Coming back to Annabhau Sathe he put the issue in a more succinct way when he said the earth rests not on the thousand headed Shesh Naga of mythology but on the hard labour of workers. Unfortunately, the governor and his ilk believe in myths, old ones that have been around for centuries and new ones fabricated by vested interests

(The writer is a senior journalist (Syndicate The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

## Election churning

Editor,  
News that HM Shangliang has now left the TMC which he joined a few months ago and joined the BJP is no longer surprising. In Meghalaya, elections are never about ideology or principles but about opportunity to be on the ruling side. Shangliang has calculated that the TMC is unlikely to get too many MLAs and being a shrewd former bureaucrat he also knows that the NPP will win more seats and will continue to work with the BJP and hence he has a good opportunity to be on the ruling side with the BJP and hence he has to address him as "Sir." Think about it!  
For some people, power is everything and the devil

take the hindmost. It is laughable to talk about 'service to the constituents' because the first service that each of the 60 MLAs have done so far is self-service. What is surprising is that Dr Mukul Sangma has not been able to stop the attrition from the TMC. Now with Mamata Banerjee having seemingly cut a deal with none other than Himanta Biswa Sarma one of the most important leaders in the BJP today, the future of the TMC seems to be blowing in the wind. No one knows what Mamata Banerjee has in mind; not even the TMC members in Meghalaya. What happens if in 2024 the TMC becomes an ally of the BJP?  
Politics is an ugly game and people should have known it by now. Finally they have to elect the lesser evil among the candidates in each constituency.

Yours etc.,  
MS Lyngdoh  
Markasa

## Sufferings of common people

Editor,  
Through your esteemed daily I would like to express my concern over the suffering of the common people in India. The ordinary citizen suffers from two major problems - access to health and education. Both sectors have become inaccessible to the common citizen. Both the sectors have become money-making businesses whereas the government is allowing them to operate without any regulations. It is observed that doctors in private hospitals are having a monopoly and put patients through unnecessary investigation and medicines while school fees have become unaffordable.  
Recently I encountered two incidents. I went to a doctor and he advised me to get some tests done in his clinic. Now why should I go to this clinic when the test-

ing and diagnoses is cheaper elsewhere. The problem is that the doctor may not see the report conducted elsewhere. This sort of malpractice by doctors has destroyed the medical system in the state as well as country.  
According to a report 5 years ago, 27% of deaths occur due to medical negligence. Government should fix the rates of hospitals and consultation and investigation as well fix the rate of school fee. Government should come with new laws for this sector.

People of this country had voted the NDA government for the betterment of the middle class but in today's world we are suffering in all the sectors of day to day life.  
The media as well as local bodies should come forward and work for the betterment of society. I request both the state and central government to intervene and stop the

monopoly of private health practitioners and the education sector to relieve the burden of the common people of this country

Yours etc.,  
Samar Deb  
Guwahati

## Teachers in politics: Hypocrisy of the MDA Govt

Editor,  
Hypocrisy as they say has its limitations and it is ultimately exposed in full public view. The recent diktat of the NPP led-government of banning or discouraging the teaching community from taking active part in politics shows that intellectuals, academicians and social thinkers have no place in the system of governance. Hence we see misgovernance at all levels. If the academic sector cannot take part in active politics then what type

of political discourse do we expect in the electronic and print media? Perhaps people in authority who take such decisions should, in fact, question themselves before they even set foot in a political party. Recently a college teacher joined the NPP from Laitumkhrah Constituency. This has exposed the double standards of the NPP which runs the government and the Chief Minister himself whose government was responsible for the order banning teachers from taking part in politics. We hope that the people of Laitumkhrah will judge for themselves who is a hypocrite and who is not?

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar  
Via email

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

"Life is a balance of fear and overcoming it."

— Jimmy Iovine

The Shillong Times

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Indigenous Peoples' Day

AUGUST 9 is observed the world over as the International Day of the World's Indigenous People. This event celebrates indigenous people across the globe and their contributions to indigenous knowledge systems, especially with regards to medicinal herbs and traditional healing systems. On this day indigenous people remind themselves of their ancestors and what they have handed down over the centuries such as the value systems, language, conservation wisdom and knowledge about sustainable living. The United Nations designates a theme every year around which the day is being observed. The theme this year is 'Role of Indigenous Women in the Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Knowledge.' Indigenous people have been known to have equal respect for women and men and the theme captures the essence of the celebration. Indigenous women are known to be innovative farmers and have for thousands of years conserved seeds and exchanged the seeds among themselves. That way the traditional farming practices are kept alive. Now scientists tell us that indigenous seeds are more resilient to climate change than genetically modified seeds. These seeds are hardy and resistant to pests and the vagaries of nature.

Indigenous women have been the natural custodians of natural resources. By nature, women are not exploitative but protective of the environment. It is unfortunate that this important milestone in the life of Indigenous peoples passed off uneventfully in Meghalaya. For one, the day coincided with Muharram which is an official holiday for schools and colleges where discussions should have been held to remind the young about their ancestors and the rich tradition they passed on down the family tree. This day should have been observed with a sense of pride and gratitude to the ancestors. Interestingly, in other states where indigenous people are aware of the erosion of their rights and the exploitation of their natural resources by corporations and big business, the day was observed with solemnity and dignity. People expressed themselves through songs and dances and organised events so that the young are exposed to the events and learn about their rich traditions. There were exhibitions of traditional arts and crafts and discussions on the importance of language as a link to the past and a bridge to the future.

It is common for indigenous peoples living in territories where they don't feel any threat to their existence to ignore this important day but those living in countries like Canada, USA, Australia etc., where they have been subjugated over centuries realise the importance of this day and observe it meaningfully. In India indigenous people are not recognised as a separate category because governments say that all who have settled in India are indigenous to the place. It is this dichotomy that has created confusion. Adivasis and hill tribes have first claim to the land they have first settled in and this needs to be recognised.

Why the President of India is also Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces

By Manish Tewari

An anecdote narrated by a colleague in Parliament about how a particular president perceived his role as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces provoked a question: Why did the founding fathers not vest this supreme command in the Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister, given that they made a conscious choice that India would be a parliamentary democracy, not an executive presidency?

Article 53 of the Constitu-

Assembly. However, any and every constitutional scheme has enough play in the joints to be interpreted in various ways, especially when a constitutional crisis comes to a head or an external emergency manifests. The term "defence forces of the Union" is nowhere defined in the Constitution.

A clue as to why the supreme command came to

premise command of the armed forces must vest in a constitutional entity that is perceived to be above partisan politics, thereby underscoring the apolitical character of the armed forces — that is, that they belong to the nation and not to any dispensation that may concurrently at a given point in time hold the reigns of executive power?

Or were they just being guided by the British practice

China on October 1, 1949 — just as the Indian constitutional deliberations were winding down.

China had an interesting institution dating back to 1925 called the Central Military Commission and, fascinatingly, after China assumed its present avatar, the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party has been invariably triple-hatted whereby he is also the president of the republic and chairperson of the Central



tion states that the executive power of the Union shall be vested in the President of India. Article 53(2) has a rather interesting formulation: "Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provision, the supreme command of the Defence Forces of the Union shall be vested in the President and the exercise thereof shall be regulated by law". The powers of the presidency are, of course, circumscribed by Article 74 which states that the president shall exercise his functions only on the aid and advice of the council of ministers headed by the prime minister.

Interestingly, if one peruses the debates of the Constituent Assembly on draft Article 42 that corresponds to Article 53 of the Constitution, there is absolutely no discussion on vesting the supreme command of the defence forces in the president. It almost seems that the Constitution framers had taken it as a given that the supreme command of the armed forces would be vested in the presidency. It is incredible that such an important aspect, even though the president of India is only a titular head, was not even debated by the Constituent

be vested in the presidency can possibly be found in the articulation of KM Munshi in the Constituent Assembly debates. While speaking on an amendment moved by Professor KT Shah on draft Article 42, Munshi argued that "The strongest government and the most elastic executive has been found to be in England and that is because the executive powers vest in the Cabinet supported by a majority of the lower house which has financial powers under the constitution. As a result, it is the rule of the majority in the legislature for it supports its leaders in the cabinet which advises the head of the state namely the king or the President. The King or the President is thus placed above the party. He is made really the symbol of the impartial dignity of the Constitution."

However, neither does Dr Ambedkar's opening speech introducing the draft constitution or closing speech on the conclusion of its deliberations mention the aspect of the president being the Supreme Commander of the Defence Forces.

Was it, therefore, the un-verbalised desire of the founding fathers that the su-

where the supreme command of the armed forces is vested in the monarch? While designing the Constitution, the framers were both following certain British traditions while simultaneously trying to break with them.

The British constitutional interpretations written by Michel de Montaigne and other scholars were not the only ones that the founding fathers took on board in their grand study of constitutional jurisprudence. The first French Constitution created by the French National Assembly in 1791 embodying the principles contained in the Rights of Man and of the Citizen equally animated them. It is another matter that France has had 15 constitutions between then and 1958. Equally, they were inspired by the American Constitution, and more so, the Bill of Rights ratified on December 15, 1791.

In both the American and French constitutional schemes, the supreme command of the armed forces vests in the president. However, both these countries have an executive presidency. Nearer home, there was another country that was born — the People's Republic of

Military Commission, except for a brief while when Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin in the late 1980s and early 2000s held this position singularly.

Interestingly, in Pakistan, Article 243-1A, as amended by the Constitution Eighteenth Amendment Act 2010, states: "Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provisions, the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces shall vest in the President" However, that has not stopped Pakistan from being convulsed by a series of coup d'etats going back to 1958.

It is, therefore, quite evident that rather than any deliberate plan or design to impose civilian control over the armed forces, as conventional wisdom or subsequent myth-making make it out to be, the President of India ended-up becoming the Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed Forces for the simple reason that the members of the Constituent Assembly decided to follow British precedent. A study of the making of the Constitution can throw up some interesting revelations.

(The writer is a lawyer, MP, former I&B minister. Views are personal. This article first appeared in The Indian Express)

Regime change in Bihar is a positive development for opposition

By Arun Srivastava

In the fierce battle for buttressing political supremacy between the two Chanakyas, Amit Shah was made to bite dust by Nitish Kumar by aborting his mission Operation Lotus, an endeavour to remove Chief Minister Nitish from power and also restructure his task to finish yet another regional party, this time JD(U) of Nitish, and create a new Eknath Sinde in Bihar.

Notwithstanding the felonious demeanour of Shah, it was particularly the arrogance of Narendra Modi and his contempt for others that conjured Nitish Kumar to quit the NDA coinciding with the day country was celebrating the Quit India day. Nitish might not have resorted to this extreme move, if Modi and Shah had not conspired to insult him, pull down his government and present him in a poor light through their party colleagues and leaders.

Before handing his resignation to the Governor Fagu Mahato, he had narrated the insult and humiliation that was inflicted on him by Modi and Shah. Nitish told his party legislators and MPs, at a meeting he convened at his official residence, that he had been driven against the wall by the BJP which tried to weaken his JD(U), first by propping up Chirag Paswan's

rebellion and later through the party's former national president RCP Singh. It is an open secret that relations between Modi and Nitish has been worsening for quite some time in the wake of disagreements over number of issues including caste census, population control and the Agnipathi' defence recruitment scheme. Of late the BJP legislators had made it a habit to question the decisions and moves of Nitish Kumar and even accuse him for all kinds of wrongdoing. The worst has been the case of the Assembly Speaker, who was not having a working relation with Nitish. In fact Nitish had asked Modi and Shah to replace him with some other leader.

Though Modi and Shah in their public postures appeared to be quite friendly towards Nitish, the fact was they always instigated their leaders to demean him. It is not that Monday's development was unexpected. In fact for the last six months they were engaged in a war of wits. It was the July 31 statement of party president J P Nadda that compelled Nitish to take his own path. Nadda had claimed that only the BJP would survive and all other parties - including regional parties - would perish in the country. As JD-U is a regional party, this message was taken as a warning.

Those who know Nadda and are aware of his style of functioning assert that he was delivering the dialogue which was tutored to him by Shah. However, some people nurse the feeling that Nadda was responsible for exacerbation of the crisis. But it is not the case. That Nitish would react in this manner was beyond their imagination. Once Shah realised that the situation was slipping out of his grip, on Sunday night he rang up Nitish to assuage his hurt feelings. But it was too late. Nitish was ready to move ahead.

Nitish's decision must not be seen merely as a setback for the saffron party in Bihar. It has wider implications across the country. The tweets and responses from the opposition parties make it abundantly clear that this incident has enthused the opposition to take the saffron brigade head on. In fact, the BJP leaders are not simply surprised at Nitish's move, they are scared of future political developments in the country. Political change in

Bihar would invariably enrage those opposition leaders who had lost hope and presumed that the electoral dynamics for the big battle in 2024 is beyond their reach with the perceived absence of a visible alternative to the domineering Modi.

Nitish reviving and restructuring the Mahagathbandhan, a forum of the RJD, Congress, Left and some democratic organisations, and becoming the chief minister would repudiate BJP's move to identify itself with the aspirations of the Dalits and OBCs. The peoples' response and their approval of Nitish's parting of ways with the BJP clearly underline that the Dalit and OBC support base has started consolidating in favour of the Mahagathbandhan. BJP had conspired to damage the JD-U by using Lok Janshakti Party leader Chirag Paswan, who fielded candidates against all JD(U) contestants in the state elections in 2020. This reduced Kumar's party tally to 43 and weakened his position in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Installing of Mahagathbandhan government on Wednesday headed by Nitish with Tejashwi as the Dy CM, would also witness resurrection of the politics of social justice. True enough Modi and Shah are

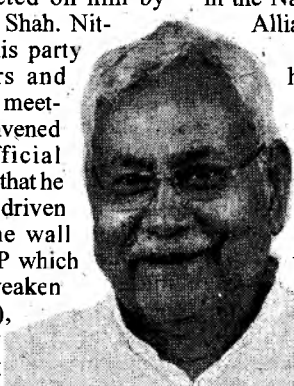
scared of the spectre of losing out in this new-found support base, which had rallied behind the BJP during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Haunted by this fear the BJP had launched personal attacks on Nitish and brought in the of phrase of "Palu" leader. They charged him with going against the peoples' mandate. But at the same time they forget the deeds of their leaders Modi and Shah, who have been primarily responsible for triggering the present crisis.

Political experts hold the view that Nitish Kumar's decision to return to the secular fold is a big boost as the JDU, RJD, Congress, CPI-ML, SP and other opposition parties constitute a major chunk of vote bank. This element has in fact convinced Congress chief Sonia Gandhi to throw her weight behind Nitish when he rang her up and sought support.

The exercise to weed out the former union minister R C Prasad Singh from the party was not merely a punitive action against him instead it had wider implications. It was a strong message for Narendra Modi and Amit Shah to keep away from Bihar. Nitish had come to know that Modi and Shah have hatched a plot to finish his political career. They were simply waiting for the right time. Shah was following his Maharashtra script. But even before it could acquire a concrete shape, Nitish, the astute politician, torpedoed it.

Bihar sends 40 MPs to the Lok Sabha and played a key role, along with Uttar Pradesh, in making Modi the Prime Minister in 2014 and 2019. With BJP already losing ground in UP, as manifest in the Assembly elections, it may have to bow out of the boxing ring in Bihar.

The CPI(ML) which has around 12 MLAs in Bihar has decided not to join the new ministry. According to Dipankar Bhattacharya, the general secretary, it would play the role of the opposition inside the government. Dipankar says, "our entire effort would be to ensure the benefits of the government reach the people at the ground level. We have to ensure that the credibility of the new government does not suffer and its image is not sullied". (IPA Service)



Letters to the Editor

Woes of rising wildlife trafficking cases

Editor In the past few days we are witnessing alarming cases of large seizures of illegal wildlife in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. Apparently they were transiting through Meghalaya on the way to other destinations in the country. We must congratulate the Police Department, local NGOs and the Wildlife Department in detecting and confiscating the live animals. What is more alarming is the fact that all the seized animals and birds are exotic species and are not native to our country as reported in sections of the media. As a person with direct knowledge of these confiscated animals' identity, I wish to clarify that they belong to several species of endangered Gibbons and Hornbills and are native to several Southeast Asian countries especially Malaysia and Indonesia. How these exotic animals landed up in our shore is a matter of guess at this moment and investigations by relevant authorities will certainly open the Pandora's Box. But a clear modus operandi is evident in these cases. Since these animals are not protected under the stringent Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, prosecution of

the smugglers is an issue and they often manage to get bail. This legal loophole emboldens the culprits to continue with this illegal trade.

As reported in the media, in recent times there have been several such confiscations of exotic animals in neighboring Assam too and all of these apparently crossed borders from Myanmar and travelled through Mizoram en route to mainland India. Wildlife Trade is one of the most lucrative illegal businesses globally with an estimated value of 7-23 billion US dollars. While a large chunk of this trade involves poached animal carcasses and their numerous body parts for their purported medicinal value, there is also a huge demand for live exotic animals as pets that drive the cases such as the one witnessed here. Huge monetary incentives must have been the driving force behind such illegal businesses. Without doubt, this is not the job of petty local dealers but a well-organized international racket with sophisticated mode of operation must be behind such business. We hope that authorities will dig deep into the problems.

Now coming to the real question - can these traffickers be punished under Indian laws? As mentioned earlier provisions of IWPA, 1972 may not be applicable to such cases. But if these criminals are allowed to go scot-free, they will only

be emboldened and this will also have a demoralizing affect on the people or agencies that painstakingly unearthed such cases. Even if there is no provision to detain these people under current laws of the land, we must explore and find ways to deal with such menace even with the help of international conventions like CITES to which India is a signatory (all gibbons are listed under CITES).

I am no expert on legal matters and it is best left to the wisdom of the legal fraternity and administrators to deal with such offences. But what I feel is that there needs to be close inter-agency co-operation between the relevant government authorities especially with Wildlife Crime Control Bureau of the Government of India which can deal with such issues on a case by case basis.

Another issue is related to the welfare of the confiscated animals. Once taken out from the wilds, these animals already have a doomed future. Since establishing the country of origin and sending the seized animals back to their native country is a humongous if not impossible task, they may be suitably accommodated in local zoos with veterinary care. I am sure the relevant agencies are mindful of these issues. The people behind unearthing the recent trafficking again deserve a round of applause. Let us all be more vigilant and not allow our state to become a transit hub for

such immoral and destructive trade.

Yours etc. Dr. Uttam Saikia, Zoological Survey of India, Via email

Of teachers' evaluation

Editor

All these years, since my mother's time ( although poor soul she did not get to study that much) mine and even during my daughter's time in school and as a student in Delhi University, teachers occupied a prestigious place in the lives of the students. During my school days, government officials like the Inspector of Schools from the Education Department would come for inspection at least once a year to have a close knit relation with the teachers and students. Today, I wonder if we still have an Inspector of Schools and if there is interaction or how well do these Inspectors know the merits and demerits prevalent in a school.

The present scenario is such that the teachers are bearing the worst brunt. It is common knowledge that school teachers do not get their salaries on time. At times they go without salary for months together. Imagine how these poor souls feed and fend for their families? Teaching is indeed a noble profession but teachers today are victimised and have to

make the streets their temporary homes in order to get their just dues. What a shame indeed! The lack of respect and regard for teachers from the higher echelons is appalling. I wonder if Teacher's Day has lost its meaning. Students in schools and colleges and every educational institution celebrate Teacher's Day as a mark of respect for their beloved teachers but for those in the government to provide the teachers their due is far from their call. Hence Teacher's Day has become a stark reminder that the teachers are a poorer lot. All that they have been doing is offer their services and answer to their call of duty with hungry stomachs.

I agree with Deepa Majumdar who writes in her article, "What is Education? Overcoming the Noetic factory" that "The final nail on the coffin of higher education are teachers' evaluation by students. Not only is it disrespectful but these ratings compromise the quality of classroom teaching, with teachers pandering to spoil youth for the sake of evaluation. I feel this is utter nonsense. I'm reminded of the time when I was still in service. What if my Annual Confidential Report had to be evaluated by a Grade IV staff? Laughable and unacceptable indeed! Of course, gone are the days when students would blindly follow the teachers. Today with the internet the students are in a better position to add to their knowledge. But how wise is

it to allow students to make a report card of the teacher's performance, especially in college where many students barely attend classes and some are like Haley's Comet? Can such students be in a position to evaluate a teacher? If the students' evaluation of the teachers is at all to be taken into account their statement should have substantial proof before they are taken seriously.

Many write-ups have pointed out that in today's world, there are a set of teachers who do not have a calling or the talent, love and dedication for teaching but are still taking up the profession of a teacher to feed their families. But can they be blamed if there is a lack of employment? They are in no position to make a choice but to take up any job that can feed them. The need is for more job opportunities which is the brief of the government. The present government would do well not to blame the previous government for all ills. Instead it should focus on the formulation of policies and find out ways and means to create more jobs and ease unemployment at all levels.

Yours etc., Helen Dkhar, Shillong-4

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

*"Indifference and neglect often do much more damage than outright dislike."*

— J. K. Rowling

**The Shillong Times**

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**Kursi Kumar, again**

INSTALLED as chief minister for the eighth time, Nitish Kumar is by now a phenomenon. The question, though, is at what cost to his own integrity as a politician. In the past over two decades, he has shared bed with every political party with the express purpose of remaining in power. Chances today are that he's courting the beginning of the end in his political career. For, Tejashwi Yadav of the RJD with double the number of MLAs that Kumar has in his JDU party is bound to make life miserable for the chief minister or, more likely, edge him out of the chair sooner than later. Bihar is likely to get into tumultuous times in its political sphere.

To say that the BJP is shell-shocked at the way Kumar has turned the tables on it should be partly true but the unpredictability of the chief minister was there for all to see. At the slightest hint that a Maharashtra-like situation could emerge against him in Bihar too, which could vertically split his JDU and rob him of the CM's post, Kumar broke his party's alliance with the BJP and got the RJD and the Congress to back him for an alternative ministry. For both the Congress and the RJD, a continuation of the BJP-JDU alliance in the state meant political wilderness for three more years. Here was an opportunity beckoning them. Scruples are alien to politics today and ideology is an empty rhetoric to fool the people.

Nitish Kumar, known by now as Kursi Kumar, worked no wonders for Bihar in the two decades of his leadership. On the positive side, he restored law and order that had been made worse under the Lalu Yadav period. It is also stated to Kumar's credit that he zealously concentrated on reaching basic amenities to villages under the slogan of "Sadak (roads) Pani (drinking water)." But, stunningly, his agenda almost stopped at that. Claims are that during the nearly 20 years of his steady governance since 2005, not to mention his brief foray as CM in 2000, he had doubled the income of ordinary Biharis. The long and short of this claim is that Biharis remained where they were 20 years ago. Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha are among the poorest states in the country today; all fiefdoms of regional leaders for decades. Bihar requires a new face, a mascot, to realize its aspirations in the economic sphere. Nitish cannot be the answer for the future. It's unlikely he will ever realize his ambition to be the PM.

# Elections 2023: Time to do a constituency audit

By Patricia Mukhim

As we get closer to the D-Day, (Election - 2023) some who cannot but help think of the fate of Meghalaya 20-30 years hence tend to go into depression. Others start writing to express their angst but are still hopeful that we will yet produce statesmen/women. Perhaps in this age when we are expected to be gender-correct it might be better to call them statespersons. This would include all genders including LG-BTQ+. Why should politics be the domain of only those who fall into the constructed binaries of male and female. In any case these males and females have let us down for fifty years and we need to encourage diversity in politics as we should be doing in other spheres of activities including teaching where most who don't fit into the binary box have to remain in closets forever. I would sincerely hope that a few from the LGBTQ+ community enter the Assembly and make legislation a more compassionate activity.

This is the time when we hear politicians talk, talk and talk. What do they talk about? Those in the government are busy defending their posteriors which we can all see is full of slime but which they can't see because it's not possible to see one's own backside. We are aware of all the nefarious deals, the mansions constructed in Shillong city from money that they will not be able to account for. And worse, even the minions serving their ministerial bosses are now owners of homes in some of the most upmarket localities of Shillong. And they want us to believe they have spent the last four years plus serving the people of the State?

Hence it has become imperative that we audit each of the 60 MLAs and subject those that held ministerial positions to even sharper and stricter scrutiny. We need to know what assets they had when they entered the legislative assembly in 2018 and how much they are worth today. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) a non-profit organisation, gives us this data. But how many know of ADR? Very few. ADR works in tandem with National Election Watch (NEW) to strive to bring about transparency and accountability in Indian politics and reducing the influence of money and muscle power in elections. The wealth ranking of most ministers in Meghalaya and those of their

close associates has gone up several rungs. They have the best homes with the latest gadgets; expensive SUVs and huge bank balances. The latter earn by doing sifارش and arranging meetings between businessmen and ministers. This is a good earning avenue.

And po, this writer and others like her who have been concerned about the states of affairs in Meghalaya are not envious of the ill-gotten wealth of these people. We are angry and upset that the resources of the indigenous people of Meghalaya - its rivers, forests, coal, limestone, boulders, sand which were

terminals? Surely there has to be an end to end cycle from origin to destination. The Police need to find out the masterminds. Arresting carriers and middle-men/women will not yield anything except add to the drugs cache.

Ministers are supposed to think beyond their constituencies. They are to have a 30-year vision for the State. However, other MLAs too are elected to think of Meghalaya and not just their piddly constituencies. We need to do an audit of which MLA in the present Assembly has initiated a Bill arising out of public concern, which after due legislative procedure has

defaulted on his work? Example: a road developing pot-holes after the first summer showers? Why have the roads deteriorated so much under this Government? What is the status of the Dome crashing report? How long does IIT Guwahati need to examine the reasons for the dome collapse? Would an independent agency have taken so long? And why is the Opposition not pushing the Government to make public the reports into the rice scam, the Smart Meter scam and the Cherister Thangkhiem investigation?

Lets come to the PHE Department. What is the status of the Jal Jeevan Mission? Will the Minister - Renikton Lyngdoh Tongkhar make public as to how many households in the whole State, out of the total designated households, have got piped water? A look at the profile of the PHE Minister as published by National Election Watch (NEW) gives interesting details. He has a total of 20 bank accounts and 17 vehicles comprising SUVs and trucks etc. It will be interesting to see this minister's wealth ranking in the next election when NEW does a new set of data compilation.

In comparison to Tongkhar who has declared assets of Rs 7.41 crore with no liabilities, Sniawbhalang Dhar's assets amount only to Rs 6.41 crore and liabilities of Rs 33 lakhs as on 2018. Conrad Sangma had declared assets of Rs 5.33 crore and liabilities of Rs 1.58 crore. James Sangma was worth more than his brother at Rs 7.94 crore and liabilities of Rs 1.17 crore. It will be interesting to see the assets added by these individuals in 2023 that is if they actually declare what they own and have acquired in these 53 months.

Going by the NEW data, Metbah Lyngdoh is the richest MLA with assets worth 87.26 crores and liabilities of Rs 30.23 crore. In 2018, Dasakhiatba Lamare had assets worth Rs 40 crore and no liabilities. Dr Mukul Sangma has assets worth Rs 13.59 crore and liabilities of Rs 78.90 lakh. Among Khasis if we try to get to know all these details we would be called "lorim" or someone minding others business. But as voters it is our right to know how our MLAs have acquired wealth; what businesses they do or if there is a conflict of interests somewhere. Unless we do our homework we will miss the woods for the trees and come election time we will vote the same old self-serving individuals.



and ought to be community property have now become individual properties owned by a few tribal families. In all these four plus years when coal has been illegally mined and transported, Meghalaya lost over Rs 600 crore annual revenue. All that money went into the pockets of people in the MDA government. And that includes all of them. The UDP, BJP, PDF and NCP cannot wash their hands off this dirty deal. They're all part of the illegal system created by the MDA Government which even claims to be exporting coal from outside the state to Bangladesh. The State Police have been compromised although a few stand out by their ability to perform in areas where they have not been told to turn a blind eye to. Otherwise, coal mining and transportation are "No Go" areas for the police, although a few are part of the loot. We have large drug hauls and we see pictures and also receive reports from the police about the arrested drug conduits. But do we know enough about the drugs trail? Where have they originated from and where are they being sent to and who are the mas-

become a law. Is there a single one in these 53 months? Where is the Mining Policy? Why is it not in place? Why have the Opposition MLAs not raised this matter in the Assembly? We the public demand a white paper on the status of the Mining Policy and why it is not being adopted to ensure that coal mining becomes a legal activity and the State gets the revenue due to it? This revenue could go to paying teachers' salaries and improving access to both education and healthcare in the State. Meghalaya needs to generate revenue to address the anaemia in women in the child-bearing years. It is pathetic that 56% of women in Meghalaya are anaemic resulting in death during childbirth. Add to that the malnutrition of children and you have a disaster in the making. Unfortunately, this matter too never features in the Assembly. Not even the women MLAs choose to make an issue of this matter of life and death!

The minister holding the PWD (Roads) portfolio must be held to intense scrutiny. Has the PWD Roads black-listed a single contractor that

## Need to change method of electing MLAs, MDCs and MPs

By Louis Pyngrope

It will not be long before the research agency NITI Aayog will brand us as people who do not know how to elect representatives in any election, whether to the Legislative Assembly / District Council / or Parliament as the way we elect them is based only on the personal, social relationships. Of course, this is also an important criterion to be considered while electing any representative, but we are still missing other important criteria in our election like the choice of the political party to which they belong. This is very important as the ruling party matters whether at the state or centre or even the district councils. This is important because the political party's policies and ideology are clearly spelled out in the manifestoes and it is mandatory for the party to function in accordance with its stated ideology and policies. This is the only reason why we have not got the government which could deliver in the last half of a century.

Our leaders took advantage of our simple mindedness by not showing their willingness to make us read seriously the manifestoes as they fear that we will judge their performances during the term when they were elected and then decide not to re-elect the same for the next term. The same ideology goes to the party ruling the state as people will get the power to choose which

assembly, and at the same time belonging to a political party committed to public service then we can expect a change in governance. But, if we fail to elect the right candidates and get conned by the same people then we will experience misgovernance and this will burden our state with the worst governance in the country. Furthermore, the absence of good legislators compels the Union Ministry to treat the resolution unanimously resolved by the State Assembly as unworthy of consideration, hence no action was taken on it ( ref: Implementation of ILP and recognition of Khasi and Garo languages for their inclusion in the eight schedule).

We have been seeing moral corruption more than our common perception of financial corruption. We will never be able to uproot financial corruption unless we first eliminate moral corruption. The first and the foremost step for us to take is to do away with the purchase of votes by political parties or by the candidate which is an accepted practice in Meghalaya, especially in rural constituencies. These types of candidates ruin the prestige of our state by promoting corruption at all levels in the day to day functioning of the government. If such leaders are voted out then good governance will ensure that Meghalayans enjoy peace and progress. As education has not been

*"In the legislative assembly election of 2023, we will simultaneously uproot the criminalisation of politics by not accepting any purchase of votes by any political party or candidate as it is the main cause for the deterioration of the quality of the legislators in our state as observed in the present government. If we can get rid of all the present set of legislators, we will be left with good legislators who are also statesmen and hopefully they will bring good governance to our state."*

party will be ruling next. As of now, these ideologies and principles are just written in the manifestoes (without any seriousness at all). They are merely to fulfil the criteria laid down by the Election Commission. Ironically, the same people we have elected do not want us to read the manifestoes seriously as it had happened in the past. Let us now be awakened by not committing the same mistake and put into practice this actual method of electing our representative from the next Legislative Assembly election of 2023 based on their manifestoes.

In the legislative assembly election of 2023, we will simultaneously uproot the criminalisation of politics by not accepting any purchase of votes by any political party or candidate as it is the main cause for the deterioration of the quality of the legislators in our state as observed in the present government. If we can get rid of all the present set of legislators, we will be left with good legislators who are also statesmen and hopefully they will bring good governance to our state. Our voters are people having enough wisdom and so they will elect only real legislators with statesmanship qualities in them. Then only can we say that we are free from the businessmen who have used politics in our state to boost up their businesses as we have experienced in the past many years. If we elect any candidate on the basis of educational qualification, statesmanship qualities and the calibre to legislate in the

given priority by past governments, our so-called leaders, for their vested interests, have not made it compulsory for the electorate to learn the pros and cons of the system we have adopted to elect the leaders of our state. Now is the opportunity for us to practice the new system to elect our good legislators as leaders.

Last but not the least, I would like to humbly request the leaders with some well-defined ideology, principles and commitments for the cause of the people to come out and contest. It is time for us to understand and adopt the new format of electing our political leaders and legislators where we can expect health and education policies to be implemented with a provision to learn healthy lifestyles right from the primary level. This should become part of the school syllabus. Furthermore, awareness should be given at the school level about the ill-effects of drug addiction and its prevention.

These new legislators may find that the knowledge of elementary laws which are applicable in our day to day activities are also very essential and hence the same should be introduced at different stages of our education. If all these are implemented, our children will be considered to have received a very good level of education and hence be given due weightage in different parts of the country and the world.

*(The writer is a retired teacher of Lady Keane College)*

Letters to the Editor

### Let's have more faith in God than in religion

Editor,  
Is our security under threat? It is a serious question. It must put all of us on high alert. The recent spate of arrests of various sympathisers or activists by Assam police who have a direct link with dreaded terrorists outside the country is disquieting. "HYC raises security concern over threat of jihadi groups" (ST, 6 August, 2022). The investigating agencies found loads of incriminating evidence to establish the fact. Similar is the case in other states like West Bengal and Kerala, apart from Kashmir. What is shocking is that, at times, even MLAs and MPs have also been reported to be hand-in-gloves with such fundamentalist forces. I am afraid that simple people from remote areas have been insidiously radicalised. They are brought up and groomed to think of others as their enemies. How on earth can one who believes in the Almighty see others who also devoutly worship the same Allah as enemies? If I am not mistaken, there must be a complete "mis-

interpretation" of our Holy scriptures. One wonders why the omniscient God is viewed through the prism of dogmatism. Please behold, when TRUTH shudders in fear, falsehood runs amok!

A Lahore-born rationalist scholar from London, Umar Khalid, who regularly bursts out through his social media posts, laments -- "the religious indoctrination which is quite rampant in a certain section of people is the root cause of the increasing bad blood and hatred. Instead of teaching the values of compassion, they are taught otherwise from an early age". The frequent down-to-earth and bold opinions have won Mr Khalid a huge following worldwide.

Of course, humanity should not be held to ransom by anyone. Tolerance, compassion and service towards fellow brethren - regardless of their caste, creed and nationality, are fundamental to existential harmony and peace. Let's all learn to stand together and help strengthen the bond of brotherhood. We are most endearing to God when we love each other instead of fighting with each other. God is infinite, his creation is infinite, and so loving Him cannot be the prerogative of a "finite" few!

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
Shillong

### Need to do away with election inducements

Editor,  
The recent news of the Aam Aadmi Party offering Rs 1000 to Gujarati women if voted to power should fall in the category of an open bribery. The same thing was done by Mr. Modi while contesting the 2014 general elections for BJP. Mr. Modi openly bribed the nation by promising 15 lakhs in each person's account, acche din and what not. In fact, all political contestants' promises should be considered an open bribe.

The Election Commission must declare such practices as criminal against which appropriate punishments should be put in place and must direct all the contesting parties to refrain from making such references. This sort of act not only induces voters to vote for the wrong politician, but it is also detrimental to the whole political system and the sound functioning of democracy.

Instead, during elections, past assessment reports of the contesting parties and the contestants must be brought to the fore in which their achievement, capacity and capability etc., are critically and factually analyzed

and must be disseminated to the voters. This would enable the voters to make sound choices and vote for the contesting parties and politicians on merit rather than tall claims which never come to pass.

The political parties and contesting politicians must think how stupid and gullible the voters are as we continuously fall for tall bribes in each succeeding election and this is profoundly saddening. It's like we are blindly digging our own graves while they laugh at us and offer us trenchers and shovels. Furthermore, had there been an independent Ministry monitoring the works of the elected government after each election: regional, state, national, then right governance, accountability, transparency would have accompanied the political system in India. As of now, most of the works and the methods utilized are shrouded in mystery of which we, the common people have no knowledge of.

The act of promises during elections must be put to an end and merit-based elections must be initiated. I know this is quite an impossible task in the current political climate. However, we can continue to inspire each other so that the idea remains intact.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

### MeECL to have a technocrat MD!

Editor,  
I presume it is welcome news for all Meghalayans, to hear from Power Minister, Prestone Tynrong, that the crumbling state power Corporation, MeECL, within a short time, is going to be headed by a technocrat as its MD. In fact, the Corporation should have been headed by a technocrat since it was incorporated in 2003. The intervening MDs (bureaucrats) for last 19 plus years have not really understood the role of the MD in a corporation and probably they have not understood the duties, functions and the dynamics of running a corporation. They took their assignments casually as if it is like running a government department with no qualms of conscience, accountability and responsibilities. Even the work culture of the employees of this Power Corporation is exactly the same as that of the government employees and there were and are no signs at all of corporate work culture displayed by them.

Now, what is quite concerning is that even after having a technocrat heading the Corporation and all its subsidiaries, if the employ-

ees do not cooperate with the head and do not change their attitudes, work culture and mindset then the fear is that the Corporation will not experience any drastic change not only in work culture but in its financial performance because the ultimate goal of MeECL is not only to generate power, transmit it and distribute power through power distribution verticals to consumers who need it but to earn enough profits to be able to sustain itself both in the short term and long term. But to meet these principal objectives the Corporation has to discharge its duties responsibly, efficiently, transparently and above all effectively. As of today its performance is woefully wanting in many ways and in fact this Corporation is in a shambles because since the time when it was a State Electricity Board it has been used by the powers that be and by certain categories of its employees as a milch cow. Yes, it has enriched too many but the price that the State has to pay is very dear and heavy till date.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Sr. Journalist,  
Shillong-2.

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

Union Ministers' visits to Meghalaya IN 2015 the Modi-led NDA Government took an important decision that Union ministers would visit one of the eight north eastern states every fortnight to ensure speedy implementation of the Centre's social and economic programmes. The tour programme was planned on the express directions of Prime Minister Modi who has taken pains to bring the region in to focus. During such visits the ministers don't just confine themselves to the state capitals but travel to the villages and inform themselves of the ground situation after interacting with communities everywhere they go.

During these tours, the visiting ministers review the implementation of central schemes related to their respective departments apart from taking part in important events in the region. Unfortunately, the present Minister for Coal and Mines, Pralhad Joshi has not yet visited Meghalaya despite being questioned twice over by none other than the BJP Rajya Sabha MP, Rakesh Sinha, on the status of coal mining in the State and providing answers that are far from the truth. Several other ministers in charge of other departments have visited Meghalaya and met with communities. This is something creditable that the Modi Government has initiated and it is hoped that the tradition continues. In the past, Union Ministers would only come on invitation as special guests and hardly spent a day in the state. Now under the Modi government these ministers have to spend adequate time because they also monitor the central schemes in a detailed manner and give a report of their visits.

Rajya Sabha MP, Rakesh Sinha who had adopted Kongthong Village and has now extended his reach to nearby villages has been mobilising resources for developing tourism and health care in Kongthong and the surrounding areas. He travels to the village quite often to monitor what's happening there. On a single day Sinha travelled from Kongthong to East Jaintia Hills to meet with the teacher and social entrepreneur, Trinity Saioo who has mobilised the turmeric farmers into progressive self help groups. The BJP ministers and MPs have visited villages that the local MLAs and MPs have not set foot in. That's the travesty of the so-called 'elected leaders' of Meghalaya, many of whom do not know their own state and nor do they understand the problems faced by the destitute section that have no access to healthcare and other basic facilities. Union Minister for Tribal Affairs and Water Resources, Bishweswar Tudu, a tribal from Odisha is presently in Meghalaya to oversee the Jal Jeevan Mission. In the past no monitoring was ever done of central schemes, hence states defaulted on submission of utilisation certificates. Central funds were not judiciously used and money remained unutilised and was returned to the Centre. It is precisely to find out why schemes don't take off or are delayed, that the union ministers are visiting the states regularly.

# Meghalaya's political whataboutery

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The term 'whataboutery' (which is commonly taken as informal and wordplay) is related to the more formal phrase 'what about'. When 'what about' is used in written and verbal communication, it carries a lot of significance. It has meaning to the extent of being critical of someone or something. For example, when one says 'what about the problem of drugs in Shillong', it highlights the gravity of the challenge with a directed question on the addict, local governance, police, civil society, state government, etc. The question has to be answered specifically by those knowledgeable on the matter. It is about fixing responsibility. Someone is accountable for a given situation and has to

Charisterfield Thangkiew, corruption in MeECL, ILP issue, inclusion of Khasi and Garo languages in the 8th Schedule, etc, the answer is whataboutery. There is no direct and specific response to any of the questions raised. It is all about buying time. Just delay, cajole and ultimately people will forget or become indifferent. Public memory is short and disillusionment is easy to come by. The ILP is an intriguing case. Now, even the central government is examining it. It is time for the people to get a clear-cut answer, be it a yes or a no. This is because the longer the delay, the more is the harm along communal lines. The recent cases of harassment

coalition partners not raising a word of protest? The MDA government is being called a liar. It is a loaded term. Being called so should have been a reason for shame/concern. But no, nothing seems to matter. By all means, the partners are more of passengers. However, they do not mind as their eyes are set on legislative assembly election 2023. The UDP has gone to the extent of saying that they are viewing at leading a government post election. What about the issues of today? The partners themselves are involved in whataboutery by not raising questions. All that transpires are half-hearted statements like 'we have told the government to check on

hurriedness of solving the Meghalaya-Assam boundary issue. Well, instead of giving a genuine answer; the MDA simply says 'What did you do when you were CM Mukul Sangma'. The result is that a fruitful debate on the entire issue is lost in the silliness of whataboutery. This whataboutery of the politicians is a cancer for the people. It is time that the people see through this facade and ask specific questions from the politicians. Do not let them go till a specific answer is received. The electioneering campaigning starts soon, this is the right time to enforce it.

There are two tenable ways of challenging whataboutery. First, the election manifesto. It tells the electorate what the party will do once it comes to govern. A person quipped

## Let there be true and authentic celebration of Independence

By D. V. Kumar

India is celebrating 75 years of independence and rightly so. Independence day constitutes a momentous day in the life of a nation. It represents the possibility of fulfilling hopes and aspirations of billions of people and therefore it is something one cherishes and emotionally becomes attached to. True and authentic celebration of independence day actually involves celebrating the fundamental values which guided the freedom struggle that led to independence in 1947. One needs to reaffirm the values which were in the forefront of our freedom struggle in the process of celebrating independence day. Otherwise it would be an empty celebration. Carrying tiranga and chanting slogans may be part of an officious definition of celebration of independence but that would

stark socio-economic disparities and different forms of oppression. He emerged as the most authentic voice of the oppressed section of the society. There were serious arguments between Gandhi and Ambedkar over what should demand their attention—the political question of independence or the socio-cultural issue of emancipation of dalits. But they had the sagacity and maturity to engage with each other despite such sharp differences in the larger interest of India. Then there was Nehru who had sharp differences with Gandhi over the question of large scale industrialisation of India. He had immense faith in the ability of the big industry to solve the massive problems that India was facing but Gandhi reposed faith in the small scale sector and

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give answers.

On the contrary, 'whataboutery' is the complete opposite of 'what about'. It is about making a mockery of a serious life and death situation. This is because whataboutery refers to the dodging of questions and difficult circumstances. It involves escaping responsibility and accountability. It is about asking silly counter questions instead of giving direct answers. For example, a student asks a teacher as to how he/she can study better; well, instead of giving a direct inspirational answer the teacher instead details into his/her eating and sleeping habits. Even worse; whataboutery also involves digging up the past of the adversary simply to make one's point with no intention of problem-solving. Today, Meghalaya politics is all about whataboutery.

The NPP likes to use a term when faced with a difficult situation. In many quarters it has become humorous content. It is called 'examine/examining'. If it is taken as a classroom examination then the NPP would be at it forever without submitting the answer script for evaluation. Be it the shifting of the residents from Them Meteor to a more suitable location, coal mining dilly-dally on rat holes and its alternative means of extraction, illegal extraction and transfer of coal, making public of the report on the death of

and violence by boys on two-wheelers are a manifestation of this delay. It is more of a pressure tactic applied by the pressure groups. With growing indecision, come increased instances of intimidation and violence.

The coalition partners in the MDA government have turned into a spectacle. In truth, they themselves are just spectators in the coalition. Whatever is done by them has to be vetted by CM Conrad

coal mining problems, etc'. It is not good enough. It is a case of 'you scratch my back and I will scratch yours'. The entire ruling dispensation is involved in a fixed-fight to turn a blind eye to the ills plaguing Meghalaya.

The politics of whataboutery is common now. It is so common that it has become a norm. The ones at the receiving end are the people. Factor this; while the government is involved in whataboutery it

that an election manifesto is good only as toilet paper. But maybe, it is time to change the narrative. This can be done by mentioning more than promises in a manifesto. A party would do well to give specific strategies on how to solve problems of unemployment, infrastructure building, law and order, etc. There must be no dodging or deceiving arguments. Second, conduct open platform debates. In Meghalaya, we hardly have open platform debates in the constituencies. All that is done is campaigning. The responsible citizens of every constituency should come forward and hold debates to be attended by all the contesting candidates. This is primarily where we can segregate the wheat from the chaff. The intention and strategies of the candidate can be assessed by the people. It helps in selecting a candidate come voting day. But factor this; since most of the Dorbar Shnong are affiliated and supportive of one candidate or the other, it would be wise for the debates to be conducted by independent citizens with no affiliation to any party.

In the end, whataboutery today is conveniently hidden behind the veil of democracy. When it is done, everything seems hunky-dory. In truth, whataboutery is a game the politicians play at the cost of the people. Wake up and smell the coffee!

(The writer teaches at NEHU; Email - benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in)



be only symbolic in nature. Real celebration of independence calls for celebration of those values which guided our freedom struggle.

What were those values which guided our struggle against colonialism which need to be reaffirmed on the occasion of 75 years of independence? These values are democracy, secularism, pluralism and respect for the dignity of the other. It needs to be recalled that our national movement was not a homogenous and monolithic movement. It had multiple currents, thought processes and different narratives vied for their space within the freedom movement. There was Gandhi, the biggest and the tallest nationalist among them for whom the goal of total independence was non-negotiable. At the same time, he was quite disturbed by the kind of destructive nationalist passions that Europe saw and called for a nationalism which was based on democracy and respect for each other. In his own words, 'it is not nationalism that is evil, it is the narrowness, selfishness and exclusives which is the bane of modern nations which is the evil'. It is this enlightened understanding of what nationalism should mean which made him lead the most non-violent and peaceful anti-colonial struggle. Then we had Ambedkar for whom political democracy would be incomplete without social democracy. The startling socio-economic disparities and the subjugation and marginalisation of a large section of the society, that is, Dalits needed to fight against at the same time as the fight against the oppressive colonial rule was happening. He argued that independence would not mean much for those who were on the margins of society and even if one achieved independence for the country, it would mean freedom only for the powerful and dominant sections of the society. Real freedom should include removal of

village economy. In fact, Nehru had a problematic relation with the very idea of nationalism especially because of what happened in Europe in the name of nationalism. But at the same time, he saw a great need to fight for independence from the British under the inexorable influence of Gandhi. The revolutionary ideas of Bhagat Singh and Subhas Chandra Bose, which created a sense of discomfort for Gandhi, competed for space within the nationalist struggle. Bhagat Singh was aware of the contradictions in the society which undermined the nationalist struggle. The caste system, untouchability and communalism posed a great threat to the success of the national movement. He felt that unless these were tackled effectively, the possibility of achieving truly democratic and free India was greatly compromised.

As one can see that there were critical differences among all those mentioned above but they had a great respect for each other and none of them accused the other of being anti-national and unpatriotic. What is that which was common to them because of which they were able to work together and respect each other. It was their immense faith in the fundamental values of human existence, that is, secularism, democracy, pluralism and respect for the dignity of the other. Without these values guiding them, they would have found themselves at loggerheads with each other and unable to launch a concerted attack on British colonial rule.

Therefore today when we are celebrating 75 years of independence, let us not lose sight of these fundamental values which guided our freedom struggle. The very essence of independence would be lost if we do not respect and uphold these values.

(D. V. Kumar is Professor, Dept of Sociology, NEHU, Shillong)

### Letters to the Editor

#### An affront or a promotion of tourism

Editor, A tourist from outside Meghalaya was heard asking a tourist cab in Shillong to take him to the "Seven Sisters Falls". I am now 74 years old, born and brought up in Shillong and this was the first time I ever heard of such a tourist location here in our state. Has Government of Meghalaya created an artificial tourist spot with seven water falls? I was intrigued to say the least. I checked and was flabbergasted to come across flamboyant Indian Tourism advertisements on the net (I deliberately refrained from searching what Meghalaya Tourism had to say because of an instinctive fear that I would

be culturally assaulted) describing the so called Seven Sister Falls as "also known as the Noh-sngi-thiang or Mawsmi Falls", a seven segmented water fall located 1 km south of Mawsmi village in East Khasi Hills district in the Indian state of Meghalaya".

"Also known"!!!! As God is my witness the said falls have always been known as Noh-sngi-thiang or Mawsmi falls and never in my wildest dreams have I ever thought that it would be known otherwise. Now please don't get me wrong. I have not the slightest interest in promoting narrow minded, insular, parochial thinking, but I sincerely believe that a small gesture of respect for local sentiments are in order while attempting to identify local places of interest. Now will Noh-kalkai, Dain then, Mawlynnong

and perhaps even fascinating Shnong Pdeng of Dawki be renamed just because such alterations sit easy on non-Khasi tongues? Or is Meghalaya simply trying to be in vogue with the latest nationalistic and patriotic trend of changing even old historic locales! Its idiotic and sheer nonsense! I fail to understand how Meghalaya tourism simply went along with this outrage nor am I able to understand the people of Sohra and Mawsmi, their Rangbah Shnongs and the Syiem of Sohra being so tolerant into this intrusion on their heritage sites. My sincere request is for the Government of Meghalaya and its Tourism Department to take immediate steps to correct this cultural incursion on our indigenous sensitivities.

Yours etc., Toki Blah, Via email

#### Prevention is better than cure

Editor, They say that when people are threatened with danger they are most law-abiding but when danger is absent they act in a laissez faire manner. News reports show that the Covid pandemic is far from over. Cases in some states like in UP, Delhi and elsewhere are rising rapidly and exponentially. Talking to some doctors in our city, they all agree that Covid 19 is very much present with us; only we are choosing to ignore its presence. This is definitely not a good policy for the government to adopt. If tests are conducted in the state, we would be surprised to see thousands of cases. It is true that the symptoms are mild and hospitalization is minimal, but we are never

sure of the virus' potential to mutate further. God forbid it from happening or else we could be in another health emergency. It is a matter of concern to see people today roaming freely without face masks and without worrying about social distancing.

In commercial centres like Iewduh, Police Bazaar, Polo and other places, it is appalling to witness throngs of people rubbing shoulders with each other and hardly anyone with a face mask. Many right thinking people are of the opinion that the government should not take things lightly after we have had such a terrible experience in 2020 and 2021. Of course a measure like lockdown is absolutely out of place, but certain basic Covid protocols should be re-imposed at the earliest. Perhaps Covid test for visitors from outside the state should be re-introduced. The three important Covid

behaviors, namely, sanitizing hands, use of face masks and maintaining social distance, should become obligatory at the earliest. Another measure the government needs to take is to restrict mass gathering of people, keeping in mind that this virus is spread through aerosols. We are dealing with a highly transmissible virus and so mass gatherings of people could easily turn into super spreaders. We hope the government will consider people's safety more important than economics. It is not advisable to indulge in damage control rather let us prevent tragedy before it happens.

Yours etc., Barnes Mawrie, Via email

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

# Five myths about partition of India

August 15, 2022 marks 75 years since the partition of the Indian subcontinent. British withdrawal from the region prompted the creation of two new states, India and Pakistan.

The process of transferring power grossly simplified diverse societies to make it seem like dividing social groups and drawing new borders was logical and even possible. This decision unleashed one of the biggest human migrations of the 20th century when more than ten million people fled across borders seeking safe refuge.

Anniversaries can be a critical moment to pause and reflect on the passage of time, and reexamine history. Partition is widely seen as the outcome of seemingly irreconcilable differences and inherent religious tension in south Asia. Three-quarters of a century later it's time to reassess some of the established historical accounts.

Myths have been established around this history based on false assumptions. Here we examine five of them:

## MYTH 1: THE MAIN AIM WAS TO RESOLVE RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

Popular accounts of partition reproduce the British colonial state's simplistic view of south Asian society just in terms of religious categories – with Hindu and Muslim identities as the biggest groups. Over the decades scholarship has shown that religious difference doesn't explain partition.

Simplistic religious categories in most analyses of partition fail to sufficiently understand complex social and political issues that shape south Asian societies. Partition pushed people to identify as a particular religion, and even to migrate, based on that identity.

Greater focus on oral histories and personal experiences of partition have highlighted how this action did less to provide a political solution than to impose new divides around national and religious lines.

It ignores huge variation of practices and identities within and across different groups in British India by assuming there was conflict based on religion. Shared cultures based on common language, literature, music and regional and local traditions challenge this.

The tendency to frame partition in binary Hindu vs Muslim terms has helped to shape the rise of religious majoritarianism in post-colonial south Asia, which is based on a constructed, even mythical idea of a majority which makes the rules for everyone, and which can most overtly be seen in the vision of a Hindu nation being advanced by the current government in India.

## MYTH 2: PARTITION VIOLENCE WAS SPONTANEOUS

British officials and nationalist leaders saw the violence of this period as the response of an irrational, religious society to complex political negotiations. But there is substantial evidence to show that the violence of partition was not spontaneous. The violence of 1947 was deeply shaped by earlier colonial policies emphasising separate religious communities and cultivating some groups over others.

One example of this was the idea of "martial races" who were recruited for the police and army and given land allocations in return for their loyalty to the British Raj. The idea of the martial races was developed after the uprising of 1857 to identify certain communities who were considered ideal for military recruitment based on their ethnicity and hypermasculinity and, above all, loyalty to the British state. Sikhs, Jats, Punjabi Muslims and



Gurkhas were all celebrated "martial races".

The violence of 1947 saw men attack one another and also women. Women of other communities were raped and killed and some men killed their own female relatives in the name of "purity" and "honour", especially in Punjab which was home to many "martial races". Described by scholars as "genocidal", the violence in Punjab was shaped by similar notions of racial purity and aggressive masculinity that had underpinned imperial recruiting policies for years.

## MYTH 3: PARTITION WAS THE OUTCOME OF LONG-TERM PLANNING

Calls for the creation of separate states, which came to the fore in 1947, had mixed and uneven support, including within the Muslim political leadership. But these ideas did not set out how, or when, such states would be created or where their borders would be drawn. Up until late 1946 the British government was very reluctant to support division of the subcontinent.

The British had planned to transfer power in 1948 but in February 1947 it was announced that Louis Mountbatten would replace Lord Archibald Wavell as viceroy, the British government's representative in India, and would transfer power by August 1947. On June 3 1947 Mountbatten, with Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru (the respective leaders of the two main pre-independence political parties,

the Muslim League and Indian National Congress), announced that the subcontinent would be divided just nine weeks later.

Between June and August political leaders and their lawyers jockeyed to establish borders that ran through the provinces of Punjab and Bengal. These discussions were overseen by Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer who had never visited India. He was given only five weeks to decide the border. While calls for the creation of a new Muslim state had been framed around religious representation, the legal negotiations of the Boundary Commission focused heavily on securing natural resources and ensuring state security.

The final borders of the new states of India and Pakistan were announced on August 17 1947 – two days after independence. Much of the violence is attributed to the haphazard communication of the high politics of partition to wider society, and the unnecessary speed with which the process was carried out.

## MYTH 4: ALL OF INDIA WAS UNDER BRITISH RULE

One-third of India was never under formal British rule but comprised more than 550 princely states. The British government had different constitutional and diplomatic arrangements with these states, all of which required legal negotiation when the British ceded power.

Kashmir was one of these princely states. The maharaja, Sir Hari Singh, signed an Instrument of Accession to place the state under Indian government rule in October 1947 even though the UN Security Council called for a referendum in 1948. This has never been held – and Kashmir's status and sovereignty in relation to India and Pakistan has been a source of conflict and unrest ever since.

The western coastal areas of Goa, Daman and Diu were under Portuguese control until 1961 and the south Indian region of Pondicherry/Puducherry was under French colonial rule until 1954.

## MYTH 5: PARTITION HAD PURELY REGIONAL REPERCUSSIONS

Estimates of people who migrated across the borders created in 1947 range between 10 million and 17.5 million. Many people from areas directly affected by partition violence, and the insecurities that followed from it, have also migrated beyond south Asia to other parts of the world.

Communities from Punjab, Sindh, Kashmir, and Sylhet form sizeable and significant communities in the UK, Canada, the US, and beyond. This is another reminder of the ongoing repercussions and legacies of colonialism.

In spite of the divisions of partition, diaspora communities can be found living alongside one another in different parts of the world.

(The Conversation)

# A jumbo affair: Protecting India's elephants

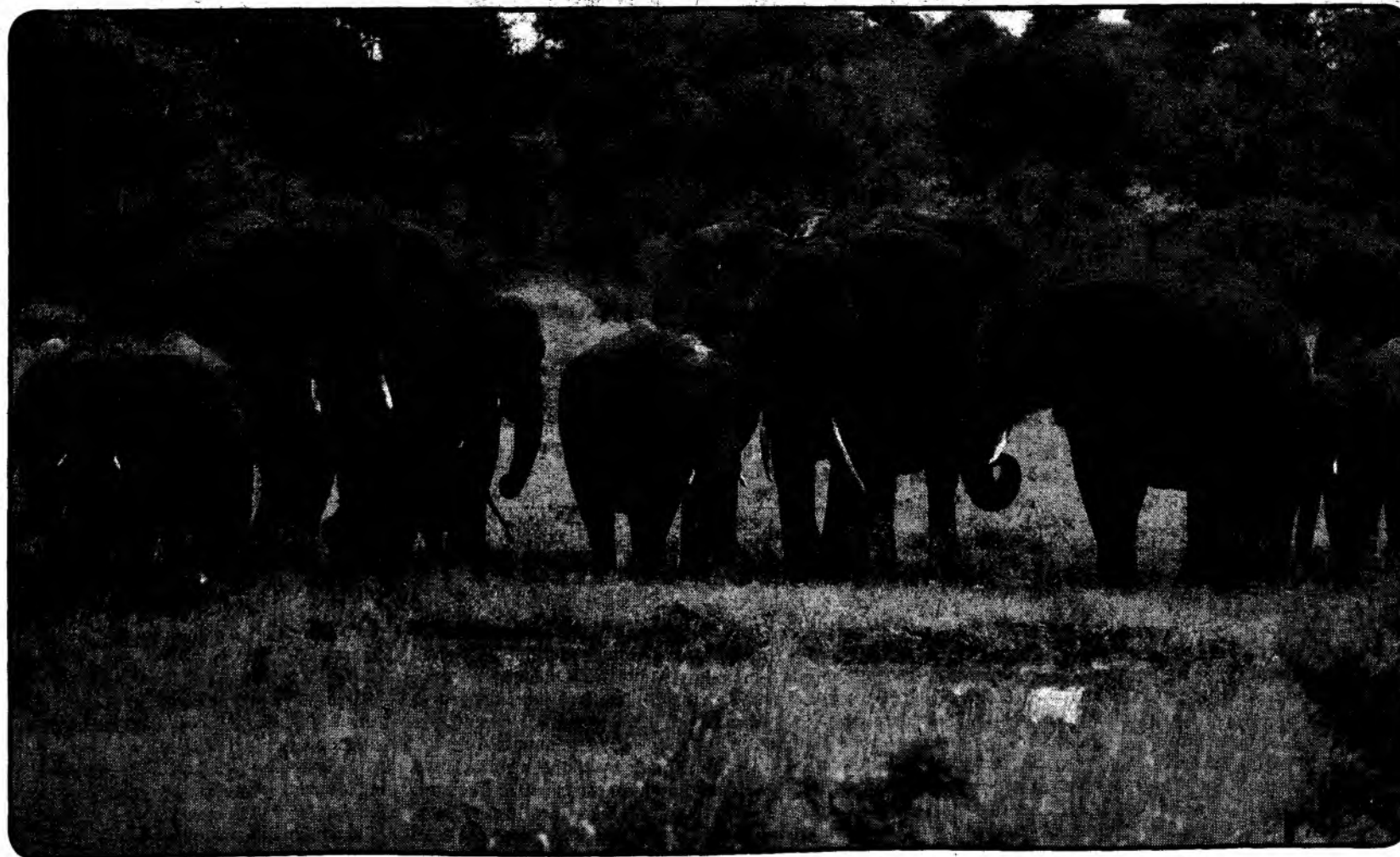
The 2017 wildlife census indicated that India had just 27,000 elephants across 23 states. This was a surprisingly low number considering over 60 per cent of the Asian elephant population is supposed to be in India.

On the occasion of World Elephant Day, CEO of Grow-Trees.com, Bikrant Tiwary observes, "As per the data provided by the Union Ministry of Environment as many as 1160 elephants were killed between 2010 and 2020, and elephant numbers continue to dwindle despite the fact that they are revered in India."

Bikrant believes rampant poaching, human-animal conflict, and shrinking natural habitats must be addressed urgently and this is why Grow-Trees.com has initiated plantation initiatives to preserve elephant habitats and expand the elephant corridor that extends from Odisha to West Bengal and crosses the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary in Jharkhand.

**Do not geotag elephant photos on social media:** Says Bikrant, "Whenever we are amid wildlife, the first instinct is to click pictures but whenever we post a photo on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, and use a geotag option to reveal the GPS location of where the image was clicked, we literally invite poachers to track and hunt down endangered elephants, tigers and other species that may be on the verge of extinction."

He suggests that as a precautionary measure, we should turn off the GPS on our phone and not mention the name of the wildlife



sanctuary where an animal was spotted, and just refer to the region in question, in a general way.

**Choose elephant friendly coffee:** In *Elephants in the Coffee*, an award-winning documentary, Bikrant discusses the escalating

conflict between elephant populations and coffee growers in Karnataka, where more than 70 per cent of India's coffee is produced. According to Bikrant, while enjoying our favourite beverage, we might not be aware that we may have indirectly contributed to the eviction of elephants from their

natural habitat.

He continues, "Cardamom, ginger, vanilla, and other spices found in coffee plantations also attract animals that feed on vegetation, and when elephants encroach on plantations, a human-elephant conflict can quickly spiral out of control. Make careful

to buy coffee from a company that has received Fair Trade certification from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The management of the plantations was confirmed by an FSC accreditation."

**Refuse and reject ivory products:** The UK recently placed a

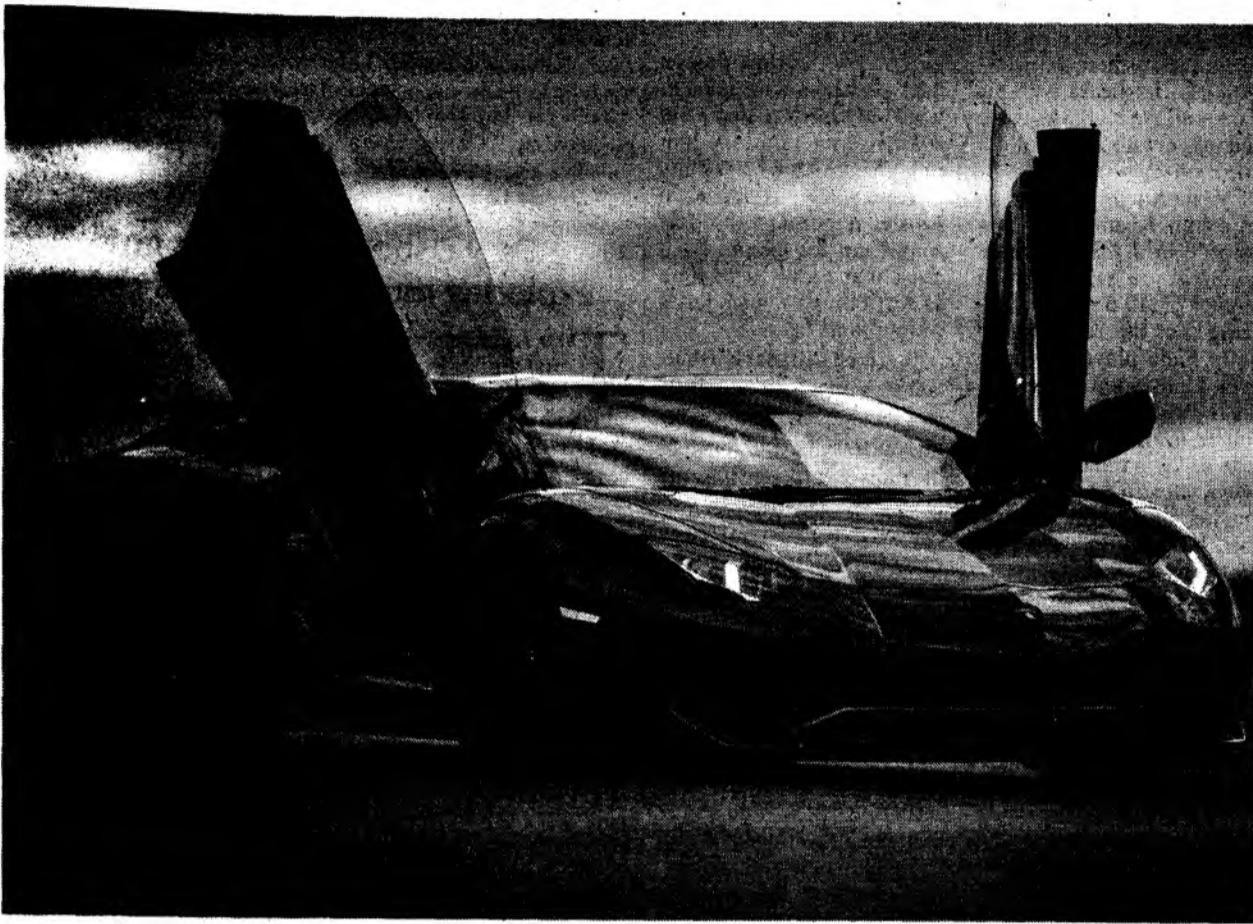
nearly complete prohibition on the import, export, and trade of goods made from elephant ivory. This was a crucial move because it is estimated that over 20,000 elephants are killed each year to meet the demand for ivory.

Observes Bikrant "Despite India's 1976 ban on the import and export of ivory, illegal poaching of elephants is nevertheless common. The strong demand for Asian elephant tusks puts these animals in danger and leads to an imbalance in the number of male and female elephants in Asia. Ivory is still used to make artefacts, jewellery, dominoes, fans, piano keys, and other items. This is why it is crucial that we permanently stop using ivory goods."

**Choose ethical tours:** A 2017 study by World Animal Protection stated that as many as 3000 elephants were held captive across Asia and were denied enough food and water.

Says Bikrant, "Often baby elephants are taken away from their mothers to provide joy rides to tourists. If you love wildlife safaris, make sure you choose one which doesn't disturb or harm animals or biodiversity. Offering bananas and coconut leaves to elephants is also not a good idea as it familiarises them to humans. This may lead them into heavily populated areas where a conflict with humans may become inevitable. Please behave responsibly around wild animals and before finalising a tour operator, check their websites to see if they follow wildlife and environmental conservation policies and are ethical." (IANSlife)

# Future perfect for luxury consumption



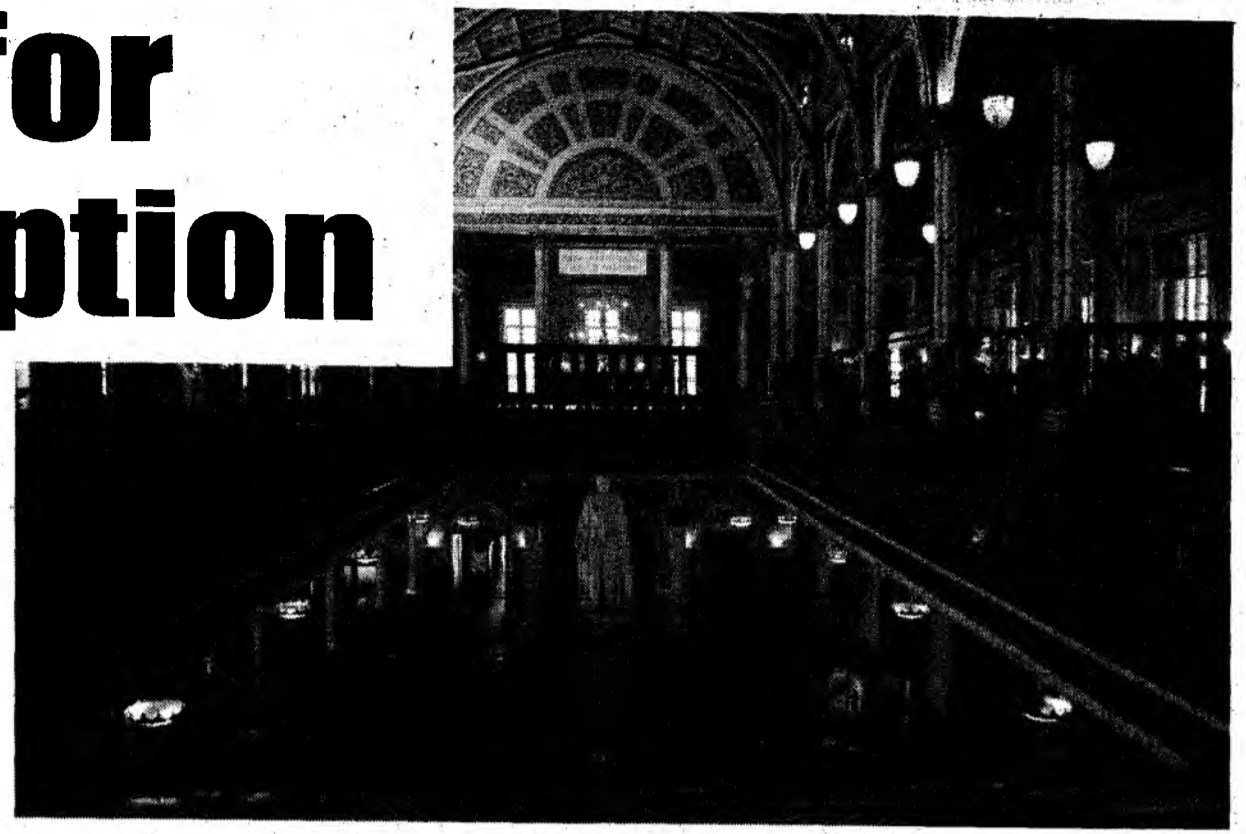
By Rohan Sharma

The luxury industry is often defined by opulent and elite consumption habits. People in emerging markets, however, are changing their buying habits, and this has implications for the luxury market. In today's world, more people have access to information than ever before and they somewhere become non-rational consumers. This means that consumers these days have a high influence by social media, social influencers, celebrities, or some other direct or indirect promotions of the products or services making an individual a non-rational consumer.

A non-rational consumer will always act without any reason or logic in its purchasing behaviour including financial interest. As per several pieces of research, it is visible that younger generations

(i.e. Gen Z) are more exposed to such topics and they are more tend to end up buying more luxury consumables. These audiences had to be born between 1997 to 2003. A large chunk of this gen use to treat themselves with luxury goods & also often seen to gift to others. As a result, there is now a general distrust of luxury companies among millennials and these attitudes will continue to reshape how consumers view brands moving forward. This article highlights trends in the Indian luxury market and how they will shape the future of consumption in this sector.

The Indian luxury market is expected to grow by 10 per cent over the next five years. In the last couple of years, only the Indian luxury market has performed better than someone had expected. During the pandemic time, India was witnessing very easy, slow & sustainable growth. It is also



projected that the Indian luxury sector to surpass \$200 billion by 2030. As per Statista, in 2021 Indian luxury goods market amounted to \$5.94 billion and expected growth of 8.03 per cent annually. This will make it the only major 1st tier region in the country like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, etc. where luxury sales are highest & also reaching the other small regions gradually. As a result, there is great potential for luxury brands.

Several reasons can be stated behind this expansion:

One is that India is one of the biggest developing nations in the entire world & factors include Policy reforms, economic development, Internet penetration, and India's several growing populations majorly growth of the middle class.

Another is that wealthy Indians are becoming more brand-loyal. And lastly, more luxury companies are investing in the Indian market.

And one reason for this is that more Indians will be able to afford luxury goods. While luxury brands like Louis Vuitton and Gucci once catered to the top 1 per cent of Indians, they are now increasingly aiming to attract a wider audience. Companies like LV are producing cheaper lines, like their "Tote" bag, which costs around \$500. What's more, they are partnering with local textile manufacturers to make their products even more affordable. This is because luxury brands are now aware that the future of the industry lies in expanding their customer base.

Another major trend in the Indian luxury market is the rise of online platforms for selling and buying luxury goods. Furthermore, this is expected to grow in the future as India is one of the fastest-growing online markets in the world. India's e-commerce

market is expected to reach \$70 billion by 2021. Consumers are also embracing online shopping in a big way, particularly urban millennials. In 2017, online sales in India were worth \$30 billion. This can double by 2023.

In 2022 and beyond, we have to leave the traditional way of marketing luxury products. The luxury market is volatile and fragmented. Consumers have dynamic habits of spending. Consumers spend to buy luxury consumables for numerous reasons; majorly all of them are linked to the strong emotions derived that we used to attach to the purchase of precious material. Whether or not a buyer is inappropriate financial stability that permits them to be capable to buy expensive items, they may pick to purchase it anyhow to achieve a certain feeling & the more they used to feel this sense of achievement or satisfaction in buying the luxury consumables it always results in the positive note for the brands.

Brands are also very much aware of the psychological behaviour of their potential customers. As per the data, several brands use psychological techniques to make sure their consumers also get themselves the same amount of satisfaction & pride with the purchase of such products & services. With the growth in the income of people & the increase in the market over the following 10 years, the portion is very much ready to see positive development through the monetary turn of events, more noteworthy connectedness, and strategy changes, all of which will offer plenty of chances for extravagance organisations to serve youthful, prosperous, associated, and certain Indian purchasers.

(The author is the CEO & MD, of RK Jewellers-South Ex2)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, AUGUST 14, 2022

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Sun on your solar return chart and it will give favorable results. You will go on a travel trip related to your work and business. You will also get involved in new ventures and projects. You will have to take a loan for children's education, studies, marriage etc. which you will pay in installments gradually. But it will not put much pressure on you as you will have continuous flow of money. Your income will be good. Marriage of a family member will get fixed. You will share good equation with your family members. You will have trust in your own capabilities and will set the goal and move forward in goal setting direction. Though for some subjects there will be a hollowing feeling in your mind. You will be on the top in financial projects and achievements. In totality a very fruitful full time period. You will be able to materialize all that you have envisaged.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is going to be a successful week on the whole. Your liberal and flexible attitude will help you maintain your dominance in your work field. Work done by you will be fully successful and will win you lot of praise from others. You will be on the move and meet a lot of people. There can be meetings, travels and contracts with regard to work. You will get beneficial results later on. You will also not interfere in affairs of other people as you do not want any unnecessary criticism. You will also enjoy wonderful bonding with your partner/spouse. You will also pay attention to your household affairs. You will be busy in shopping and buying new items for your home. You will be busy in making preparations for festivals at your home. Students will get success in interview/exams.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It is going to be a week which will bring changes in your personality and attitude. You will get new job/business offers. Your time will be spent in business activities and professional engagements. You will have monetary gains. All your plans will move in the direction of fructification. Your pending work will gather speed. Your life will gather speed. Your life will once again be back on track. You will also perform noble deeds. There will be an increase in your prestige and name. You will also come closer to your mate. The atmosphere at home will be peaceful. Auspicious functions will also take place at your home. Romance with partner will deepen. In money related matters you will move forward with intelligence and cleverness. You will be full of enthusiasm and energy. You will make plans for the future. There will be praise from all quarters.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

It is a great period for mental peace and bliss. You will remain grounded and realistic. You will not let your ego come in between your career and personal gains. You will keep things to yourself and not talk about your plans with anyone. But this will pay you in the long run very well. You will enjoy good health. Your achievements in the financial field will be great. You will also make plans of going out somewhere with your family. You will get to learn a lot from your experience. You will move forward too. New job/business offers will keep coming. With your liberal and positive attitude you will be successful in winning over your friends. A dispute in the neighborhood will get resolved. Those who are in politics, media and social work will shine. Some pleasant news will be received from a relative. You will meet a famous personality too. Your time will be spent in joy, laughter and amusement with your family members. You will also read some inspiring and knowledge giving literature. You will feel enlightened.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

It is time to take stock of the things and review your priorities. The tide won't be favorable to begin with. Your income will be good but your sky rocketing expenses may put you in a financial crunch, forcing you to rocketing even incur a loan. Hence, you need to be careful. Due to your poor health you may postpone your social commitments. But by the middle of the week you will be in command of the situation. Your work will start to get completed and you will feel a lot more relaxed and confident. You will get success in love matters. Husband and wife will enjoy better understanding. Guests may come and you will treat them quite lavishly. You may get an exhilarating news from your progeny.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

A wonderful week awaits you ahead. You will be enjoying a favorable phase in your life. You will never be short of funds and money will keep coming. Your enemies will also not be able to stand before you. You will also bring a good name for your family. Your efforts and hard work will give you good results. But the pressure of work will be too much. But you will manage it well. You will remain busy and will not be able to give time to your family. Your partner will not be happy with it. You need to balance the things and need to look at your family affairs too. There can be a discussions or argument in your family. But you will avoid it. A family function will also take place. You will be pleased and happy in the company of your friends.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Your official matters will be solved with ease. Suddenly your name and fame will rise. You will become very popular amongst your colleagues. Those who are in business in partnership or association will get gains and profits. Your financial status will be stable. Your enemies and

opponents will be active but unable to harm you. You will get lot of success in matters like job, business and investments. You will be full of energy and excitement. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your male. The husband and wife will understand the needs, feelings and aspirations of each other's well. You will also meet an inspirational or influential person. He/she will help you to rise in your work. You can fall in love with someone special. You will be successful in your love relations. Your decisions will prove to be correct.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

All good things will happen to you this week. The star of your destiny will once again shine and your struck tasks will gather momentum. Income will rise. You will have gains from investments you made in the past. New job/business offers too will come. Your work will be appreciated so your self-confidence will increase. You will get success in love and romance. You will also get blessings of your elders. Your faith in god will help you in overcoming all problems. Your wife/husband will prove to be a source of strength. New contacts will be made in your business or job. You will not waste your time on useless things. You will implement new strategy and because of which you will meet an influential person. And get success too.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This is a favorable time period for you. You will move ahead on the path to success. You will also have financial gains. Your growth in business is going to be good. You will put your best efforts realizing your dreams and you will get positive results for it. Good news will come from somewhere. Time will be peaceful. You will also travel with your family on a travel destination for fun and relaxation. You will plan well before doing any work. You will get success in property deals. Time will be spent wonderfully. There will be too much of fun and merriment. Do not lend money to anyone. You will be successful in finding a solution to several problems with your intelligence and wisdom.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

You will have peace of mind. You will march ahead in your profession and outshine one and all. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will also explore additional sources of income. Friendly and attentive behavior will take you ahead. You will take part in the work of social welfare. You will also enjoy a wonderful love life and get success in love matters. You will also spend quality time with your family and plan to go a short trip for relaxation and fun. You will be promoted in your job. You will also like to get transferred to be a place of your choice. You will be able to bring changes in your personality. You will also be admired all around. Your intelligent investment can be beneficial for the future.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Time is changing fast and you will have good days to enjoy. You will do something which will bring you lot of name and fame. Some people will challenge your authority but will be unable to do anything. You will be targeted purposely but you will not be humiliated or pushed to corner. Nor your work will get struck. You will be the winner. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will have wonderful bonding with your mate. You will enjoy confidence of your family members. Students will get success in exams/interview. Your choice of work will be completed. If you decide to marry a person of your liking, it will be worth it. Your family members will give full support. You can start a new job/business. If you are working in the public relation, it will turn up faster.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

It is going to be a gainful and productive week. You will feel peaceful and relaxed. You will earn more profit from little work. Income will be good. You can also move to a new locality of your choice. This is the right time to take advantage of the hard work of the past. You will feel relaxed. You can get promotion, allowance, inoelives too. Work on land or property will begin. You will buy new things. The behavior will be pleasant in the neighborhood. The plans for the auspicious program will be made. You will be very happy. Make home a house for peace, joy and bliss. You will give lot of importance to your family. You will not trust everyone in financial matters. You need to explore the significance of life within.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

There are possibilities of big financial gains this week for you. You will make new investments too. Income will be good. You will also plan to buy a new property or vehicle. Those looking for job will get success after all. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your spouse. You will also get the support of your better half. Favorable response will be for unmarried people. You will be busy in the preparation of any festival. You will be also having hold on your society. In family, there will be good relations between mother and daughter. Also your wife and sister. You will help those who are old and needy. You will be able to connect with them at an emotional level. There will be change in circumstances. You will prosper and be happy. You will get lot of name, fame and prestige.

## Confidence: Are we born with it or can it be nurtured?

By Neeraj Malik

Contrary to what many industry experts, courses, programmes, workshops, and training sessions would have you believe, I firmly believe that everyone is born with the level of confidence they require to live out their life, their purpose, and their journey.

Let me ask you - Have you ever really noticed a child? When a baby is born he's free and full of confidence. The baby is confident, when he/she cries for milk, it appears, when he poops, someone appears to clean it up. Have you noticed a toddler, how confident a child is about what he wants, and how he clearly communicates without prejudice or hesitation? Almost till the age of 6-10 years, there is an abundance of self-confidence and effectiveness in communication.

Post that age, we start gathering the baggage of life - every time someone says - "Are you sure?", "Work hard so you don't fail", "You should not fail!", "A lot depends upon you!". We feel the fear of failing and slowly start to resist taking on big challenges so as not to face that fear. Over time (years) even though people outside may stop saying it, our mind remembers all the times we failed in something & slowly the self-doubt starts to add layers over and over. Now a confident, outspoken and fully self-expressed child slowly starts to doubt & second guess himself. We are filled with experiences of failures, rejections and belief in our incompetency. And as there is a need for confidence in the market, and different industries, we are always looking to collect news, and education, we put up a facade of false self-confidence & project it to the world, hoping no one would find out.

However, inside there is a huge conflict between what we are really feeling and what we are pretending to be so that we may be accepted, acknowledged

& appreciated. Over time this gap continues to eat us inside, like a termite, and increase the experience of something lacking.

Time and again it has been proved that potential is never an issue with human beings, we can achieve whatever we believe - but most of us carry a lot of unconscious beliefs in our failures, our rejections & our lack of success. We are settled in our lack but not in our ability to create, to be bigger, to be tougher, more powerful, or beautiful. The more pressure we apply to be confident and self-assured, the more the absence of it shows up. What we resist, persists. We resist failure, un-surety, and lack of confidence and that is what we continuously and ongoingly attract in our life.

Over time the amount of pressure and fear that we carry increases to a tremendous amount - the pressure that no one should find out about the lack of self-confidence and that slowly starts to effects our communication our performance and overall self-esteem. When someone says you are confident, you feel validated. It is like what you are trying to prove has been accepted. You've won! But that confidence is very short-lived and we need to put a lot of pressure on ourselves to perform every time. To access that inherent and inborn self-confidence, instead of adding anything new, acquiring any new knowledge or training, or attending a workshop, we need to work on removing the years of conditioning.

We need to work on removing those old limiting beliefs that are not serving us - beliefs that limit us and hold us back from living our truest potential. We need to break through the years of layering of self-doubt, judgment, and fear of failure and reconnect back to that confidence that is already there inside us all.

(The author is an Emotional Wellness Coach and Mind Healer)



"Aging has a wonderful beauty and we should have respect for that."

—Eartha Kitt

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No.6 SHILLONG, MONDAY, AUGUST 15, 2022

### Time to cheer

THE nation has risen like a colossus to celebrate the 75th Year of Independence and there's cause for a lot of cheer. India marks the spectacular anniversary with a sense of great confidence as it passes through a season of peace, tranquility and slow but steady economic progress. The favourable situations punctuated by political stability provided by the eight years of rule by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the overall sense of confidence in his leadership as reflected in recent opinion polls are good signs. This is time to repose faith in the nation's leadership to take India forward with a renewed sense of dedication to the collective causes of a people, to uplift its disadvantaged sections not just out of poverty but also by giving them the opportunities to strengthen themselves, which is the way to further strengthen the nation itself. The demographic dividend, of a population of 1.4 billion with the largest mass of youth, is what makes India special. Even China has an ageing population due to its hard-edged birth control policy that has of late been relaxed.

The British ruled India via Direct Rule from Great Britain only for around 90 years – from 1858 to 1947. Independent India under desi rule is edging close to such a term. The British united India as a single entity for the first time in the landmass' history. While they plundered India's wealth as would any colonial ruler, they also acted positively in providing us with the world's best administrative mechanism and institutions like the Railways. While the initial years of the post-Independence period were one of visionary leadership and growth, the later decades were punctuated by internal strife, corruption in the political and bureaucratic levels and loosening of the systems. Our lack of efficient leadership was also evident, set against the growth of China, which was on equal terms with India at the turn of the century both in military and economic terms but now claims five times the strength of India.

Yet, hope is not lost for India. It is the world's sixth largest economy and hopes to be the third largest in the next ten years. Markedly, India has become self-sufficient in food grains – a real feat considering its huge population bulge – and its exports have seen a major leap. It's time for India to strengthen its military muscles, considering the kind of security concerns the geopolitical region presents itself. An unpredictable China on the one side and a scheming Pakistan on the other worsen the region's security situation. India must matter more to the world.

### Letters to the Editor

#### On VIP interaction with the common man

Editor,  
Meghalayan readers of our local papers were hugely embarrassed and discomfited to read of Union Minister of State for Jal shakti and Tribal Affairs, Bishweswar Tudu's angry reaction towards Meghalaya officers making a muddle of their Power Point presentations regarding review of progress of development works in the state. The next day the MOS again made some remarks that, if read between the lines, actually meant his anger and disapproval over the seriousness Meghalaya shows towards centrally aided development schemes. In a veiled but diplomatically reprimand, on both the officials executing as well as the political master monitoring central schemes for Meghalaya, Tudu expressed disappointment by saying "In pen and paper I am happy but practically I am not happy". Now what does such an oxymoronic statement from a Central Minister, who supervises the release of scarce funds from his ministry, mean? To me it translates as "As you guys are not serious about the proper implementation of resources released for your development, rest assured we too will not take seriously

your future developmental demands." Apparently from the silence maintained by both the CM and the Minister PHE it meant very little to them. Like water off a ducks back, if you know what I mean. But to more sensitive citizens it spells disgrace and ignominy at the way this Government reacts to development and governance.

Newspaper reports also point to the fact that the Central MOS actually took time to personally visit some PHE schemes. It simply shows the interest and attention paid by such people's representatives over the proper utilization of funds. Question I would like to ask is How many of our own Ministers ever visit to inspect, evaluate and monitor schemes under their charge? Very little by a very few if one is to believe reports coming from the ground. Serious Ministers and Officers take site inspections and tours, especially to remote rural areas very seriously. I still remember the visit of senior members of the Planning Commission, Mr BN Yugandhar and Ms Sayeeda Hamid of interior projects in West Khasi Hills under the then NERCOMP IFAD project. Despite bad roads the pair drove deep into the interior. What struck me then was that during inspection of a village, I, as Programme Director of the Project was barred from speaking. They wanted to interact directly and personally with the bene-

We are celebrating the 75th Independence Day from August 13 to 15, 2022. Glad to say, a slew of innovative celebrations and events are being chronicled in the books of history. But sad to say, lakhs of inefficient and non-performing employees who are currently working in different Government departments, never realise the value and importance of our "Home Rule".

The 75th year of Independence is, indeed, the perfect occasion to look back and cherish our glorious past. Lakhs of our revolutionaries, freedom fighters and Indian soldiers who had sacrificed their lives for achieving the country's political and economic welfare.

"When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today." This evocative epitaph is enshrined on the Kohima War Memorial in Nagaland, which was built to commemorate soldiers of the empire who laid down their lives to repel Japanese assault in 1944 during World War-II.

In her first address to the nation on July 25, 2022, President Droupadi Murmu said, "...today, in the 75th year of Independence, I have been assigned this new responsibility. It is my great privilege to be given this responsibility at such a historic time when India is engaged with full vigour in realising its vision for the next 25 years."

That is, our forefathers, freedom fighters and intellectuals had to sacrifice their precious time, money and everything, even their lives, to get freedom from British rule. They wanted to see Free India with power, name, fame and glory led by a dynamic leadership and performing workforce. Practically speaking, we find very few performing people in the Government Departments and State-run organisations throughout the country.

A few years ago, the State Bank of India, the largest public sector bank of the nation, implemented and premature retirement plan called "Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS)" for its staff. A large number of SBI employees had availed the scheme and superannated.

In fact, both the Central and State Governments may formulate, announce

### Perform or perish: Need of the hour

## Government's action plan to 'weed out' 'dead wood' and 'dark sheep'

By Amar Krishna Paul

and implement VRS like new or revised retirement programmes for their non-performing employees to vacate lakhs of posts in various Government institutions. The move would definitely generate employment avenues for the computer-friendly young educated boys and girls of our native motherland.

Most Governments have VRS for the employees who attained 50 years of age. But this age barrier may be curtailed to 40 years for the non-performing staff. Those who work should get salary, perks and facilities. For the non-performers, there should be a Compulsory Retirement Scheme (CRS) instead of VRS. Actually, the employees' performance review is conducted under the Fundamental Rule (FR) 56 (J) and 56 (I), and also under Rule 48 (1) (b) of the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules, 1972, that gives "absolute right" to the appropriate authority to retire a government servant, "if it is necessary to do so in public interest".

Of late, Delhi Government sought the list of 'ineffective' officers with 'doubtful' integrity for early retirement. Accounts officers nearing retirement age and those found to be ineffective may have to proceed on early retirement as per the Delhi government finance department's order in July, 2022.

All department heads (HODs) have been asked to treat the matter as "most urgent" and submit the report at the earliest. According to officials, the directions were given following guidelines from the Central Government's Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT). "The services department has issued detailed instructions dated July 12, 2019 in this regard stating that Lieutenant Governor (L-G) has taken a serious note on the issue and has desired that periodical review of all categories of government servants working under the government of NCT Delhi under the FR-56 (J) and Rule 48 of CCS (pension) rules 1972 may be taken on priority basis to "weed out" the "dead wood" and the "dark sheep". An action report is to be submitted to

the services department on 15th of each month in the prescribed proforma," read an order issued by the Finance Department.

In an unprecedented step, the Indian Railways on May 11, 2022 removed from service 20 top class one-officials, including eight joint secretary level officers, and top electrical and mechanical engineers. With this, around 100 top level officers have either been dismissed or forced to opt for Voluntary Retirement Services (VRS) in the last 10 months. They include three secretary rank level officers.

Kautilya, the Minister of Chandragupta Maurya, had indirectly focused on the fruits of accountability in his book 'Arthashastra'. To him, accountability does always pay. Nothing more than the following story explains the idea of accountability as perceived by him. One night he was writing a book as assigned by his King Chandragupta. Then, one visitor came to his house. Kautilya looked at the visitor, smiled, put off the lamp and asked his wife to bring another lamp. She came with the lamp. After he finished with his visitor, Kautilya lit the lamp and resumed his writing. He had put off the lamp to save the fuel supplied by the king to write the book. The story is very simple. But it leaves a thought-provoking lesson for us for the effective implementation of different schemes of the country today. That is, it is now our turn to be accountable along the lines of Kautilya since accountability is the key to transferability and, hence, higher productivity. The reason is not far to seek.

Our nation has completed 75 years of Independence. We have to achieve breakthrough, especially in poverty eradication, curbing unemployment, checking population growth, creating favourable balance of payment, arresting factors of price-spiral, minimising deficit financial, increasing growth rate and, above all, slashing unproductive expenditure like subsidy, concession, exemption etc.

During the 200 years of the British administration, 'the land of plenty' was re-

duced to 'land of hunger and misery; widespread poverty' had established its roots, and all-round backwardness set in.

The challenge of poverty eradication was taken up immediately after independence in the form of the five years plans. All along our narration of the story we have tried to focus on the fact that our economy is in transition from poverty to plenty. The process of this transition has been sluggish but it has been steady which augurs well for the new millennium.

In other words, if we properly diagnose the real economic scenario of the nation today, we will realise that we are in a better position in free India than under the British Raj.

Today, we do apply the guidelines given by Kautilya in the book directly or indirectly. For instance, he prescribed a system of price controls to protect the interest of the consumers. He also suggested a balanced budget. We are applying the controlled price system in pursuit of a so-called public distribution system and administered-price mechanism. Some states are in the process of initiating a slew of measures to work out a balanced and fruit-bearing budget with a view to pump-starting the emerging market economy of corporate India.

Likewise, we are implementing Kautilya's treatise on Economics, which strictly engineers drives against corruption. Can we accept his pragmatic views on accountability to bail out the country from stagnation and push it towards long-run recovery?

To sum it, we have seen that Kautilya saved fuel when the visitor came to meet him, although there was no instruction to do so. We have been instructed in our day-to-day life by the Department of Petroleum and Natural Gas to "save energy to save the world" by stopping the vehicle engine when there is a "traffic jam" that takes long to clear. However, very few people follow these instructions. Perhaps we need to learn more from Kautilya.

(The writer is a Freelance Journalist, may be contacted [amar.krishna@gmail.com](mailto:amar.krishna@gmail.com))

are not accepted by Courts and the arrested persons had to undergo medical tests in neighbouring states. It will really be a herculean task for the people of Bengal to come out of the prevailing situation which is the result of political culture implanted by the Marxists and happily adopted by TMC.

Yours etc.,  
D Bhattacharjee  
Via email

#### Celebrating 75 years of Independence

Editor,  
I am grateful and thankful to God to join my fellow citizens of India to celebrate the platinum jubilee or 75 years of India's Independence. This year in our beloved state Meghalaya, for the first time I see the public putting up the tricolour in nearly every house in the city, on vehicles, two wheelers etc. This shows the love and pride of the people which comes from the heart. No one forced them to do so. It is a good sign of returning to the old days where we can celebrate Independence Day in churches, schools or anywhere we like.

But, my simple thoughts go to the youth of the state in particular and the country in general. Are they truly celebrating with joy or are they joyful for two days

only. Are the rulers of our country and of the states really thinking about the youth who are the future of the family, society, the state and the country? Is anyone thinking on behalf of those hailing from downtrodden families and villages? Where will our youths go when they can't get proper jobs in the government or private sectors or in agriculture or any other profession. The top policy makers, the top policy implementers, the executives and even lower ranks are too busy with their own interests. No doubt, from the above there are a few who really think about the welfare of the state and country and of the youth in particular but they are in not in a position to do much because the system is either too complex or they are not allowed to carry forward their mission.

My simple suggestion to all those in power is to please put the country and the youths first so that the youth and country prospers. Create avenues for employment in every sector. Show the way through your deeds and not through your speeches. Actions speak louder than words.

Yours etc.,  
PSR Kharkongor  
Shillong - 8

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### Stabbing Salman Rushdie in open stage by a fanatic, an ominous signal

## World remains unsafe for freedom of expression even by writers

By Sushil Kutty

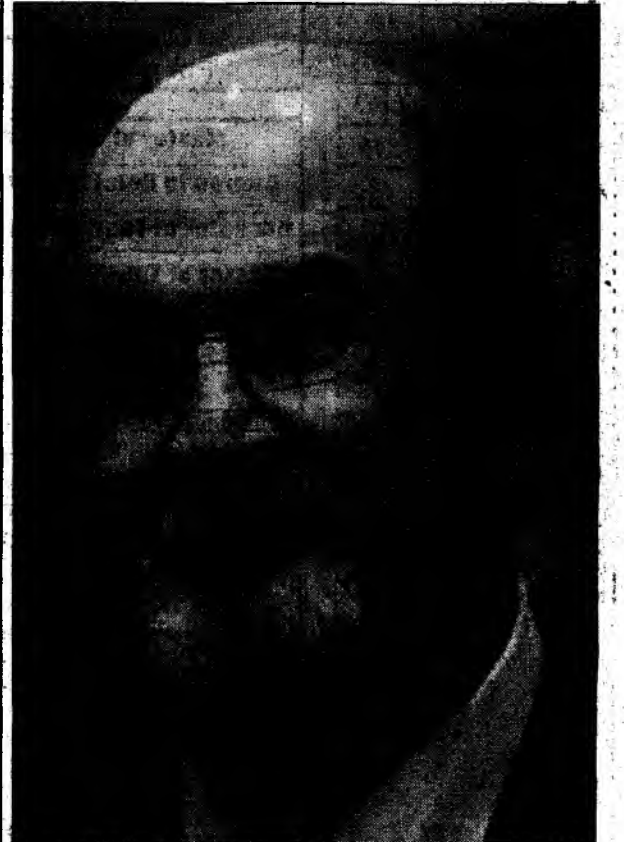
Two headlines stood out. One in an Israeli newspaper, 'No one will any longer dare offend Islam: The 1989 fatwa against Salman Rushdie'. And the other in a New York daily, 'NJ man, Hadi Matar, with sympathies toward Iranian government ID'd as suspect in Salman Rushdie stabbing'. The second emphasized on the first. Not only will no one dare offend Islam, those 'no one' will also not dare link the killer with Islam.

Salman Rushdie managed to give the slip to the fatwa for 34 years. The lull of several years was comforting. Henceforth complacency will be identified with Salman Rushdie. Even 'security' had forgotten the fatwa. And then, the assassin came on stage, quite literally. The knife attack on Rushdie is a reminder that not all religions are forgiving. Also, Iran's

sensitivities of the followers of Islam, dare not link Rushdie's attacker to Islam in any manner of speaking. So, New Jersey resident Hadi Matar is just another "NJ man", with "sympathies for the Iranian government".

In India, a "terrorist" with links in Pakistan has been caught with a plan to execute Nupur Sharma in the "fidayeen style". There is no doubt that he meant business. There's a fatwa sentencing Nupur to death. Nupur is a victim of her own excited presence, and the global exposure she got through a fact-checker of international standing. Salman Rushdie is proof that the hornet's nest is not an exaggeration, and fatwas don't go unanswered.

The fatwa given against Rushdie was for overstepping the limits of freedom of expression; the limits set by



once supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini can finally RIP.

It was Khomeini's February 14, 1989 fatwa that Salman Rushdie was battling, the extra-judicial death sentence handed out to him for writing "The Satanic Verses," a piece of "magic realism" that allegedly "insulted Islam". If anybody gets the feeling, Rushdie considered "Satanic verses" his best work, that person wouldn't be wrong. Rushdie stuck to his verses in numerous, safe-houses in London and elsewhere. And the assassins took their frustration on the translators of Satanic Verses, attacking two and killing the Japanese one.

Khomeini had asked "Muslims of the world rapidly to execute the author and the publishers of the book so that no one will any longer dare to offend the sacred values of Islam." He lived for five more months and then went his way, leaving behind the message that any Muslim killed trying to kill Rushdie will "martyr" with a place in "paradise". A \$2.8 million bounty on Rushdie's head sweetened the fatwa.

Rushdie, the atheist "born in India to non-practicing Muslims" has since then been living in dread. And under the pseudonym 'Joseph Anton' and in the company of solitude. "I am gagged and imprisoned," he wrote in his 2012 memoir. "I can't even speak. I want to kick a football in a park with my son. Ordinary, banal life: my impossible dream."

The New York daily's headline, 'NJ man, Hadi Matar, with sympathies toward Iranian government ID'd as suspect in Salman Rushdie stabbing' betrays the reluctance and fear to take the instructions of Islamists lightly. Even law enforcement dare not "offend" the

a religious order, and which applies to the followers of all faiths. The sort of FoE that the West knew is in the ICU. The Satanic Verses was considered blasphemous. Also sacrilegious. Followers of all faiths fell in line. Defiance spelled nothing less than death. Curiously, the vast numbers of teeming millions agree. In the name of not hurting religious sentiments, casually dealt extra-judicial death sentences have become common currency. Successive generations of lawmakers haven't had the courage to take the scourge head-on, much less eradicate it from the face of the earth. Neanderthals had more sense than the current set of world denizens.

Have we ever thought why the Yeti and the Big Foot withdrew high above to an icy existence, occasionally stepping out to see if the world had changed in the interregnum? Do we even comprehend where and how a set of rigid religious diktats, supposedly of divine origin, is leading the human race to? We are like the frog in a bag of slow warming fire, slow to realize that the water will in time come to a boil!

Salman Rushdie was not the first to feel the brunt of FoE. And he wouldn't be the last. Does not matter how many more times the headline 'No one will any longer dare offend Islam: The 1989 fatwa against Salman Rushdie' is repeated. Rushdie, say reports, has bled from the neck and the liver, and he'll lose an eye. And maybe he's still not clear of death by stabbing. It is very important that Salman Rushdie should die of old age, and not by any fatwa. Freedom of expression is not something that can be assassinated on stage, and no religion should be allowed a total veto on FoE. (IPA Service)

"It's not about finding a home so much as finding yourself."

— Jason Behr

The Shillong Times

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**Cleaning the Augean stables**

WHEN the Leader of the Nation speaks, people listen. More so when the speech is from the ramparts of the historic Red Fort and the occasion being the celebrations marking India's Independence Day. Year after year, leaders climbed up the dais and spoke; so did Prime Minister Narendra Modi. What they left behind were, glaringly, broken promises. When Modi spoke from the pulpit this time, his emphasis again was on his "resolve" to root out corruption — a promise he had made when he addressed this event for the first time in 2014. His famous one-liner, 'Na Khaonga, Na Khane Doonga' (will not eat dirty pie; nor will allow others to loot public money) resounded in public minds for some time and then passed into history.

This time, Modi sought people's cooperation to take on the corrupt including the big-wigs. Question is, what has prevented him from doing this all through his eight years in power and what can he do in the less than two years that are left for him in the present term. Narendra Modi does not have an image of a corrupt politician. Unlike the dynasts, state after state, who are now amassing huge unaccounted wealth, Modi has crafted a personality of his own with no links to his family. His recorded wealth is in the range of over Rs 2 crore, and it's unlikely he fancies being rich. His ministers are also not known to be corrupt though there indeed are grey areas. Overall, corruption at the central ministry level is not spectacular now. Yet, fact is the graph of corruption is going up. The bureaucracy is steeped in corruption, top to bottom, and so are regional politicians. Many see the Central Secretariat as the main beehive of corruption. Modi, despite his big talks, could hardly stem the rot. Perhaps he does not know how to go about it. The corrupt are smarter than the system itself. Modi has failed to check the gaps in the system through which the corrupt escape and make merry.

Modi also spoke out against the evils of nepotism and of the dynastic system in politics. Nepotism undercuts the principle of merit; but this is all-encompassing in this country and mostly found in sectors associated with government, be it in the academic world, the judiciary, the police and other spheres. Dynasties across states have cemented their evil grip in recent years though the Thackerays, the Mulayam clan, the Abdullahs and the Badals have taken the backseat. For the PM, action should speak louder than words. Cleaning up the Augean stable requires both grit and determination.

# Saving ourselves from ourselves

By Toki Blah

The English language has a beautiful phrase describing futile attempts to change something that refuses to be changed. It's called "Whistling against the wind". The Yanks of course express the same feeling in a much cruder, figuratively vulgar form but it means the same thing. It simply means to waste time on a pointless or fruitless task; do something that is ineffective or counterproductive. Living in today's Meghalaya; witnessing the wasteful and senseless existence of a Government that refuses to govern; listening to the childish, juvenile chatter of immature elected representatives; tormented by the refusal of an insensitive political system (that includes elected politicians, wannabe politicians and existing political parties) to acknowledge the multiple woes of the common man and agonizing at the refusal of the Meghalayan electorate's obstinacy to differentiate between a political conman and a statesman, one stands alarmed at the speed at which 2023 is approaching to once again give ruthless visionless scoundrels yet another five year term at looting the state. Everyone of them is the same. No exceptions and Samuel Johnson's declaration (18th Century British writer and philosopher) that "politics is the last resort of rogues" stands vindicated here in our state as nowhere else.

"Pissing against the wind" therefore beautifully articulates all sincere but barren efforts to reverse this cannibalistic political trend of Meghalaya's politics. It seems that all of us like lemmings, are destined to follow our own elected leaders to our own demise!

Rant all we want but we must also admit that our politicians have one defining quality — their steadfast, unwavering and hell-bent determination to win an election and stay in power whatever the cost! They will promise you the moon and even give it to you if they had an ounce of sincerity in their promises; they will spend and invest money (don't ask where it came from); crawl on their bellies through muck and filth; discard and abandon all concepts of ethics and principles; sleep with the Devil if they must; fortunately it has never come to pass but as someone declared "even sell their own mothers" if need be, simply to win an

election and come to power. One really must admire such fortitude and determination of purpose. Sadly however, like all dodgy obsessions, this trait too has a basic flaw — the inability what to do next, once power is achieved!

Now, now don't accuse me of making it up. It's all a fact. Look at the governance we are enjoying, not the right word perhaps and 'suffering' is more appropriate. Public protests, complaints, grievances and public grumblings make up and take up most of our time. Government has no sense of direction; no vision; no goal and crisis management, jumping from one calamity to the next, is the order of the day. Now there are a lot of optimistic but unrealistic people who sincerely believe all this will settle down post 2023 polls. Our politicians are once again out on the road selling this dream to a gullible and gullible electorate. Vote me, Vote us and only us to power and we shall line all Meghalaya roads in gold! Vote in line with the national trend and peace, prosperity and happiness will be yours forever and ever (remember that acche din promise of 2018 spiced with a 15 lacs per voter? Still waiting!). In Meghalaya there is even this ridiculous call for regional party dominance to solve all the state's problems. Let me with all the unwillingness and reluctance at my disposal assure everyone that it is a pipe dream, which in all probability will turn into a devilish nightmare once achieved. A Pied Piper of Hamelin wishful thinking!

I can already see the accusations and charges against this prediction of mine. How can you say that? Where is the proof that nothing will change? How dare you predict that things will be worse when we are assuring everyone of a return of the Golden Era once we and our party are voted to power? Are you blind? Don't you see the thousands that attend our meetings; the large public attendances at our (Sorry, my) campaign? Please forgive me Sirs. Forgive my insomnia. The reluctance of my eyes to be blind. Forgive my inability to be lulled to sleep. The pitiful cry of the poor and the marginalized of Meghalaya won't let me be. The unbearable cry of hungry babies simply because there is no food at home prevents

me from believing in your repeated lies. The hopeless youth who turn to guns, drugs or drinks in an attempt to drown their frustration just won't allow me to close my eyes. Infuriated teachers sleeping on pavements make me nervous because Education is being compromised and none of you seem to care. The despair in the eyes of that woman you branded a harlot, waiting for customers in the shadows of PB because she has nothing else to sell but her body, simply to feed her hungry babies, continues to haunt my conscience.

Self righteous political rants mean nothing nor do the hollow pre-election promises you make. I still continue to see frantic farmers, forlorn and beaten, forced into distress sale of their products just because pompous insensitive MLAs refused to discuss their plight in the Legislative Assembly. I continue to see our highly qualified youth, anxious to serve the state and its people, forced to seek employment elsewhere simply because of a visionless selfish political system that has no sympathy nor understanding of merit or hard work. I know I will be accused of anger. But I am angry because of a system that promotes empty promises over pre-meditated vision. Sorry but some of us refuse to close our eyes because of the existence of a sightless leadership. The state needs Hope. The people of Meghalaya need a vision. We need a roadmap for the next 10, 20, 50 years. We need to know where we are heading and where do we lead our children to. We don't have hope. In its stead you only offer empty words that you don't even know the meaning of. We need leadership as we simply don't have one. Our demand for 2023, produce a leader or leaders for the people. We are sick and tired of your "winnable candidates" who care for nothing but their own pockets!

The other evening my heart bled in nostalgic reminiscence listening to Headingson Rynthiang croon as only that melodious voice of his could, the unforgettable Khasi musical composition "Por ba la leit kin ym wan phai" (Time once gone will never return). I was humming to myself the above tune as I wrote this essay and suddenly it dawned upon me

that perhaps it is this melancholic attachment with the past that prevents the Khasis from thinking or visualizing the future! It's a frightening thought. Perhaps we live too much with the legends of our ancestors to even realize that our children and their future are as much our responsibility as our devotion to the past. Perhaps "Ka juk u ksiew jong nga" is as important, if not more, than "Ka juk ksar u longshuwa" (the future of my grandson is as important, if not more, then the Golden era of my ancestors)! Perhaps we need to move out of the imagined glory of our past into a more practical vision for our future. Perhaps as a society, and together with society also its elected leadership, should invest more, devote more time, energy and resources on the wellbeing of our children and their future. If we accept this analogy, then and only then will the need for a vision; a roadmap, long term plan for the future become universally important for the people of Meghalaya. Only then perhaps will the electorate of the state start demanding for meaningful, doable and visionary manifestoes from our politicians and their parties.

Today, bereft of a vision, all of us enter into an election exercise to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, based only on meaningless rhetoric. It is in such a pathetic and wretched scenario that opportunistic rogues, otherwise lovingly called 'WINNABLE CANDIDATES' by their equally opportunistic political parties, get a chance to buy our votes and make monkeys of us all. The whole society is in turmoil. Our own misery adds to this social distress that has befallen us. We need to get out of this rut. We need to save ourselves. To do this we require the will to start thinking about our future. Yes we don't have leaders that are capable of leading. As a matter of fact they conversely depend on the people to lead them (ka sur u paidbah). Sad but true, but if that's the case lets accept it. Let the people demand for a plan of action to save the future. That is the only way to encourage democratic leaders to emerge and force "self centered dukandars and mahajons" to leave politics alone. We need to save ourselves from ourselves. Are we ready to do it in 2023 itself?

# India@75: Fighting nepotism, corruption

By Jagdish Rattanani

Seventy-five years of Independence marks a significant milestone in the history of a nation rising. We can quibble over past events, remain distraught about the present socio-political strains or look to the future to ask what must be done to move to a better place.

In his Independence Day speech from the Red Fort, the Prime Minister highlighted two key challenges facing the nation — corruption and nepotism. There will be some immediate guffaws, given that the ruling political establishment is not beyond practising both. But away from scoring political points, what does it really mean to fight the two ills?

Inevitably, immediate attention gets drawn to the political battleground, given that dynasty has been used

election campaign looking to a third term for the BJP in 2024, and in that sense is one more clichéd political narrative for the headlines? If this is not the case, then how precisely will nepotism be contained?

The immediate answer is merit, which is a loaded term given the way it has been used in popular perception by those talking against reservations for the backward castes and the downtrodden. An early answer to merit was offered by Vishwanath Prasad Singh who once famously said to the effect: What are you to do with a person who has a head when he doesn't have a heart to serve the people.

Yet, there is no question that the modern State apparatus will have to be protected from the ills of power and patronage, from



by BJP and its friends to mostly refer to the leadership of the Congress, Samajwadi Party and other assorted political heirs and a number of anti-BJP players in various States. Uddhav Thackeray of Maharashtra's Shiv Sena is only the latest example (and victim) of BJP statecraft in this regard.

But on August 15, the Prime Minister did make the significant point that his understanding of nepotism is not about politics alone — "not at all", as he put it. In the Prime Minister's words: "Unfortunately, it (nepotism) is being nourished in other Indian institutions as well. Family bias, nepotism has gripped many of our institutions today. This is sadly harming the immense talent pool of our country. The future potential of my country is suffering. Those who are legitimate contenders of these opportunities and are genuinely eligible get side-lined due to nepotism. This is a good reason for corruption."

In this characterisation of the twin ills, corruption is caused in part by nepotism, and the widening of the frame of familism beyond the political arena appears to take the issue into many other facets of Indian life. It challenges the widely held notion in the Indian context that a family member who has moved up the ladder is expected to help others in the family rise. This is the way a family stays together, ties are strengthened and indeed new bonds built as each helps the other — private space that inevitably spills into public space and often makes its biggest impact there. The family system builds on these connections. A rather rustic if naked example of this was once displayed by the former Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal who reportedly said something to the effect on political fortunes in Haryana — if not my son, then whose son would I make the Chief Minister! The BJP sits in power in Haryana today with the great grandson of Devi Lal, Dushyant Chautala as the Deputy Chief Minister and son Ranjit Singh as a minister. To make matters complex, the 1-Day speech notes the significance of the family as well. "The joint family system is an asset," the Prime Minister said.

So, it would be fair to ask if the Prime Minister and the party he leads are really up to fighting nepotism? Or is this the launch of a new

the club-like mentality that keeps out ordinary people and feeds on power and privilege. In this, the one institution that has not been discussed is India's corporate sector and its growing reach and power.

Is the son or daughter of a Chairperson sitting on the board of a company his or her parents built, and then inheriting the business, a case of nepotism?

This leads to the touchy question of tax, and how wealth is inherited and transferred tax-free in India so that some of the biggest sources of power and privilege, are untouched by the political campaign against nepotism and corruption.

The corporate sector itself has been working internally for better governance standards. But equally, tales of inner deals and backroom machinations have only grown, not died, just because the BJP came to power.

This then may be a good place and time to discuss the return of the inheritance tax, which India had up until 1985 when it was scrapped on the argument that it had not achieved the goal of reducing unequal distribution of wealth and of garnering resources for developmental use. On the other hand, most developed economies have such a tax. Even in the United States, a country with distinct capitalist approaches and a strong anti-tax bias, the inheritance tax remains in vogue though the threshold at which it kicks in changes often. Called the federal estate tax, or the "death tax", by some, the levy has a history of 100 years in the United States. It makes those with the highest ability pay, raises revenues, promotes charitable giving and puts some brakes, albeit light ones, on power and privilege. Further, the tax is on market value, not book value, and kicks-in with valuations above 12 million USD, with a top rate of 40%.

In the Indian context, some have asked for the return of this tax. There has been talk that the BJP would reintroduce it. Yet, the actual return of the tax will be a big step politically, an anti-nepotism tax of sorts that can give a very different kind of fillip to the agenda on fighting nepotism and building a less unequal society.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

## India @ 75: Anything forced is not freedom

Editor,  
While I pay my utmost respect to those who sacrificed their lives for our freedom I also reaffirm my fundamental duty to respect the Constitution and the Tri-Colour (Flag). For over 30 years in these Hills (Hynniewtrep Land), during the Independence Day people were forced to stay indoors and at the height of insurgency people couldn't even publicly discuss plans for observing India's Independence celebration due to fear. I remember when Late T.H Rangad, the then Home Minister, took out a lone procession to Polo ground on August 15, people reviled him for violating the bandh call by the HNLC. Fortunately, the internet had just entered our state and there was no social media then. Otherwise, he would have been crucified.

This year as we observe the 75th year of Independence the Modi Govt led by the BJP is making all efforts to ensure that the Har Ghar Tiranga programme becomes a success. Yes, there is nothing wrong in hoisting the national flag in homes etc. Rather it is our fundamental duty to pay respects to it. Ironically, in certain areas in these hills, where 30 years ago people would not dare to even talk of India's freedom on 15 August, now there is singing and waving of the Tri-Colour with fervour. However, there are debates

around the Har Ghar Tiranga programme and debates will continue.

Coming back to these hills (Hynniewtrep Land), now that the negotiation with the banned HNLC is on, while I pray for the early peaceful solutions, I am also apprehensive that militancy may perhaps resurface in the near future for obvious reasons, especially with the present Home Minister in the State who cannot handle law and order which is deteriorating by the day and citizens are living in fear. If militancy/insurgency ever resurfaces in the State (God forbid) it's going to be the worst of its kind as it will become a "private militia" in the name of Jaidbynriew.

Insofar as India's 75th Independence Day is concerned I view the world of politics and economics through the tribal lens. I look at society from the margins. There are issues of tribalism which need to be addressed within Independent India, but not at the cost of others but rather by finding workable solutions.

The threat towards tribals, dalits and religious minorities continues and has increased in the past two decades. Now that the drafting of a new Constitution for a "Hindu Rashtira" is under way the threat is not just alarming but it is very real.

It is imperative for progressive minds across the spectrum to come together to defend the Constitution and shun injustices, religious, communal violence and discrimination at every level.

Yours etc.,  
Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh  
Via email

## Traffic congestion: Who's at fault

Editor,  
Most people complaining about the traffic jams in Shillong are also the ones contributing to it. How hard has it become for people to walk? Shillong is a walk-friendly city, and anyone can easily walk for 10 kms or more. Nowadays, people take their vehicles even for short distances hence major roads are snarled up in the rush-hour. Generalising this observation would be absolutely wrong, but there are still a few others who walk to avoid traffic jams, and many others who genuinely enjoy walking. Before we point fingers at the Government for not taking initiatives to bring a permanent solution to our grievances, let us ask ourselves a few questions: Are we willing to solve this issue? Will we be willing to send our children to school by bus if the government implements the school bus scheme? If not, can't we send them to schools in the JNNURM buses? In short, use public transport?

"Was stuck in a traffic jam for a long time," would be the only reason we give to schools, colleges, and workplaces for being late. This reason can be forgiven once, but can we give this excuse to our superiors every time? Knowing the ground realities they will not easily forgive us but will come up with befitting action as they must, and also ask us to schedule our travel better.

Can we, the general public, join hands and try to solve this issue by doing a

rehearsal for three days? If our schools, colleges, and offices are within the radius of our homes, let's walk; if not, let's get on the bus, take a taxi, or maxicab, and head off to our respective destinations. Send our children to school using the available public buses and maxi cabs, and also encourage college-goers to use public transport, and let's give up on the easy life for a few days. Can parents take the initiative to encourage their kids to board public transport rather than drop and pick them up from school? Or has this become a competition among parents themselves to drop their kids off at school because the others are doing so, thereby also demonstrating how protective they are of their kids?

Here's where interesting questions arise, although the outcome of the above rehearsal would be overwhelming. Will we give up our easy lifestyles of heading to our respective destinations by using passenger vehicles? How willing are we to contribute to this plan if it is at all successful? Should we not think of the greater good of society? This is where we will know and understand if the reason for traffic congestion in Shillong is due to narrow roads, unreasonably taking our vehicles out or both. Again, this is where we will decipher if the government is to be blamed or we, the hoi polloi.

JNNURM buses would be very helpful for commuters like school and college students and office goers, had the authorities allowed them to take a route via the Police Bazaar from Motphran to Barik, just like they did some eight years ago. Motphran is the epicentre for

students and working professionals from Mawlai, Jaiaw, Mawprem and the neighbouring localities. Presently, buses from Motphran heading to Laitumkhrak would take a route via Garikhana and Civil Hospital, ferrying a few passengers only, and a few students from Jhalupara, Garikhana, and Rhino Point. Students nowadays refrain from getting on the bus while heading to school for similar reasons: long distance routes and traffic jams. This is something we should ponder upon, and maybe the concerned authorities can do a drill on the same for a week to see the difference. I'm sure if the buses were to resort to the old route from Motphran via Police Bazaar, it would definitely cater to the students of schools in Barik and Malki, including students of St Anthony's College in large numbers.

It would be interesting to know how many JNNURM buses actually operate on Shillong's streets on a daily basis. In 2011, 120 JNNURM buses were introduced. As of January 2016, there were 85 buses plying in the city, and the State Government has ordered 75 additional buses, making a total of 160. At present, we barely see even 20 buses. Where have all the buses go?

Let's take an example of a European country that has come up with a well thought out plan to solve the issue of traffic congestion.

Buses, trams, and trains are now free to ride on, and we don't need a ticket to board. This is an initiative taken by the Government of Luxembourg. Luxembourg is a small country landlocked by Belgium, France, and Germany. As of March 1,

2020, all public transport in the country—trains, trams, and buses are now free. This move by the government has encouraged citizens to opt for public transport. In fact, Luxembourg became the first country in the world to offer free public transport to everyone. It also became the first country in the world to offer free transport services to both residents and visitors.

According to the recent survey conducted by the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills, 20% of parents in Shillong drop their kids off on their way to work. 68% of parents in Shillong are using their vehicles for a dedicated school trip. This includes mothers and fathers taking time out of their office/work hours to pick up their kids. These statistics are as per a survey conducted for 19 schools among 6510 parents in Shillong City.

Are we willing to own up that the solution to the problem could be us and us alone and not blame it on the traffic department or Government? Are we ready to take on that responsibility? How far are we from attaining a solution? How eager are people to coordinate? When will we see a permanent solution? Will we make an effort to find a collective solution? Can we anticipate a traffic-free road? Only time will tell, and hopefully that is sooner than later. Let's decongest the already congested Shillong roads.

Yours etc.,  
Emidao Shylla,  
Via email

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*"Light in Nature creates the movement of colors."*  
—Robert Delaunay

The Shillong Times

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## Meghalaya BJP in a tailspin

WHILE the BJP national vice president M Chuba Ao who is also in charge of Meghalaya has made it amply clear that the current BJP state president Ernest Mawrie should resign gracefully for failing on all fronts to promote the interests of the Party, BJP MLA and Minister Sanbor Shullai has other ideas. Clearly Shullai and Mawrie share a comfort zone that could get disrupted should any other person become the Party President. That's about the real story coated without the embellishments. Shullai claims to have spoken to Chuba Ao to revise his decision to drop Mawrie. He even termed the move to drop the present BJP president from his post as "suicidal," making it appear that Mawrie is indispensable to the success of the BJP in Meghalaya. This goes counter to the BJP's prime ideology that individuals are not above the Party. It will be interesting to watch how things unfold henceforth. Mawrie has ambitions to contest the forthcoming elections from West Shillong Constituency and has made this quite clear from his actions within that Constituency. When Mr Ao says that Mawrie has treated the BJP as his private party and insulted aspiring candidates he is speaking from a position of one who knows what's ailing the BJP in Meghalaya. He must have got adequate briefing from the karyakartas working on the ground.

Having stated upfront all that needed to be said in plain language, it would contravene the BJP Vice President's stand should he revoke his statement merely because Sanbor Shullai feels otherwise. The BJP prides itself in being a Party of karyakartas or workers whose prime duty is to work at the grassroots to address the concerns of the people and thereby earn their support. If the karyakartas are unhappy with the manner in which the President conducts himself and they have appealed to the higher echelons of the BJP to redress their grievances then it is only proper that their concerns are addressed. That is the task entrusted to the person looking after the affairs of the Party in each state. Mr Ao therefore has to balance things out before they go out of hand.

Meanwhile Sanbor Shullai has asserted that the BJP would do well in 2023 and the MLAs elected would reach the double-digit figures. What the calculations are and where these MLAs will emerge from is anybody's guess. The BJP is yet to make headway in Meghalaya despite the tall claims. People are still wary of the anti-Christian stances of the Party which are evident from the attacks on Christians and other minorities in other states. Sanbor Shullai's claims therefore have no merit.

# Musings on Meghalaya's lop-sided development

By Albert Thyrsiang

On a recent day trip to Shillong with six students from Karbi Anglong our first stop was the Elephant Falls. I was surprised that the entry fee is Rs 100 per person. In the 1990s it was free. Next was Shillong peak. Here again, in the 1990s the public used to gain entry into the Air Force check gate without much of a hustle. Today private vehicles are not permitted inside. Local taxis have to be hired at Rs 200 per trip in addition to the entry fee of Rs 80 per person. We then by-passed Wards Lake for Golf Links hoping to spend more time in the green grass. But we were shocked to discover that here too we had to pay to gain entry. Much has changed. Till recently the young and the old would flock to the 'Shillong recreational venue' on weekends.

At my village when I narrated our visit to the 'Scotland of the East' someone said, "We too will go to these places" with others agreeing in unison. But when they were told of the entry fees, they said, "Then we cannot afford to see those places in Shillong." It is true that villagers may never see the places of attraction in the state capital. To visit the Elephant Falls, Shillong Peak, Lady Hydari Park, Wards Lake, Golf Links, one has to spend Rs. 500/600 on tickets alone.

Our conversation on tourist locations continued. In West Khasi Hills and South West Khasi Hills districts there are some great spots like the Wah Rilang View Point near Mawkyrwat, the Nongsynrieh Hill and rock, the Nongkhnum river island and the waterfalls over there. These are no less stunning than the aforementioned tourist locations in Shillong and Sohra (Cherrapunji). Many of these spectacular places are free for visitors. Therefore, another one remarked, "Haba ngi leit sha ki jaka sor ngi hap siew shispah tyngka. Haba ki nongsor ki wan jngohkai ia ki jaka jong ngi pat ki peit ei ne siew tang arphew tyngka." (When we visit tourist places in Shillong we have to pay Rs 100 but when Shillongites come to our sites they pay a meagre Rs. 20.) The peripheries are always at a disadvantage. Disparity is too obvious. Development is one sided.

Rangblang, my birth place is a village of over 300 households. But there is no PHE water connection to any home as yet. In all localities (dong) broken pipes are seen along the road. The storage tanks are all dilapidated. Two

PHE schemes were brought to the village in the past. Storage tanks for distribution to all localities were built on a hill called, 'Lum lingmane Barim.' I visited the site and found that the tanks completely dry. One of the tanks is probably incomplete. The pipes into them and out of them are broken. I took a couple of videos and posted them on social media asking whether this was a scam and what has happened to the schemes and why the projects were a failure? A journalist responded promising that he would follow it up. Another senior scribe informed that the schemes were sanctioned and executed during the time of a former MLA who was also a minister. He also mentioned the name of the contractor. "Both the minister and contractor is dead but water is yet to reach the people," he joked.

Such a thing would never happen in Shillong, Tura or Williamnagar, Nongstoin or Jowai. In rural areas like Rangblang, things are taken for granted because people don't raise their voices. So development works are half done, incomplete and they lay in ruins. Contractors escape with the money, in all likelihood in collusion with high level officers, ministers and public representatives. On paper Rangblang is probably shown as a village where PHE water flows to each of the households. But in reality there is not a drop of water. Possibly there are hundreds of other Rangblangs across rural Meghalaya.

The Nongstoin-Rangblang-Wahkaji-Ranikor road is an endless irritation. People no longer grudge the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) for blocking the 93 km stretch when in 2015 it was all set to be converted into a two lane road. The reason given for blocking that road project was that it would facilitate uranium mining in Domiasiat, Nongbahjynrin, Mawthabab and other locations. This is absurd and unacceptable. In spite of the assurance that there was no mining intention behind the road project the pressure groups were adamant. We know there are uranium deposits in Sohra, Mawsynram and close to Mawkyrwat too. Will the anti-uranium groups protest and stall a two-lane road to any of the above-mentioned towns? They may say, "We will allow the roads, but we will never let mining take place." Then why not apply the same yardstick to the Nongstoin-

Rangblang-Wahkaji-Ranikor road in 2015?

The distance from Nongstoin to Rangblang is a mere 25 km but it takes over two hours from one end to the other. From Rangblang to Wahkaji the distance is less than 40 km but a ride takes three hours or more. By now the whole stretch would have been like the Shillong-Nongstoin-Tura road. But here we are now still riding on the bumpy 'country roads to take us home.' I visited Wahkaji, Domiasiat and Nongbahjynrin recently (more about them later) and discovered shocking revelations. In public transports, in tea stalls and in other conversations people blame the KSU for the loss of the two-lane road. Since everyone in the area speaks the Rangblang dialect the chorus is, "Ta seng bhalang da menkhang china surok. Seng bhalang aoi gai ata" (It was the 'do-good' organisation which prevented the construction of the road. Who knows what kind of organisation is that). Even children take the name of the KSU and hold it responsible for the hardship of the people till date. People also revealed that the real reason for obstructing the road construction was actually jealousy. During the public hearing certain leaders scornfully uttered, "Balei ai surok ia ki shrieh?" ("Why give a road to monkeys?") "Balei, shna surok sha khlaw?" ("Why make a road in the jungle?") So it was discrimination against the people in the Langrin areas that stalled the road project.

That the KHADC too was involved in this discriminatory act is disappointing to say the least. The Council refused to grant NOC to the Nongstoin-Wahkaji-Ranikor road but was liberal in issuing NOCs to Nongstoin-Rambrai-Kyrshai, Mawsynram-Balat-Nongjri-Moheskola, Nongstoin-Maweit-Kulang-Nongjri, Riango-Athiabari-Hahim-Boko roads. Why block only the Nongstoin-Rangblang-Wahkaji-Ranikor road just because there are uranium deposits on the way? Is this not a blatant discrimination?

This writer visited Domiasiat and Nongbahjynrin on August 9. Nongbahjynrin, a sleepy, tiny hamlet of 5 households where the exploratory uranium mining was carried out in the 1990s has a motorable road from Wahkaji (22 km) because UCIL constructed it. The village hardly gets electricity. People depend on solar

panels for lighting purposes. Mobile connectivity is only for making calls and does not support internet connection. The village has a decent LP school building but teachers are not very regular. In November 2021 there were reports of explosion from one of the abandoned sealed tanks containing uranium effluents. This visitor and others found two tanks manipulated but ultimately no real cause.

Domiasiat is puzzling. The epicentre of anti-uranium mining, thanks to late Kong Spility Lyngdoh Langrin, is situated 3 km away from the Wahkaji-Nongbahjynrin road. The ten household settlement is quite isolated. The approach road is horrifying. Only pick-up vehicles can reach the village. In fact the path is not even a PWD road. The village has no drinking water supply. People have to walk for 1 km down the valleys to fetch water. Electricity is non-existent. It may come once a week informed the residents. The village has an LP school building but it has only two classrooms for students of class I to V. It was closed down in 2004 due to the negligence of teachers and was reopened in 2021.

In terms of natural beauty the village is a paradise. Nestled around hills and green vegetation, the surrounding is a sight to behold. I intend to revisit this village. But the residents wonder as to when road, water and electricity will come. They have approached the local MLAs, present and past, but nothing has happened. Some are desperate. They warn the government that there may come a time when they could allow uranium mining so that development would come. Not only in Domiasiat but in other villages, people recalled that when uranium mining was on there were electricity and other facilities. Thanks to UCIL, the present tarred road from Wahkaji was constructed. If not for UCIL the cluster of seven villages would have remained isolated even today, people confessed.

Regarding the recent statement by the central government that it has not abandoned plans to mine uranium in Meghalaya, people are quite cool about it. They are amused that politicians and pressure groups warn of a law and order situation in the event the central government resumes mining in the state. People lament that it is they who suffer whether uranium is mined or not. Hence they should be allowed to decide their own fates! Period.

## Meghalaya a sports unfriendly State

By Barnes Mawrie

The origin of sports goes back to pre-historic age, some 15,300 years ago. Remaining depictions of Sumerian civilization (3000 BCE) show that sports was common among them. The Egyptians (2000 BCE) used to have various types of sports like wrestling, weightlifting, swimming, long jump, archery, rowing and fishing. The ancient Greeks (1500 BCE) were lovers of sports and games and they had different kinds of games. The ancient Greeks were the first to formalize sports and games with the first ever Olympic Games held in 776 BCE in the city of Olympia. The Romans were great lovers of sports and games and they built gigantic and state of the art colosseums in every provincial city. History of ancient India proves that various forms of sports and games like wrestling and archery existed.

Sports and games were considered vital to the state in ancient times for the reason that they promote discipline of young men and women and prepared them for battles. These youth were ready-made warriors in times of emergency since they were physically fit and combatant. The Roman army was feared

our state has not produced any sports person of international renown. Are our youth not physically fit or are they not talented and gifted for sports? The answer is definitely negative. Our youth are as fit as other youths of the country. What is lacking however is the opportunity and the goodwill of the state to back them up. When it comes to sports infrastructure our state fares deplorably. The other day as I was passing through Polo, I happened to have a dekho at the first division football ground. I was shocked to see the condition of the playground. What used to be a lively ground where important matches used to take place, has today become literally a jungle. The playground is overgrown with bushes and wears a deserted look. Soon enough we may find some wild animals occupying that place. This is a perfect image of the state of sports in Meghalaya.

We are told that this year the state would host the National Games, but as of now it looks like an impossibility. If the main venues where sports and games had been taking place for decades, now wears such a miserable



by everyone because of its discipline and the physical fitness of its soldiers. This was facilitated by the regular sports and games that the empire promoted. As the old saying goes "the heartbeats of Rome are the sands of the colosseum."

The tribal communities of Northeast India used to have an ancient institution known as "bachelors' dormitory" known by different names in different tribes. This institution used to be the training place for the youth both boys and girls. Here the youth were taught to participate in traditional games and sports like wrestling, archery, sword fencing, javelin throw and traditional martial arts. Unfortunately, this institution has disappeared altogether and this should be considered as a great loss to the communities. It is in this context, that the state government should give priority to sports and games, not only because they discipline our youth, but also because they can be adopted as professions by our talented youth.

Manipur is a model state in our region when it comes to priority given to sports and games. No wonder this state has produced sports persons of national and international fame like Mary Kom, Mirabai Chanu etc. The state has successfully hosted the National Games in 1999 and it provides ample infrastructure and support to various disciplines of sports and games. These persons have brought fame and glory to our region and we are sure that they would do the same in the coming Paris Olympics in 2024.

We as Meghalayans, however, have nothing to cheer about when it comes to sports and games. So far

look, how can we ever hope to host such a mega sports event? Sports and games in Meghalaya continue to remain a co-curricular activity of schools and colleges. Annual sports days are held in every educational institution of the state and ministers or directors of sports and youth affairs are usually invited to grace the events. Unfortunately, these responsible persons come and go from one function to the other without however being motivated to do something tangible to improve these activities in the state. How much the state allots to sports and games in its annual budget, is anyone's guess.

Our stadia in Polo Grounds will perhaps become venues only for concerts, trade fairs, political events etc. Consequently, these grounds are missing the purpose for which they exist. Why is the government unwilling to implement projects to promote sports and games in the state? We need a Sports and Games Academy in the state, financed by the government, where the required infrastructures are available and management is excellent. Such an institution would be able to tap the abundant talents of our youth and thereby produce renowned athletes and sports persons. Our state is gradually becoming a drug-infested state and our youth power is being wasted away. Perhaps with sufficient opportunities in the field of sports and games, these youth could be prevented from falling victims to substance abuse. We as citizens of Meghalaya would love to see our young men and women participate in the coming Olympics or Commonwealth Games and winning medals for the country.

### Letters to the Editor

#### United by parking problems

Editor,  
As one visionary says, "Population grows but the land does not." This also applies to vehicles and roads in towns and cities all over India particularly hill stations like Shillong. The number of new vehicles plying on the same roads which had not been widened for ages and are not likely to be so for obvious reasons. In the past hundreds of vehicle driver coming towards Meghalaya Secretariat breathed a sigh of relief when they found a place for parking on the roadside stretching from the YWCA up to Talents Club. But in the recent past some unpleasant incidents must have happened there, after which, it was turned into a 'no parking zone' except on Saturdays and Sundays near Garo Baptist Church.

Parking problem is a global problem and can be eased to some extent when public-police understanding is there. In such a case, if the authorities concerned review certain decisions and allow parking of small vehicles on one side of the road mentioned above it would surely

ease the parking problems of the people to some extent who are visiting numerous offices located at Lachumiere including the Meghalaya Secretariat.  
Hope somebody listens!  
Yours etc  
Thrumen Sangma,  
Via email

#### On Anita Pfaff

Editor,  
Ms Anita Pfaff appealing to the Modi Govt for DNA testing the ashes kept at the Renkoji Temple in Japan and which is believed to be that of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose her father. She is even ready for her DNA test to ascertain her identity! Anita Pfaff knows very well that the secret files lying with Britain, Russia, Germany, Japan etc will never be declassified and the files contain secret information on Netaji after the so-called plane crash on August 18, 1945.

Experts have specifically mentioned that DNA tests may not be possible on the ashes after so many years and if even done the accuracy of report would be doubtful. Now for the sake of argument, say, if the DNA tests match, then what? Will it really end the controversies and beliefs of crores of

people across the world who still know that Netaji did not die in plane crash?

As a Netaji researcher, I do believe that Ms Anita Pfaff, an Austrian national has to do much more to prove her relationship with Netaji. Mere DNA testing is not enough.

Yours etc.,  
Anjan Kr Das,  
Shillong -6

#### Rain water harvesting

Editor,  
Meghalaya is a state that has been abundantly blessed with heavy rainfall every year, yet every year there are reports of people facing shortage of water in their towns, villages and households. It is high time for the government and the people to wake up and realize that depending only on tap water will not be enough. Rain water harvesting and conservation is something that should be encouraged amongst the public. The government must take the initiative to start projects on rain water conservation and educate the public on the need and importance of rain water. As a growing and developing society, we must know and understand

that in a few decades or may be just a few years, we may not have proper access to safe and clean water and therefore it is a must for us to learn how to sustain our water resources and one of the main steps towards a sustainable environment is by starting to use the natural water that has been bestowed upon us.

Yours etc.,  
Reakor Shisha Kharkrang,  
Laimtysaw Village,  
Upper Shillong

#### I-Day celebration or Govt publicity?

Editor,  
The MDA Government like its benefactor the NDA Government at the Centre has turned everything into a publicity stunt. The other day the Deputy Chief Minister gave out cheques to people who won in different sporting events observed as part of Meghalaya's 50th year, at the Soso Tham auditorium. There are prizes won for this and that event and money is distributed right left and centre. There's money distributed to farmers at Rs 5000 each under a scheme called FOCUS. How far can

Rs 5000 take a farmer in this day and age? The minister's and MLA's children spend Rs 5000 a day just on fast food, drinks, fuel and entertainment. For them Rs 5000 is peanuts but the farmers are supposed to save their crops and do their agriculture with the same amount. But our people have become so poor and dependent on largesse that politicians can easily win them with money; any amount of money in fact.

All kinds of schemes are conceived in the Secretariat without really knowing what the people really need because there's a huge distance between the people in the last village of Meghalaya and the State Secretariat. That distance is growing by the day instead of the gap closing now that Meghalaya is 50 years old. But let's get serious. Who's really thinking about the State? The MLAs are not even aware of the areas of concern in their constituencies since they have become occasional visitors there. All the MLAs and MDCs are Shillong-based. They don't need to negotiate over the rough and uneven roads that their constituents have to pass through daily. If they do visit their constituency it is to inaugurate something or the other. And that

is all about photo-ops, not an ordinary visit to just meet and listen to people voicing their concerns. Would it not be better for ministers to listen than to speak all the time? The Sports and Agriculture Minister's statement which has gone viral has shown him yet again in a very poor light. He believes this year is India's 150th year of Independence. Should ministers not have some basic education and general knowledge? It looks like Meghalaya does not have capable and competent individuals to become lawmakers so voters are forced to elect those whose intelligence is below par. Naturally they need to be spoon-fed by bureaucrats and don't have a mind of their own.

There is nothing to celebrate in today's Meghalaya. The surveys by different agencies tell us what the politicians don't want us to know. Conrad Sangma should stop advertising what his Government is doing because it has not done much.

Yours etc.,  
SN Nongkynrih,  
Via email

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"Mystery creates wonder and wonder is the basis of man's desire to understand."

— Neil Armstrong

## The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, AUGUST 19, 2022

### Kejriwal's PM dream

A broad hint from Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is that he would enter the ring and challenge Narendra Modi in the next Parliamentary polls in 2014. He has held out the slogan, Make India Number 1, and is planning a nation-wide tour to drum up support and feed his own ambition to be the Prime Minister. He is putting his 'best foot forward' when 'aspirants' like Mamata Banerjee have run for cover, Sharad Pawar was flooded in Maharashtra and Nitish Kumar is making a laughing stock of himself in Bihar. It's natural that Kejriwal senses an opportunity. Yet, consider the fact that despite his popularity in Delhi, the AAP could not win a single parliament seat in the national capital in 2019 and his party does not have any representation in the Lok Sabha. What fuels his ambition, still, is the fact that his is the only regional party that runs governments in more than one state.

A positive aspect about Kejriwal is that, unlike any other regional politician, he runs a people-friendly and mostly corruption-free government. In today's India, this is a great credit. Yet, the problem is our national character that finds eloquent display in elections in state after state. The electorate is often less enthused by good governance and more by show, bluff and bluster. True, there are also times when a government that went terribly wrong — as in the case of UPA-II vis-à-vis corruption — was voted out. This apart, Kejriwal is still the leader of a small regional party that has no presence in most states. Had he had the clout he thinks he has, AAP would in the past 12 years have made a pan-India presence. His first job as a politician aspiring to run the nation is to precisely do this, rather than making a Mamata Banerjee out of himself.

A national appeal is the first and foremost requirement for a politician aspiring to run the nation; more so for the leader of a regional party. Narendra Modi rising from the CM's post to PM's chair was by virtue of his selection as the nominee of a national party, the BJP. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi may have his flaws; yet, as long as he represents an omnipresent national political establishment like the Congress, he remains heads and shoulders above regional chieftains in the national political sweepstakes. The Congress party has a wealth of experienced and talented leaders to run a government; not so the regional parties. Fact is also that no regional leader can ever run a stable government at the Centre.

# Roberts' Hospital Centenary: The Pioneer Matrons

By Rev. Lyndan Syiem

On Monday, 8th August, 2022, the Honourable Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Mr. Conrad Sangma, inaugurated the College of Nursing at the premises of the Dr. H. Gordon Roberts Hospital at Jaiaw, Shillong. The inauguration of this BSc nursing institute was attended by many public representatives, church leaders, women's fellowship leaders and senior hospital staff. Exactly 100 years ago, the School of Nursing was opened under the pioneering leadership of Margaret Elizabeth Buckley at the then Welsh Mission Hospital. It was a quiet beginning, in contrast to the hospital's grand inauguration by the Governor of Assam,

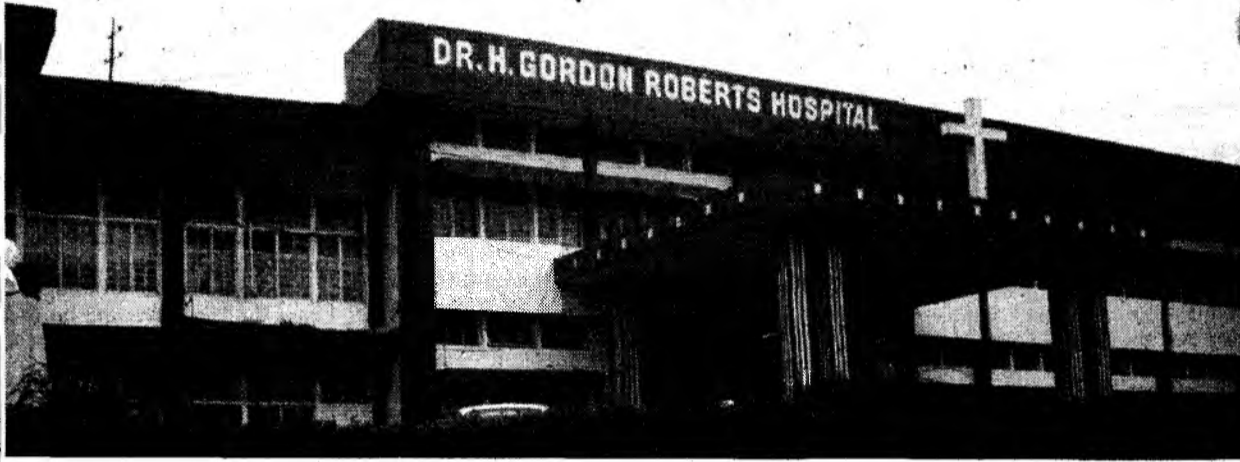
Margaret Buckley arrived at Shillong in 1919 and briefly served at the Civil Hospital. When the Welsh Mission Hospital opened in 1922, she joined as the hospital's first matron and also helped establish the school to train nurses from among the Khasis and Lushais (as the Mizos were then known). In a strange turn of events, Margaret was diagnosed with appendicitis and became the hospital's first surgical case! Her treatment and subsequent recovery served as a real-life example to the trainee nurses, most of whom had never seen or even heard of a surgical operation.

dent spirit relished.

She began training local girls as nurses and midwives, and raised funds and clothes from family and friends in Wales. Her warm, gregarious personality attracted many patients and revived the dispensary, raising ambitions for a full-fledged hospital at Jowai. However, lack of funds and World War II postponed those ambitions till 1953. While she conscientiously cared for patients, Margaret Buckley was less careful of her own health and contracted dysentery, typhoid and malaria. On Dr. Roberts' and Dr. Hughes' advice, she went to Wales in 1940 for rest

retiring in January 1961 at the age of 71. During those 14 years, she travelled across the entire Assam, visiting all 64 hospitals (at the time of her retirement), including those in interior areas, by road, rail, air and on foot. She would typically visit them twice a year, inspecting the nurses' quarters and the training facilities. She also conducted examinations for state certification twice a year.

In recognition of her dedicated service, Amy Bullock was awarded the International Red Cross Society's Florence Nightingale Medal in 1951. Ten years later, Queen Elizabeth II on a state visit to India, awarded her the MBE at Calcutta. Despite her busy



Sir William Marris, on 25 March, 1922. The founder, Dr. H. Gordon Roberts, realized that they needed to train their own nurses, hence he started the nursing school.

This article is a sequel to two recent articles in the Shillong Times on 'Dr. Hugh Gordon Roberts and Dr. Robert Arthur Hughes, whose names are synonymous with the Welsh Mission Hospital at Jaiaw. These surgeons however could never have made such an impact on healthcare in undivided Assam without the support of two remarkable women who were the first matrons of the hospital: Margaret Elizabeth Buckley (1887-1941) and Amy Katherine Bullock (1889-1986). Their importance is not only medical but also sociological: they influenced generations of Khasi girls into entering the nursing profession, they set high standards of nursing care and also modelled impeccable personal conduct and carriage for nurses.

Margaret Elizabeth Buckley was born on 8 February 1887 at Adfa, Montgomeryshire in Wales. Her parents shifted to Cwmparc in the famed Rhondda Valley but Margaret was for the most part brought up by her grandparents at Montgomeryshire, being greatly influenced by her grandfather, a church elder at Gerizim Presbyterian Chapel. After finishing school, she trained as a nurse at Liverpool and gained valuable experience as a district nurse in Pontardawe. She applied and was accepted for missionary service to India.

According to reports, most were village girls, about 16-20 years old, with elementary schooling and many superstitions. The school's curriculum was hygiene and basic nursing skills. Miss Buckley taught by example — washing the floor of the wards, filling mattresses with pine needles and personally attending to patients' toilet needs. Many of the trainees had tuberculosis and some died of the disease, others contracted typhoid and had to be sent home to recover. There were 35-40 nursing students, an average of 110-120 in-patients, plus 20 beds in the maternity ward. Miss Buckley was physically and mentally exhausted but received help from a Nurse Hopkins (who stayed only one year) and Katie Roberts, wife of Dr. Gordon Roberts.

Due to ill-health, Margaret went on furlough in 1925. When she returned however, things had changed, especially after the arrival of the better-trained Amy Catherine Bullock in 1929. Historical records tell of disagreements between the strong-willed Miss Buckley and the meticulous Dr. Roberts over the curriculum and training of nurses. Eventually, she volunteered to move to Jowai in 1934. After the departure of Dr. Edward Williams from Jowai in 1925, there was no resident doctor but only visiting doctors from Shillong. The old dispensary had no electricity, no piped water, no drainage system. This was exactly the kind of challenge that Miss Buckley's indepen-

and further treatment. Sadly, her desire to return to Jowai remained unfulfilled as she died on 13 January, 1941 at her sister's home at Ystrad Rhondda, Wales.

Her successor, Amy Katherine Bullock, initially had no plans to serve as a missionary nurse. Actually, she came to India in 1920 just to escort a small child to its parents at Calcutta; this extended to a lengthy tour of Darjeeling and Shillong, where she contracted typhoid. She was treated by Dr. Gordon Roberts and Margaret Buckley at the newly-opened Welsh Mission Hospital. Amy was so impressed by the hospital's work that she decided to study nursing and to return to serve in the hospital.

After training at King's College Hospital in London, followed by a course in midwifery, Amy Bullock was accepted by the Mission Board and joined the Welsh Mission Hospital as a nurse in January 1928. When Miss Buckley moved to Jowai, Miss Bullock became the matron in 1934. She provided efficient leadership and the colonial British government awarded her the Kaiser-i-Hind silver medal in 1945, which Margaret Buckley had also received in 1923. Under her guidance, the government passed the Assam Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Registration Act. Unlike her predecessor, Amy Bullock possessed tact and diplomacy.

In 1947, the Government of India appointed her as Nursing Supervisor of Assam, where she served until

schedule as Matron, Principal and later as Nursing Supervisor, she faithfully attended the Jaiaw Presbyterian Church. Interestingly, when the Anglican (now CNI) All Saints' Cathedral in Shillong built their Sunday School block in 1960, they invited Amy Bullock to lay the foundation stone. Post-retirement, she settled at Newlands, Malvern, England, where she died on 19 November, 1986 at the age of 97.

Margaret Buckley and Amy Bullock never married. It was then unwritten policy that married women couldn't continue in 'full-time' service but resigned and followed their husband to his posting. This was the case with Ann Beatrice 'Nancy' Hughes (nee Wright), wife of Dr. R.A. Hughes, Menna Philips (nee Jones), wife of Rev. T.B. Philips, and Doris Blodwen Crockett (nee Jones), wife of Rev. T.A. Crockett, who were all trained nurses. To their credit, Buckley and Bullock ensured that this policy didn't extend to Khasi nurses, but rather made provision for their maternity leave and delivery of babies at the hospital.

There were many other nurses of the Welsh Mission as well of other organizations who had all contributed to early healthcare in the Khasi Jaintia Hills. However, it was Margaret Buckley and Amy Bullock, who pioneered nursing training in Assam and shaped the public perception of nursing among the Khasis.

## War of attrition between Narendra Modi and RSS intensifies

# PM wants to be the sole arbiter for 2024 Lok Sabha polls

By Arun Srivastava

The political spectre looming over the country points to bad days. The recent political actions of Narendra Modi without any ambiguity underline the threat of India turning into an authoritarian state. Modi has turned so self-aggrandizing that he is reluctant to tolerate critics belonging to his own party.

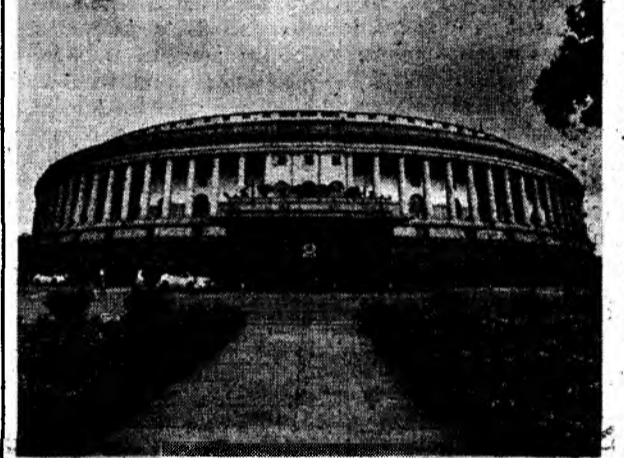
He is on a drive to weed out such elements, though done behind the veneer of revitalising the party and honouring the stalwarts. What made Modi to suddenly realise the importance of rehabilitation of the old leaders whom he had removed from the scene is really intriguing. It cannot be denied that Nitish Kumar's jolt has unnerved Modi and he has been using all kinds of machinations to boost his image and position.

Claims by his friends that in his speech from the Red Fort he has unveiled a new vision is an instance. But these people could not cite even one tangible instance. Even his friends cannot deny that Modi in the prevailing political situation he is held in low esteem. Obviously,

have found place in the new committees. Yediyurappa was forced to resign as the Chief Minister on the allegation of his being involved in corruption. Though his induction points to Modi's desire to expand in South India, it also aims at countering the domination of RSS.

Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath, who led the BJP to an unprecedented second term in the state, has not been "rewarded". He is not on good terms with Modi-Shah. It implied that he has no role to play in the decision-making process.

Modi was working on the design to combine the RSS's traditional sense of organization with the populist nature of politics. Initially he succeeded to a large extent but now in the prevailing situation he is caught in a bind. Precisely this is the reason that he is trying to present his image larger than the image of the RSS. Modi had helped the party to win municipal elections. But these utterly lacked the economic issues. It was purely based on caste equations. In a way Modi has mastered the art of using caste and communalism



the reply lies in the wisdom that he has failed to fulfil the popular expectation of the people that he would come up to their expectations and provide good governance and maintain personal integrity.

He has come to nurture the feeling that he is superior to the RSS and instead of taking calls from the RSS leaders he is dictating to them. Modi who already nursed egotism has become more arrogant. He did not like to have any adversary even in his dreams. The latest move of dropping efficient union minister Nitin Gadkari and MP chief minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan from the Parliamentary Board of the party is a candid example.

In a major reshuffle ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP on Wednesday reconstituted its two top decision-making bodies — the 11-member Parliamentary Board and 15-member Central Election Committee

dropping Nitin Gadkari and Shivraj Singh Chauhan, indicating their diminishing stock in the party. Undeniably omission of Gadkari from the powerful board signals a major generational and political shift in the highest echelons of the BJP in the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah era. Modi has sent a clear message that he is not willing to tolerate any kind criticism to his leadership.

Gadkari is also a former BJP chief and by virtue of this he should have found a place in the board. The party keeps former presidents in the decision-making process. Gadkari is also known for his proximity to RSS, closer than Modi. The party made six new entries, including Punjab cadre IPS officer Iqbal Singh Lalpura and Haryana leader Sudha Yadav, in the Parliamentary Board. Headed by President JP Nadda, the two panels include who's who of the BJP — Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and general secretary (organisation) BL Santhosh.

Significantly former Karnataka chief minister B S Yediyurappa and union minister Sarbananda Sonowal

endeavour to flood social media profiles with the national flag has not moved RSS. It also did not obey Modi's directive to change the display profiles to the tricolour to mark the 75th year of Independence. The mood could be gauged from the observation of a senior RSS functionary: "We don't take any decision under anyone's pressure. If the display pic of our official Twitter handle has to be changed, it will be done in due course of time."

The RSS leadership is beleaguered with the sense that BJP leadership has been trying to deny its inherent right to oversee the BJP's morals and manners and it does not like drafting of the senior RSS leaders into the BJP. The party leadership is pursuing its own independent political line which is not approved by the RSS though it provides foot soldiers to ensure the victory of the BJP candidates in the elections. The feedbacks received from RSS cadres working at the ground level has been quite disappointing and it feels that the BJP is losing ground with Modi being the only vote getter. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

## Traffic congestion in Shillong

Editor, Vehicular traffic is a global concern and not just in Shillong. Rising economic activities and its impact on people is increasing their purchasing power for vehicles. Almost every day a letter appears in this paper talking about the traffic woes in Shillong. However, nothing substantial has been done to ease the traffic congestion. The State Government should have enacted laws in the late 1990s to control vehicle purchase and registration. But successive Governments were not far sighted and did not handle the situation which is now leading to chaos and discomfort to the public. Though the numbers of private vehicles is rapidly growing in Shillong, so are the commercial vehicles. However, private cars and others do not circulate in the city all day long unlike the commercial mini trucks, buses, taxis etc. These commercial vehicles criss-cross

the city for 12-15 hours in a day and are the primary and leading reason for traffic congestion. Permits for commercial vehicles are issued without taking into account the capacity of the roads in Shillong and for the purpose of revenue generation. Corruption is rampant in the Transport Department. No solid regulatory authority has been set up to responsibly manage the traffic system which is left only to the police. It is still not too late now to control vehicular population in the city by enacting laws so that the general public feels that they are living in a hill station and not in a slum city.

Yours etc.,  
Dr H.S. Ranhotra,  
Shillong

## The most honest place on Earth

Editor, This is something that came on the spur of the moment and which I thought I should share with readers of the Shillong Times in

these columns of Letter to the Editor. It's here, in these columns, that most of us love to share our sense of achievements, joy, happiness, whatever with the world around us. Most times however these columns are where we express our anger at what is happening to our society. Mostly at the sense of outrage we have against people, institutions or places in and around us and actions or deeds that we believe adversely affect us and our loved ones around us. In recent times its mostly about our wayward leaders; our politicians; the glaring accumulation of wealth openly amassed at the cost of the common people or the state itself; at the absence of governance and development. With this also comes that deep sense of grievance of having been cheated, tricked and conned by and from people we expected better.

Well this time, I thought enough of that. So this is not about politics, religion, accumulating wealth, or for want of better governance. It's also not about being charitable, about being a good human being, being

nice to people or being liked and respected in life. It's nothing about these things that trouble our thoughts while we live life on earth. It's about something else. It's about something we always moan about not being there any longer. We always love to associate the faith we believe in, our culture and tradition with something we feel is no longer there with us. It's about honesty. It's about being told the truth. It's about people who give you facts as they are, warts and all. About a place where people just can't afford to tell you anything else but the truth. So does such a place exist here on earth? Are there still people around capable of this desired quality? If so, where and how does one come across such delightful, sincere, frank, honest citizens? Where indeed?

Sorry its none of the above. Instead it's in a place run and managed by people who can't afford to tell you anything else but the truth! So is it a Church, a Temple, A Mosque, a holy place of worship run by priests and those who claim they are ordained by God? Sorry! Wrong num-

ber but don't be in a tearing hurry to visit the place I have in mind. I am confident and quite sure that it's the last place any one of you would want to be in, for this place I am talking about is a Hospital! You're admitted into one and especially if you are in a really critical condition caused especially by over-indulgence of bad habits, the doctors who treat you have no other choice but to tell you the hard facts of life. Unlike loved ones, family or friends there is no coaxing or sweetening of facts in this place. You're told the bitter truth about yourself, how you are the main culprit for the state you are in and of the unpleasant consequences you are likely to bear and carry to your grave. Doctors can be friendly, smiling and courteous to a fault but they can be honestly brutal with facts when they need to. For them and their patients under such circumstances, Honesty is the best Policy! Yes a hospital is where an abundance of truth still exists!

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request  
Via email

## Drug menace in the city

Editor, It was a great move by the Shillong Cantonment Board to demolish the illegal housings in Jhalupara recently. However, what's more concerning is the prevalence of drug addicts in the area. On August 16, I happened to visit the area and what I witnessed was two guys injecting themselves with drugs. They were sharing the same syringe which was even more horrifying.

I have a humble request to the Police Narcotics team and other concerned NGOs to look into the matter. The area will emerge as a breeding ground for drug addicts if timely action is not taken.

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

*"Often the most unexpected, unpredictable moments in life are the ones that leave the biggest impression and that teach us to roll with the punches."*

— Natalya Neidhart

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 10 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 2022

### Bilkis Bano Case & The Law

THE Bilkis Bano case reeks of a convoluted application of the law where those who are tasked with upholding it have gone berserk. The case dates back to the Godhra riots of 2002 where the 21 year old and pregnant Bilkis Bano who tried to escape a mob was gang-raped while the head of her three year old daughter was smashed by the murderers. Other members of her family were murdered. Bilkis Bano was an eye-witness to all this horror. Eleven men were identified by Bilkis. They were convicted of rape and murder by the court in 2008. They have now been freed after 14 years in jail on the basis of an executive decree dating back to 1992 which grants remission to prisoners on the basis of good conduct inside the prison. This, when the order for such remission was already thrown out in 2014!

It is one thing to engage in hair-splitting arguments and quite another to ensure justice is done in a case as shocking as this. Bilkis Bano's experience was horrendous and nerve-racking for all those who know the details. In fact, it involved rape of several hapless women as also killing of many including children, at a besieged home in the aftermath of the Godhra train burning incident. The case was transferred to a Mumbai court which convicted the rapists. When the plea for remission of the life sentence of the accused reached the Supreme Court, it directed the Gujarat government to take a decision based on its Remission policy of 1992 that existed when the crime occurred in 2002. The state government now claims that it was a loosely drafted order – giving the BJP dispensation sufficient scope to act in favour of the convicts. It would look as if the government was simply waiting for this opportunity to hurriedly sit and decide on the matter. Note the fact that speed is normally not an attribute of our governments while responding to such matters.

Most glaringly, the Gujarat Government bared its saffron fangs. Its action is anti-woman, anti-minority and inhuman. Those who indulge in gang-rape and manslaughter do not deserve sympathy. While agreeing that courts have to go by the prescriptions in the rule book but situations like these would require them to look at matters from the humanitarian points of view as well. The justice dispensation system grants as much elbow room for them to hold forth. The message that this remission of sentence sends out to the wider world and to the minorities within the country is one of utter hopelessness.

# North East Christian Churches & Clean Elections Movement

By Philip Marwein

Of all the North Eastern states the elections in Mizoram are exceptionally free, fair and just as claimed by many sections in that state and outside including government authorities. This is thanks to Presbyterian Church, the Young Mizo Association and the civil societies. How is this possible? The answer is simple. Because free, fair and just elections (clean elections) has become a people's movement. Each voter has vowed to make each election clean because each one has understood his/her sacred democratic right of franchise. This has come about as a result of many factors and it is too long a list to enumerate the factors in this limited space. But the major credit for clean elections in Mizoram is due to the hard and zealous works of the Mizoram Peoples Forum (MPF) which comprises several church bodies and civil society groups mainly the YMA. It is indeed their commitment, dedication, unity, co-operation, co-ordination and understanding to ensure clean, fair, just, free and successful elections in Mizoram in the past and they promise to continue to be so even in future as long as the MPF exists.

Specific mention must be made here, that the prime movers and the engine of the bold initiatives for free, fair and just (clean elections or clean politics) in Mizoram definitely comes from the Presbyterian Church Synod and the Young Mizo Association. The rest of the NGOs and Civil Societies which together constitute the MPF, came in later to form a powerful lobby to ensure smooth preparations, processes, participation and conduct of elections. The fact that each and every election in Mizoram is free, fair, just and clean from all sorts of fear and favours, evil designs and devices, corruption and corrupt practices is because of the ability of the MPF to organise, guard, supervise, monitor and control everything up-to the booth level. Another important aspect that must be prominently highlighted in connection with elections in Mizoram is the fact that all political parties, including Independents, and the MPF have to agree to work together and cooperate to ensure clean, free, fair and just elections by adhering to the rules and provisions laid down by the MPF to be signed by representatives of political parties, Independents (if there are any) and the representatives of MPF. This is called signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The signing of the MoU with all political parties applies not only for the Assembly elections but also for MP, District Council, Aizawl Municipal Corporation, Aizawl Local Council and even Village Council Elections.

It is of utmost importance

to highlight some important points contained in the MoU prepared and laid down by the powerful body, the MPF, some of which are taken from ECI strictures. Foremost is that each stakeholder involved in the election should ensure that it is clean, fair and just. Each voter should cast his/her vote willingly, freely and no free transport from candidates or their agents is allowed to reach the polling booth. It asks candidates to strictly adhere to the ceiling of expenditure, no cash, no favours, no gifts in cash or kind

*"What each Christian denomination does within their four walls with regards to clean elections and clean politics is not known."*

*What all eligible Christians voters in Meghalaya know, like non-Christian voters do, is to sheepishly and obediently exercise their right to franchise on polling days as notified by the ECI."*

to any individual or groups even tea and snacks are not allowed to be served during or after meetings. Flags, posters, banners, badges are strictly regulated and fixed in size and number and places to be displayed. The provisions in the MoU strictly disallow picnics, partying, borrowing or taking foodstuffs from shops during elections lest it leads to corrupt tactics played by candidates.

Once elections are declared by the ECI, parties and candidates are not allowed to hold election processions and rallies. Even public election campaigns and common platforms are held and organised only under the guidance and supervision of the MPF members: even house to house canvassing

*"On various malpractices, corruption and corrupt practices before and during elections to Parliament, State Assembly and District Councils, Meghalaya is not at all free from these evils, but certainly it is nowhere near the scale of Nagaland."*

can be held only with the supervision of members of MPF. Public entertainers are not allowed to campaign during elections. Misuse of social media to spread false propaganda, misinformation, misrepresentation etc., are banned and not permitted by MPF and also punishable by law. Besides, manifestoes, policy and programmes which are false and which cannot be fulfilled are totally banned even by ECI.

On setting up of candidates by political parties the MPF is very strict by putting forward certain stringent conditions. Parties are pointedly asked not to set up people of disrepute, having infamous

character and having adverse antecedents, having criminal records, infidelity backgrounds, unstable character, unsound mind, quarrelsome and other antisocial records in society. However, MPF values candidates who are law abiding, righteous, religious, educated and cooperative, with good reputation, blameless, trustworthy, capable and free from corruption.

While it is a fact that the Election Commission of India conducts elections in Mizoram through the State election machinery but the

responsibility shouldered by the MPF to ensure clean, free, fair and just elections is indeed praiseworthy. It has made the task of the ECI and the Mizoram state Election machinery very light. Actually, it is the MPF that is running the whole show right from the time of announcement of the election schedules till the time of voting. In fact, the whole election process and electioneering is closely monitored by MPF. Violation by any candidate or his election agent / canvassers of any rule and provision contained in the MoU agreed and signed by the parties involved invites strict action by MPF and unfair practices are declared publicly in the concerned constituency / constituencies wherever the

violation or breach has occurred.

Coming to Meghalaya which has about 76 per cent Christian population with several Christian denominations – the majority being Catholics, Presbyterians and the Baptists, so far the Christian churches in Meghalaya have not taken any stance on having clean elections (clean politics) like that of NBCC in Nagaland and Presbyterian Church Synod in Mizoram. Neither did it jointly or otherwise issued any standing written orders, instructions or notifications to that effect to the Christian faithful to follow and practise accordingly. Once in a blue moon a loose

entity by the name Khasi-Jaintia Church Leaders Forum (KJCLF) appears on the scene from nowhere appealing to political parties of Meghalaya to rein in their elected legislators (MLAs/MP/MDCs) and ensure probity in public life. Once or twice during the last 50 years this Forum has appealed to the public (voters) of Meghalaya through media to elect legislators that are capable, have integrity are God-fearing etc. But nowhere have they mentioned that corrupt practices should be curbed during elections. That is all from the Christian Churches as a whole here. What each Christian denomination does within their four walls with regards to clean elections and clean politics is not known. What all eligible Christians voters in Meghalaya know, like non-Christian voters do, is to sheepishly and obediently exercise their right to franchise on polling days as notified by the ECI.

On various malpractices, corruption and corrupt practices before and during elections to Parliament, State Assembly and District Councils, Meghalaya is not at all free from these evils, but certainly it is nowhere near the scale of Nagaland. But regarding voting on polling days it has been found that over the years they have been free and to a large extent fair and peaceful. However, the diabolical tactics and corrupt practices indulged in by political parties, candidates, their sponsors, financiers and agents are rampant. Favours, gifts and money are still very attractive to voters in exchange for votes and at times even en-bloc voters are won over by such baits.

Religion still plays a key role even today in the choice of candidates at party levels and while voting. The major reason as to why clean, transparent and accountable governance is absent in the state and also why there is high prevalence of mal-practices and corruption before and during elections is because those leading the Christian churches here are cowards. They are too scared to come out openly and take on the government and its agencies head-on by publicly speaking out and openly condemning corruption, corrupt practices and various other evils. The same thing happens before and during elections. The Christian churches are laid-back and stay in their own comfort zones and just watch the drama from afar. This indifference emboldens the perpetrators of wrongdoings both in times of elections and in governance. The worst worry and fear for well-intentioned people of Meghalaya is to act and pray that the temple of democracy (Legislative Assembly) will never be filled up and dominated by crooks of the politician-bureaucrat-business class nexus. We can very well imagine what the future will hold for the 36 lakh people of the state if such a thing happens.

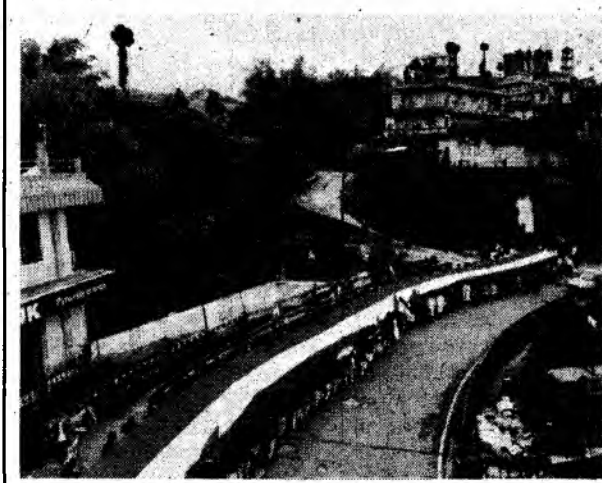
## Let there be true and authentic celebration of Independence

By D. V. Kumar

India is celebrating 75 years of independence and rightly so. Independence day constitutes a momentous day in the life of a nation. It represents the possibility of fulfilling hopes and aspirations of billions of people and therefore it is something one cherishes and emotionally becomes attached to. True and authentic celebration of independence day actually involves celebrating the fundamental values which guided the freedom struggle that led to independence in 1947. One needs to reaffirm the values which were in the forefront of our freedom struggle in the process of celebrating independence day. Otherwise it would be an empty celebration. Carrying tiranga and chanting slogans may be part of an officious definition of celebration of independence but that would be only symbolic in nature. Real celebration of independence calls for celebration of those values which guided

and different forms of oppression. He emerged as the most authentic voice of the oppressed section of the society. There were serious arguments between Gandhi and Ambedkar over what should demand their attention-the political question of independence or the socio-cultural issue of emancipation of dalits. But they had the sagacity and maturity to engage with each other despite such sharp differences in the larger interest of India.

Then there was Nehru who had sharp differences with Gandhi over the question of large scale industrialisation of India. He had immense faith in the ability of the big industry to solve the massive problems that India was facing but Gandhi reposed faith in the small scale sector and village economy. In fact, Nehru had a problematical relation with the very idea of nationalism especially



our freedom struggle.

What were those values which guided our struggle against colonialism which need to be reaffirmed on the occasion of 75 years of independence? These values are democracy, secularism, pluralism and respect for the dignity of the other. It needs to be recalled that our national movement was not a homogenous and monolithic movement. It had multiple currents, thought processes and different narratives yied for their space within the freedom movement. There was Gandhi, the biggest and the tallest nationalist among them for whom the goal of total independence was non-negotiable. At the same time, he was quite disturbed by the kind of destructive nationalist passions

because of what happened in Europe in the name of nationalism. But at the same time, he saw a great need to fight for independence from the British under the inexorable influence of Gandhi. The revolutionary ideas of Bhagat Singh and Subhas Chandra Bose, which created a sense of discomfort for Gandhi, competed for space within the nationalist struggle. Bhagat Singh was aware of the contradictions in the society which undermined the nationalist struggle. The caste system, untouchability and communalism posed a great threat to the success of the national movement. He felt that unless these were tackled effectively, the possibility of achieving truly democratic and free India was greatly

*"There was Gandhi, the biggest and the tallest nationalist among them for whom the goal of total independence was non-negotiable. At the same time, he was quite disturbed by the kind of destructive nationalist passions that Europe saw and called for a nationalism which was based on democracy and respect for each other."*

that Europe saw and called for a nationalism which was based on democracy and respect for each other. In his own words, "it is not nationalism that is evil, it is the narrowness, selfishness and exclusives which is the bane of modern nations which is the evil". It is this enlightened understanding of what nationalism should mean which made him lead the most non-violent and peaceful anti-colonial struggle. Then we had Ambedkar for whom political democracy would be incomplete without social democracy. The startling socio-economic disparities and the subjugation and marginalisation of a large section of the society, that is, Dalits must be overcome just as the fight against the oppressive colonial rule happened. He argued that independence would not mean much for those who were on the margins of society and even if one achieved independence for the country, it would mean freedom only for the powerful and dominant sections of the society. Real freedom should include removal of stark socio-economic disparities

compromised. As one can see that there were critical differences among all those mentioned above but they had great respect for each other and none of them accused the other of being anti-national and unpatriotic. What is that which was common to them because of which they were able to work together and respect each other. It was their immense faith in the fundamental values of human existence, that is, secularism, democracy, pluralism and respect for the dignity of the other. Without these values guiding them, they would have found themselves at loggerheads with each other and unable to launch a concerted attack on British colonial rule.

Therefore, today when we are celebrating 75 years of independence, let us not lose sight of these fundamental values which guided our freedom struggle. The very essence of independence would be lost if we do not respect and uphold these values.

(D. V. Kumar is Professor, Dept of Sociology, NEHU, Shillong)

### Letters to the Editor

#### To fertilise or not to fertilise

Editor,

Social media platforms in the last two days have come up with a very interesting development on a major policy shift of this MDA Govt relating to Agriculture and Agriculture production. It is interesting because the Government claims that it is approaching this major policy decision based on the demands of the agriculturists. Concern is no mention was made of the needs of the larger section of society which goes beyond the vested interests of a few farmers. Here things get interesting as it is evident that the major policy decision (already taken it seems) springs solely from the demands of organised groups of farmers from East Khasi Hills only. What about the views/opinions of farmers from the other 11 districts of the state? Apparently not taken. Question is whether a

major policy decision affecting the whole state be taken based only on the demands of a few farmers from one district only? Who are these farmers? Do they represent the interest of farmers of the state or only the electoral interests of a few politicians? The haste of the decision, on the eve of elections, raises public suspicion.

Meanwhile the Minister for Agriculture who belongs to the PDF speaks on this major policy decision in one voice while the Dy CM, who has nothing to do with Agriculture (but who interestingly belongs to the NPP) speaks in another voice. So is the MDA coalition which from the very start had no Minimum Common Policy and which has been steaming along in fits and starts; knee jerk reactions (called Policies) in another of its epileptic fits to please individual political constituencies?

The decision to revert to a fertiliser cum pesticide mode of Agriculture and of abandoning the Organic Policy enunciated earlier appears to

be based on the low production ratio between Organic and Inorganic agricultural products. True, but this is no recent earth-shaking discovery. It was known from the start. The higher price of organic products was felt sufficient to counter the loss of quantity of production. Problem here is the non-existence or official follow up on a lucrative market for organic products. Government was supposed to have facilitated such markets, within and outside the state. This was not done. In view of Government failure to do this, is the decision to junk Organic farming and revert back to inorganic farming justified?

The earlier decision to go in for organic farming was based primarily on three main issues (a) that organic products fetched a higher price.(b) It was more suitable for upland farming such as ours and is the globally preferred mode in a World that is desperately seeking to reduce chemical footprints in agricultural practices(c)

to prevent unregulated and unsupervised use of pesticides, especially on vegetables, which were sold and consumed by people of East Khasi Hills. The high incidence of cancer in EKHs was linked to this factor. So, is the health of the public to be sacrificed for a few rupees profit of some farmers?

In view of the above major factors the whole state of Meghalaya needs to be considered before any major long term policy decision is taken on the subject. (a) Since the health of consumers is now under question, it is unfair/unwise/unhealthy/politically unethical for such a decision to be taken by the Agriculture Department alone without the considered opinion of the Health Department. Has this been done? If not then why not, if only in the interest of the general public? (b) If no proper scientific research has been conducted to support such a major policy shift, how can the same be endorsed by a few politicians, whose academic qualifications and ca-

capacity to understand, leaves much to be desired, without a wider public discourse on the subject in the public domain. Scoring political brownie points is uncalled for. Approaching elections or not a more in-depth examination on the subject is called for.

It is totally unethical to make such a decision based only on the demands of a few farmers, who perhaps are supporters of some politician or the other, taking advantage of approaching elections to achieve more profits. Political expediency cannot be at the cost of the welfare of the general public. These farmers seem to be interested only in the profit they make. This is understood. What is difficult to understand is for the cabinet to be influenced by such demands alone without taking into consideration the wider ramifications of such decisions.

These doubts are being raised not because of political preferences of one party over the other. They are the outcome from concerns for the general welfare of a

larger public. We all know that Assembly elections are approaching and of the need for politicians to appease their voter base and supporters. But should this be done at the cost of the health of the people? The electorate has to decide. It cannot remain dumb and quiet on such crucial issues. As a former agriculture officer serving in another state I feel compelled to raise my concerns and hence this letter.

In view of the dangers posed by chemical fertilisers and pesticides to human lives, may I ask what the other MLAs who are not in the Government have to say about this potentially dangerous move of the MDA Government which seems to be aimed at commerce at the cost of public health.

Yours etc.,  
AK Mukherjee,  
Via email

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

# What The Most Hated Man on the Internet gets right (and wrong) about 'revenge porn'



The most hated man on the internet, according to a new Netflix docuseries, is Hunter Moore. The convicted criminal and self-described "professional life ruiner" Moore enabled the non-consensual distribution of thousands of private images by founding "revenge porn" website Is Anyone Up?

The documentary captures what revenge porn is, how it is carried out and how traumatic it can be for victims. The women in the series were not stereotyped as being naïve or at fault, as they often are in media coverage. The series showed how the thousands of people who share the image play a role in revenge porn, not just the first person to upload them.

As a former probation officer, I'm interested in how society views sexual crime, and how we treat women who are victims. The docuseries could have gone further by talking about brave women as victims of gender-based violence, not just "revenge porn".

This term overlooks that private images shared without consent are not always actually pornographic. It also blames the victim, because it suggests they did something to deserve revenge. While I've used it above as most readers will be familiar with the term, for the rest of the article I will talk instead about image-based sexual abuse.

The series doesn't make especially clear that it is normal to take and send images of yourself as

part of sexual self-expression, but when someone shares them without consent, it can be a form of domestic abuse. The internet is saturated with such images. There are now over 3,000 websites dedicated to image-based sexual abuse, and reports to the government's revenge porn helpline are increasing year on year.

Victims of revenge porn become isolated and frightened of what others think of them. Because of this, many experience mental health issues including PTSD and depression.

As the docuseries showed, victims are usually female. Data from early 2022 shows that in the UK, 81% were. Their images are generally shared without their permission by men, though not usually those who hack into their accounts. Most image-based sexual abuse is perpetrated by ex-partners.

Many people imagine an angry ex-partner commits this crime for retaliation after an unwanted break-up. However, this is not always the case. A 2021 study of over 2,000 British people conducted by the law firm Slater & Gordon found some men wanted to scare their victim. Others thought it was "a laugh", an attitude shared by the perpetrators in the Netflix documentary.

We live in a society where misogyny and male entitlement leads to violence against women and girls. "Upskirting" and images of breastfeeding taken without consent are also forms of sexual abuse, and evidence of the sexual harm caused

to women in our society. A 2017 study found that the impact on victims of this kind of sexual abuse is similar to that of sexual assault. On this basis, many campaigners and researchers argue it should be a specific sexual crime.

### WHAT THE SERIES DOESN'T COVER

The *Most Hated Man on the Internet* series gave a sense of what was happening in the US, but not in the UK. To tackle this crime, the UK government is trying to regulate the internet. The online safety bill proposes forcing internet providers to be more proactive in removing image-based sexual abuse, rather than waiting for victims to report it.

In England and Wales, "revenge porn" became a specific offence in 2015, with a penalty of up to two years in prison. The threat of sharing non-consensual private images became illegal in 2021.

Even with these laws, victims are understandably reluctant to speak to police. This isn't helped when police officers don't have enough training or understanding about these experiences. Some officers have blamed women for being victims of image-based sexual abuse. Currently, only a fraction of police reports of image-based sexual abuse lead to a charge or summons to court.

When victims do report, one third of them don't pursue a charge because they cannot be guaranteed anonymity in a "communications offence". If image-based sexual abuse was a sexual offence, then

victims would have to be kept anonymous.

### VICTIM SUPPORT

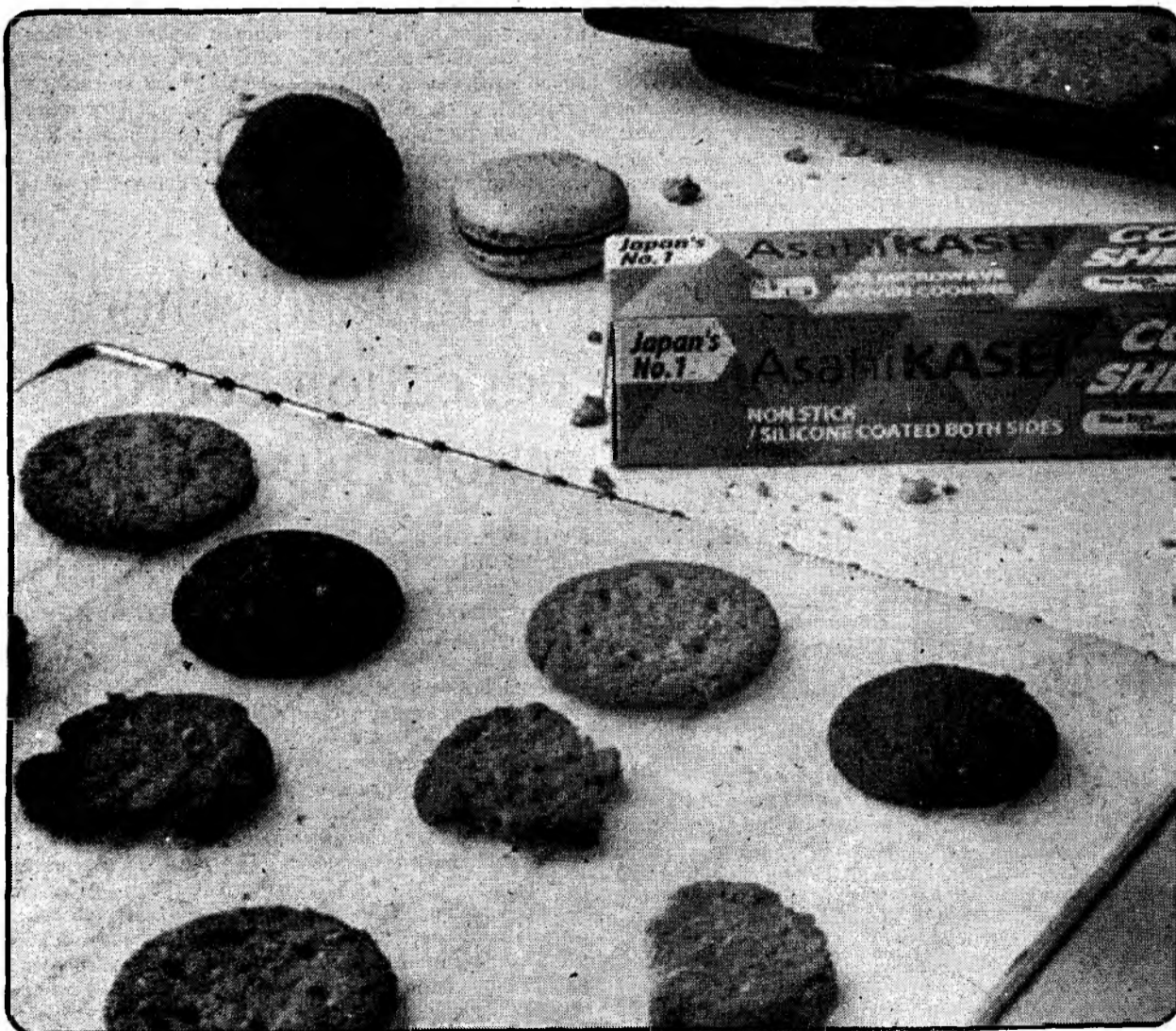
Another thing the docuseries showed was the importance of family support, both for the victim on an emotional level, and in seeking justice. The highlight of the series, for me, was Charlotte Laws, the mother of one of Moore's victims. She campaigned against his website, and didn't stop once her daughter's image were taken down. She supported other victims and the FBI in a fight for justice against Hunter Moore.

Victims of image-based sexual abuse clearly need support, but not all have someone like Charlotte. Destiny Benedict, another of Moore's victims, has since discussed how vulnerable and isolated she felt during her experience. The docuseries portrays Moore manipulating Benedict into sending him more content so he would remove photos of her children from his website.

The UK government has recently increased funding for the Revenge Porn Helpline. The helpline is a place for people to report being a victim, but also a source of support which helps take images down.

The *Most Hated Man on the Internet* has drawn important attention to this issue, but there is more we can all do to support victims of revenge porn, starting with recognising it for the abuse it is. (*The Conversation*)

## Bake more and worry less!



One secret that every beginner baker wants to know is how to demold your cakes and cupcakes without it getting stuck on the bottom or having uneven edges, or how to bake your cookies without worrying about puddles of butter all around the cookie. The answer to all these problems is a cooking sheet. Thanks to the innovative Cooking Sheet, you can bake more and worry less!

### But have you heard of a cooking sheet?

Luve Oberoi, Sr. Marketing Manager, Asahi Kasei India, says, "It is basically a baking paper that is silicone-coated on both sides to prevent food from sticking so that

you can bake without making any mess. Just place the sheet on the tray or pan inside the oven and you're ready to go! These sheets are not new, they have been used by professionals for a while but they are becoming a common piece of cookware at home and have several advantages that are certainly worth knowing."

He continued...

**NON-STICK:** You don't need to use any butter or oil to grease the pan when you are using the Cooking Sheet. It is non-sticky and leaves no stain on the sheet. The silicon-coated on both sides of the sheet makes it a viable option for being a healthy and regular choice for all baking needs as

it can be used in both Microwave and Oven. The dual-use enhances the importance of the product.

**HEAT RESISTANT:** It is heat-resistant which means it won't burn in the oven, allowing anyone to bake anything at the highest temperature of a recipe's needs. The paper does not crumble even in high temperatures of up to 250 degrees kept for approximately 20 minutes. It provides adequate heat required to properly bake the product and prepare a freshly cooked delicacy to enjoy. You just have to place the sheet on the tray or pan inside the oven and you're done. Leave the rest to see the magic it creates. The quality of silicone used in the product makes it a perfect fit for

all baking needs.

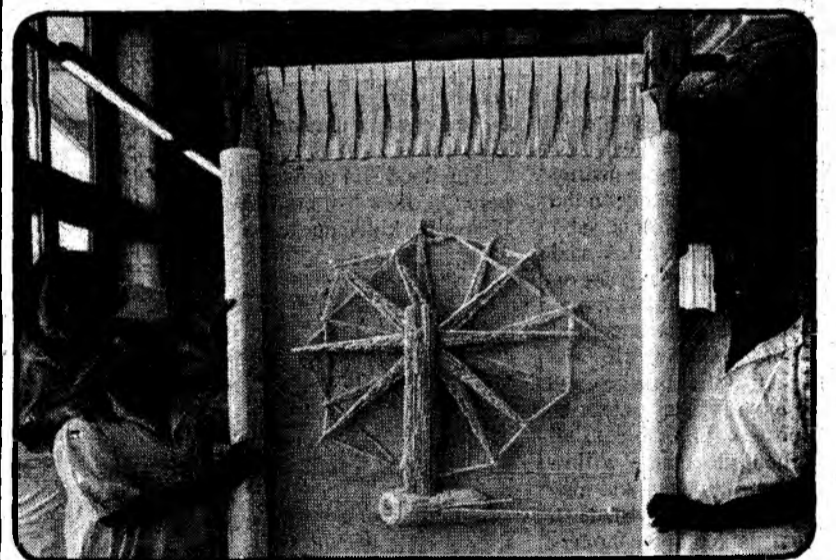
**EASY CLEANING AND CUTTING:** It is a non-sticky and non-greasy paper which makes it quite easy for anyone to clean the tray or the pan as it leaves no stain on the tray or the pan. One just needs to remove the sheet after use and that's it - no cleaning is required at all. To make the task easy, these Cooking Sheets have an inbuilt cutter and can be easily torn from the roll in a hassle-free way.

**VARIED USES:** It is a versatile product that has many varied uses in the cooking process. It is a grease-proof paper that makes it feasible for being used more than once for the same recipe. It can also be used for making a soft dough where no direct contact with a rolling pin is required and only a pinch of flour is required. It can also be used as a wrapping paper to wrap Frankies, Wraps, and Rolls. Not just this but it can also be used to bake in a Microwave as well as in the Oven.

**A HEALTHY CHOICE TO SWITCH:** Eating healthy does not require one to give up one's favourite foods but less calorie intake is important for a healthy lifestyle. So this cooking sheet comes to your rescue as there is no need to use any butter or oil to grease the sheet before use which makes it a healthy switching option as it reduces the calorie intake to a great extent. There is also no need to use cooking spray to avoid sticking the food to the pan.

**COOKING SHEETS:** They are also great for dessert that you cannot simply flip over but actually need to lift out of your baking pans. Millionaire shortbread, brownies, fudge, dessert bars, and other desserts that if you flip over, might fall apart or create a messy dessert. You can essentially bake, roast, cook, and much more with these sheets, which are easily the most overworked and underappreciated items in any kitchen, yet using them will give you a brilliant culinary advantage. (*IANSLife*)

## Spotlight on Indian Textiles & Craftsmanship



Sutr Santati, an exhibition, brings together various textile traditions from around India to commemorate 75 years since the country became independent. It was planned and produced by some of the nations most renowned artisans, craftspeople, designers, and artists. They see the topics, methods, and materials employed in the specifically commissioned fabrics shown here through the prism of innovation. By doing this, they emphasise the role of fabric, a significant legacy of Indian nationalism, in defining the nations modern cultural scene and advancing its inventiveness. Sutr Santati literally translates to "yarn consistency." The title of the show serves as a metaphor for the continuing conversations that define Indian culture and society and unite the past and present. This, its second version, is built on the principles of ecological preservation and workmanship. The first, which debuted in 2018-19 and celebrated Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birthday, was titled 'Santati Mahatma Gandhi: Then Now Next' and honoured his progressive viewpoints on sustainability and circular industries via

textiles, fashion, and design. Textiles made by hand weaving, embroidery, resist dyeing, printing, painting, and applique, among other techniques for modifying yarn and fabric, are on display. Local fibres including Kandu and Kala cotton, mulberry and wild silks, camel and sheep wool, goat and yak hair, as well as lotus, banana, and water hyacinth, are used in these commissions. The exhibition's curatorial vision is to advance the concepts of organic and slow consumerism in defining a country's self-worth, such as India, as well as the inherent group and collaborative efforts that are necessary to advance such objectives. The rural and the urban, the historical and the modern, and most importantly the local and the global, come together on this road. The Abheraj Baldota Foundation is hosting the Lavina Baldota-curated exhibition. Nearly 75 participants from a variety of backgrounds-including fashion and textile designers, craftspeople, artists, textile revivalists, organizations/NGOs, and design institutions - are on show. (*IANSLife*)

# New Zealand: A paradise for those with the lens



From magnificent mountain peaks to wild coastal beaches and vibrant urban centers, New Zealand is a photographer's dream in every way. Year-round, majestic vistas and evergreen forests present numerous possibilities for capturing stunning imagery. The diversity of the landscapes that can be captured here is unlike anywhere else on earth - the photo opportunities are endless.

In summer, take advantage of the long days and warm, golden light. As summer turns to autumn, the crowds disappear leaving open countryside with clear crisp blue skies. Snow-capped mountains, misty landscapes, and flowing waterfalls are the hallmarks of winter. In spring the return of warmer weather brings a stunning display of wildflowers mixed with frolicking wildlife. Here are some great tips for photography in New Zealand through their majestic seasons:

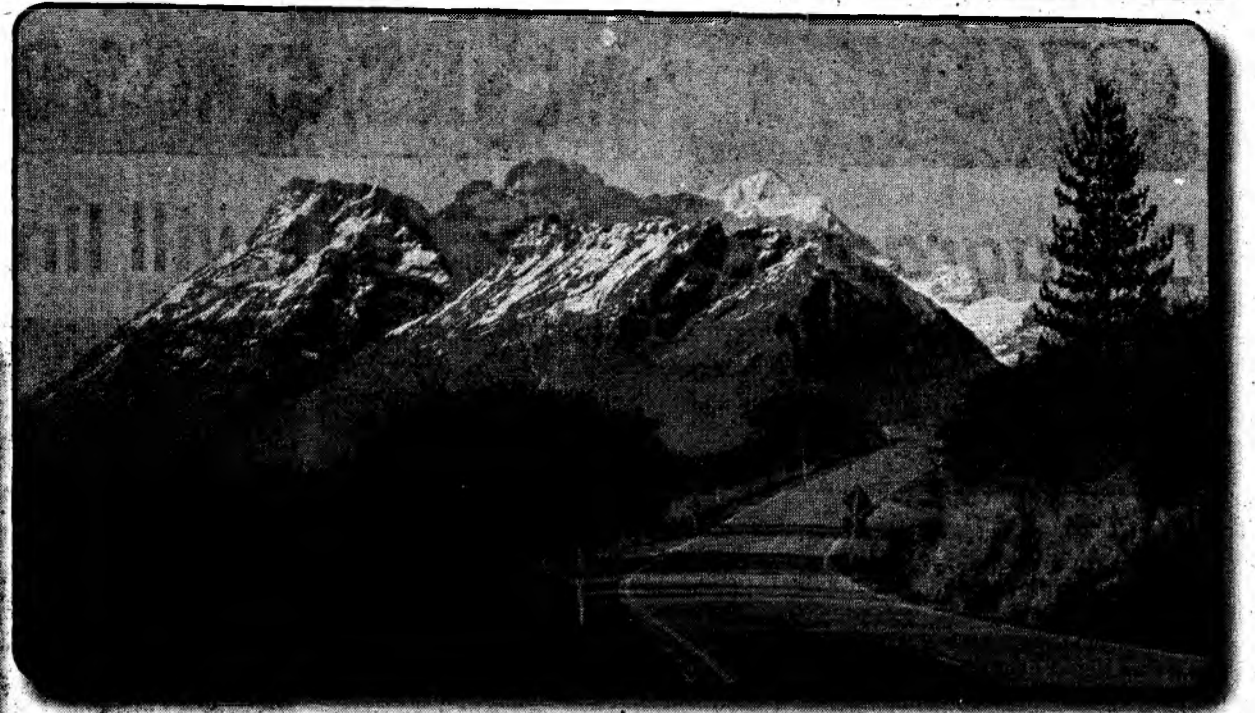
## Capture the warmth of the pleasant summer breeze during spring (September - November)

Spring is one of the perfect seasons to click images that carry a pleasant summer breeze. Spring in New Zealand is a great time for photography, and

there are a number of different interesting subjects to point your camera at. Photos of New Zealand in spring will often feature the lupin - a beautiful blue/purple flower abundant in many of our national parks. New Zealand has around 200 species of fern, the fern 'koru' is often photographed - this is the tightly rolled spiral shape of new fronds or leaves. Another popular subject amongst photographers visiting in spring, is the Aurora Australis, or Southern Lights. The phenomenon is visible quite often in winter and spring, and with the temperatures rising, spring is a more pleasant time to stand outdoors with your camera late at night.

## Photograph sunshine and playful wildlife during summer (December - February)

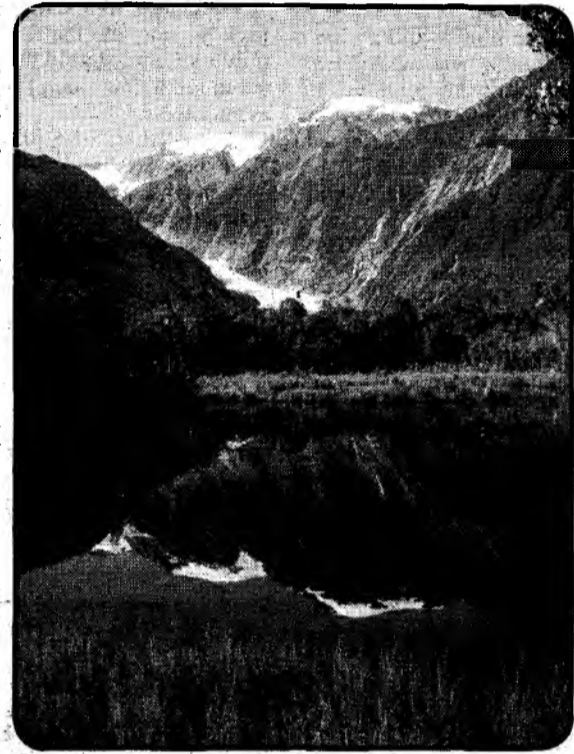
Summer in New Zealand sees the Fiordland crested penguin returning to Milford Sound on the South Island's lower West Coast. New Zealand fur seals and several species of dolphin can also be spotted there at this time of year, so it is recommended to grab your camera and test out your eye for a wildlife snap in Fiordland National Park. The great thing about photography in a setting as beautiful as



Milford Sound is that if the wildlife aren't playing ball, or you can't get close enough, the sheer cliffs of granite, plunging into the dark depths of the sound make for some incredible and equally rewarding captures. In picturesque Queenstown, keep an eye out for the warm light of the long days in the Wakatipu Basin, sunsets there are often amongst the most impressive on the planet. For those who like their subjects a little more adventurous, why not go find the rope swing at Lake Hayes, or 'Little Thailand' on Lake Wakatipu, and snap people throwing themselves bravely into the refreshing waters of the lakes around the Queenstown area?

## Frame the auburn leaves captured during Autumn (March - May)

Autumn in New Zealand is a beautiful time of year to capture some beautiful tones of red and yellow. The deciduous trees turn from green to red, orange, and yellow, and the ground is blanketed in different shades of autumn leaves. The small gold mining settlement of Arrowtown, in the Wakatipu Basin near Queenstown, is arguably the best spot in the country to capture the changes in the autumn season. Beautiful, traditional wooden storefronts characterize the main street of Arrowtown, alongside the majestic



poplars shedding their spring and summer leaves as the temperatures fall.

## Capture the snow paradise during winter (June - August)

Crisp, clear blue skies, snow-capped hills as far as the eye can see, and icy blue lakes describe winters in New Zealand. New Zealand's North Island is characterized by its geothermal activity, and its famous volcanoes include Mt Taranaki, Mt Ruapehu, Mt Ngauruhoe, and Mt Tongariro. They are mighty impressive in the winter, and when blanketed with fresh snowfall there are few mountains in the world that look more impressive. A visit to the Chateau Tongariro in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Tongariro National Park gives an opportunity to photograph the unique architecture of the Chateau, with the backdrop of snow-covered volcanoes, and we don't think there's anything quite like it anywhere else on Earth.

With New Zealand's borders being opened to all, it's time to visit New Zealand and discover the photographer in you. (IANSlife)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi

Sunday, AUGUST 21, 2022

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart and it will give favorable results. You will have monetary gains but your expenses will mount. Your business will flourish. All your business expenses plans will get implemented. You will also get a good job offer. You could be promoted in your job as well. Some enemies or opponents may try to conspire against you. You need to be careful in money matters. Although you will do your work with lot of cleverness and tact, still you need to show wisdom and patience. Always take into confidence your trustworthy fellows. You will be successful in matters related to heart. Your spouse/partner will understand your feelings well. You will give enough time to your family members. The property disputes between you and your siblings will get resolved amicably. If you work systematically you will surely earn good profits. Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is going to be a fantastic week for you. There will be modesty and gentleness in your behavior. You will be able to make lot of name and fame for yourself. You will go for a change in your image. You will have lot of positivity and your work will get completed. You will have concentration in your job and business. It will result in good changes leading to good things happening to you. You will also take proper steps to make things better. Your prestige will grow. It is a good time and you will make good progress. Your faith in God will be stronger. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. This time will bring a new meaning and new light in your life. There will be good bonding with your siblings. You will be caring about the need of your family members. Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

The time will be totally suitable. You will have time to fulfill your aspirations and dreams. You will be devoted towards your work. You will also make best use of internet and social media platform. You will get lot of information about your subject. It will be a knowledge gaining week. You will also have a good time with your family. You can also attend parties and functions. If you are a bachelor, there are chances of an engagement or a wedding. You will have achievements on your own abilities and skill. You will prosper in your business. You will decide your targets. Take care of your elder's health. Legal matters will get settled. Financially and in business you will have profits. You will make good investments of money. You will have the best pleasures of life. Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

It will be a favorable time period for you. You will put your best in your work. You will be full of energy. There will be financial profits. You will be cheerful and happy. You will have lot of self confidence. You will also make a new start. There will be lot of travelling to do. You will meet lot of people and make lot of money. You will be successful. You will enjoy entertain along with doing work. You will spend pleasant time with your loved ones. It will be all profitable days. You will have close friend's support. You will also recover your money. Means of pleasure will come down. Your family will support you a lot. Pending work will speed up. You will also benefit in partnership with your associates in business. Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

The time will be suitable. You will get rid of past problems. You will also start new projects. You will be successful in exams, interviews and competitions. You will have a wonderful romantic life. Lovers will meet each other. You can be preparing for special functions and festivals. You will also make efforts to solve their problems. It will be all beneficial days. You will be benefited from everywhere. You will get your favorable results. You will also take a few risks. Marriage of a family member will get fixed. You will be working hard to get success in life. Your public contacts will be expanded. Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The benevolent Jupiter will bring lot of financial success for you. You will have monetary gains. You will be working hard to get success. You will be in the mood for only work. Your peers and superiors will cooperate with you. You will also enjoy quality time with your family members. You will be in a mood of merriment. You can go to a cinema or party. Your self confidence will be much higher. Your public contacts will also expand. You will get wealth and money. Love birds will have a wonderful time. Your materialistic pleasures will increase. You will also leave some new skills. You will get rid of past problems and new projects will get started. Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There will be lot of profits in your work and business. You will be satisfied with what you get. You will put your best efforts, but its results will come later. You will take steps in the direction of fulfilling your long timewishes, dreams and ambitions. You

will get good job/business offers. Your associates will make way for you. You will travel a distance to improve your ties with your relatives. You will be trying your best to strengthen the relations. The time will be favorable. You will win the battle of life. In the office despite the rivals opposing. You will be far ahead with your hard work. You will get a good chance to prosper. You will have support and love. You will suddenly get a news. Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)



The week will be spent in good works. Your professional work will gain momentum. You will get inspired to perform well. You will have the enjoyment of self expression. You can also get promoted in your job. A new project can also get initiated. You will adopt new methods in business and feel yourself being more effective. You will be active and get your job finished in time. Your days will be busy as you do your works seriously. The company of friends and family will have you feel energetic. You can also plan to go out with your family for picnic, movie or fun filled activities. Newly weds will spend their time together happily. Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



This is a favorable time period for you. You will move ahead on the path to success. You will also have financial gains. Your growth in business is going to be good. You will put your best efforts realizing your dreams and you will get positive results for it. Good news will come from somewhere. Time will be peaceful. You will also travel with your family on a travel destination for fun and relaxation. You will plan well before doing any work. You will get success in property deals. Time will be spent wonderfully. There will be too much of fun and merriment. Do not lend money to anyone. Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)



The time will be of great results. You will have a wonderful time. You will be involved in lot of activities. This is the best time for contacts and dialogues. There are chances of recovery of blocked money. Old disputes will get resolved. Family expectations will be more from you. You will come up to their expectations. There will be tensions of additional work load and excessive expenses. Take decisions wisely in financial matters. You will be criticized at the workplace but should stay calm. Lovers can go on dating and plan to get married. There will be more closeness between relatives. You can think about going out. You will be supportive to each other. You will have profits in business. Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



The time will be normal. You will be result oriented in your work. There will be profits in business/work. You will be cheerful. The time is for all beneficial days. Your fame will be all around. You will move towards success in every way. Financially you will be well off. Your friends will be with you in time of needs. You will get support of your seniors. You will make changes in life style and daily routine. Changes will be positive. Meeting with friends and colleagues will make you happy. You will perform well in your business. You may get promoted in job. Students will get good results for their efforts. Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

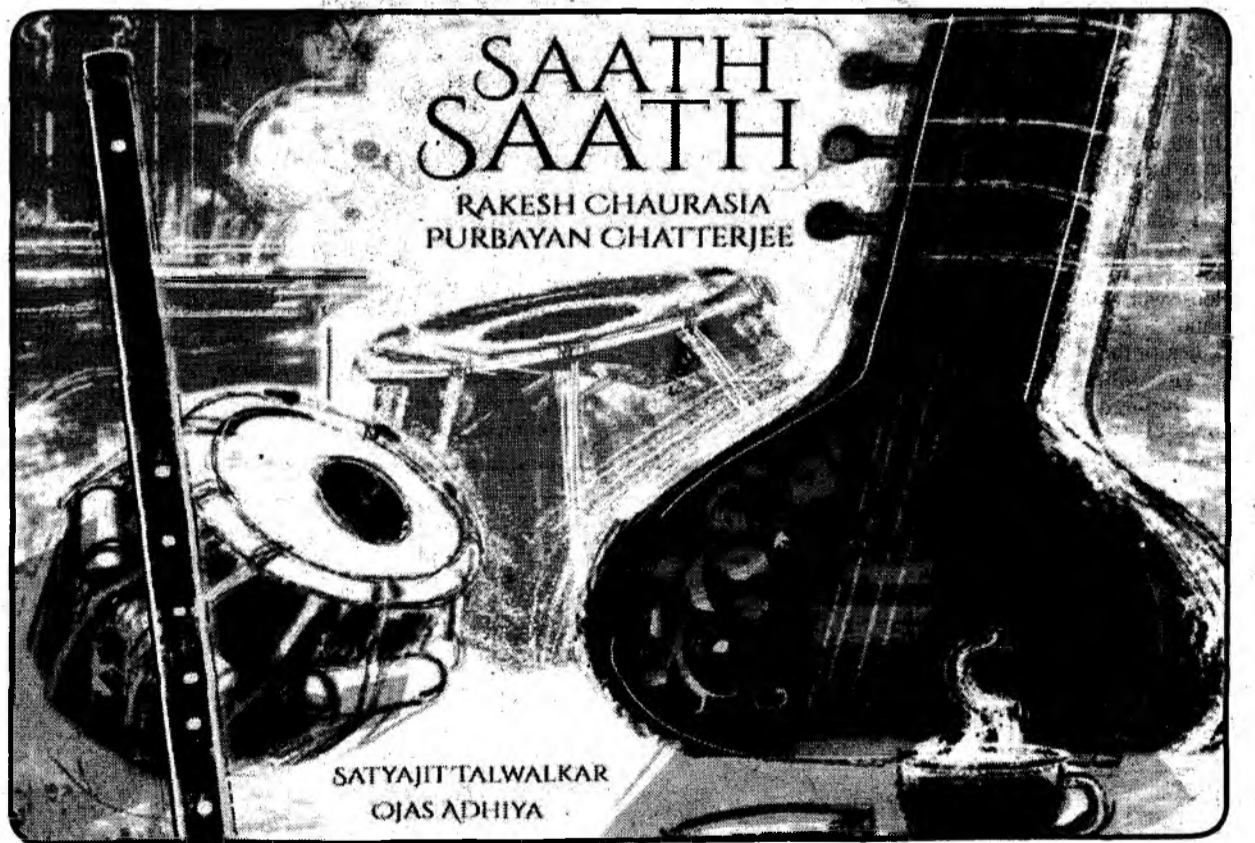


It will be a week that will give you mixed results. You will get good end bad results both. You will make good progress in your job. You will also put your best efforts for the betterment of your business. You will also get positive results as a result of which you will get the support and encouragement of your bosses at your work. You will be blessed by your elders in your family. Your income will be good. You will recover your loaned money. Unemployed persons will get good job offers. Youngsters/students will be more serious and dedicated towards their studies and career. You will invest your money in multiple schemes and get good return. Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



The time is good. You will make plans to go out of station with your family. There will be inflow of money. You will be investing in some good place. You will have full support of subordinates in your job. Your bosses will implement your ideas. Your dreams will come true. You will plan to get married. This is the best time for weddings and relationships. You will be never sort of funds. You will buy expensive and valuable items. You will focus on the future along with the present. In this time, you will get lot of appreciation. You could be rewarded too. This is the time to make your dreams come true. You will have achievements from all over. Your trust in others will be valuable. You will be able to shine in your field.

# Music which consistently strives to bridge cultures



After releasing a stellar album *Unbounded -- Abaad* that featured legendary musicians like Bela Fleck and Ustad Zakir Hussain, Indian sitar player and composer Purbayan Chatterjee is set to release a new album 'Saath Saath' with flautist and lifelong friend, Rakesh Chaurasia.

On Wednesday, a new track *Yaman Drut* — the second single from the seven-track album — was made available on streaming platforms.

*Saath Saath*, which was recorded earlier this year in Mumbai, features seven ragas for morning and night and is set to be released on September 9. The record, co-written with flautist Rakesh Chaurasia, nephew of legendary flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia, draws inspiration from the original spirit of the raga tradition and provides a beautiful aural experience.

Purbayan and Rakesh gave a performance as a duo on August 14 at New York's Carnegie Hall, accompanied by Ojas Adhiya on tabla and Taufiq Qureshi on percussion, and as a trio on August 20 in Jaipur.

Purbayan's music consistently strives to bridge cultures as he seeks out new voices and interprets the classical approach in novel and innovative ways. While *Saath Saath* adheres most closely to the spirit and traditions of the ragas in style and sound, it

is also an evolution from Purbayan's progressive approach to Indian classical music, which began in earnest after a moment of epiphany during one of his many trips to California during the 1990s, when he'd make musical pilgrimage and immerse himself at the Ali Akbar College of Music, founded by the great sarod master, Ustad Ali Akbar.

Purbayan's previous recording *Unbounded -- Abaad* from 2021 was a collaboration with banjo player Bela Fleck and the eminent Ustad Zakir Hussain, among many others, on a progressive jazz-rock opus.

*Saath Saath* was recorded in one or two takes, and the progression of the album follows the passage of day and night, with the first half of the album dedicated to the more soothing morning ragas and the latter night ragas, building to a crescendo like in *Yaman Drut*.

Purbayan and Rakesh have been friends for over two decades, and have steered a similar musical path, experimenting outside of the classical tradition. *Saath Saath*, which literally means 'doing something together', brings Purbayan and Rakesh's chemistry and friendship to the forefront, and shows the intimate dynamism between the pair, two uniting souls, through their instruments, the sitar and the flute. (IANSlife)

"As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live."

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 12 SHILLONG, MONDAY, AUGUST 22, 2022

### Exits from Congress committees

THE Congress party's travails require no elaboration. The setbacks to its existence have been many, the latest being the abrupt resignations of Ghulam Nabi Azad in Jammu and Kashmir and Anand Sharma in Himachal Pradesh from Committees they were earlier appointed to. Notably, both are stalwarts with long years in leadership and leading faces of the G-23 group of reformists seeking elections at all levels in the Congress. Both feel they have been ignored and slighted by the party. Sharma says he would remain a Congressman forever, but one doesn't know. Azad is likely to form a regional outfit for Jammu and Kashmir as per some reports. Notably, with the Congress party failing to pick a president for so long, the mood in the Congress is one of desperation. Sonia Gandhi's health problems make her continuation as interim president difficult. The "rudderless" status of the principal opposition party is music to the ruling BJP's ears. Thus, a fear among the Congress ranks today is that the "exits" crisis in the party could snowball.

It is still difficult to write off the Congress. The grand old party has been edged out of power in almost all states since the rise of the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Regional parties captured power in several states and thrived at the cost of the Congress. The tri-colour party now rules no more than two states — Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh — though it remains as a strong Opposition in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. The eyes of political analysts are set on the assembly elections due in several states in the coming months. If not for the Congress' own merit, a possible anti-incumbency wave can be advantageous to the party. If the party wins some of these states, it can act as a morale boost to Congressmen. This can be the springboard on which the party can launch itself on to the 2024 Parliament polls, or general elections.

While the complacency of the Congress establishment is there for all to see, several situations today are to the advantage of the BJP. The presence of Modi at the apex is one. As opinion polls showed, he towers over other leaders. The national economy is in revival mode when economies of neighbouring countries as also of the US are struggling in the post-Covid phase. As of now, there exists no anti-incumbency mood against the BJP or Modi. Point to note is, such scenarios can reverse any time. 2024 is still far away, but time is running out for the Congress to set its house in order.

# Election 2023: Who should we choose?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

The upcoming 2023 assembly election promises to be an intriguing affair. Although it hasn't been smooth sailing (scams, alleged fake encounter, innumerable violations of the ban on coal mining, ethnic clashes, protest over CAA, and so on), the NPP is going into the upcoming elections with great conviction. This is mainly due to the fact that the main opposition party, the Congress has been decimated by defections and desertions. In its place AITMC (All India Trinamool Congress) is touting itself as an alternative. It has seasoned leaders like Mukul Sangma who was a two-time Chief Minister from the Congress. With voting in the State elections being more geared towards individuals rather than the party per se there is a strong chance that TMC could do very well in the upcoming elections. Whether it will be enough to win the seats needed to form the Government is another matter.

There is, therefore, a lot of churning that is happening in the political arena. As such, a perception has been created that a vacuum exists that can be filled with new people and new ideas. There is a belief among some that there is the genuine possibility of taking advantage of the eternal longing of change this time around. These are the individuals and groups that have entered the election fray promising real change if voted into power. However, such rhetoric is actually used by every political party before elections. For common voters like me how do we know we will get the change we desire? Who will actually live up to their word? Whom should we trust with our vote?

A couple of months ago I was at a public meeting called by one of the new groups who had decided to contest the 2023 Assembly elections. Ex-politicians, former administrators, professionals from various backgrounds, and academicians, among others, attended this meeting. The meeting was called to solicit ideas from those gathered for a vision and roadmap for the State. There were those who were supportive of the initiative while there were also those

who were skeptical about it.

Among those that are skeptical there are again two categories. First there are those that think that initiative, i.e., contesting the upcoming election, though praiseworthy is doomed to failure. This included an ex-politician who cited his own example of how despite his best efforts he could not fight the system. Winning the election itself is going to be nearly impossible. But even if some of their candidates were to win they will not succeed in bringing any substantive change because of the entrenched systemic problems. In short, it's an attempt doomed for failure. Secondly, others believed the group lacked specific policies that it wanted to implement. In other words, the group's initiative was merely rhetoric lacking any substance, raising doubts about whether it really wanted to bring about the change that it claimed. The concerns raised by the skeptics therefore are that the group does not want to bring any change and even if it wants to it cannot bring any change. How does one deal with such naysayers? By analyzing whether the concerns are actually valid.

It is to be accepted that bringing about any systemic changes is indeed a difficult task. One only has to look at the best example for that in India — the caste system. There was a recent news report that as India was gearing up to celebrate its 75th anniversary of achieving independence from British rule, a nine-year-old Dalit boy from Rajasthan died after being beaten up for touching a drinking water pot. This is not an isolated incident. Caste-based discrimination continues to be a lived reality for many in the country despite practices like 'untouchability' having been abolished since the 1950s. In fact, frustrating though it might be to admit, it is not going to disappear very soon. However, this does not mean that the system has to continue in perpetuity. Such thinking ignores the fact that the system in which people find themselves is a social construct. Just like all

constructs there is always the possibility for a re-imagination and re-creation based on fairness and justice. Not trying to change a malignant system is a luxury for those who benefit from the status quo. Change must happen and there is a greater chance of it happening when there is intent towards it. Fear of failure is not an excuse for not trying. It is an imperative.

The other concern, i.e., there is no intent is a more serious allegation. However those who raised this issue missed the point of the meeting: it was called specifically for that reason — to get suggestions for specific policies. In fact, many specific suggestions were given by others present, ranging from health, the prison system to education. This still does not fully allay the concern, which in my opinion was the real issue — the assumption that the group lacks expertise to understand the nuances of the policies and their implementation. This ignores the fact that expertise is not the problem, political conviction is. For example, the Tamil Nadu Government has appointed Jean Drèze, a noted Belgian-born Indian welfare economist, social scientist and activist as member of Economic Advisory Council to the Chief Minister. Members to this Council also include Esther Duflo (Nobel laureate), Raghuram Rajah (former Governor of Reserve Bank of India), Arvind Subramanian (former Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of India). Hence, finding expertise to prepare specific policies and implement them is not difficult if there is a political will. This comes back to the external form of the concern (internal was the assumed lack of expertise) being raised, i.e., there is no intention to bring any change. How do we truly know that? Answer to this question will determine whether we will make the right decision with the vote. The answer is actually quite simple: *Facta, Non Verba*, i.e., deeds, not words.

During elections every candidate promises that if they win, they will work for the betterment of the people.

In other words if they have power they will bring about the change. Experience tells us, many a times, this does not happen. This is because doing something good does not depend on access to power but on the conviction and desire to fight for what is right especially when odds are stacked against one. To put it very simply, for me a right candidate would say "I worked for your benefit even when I had no power and I will continue working for you even when I will have no power". Gaining power is just a medium but not the goal itself; the ultimate goal being making life better for the people. But that cannot happen if suddenly one realizes that they have to work for the public during elections and make a conditional promise, i.e., will work if election is won. That is a disaster waiting to happen.

For those that are running for re-elections the same principle applies but with a slight difference "what did you do when you were power?" Amnesia (memory loss) and the hope that people will change may compel people to vote for the wrong candidate again. For the latter, it is very important to remember an important facet of human life — people don't change as long as not doing so does not harm their interest even if they know what they are doing is wrong. While people may harbour hopes of a non-performing candidate suddenly changing if given the chance again, I am sorry to inform them it will not happen. As for amnesia, it is a privilege many of us do not enjoy. If we suffer from it during the elections, we will be forgotten after the election is over.

Who should we choose during the 2023 elections? Do the new entrants, i.e., individuals and groups (like the one whose meeting I attended) have anything new and better to offer? And will they actually deliver? Or are they old wine in a new bottle? Those are questions that have to be answered by every individual themselves. It is a difficult choice no doubt. But what can help us in making that decision is to remember the adage: *Facta, Non Verba*. If we do that we will hopefully make the right choice.

## Bilkis Bano case, yet another eye-opener to judge BJP Left and democratic masses must prepare for a long fight

By Binoy Viswam

On the 75th year of Independence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi as usual was eloquent in his rhetoric. He minced no words to impress upon the people of India by preaching his government's commitment to the men and women of the country. Though he addressed the 'countrymen' at definite intervals, women were not completely forgotten. A small portion of his speech was specially devoted to 'Nari Shakti', where verbal adulations were ornamentally reserved for women empowerment. At the same time, in Gujarat the BJP government was unmasking a different face of their concern for women's rights.

Eleven convicts of the Bilkis Bano rape case were set free from the Godhra sub-jail the same day. 'Nari Shakti' of Modi brand is blind to the plight of the 'women if they are Muslims or poor. The country cannot forget the incident that happened in Godhra on the fateful days of 2002, following the

ment to look into the matter, which subsequently formed a committee which gave a unanimous decision to release the convicts as per their behaviour during the sentence and 'nature of the crime'. The wheels of justice swiftly moved into action releasing them through a 'special remission policy' as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. The partisan spirit of the committee was manifest on the same day evening. A hero's welcome was accorded to them in the VHP office.

In stark contrast to this, as per the India Justice Report 2020, 68 per cent of the prisoners inside the jails are under-trials and some of them have been jailed without a single charge-sheet being filed. The custodial death of Tribal activist Stan Swamy who was arrested in the fabricated Bhima Koregoan case and was denied even a sipper to drink water on medical grounds, continues to haunt the nation.

The message RSS-BJP



communal riots that engulfed Gujarat.

Atrocities were unleashed against the hapless Muslim women in various parts of the state. In the Bilkis Bano case, apart from the heinous crime of rape, seven members of her family were killed including a three-year old child. Following the investigation and trial the accused were convicted for life imprisonment. Because of the particular nature of the case, the investigation as well as the judicial process was long and complicated, the hearing was shifted from Gujarat to Maharashtra.

Even though human right activists and India's secular conscience were always on the vigil, it took six years for the Judiciary to complete the trial. From 2008 onwards, when they were put behind the bars the Parivar forces and Gujarat government were anxious about their freedom and well-being. Now, after their 'long wait' the rape convicts are walking out to the world of freedom created by the guardians of Parivar. Fifteen years after their conviction and serving the minimum sentence legally possible, the script for the release of the rape convicts was carefully drafted under the guidance of the bigwigs in the Parivar.

The trajectory of the rape case, from the date of its occurrence throws light to this connection. An application was filed for the remission of their punishment in the Supreme Court in May this year. The Supreme Court ordered the Gujarat Govern-

ment wants to convey is crystal clear that Azadi in this country, under their rule, has a special care for such kind of people who are close to the rulers and their politics. The basic doctrines of rule of law and equality before law are thrown to the dustbin. The lives and rights of minorities, Dalits, women, and the poor are passing through a series of violations. The government's move to amend the criminal laws, in this background signals new challenges before the oppressed. The committee entrusted with the task is having only five members, all of whom are categorically selected from the upper caste.

In the present conditions of India, the new lawmakers cannot be expected to do justice to the under-privileged and voiceless. 'Azadi' is not a concept meant only for celebrations and rhetoric, it is a great promise of history before the people that their country will safeguard them from all kinds of suppression. It is a promise of freedom from hunger, poverty, social and sexual exploitation. That was the idea of free India which the freedom movement shared with the people of India. The present ruling dispensation is quite unaware of it, as they have no role in the freedom movement to shape the destiny of India.

The Bilkis Bano case reminds the men and women of India that they have miles to go to reach the goal of freedom and equality. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Traffic Woes in Shillong

Editor,  
Apropos of Dr. H.S. Ranothra's suggestion on traffic congestion in Shillong (ST Aug 18, 2022) it is really sad to say that the Government has not taken up any plans to ease the traffic woes in Shillong. The traffic regulation was entrusted only to the police. What are the MLAs, Ministers as public representatives doing? Are they not responsible for all the traffic woes in Shillong? Since these VIPs have no personal problems to move around themselves, they don't really care about the sufferings of the public due to the traffic menace. What are they doing in the Assembly? Are they not to debate and find out ways and means on how to solve the traffic problems in Shillong? Are they not also responsible for the state of affairs of the State? Are they not elected as public representatives to see that the public are not suffering due to traffic congestion among others? As public representatives, they should have worked out a plan on solving the problems created by the increasing number of vehicles both private and commercial. The Govt. should make a law to ease the traffic flow in Shillong. They are sitting in the Assembly for the purpose of making a law for the welfare of the State and its people. If the Government cannot do it then who will be able to do it?

So far, no NGOs have debated on the traffic snarl

in Shillong. The public are suffering every day, school-going children, the office goers and the needy, especially the sick are suffering due to lack of will of the Govt. to take strict action to solve the traffic woes in Shillong. For what purpose are they being elected? Are they not responsible for the everyday traffic affairs in Shillong? The State has completed 50 years of statehood, but the conditions of the roads are the same even now. No change has been attempted by governments, past and present on tackling the traffic condition of Shillong. And we all seem happy to silently suffer the pain even though we are facing daily problems in congested roads that take us so long to traverse. When shall we see the change?

Yours, etc.  
I.R. Dikhar  
Shillong

#### Shillong's stubborn traffic jams

Editor,  
I fully agree with the letter in your esteemed daily dated Aug 17, 2022 by Emidao Shylla, captioned "Traffic Congestion, who's at fault." As pointed out by the writer, we the general public are equally at fault. Nowadays, every parent prefers to pick and drop their children and wards to school and with loans readily available, many prefer to go to work in their private vehicles. Well, vehicles are becoming a necessity not so much a luxury but the one big problem that is con-

stant is that while the number of vehicles are increasing the roads are still as narrow as before. To add up, pavements and even roadsides are being taken over by the hawkers who could set up shops and display their wares just about anywhere, unabashedly. Are we to blame the hawkers or governments past and present who fail to allot a space for the hawkers to do their business?

One agrees with the writer, on the route that the buses should be allowed to start from Motphran enroute to Laitumkhrak, Nongthymmai via Police Bazar, IGP, Barik. This way the buses can pick up school and college goers and even office goers etc. Closing this road to public transport has added up to the misery of the people who would like to use such public transport. A trial basis could perhaps be carried out to see if it will help. May one also urge those in authority managing the traffic routes to seek suggestions from stakeholders, who are working at the ground level in order to reap beneficial results.

In order to ease traffic congestion that more than often has been attributed to school timings, can every school start a school bus facility of their own to ferry the children of their schools back and forth? A school bus that will accommodate 40 students, will definitely save parking space of let's say 30 private vehicles. Many parents may express fear and concern about the safety of their children inside these public transports. This is a genuine concern but if the

school bus is one that belongs to the respective schools or is hired by the school then it would be the responsibility of the school to employ and engage a responsible person who would be provided a uniform and an identity card who will cater to the children's safety.

In conversation with parents who are open to sending their children to school in school buses, I found out that these very parents express their apprehension in sending their children through buses run by the government wherein children from different schools would be accommodated. They feel that school buses owned by the school where children from the same school only would use with the school authority managing and taking responsibility for the children would be a safer and more secure form of transportation.

Traffic congestion is faced by the common man on a daily basis. It is our responsibility and the duty of the government to find out ways and means to sort this out.

Yours etc.,  
Jennifer Dikhar,  
Via email

#### Mall at MTC campus a harsh decision

Editor,  
It's become big news regarding the present MTC complex at Police Bazar being turned into a mall which presently, I believe is not genuinely required by the people of Meghalaya. It will do more harm than good for

the business community, as most of the malls in Shillong are a failure due to very few footfalls, apart from creating more competition. Government should instead invest the money in more important matters, like roads, hospitals, engineering and medical colleges and other infrastructure through which youth could be employed. The Government shouldn't take such a harsh decision of evicting old tenants whose families and staff are dependent on the business in MTC for decades just to please some private company. What's the point in voting for a government which is not sensitive towards people's livelihoods and only favours a few of the elite? The Government's duty and responsibility is to see that no citizen should suffer unnecessarily. Further there's ample space in the MTC compound where the Government can do additional construction without evicting old tenants.

Yours etc.,  
Justic Roy,  
Shillong 2

#### On celebration of Independence Day

Editor,  
The article by D V Kumar (ST August 21 2022) has raised some issues in my mind in the context of celebration of Independence Day. India attained freedom from British rule on August 15, 1947 but not before undivided India was being divided into two countries — India and Pakistan. Nehru

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

"A family shares hardships and a connected history."

— Kamala Harris

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 13 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2022

### Of MLAs changing stances

MLAs who were once part of the Congress and took decisions based on their party ideology have now changed their stances upon aspiring to join another political party. It just goes to show that they have no sound or committed political values and are there to serve a limited selfish interest. Those that stand out for their differing stances include the Mawlai MLA, PT Sawkmie and Mohendro Rapsang both of whom were suspended from the Congress Party. Sawkmie has now publicly stated that he would join the United Democratic Party (UDP) by November-December to avoid the anti-defection. Rapsang has recently averred that he would join the National Peoples' Party (NPP) by November-December also for the same reasons. Sawkmie has come out publicly to support the MDA Government's attempt to revert to chemical fertilisers and pesticides to appease a section of farmers whose only interest is to grow crops they can sell, notwithstanding the evident health concerns due to such chemicals which are well documented in the State. With such ardent supporters the NPP and UDP face no challenge other than that from the TMC which is going hammer and tongs to point out the malfeasance in the MDA Government with documentary evidence.

Every MLA wants to be re-elected because the spoils of office and the possibility of becoming a minister in the next government are attractive propositions. UDP working president, Paul Lyngdoh has told the media that Mohendro Rapsang is privy to the decision to relocate the Sweeper Colony from the present location to Mawbah which is in his constituency. Obviously, the local MLA has to be consulted while taking such a major and thorny decision which the people or the area are disinclined to accept. It remains to be seen therefore as to whether the Mazhabi Sikhs whose future residential location hangs in the balance will be 'allowed' to settle at Mawbah, knowing the peculiar land tenure system in Meghalaya where the Government only has control over revenue land.

What this matter brings to light are also the contentious political grandstanding of MLAs like PT Sawkmie who want to make sure that the UDP gives him the ticket even while denying their long-standing member Embhah Syiemlieh of the same from Mawlai. Similarly, Teiborlang Pathaw, the Mawlai MDC quit the UDP and joined the NPP. Now Wellberth Rani, also a resident of Mawlai and who has been for the longest time a leader of the FKJGP has also joined the UDP but because Mawlai is crowded has threatened to contest from Mawphlang. So where does that leave Eugeneson Lyngdoh the sitting MLA of the UDP?

Meghalaya has a history of propelling leaders of pressure groups into politics. It is this that erodes the credibility of pressure groups in the state. Each leader's final aspiration is to join politics and enjoy power and pelf.

# Is NEP 2020 the garb for saffronization?

By H. Srikanth

In recent years, we have come across several articles eulogizing the merits of the NEP, 2020. Thanks to them, most people associated with education in one form or the other have become familiar with terms and expressions like internationalization of education system, collaboration with foreign universities and institutes, the world academic ranking, multi-disciplinary education, multiple exit and entry options, digital platforms, online education, vocationalization of the school and college curriculum, etc. Given the sorrow state of education, many see in the NEP, 2020 a panacea for ills affecting the education sector in the country.

Radical restructuring of education in the country is possible only when the government increases the budget for education, appoints qualified teachers and provides the basic facilities for running the educational institutions. The success of online education through e-platforms requires a bridging of the digital gap and providing internet services to the remote and far-flung areas. Increased corporate investments in education and growth in the number of corporate schools, colleges and universities are of no use to the students coming from poor and middle-class backgrounds. It is only by strengthening of the public universities and by providing financial support to the students coming from marginalized sections it becomes possible to increase the access. Proposals like entry and exit, four-year degree, multi-disciplinary curriculum, cafeteria approach, etc., become meaningless unless the universities and colleges have adequate infrastructure and human resources. Vocationalization of the curriculum serves no purpose until and unless the government set rights the economy and increases the job opportunities. Unfortunately, we don't see the government taking the right steps to address these vital issues. In the absence of required preconditions, the declared objectives of providing quality education and increasing its reach remains a mirage. The NEP then only becomes a conduit for privatization and commercialization of education in the country.

Apart from these concerns, the critics have also pointed out another development which will have serious implications for the future of education in the country. Besides advocating

the internalization of the Indian education system, the NEP also seeks to impart Indian values and traditions through education. But what does one mean by Indian values and tradition? India is a civilization with thousands of years of cultural and social history. The people belonging to different religions, races, languages and cultures inhabit the country. India has accommodated streams of invaders, migrants, refugees and travelers. It is difficult to say who in India is a native and a foreigner. Interactions between these diverse groups and communities have enriched Indian history and heritage. Every community that settled in India has contributed its bit to enrich the Indian civilization. India cannot be identified with any one religion, language, or culture.

While being proud of India's composite heritage, one should not ignore the fact that India was never a nation in a political sense. Till the British colonized the subcontinent and brought it under single political and administrative control, the India was ruled by different dynasties at different points of time in history, and their territories changed from time to time, depending on who the ruler then was. There was never a dynasty or Empire that ruled all the territories that we have inherited as India from the British colonizers. Being aware of the cultural and religious diversity, Indian nationalist leaders and social reformers rejected the idea of making India a theocratic state. In order to keep India united and prevent another Partition, the national leaders gave shape to a Constitution that acknowledged India as a Union of States and guaranteed religious, cultural and civil rights to all its citizens. In conformity with the constitutional values, the Kothari Commission recommended the need for imparting and promoting secular and scientific temperament through education. Institutions like UGC, NCERT and CBSE gave shape to curriculum and syllabus, emphasizing the composite history and included lessons promoting democracy, secularism, rational and scientific thinking. Does the NEP 2020 continue to uphold these democratic and secular traditions?

A careful look shows that the NEP document consciously avoids any reference to the term secularism. It ap-

pears, to the proponents of the NEP, Indian values basically mean the Hindu values, as conceived by the Hindutva ideologues wedded to the idea of Hindu supremacy and Hindu Rashtra. They view Indian history, culture and heritage through the prism of Hindutva. Giving up all scientific methods of studying and writing history, they talk of rewriting history based on majoritarian faith and beliefs. Several 'WhatsApp historians' sprang up from among them, making exaggerated claims that ancient Hindu India knew everything that the modern science has discovered / invented. In their attempts to rationalize the Aryans as the natives of India and the Harappa and Mohenjo-daro civilization as Hindu civilization, of late, they started propagating the idea of mythical Saraswati civilization. Blurring the difference between history and mythology, they have been making efforts to project mythological figures as historical personalities. Forums like All India History Congress were used to promote such irrational ideas in the name of history. All great intellectuals and scientists that ancient India has produced are viewed not as individuals, but as the representatives of the Hindu religion. The contributions of the Charvaka and the teachings of Buddha, which upheld rationalist traditions in Indian philosophy, were consciously hidden. The enmity between the Hindu and the Muslim rulers is given undue emphasis, and the secular and syncretic traditions that were in vogue in political and cultural domains are deliberately overlooked. Attempts are made to paint all Muslim rulers as invaders and as anti-Hindu fanatics. The challenges that the lower castes in ancient and medieval India had posed to the Brahmanical Hinduism are concealed to construct the myth of a unified and homogenous Hinduism. In the name of unearthing the unsung heroes of India's freedom struggle, they belittle the contributions of reformist and secular leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru. Conscious efforts are on to present and popularize the ideas of some leaders and organizations which played an insignificant role during the freedom struggle.

In pursuit of their objectives, most committees created to execute the NEP, including the National Cur-

riculum Committee, are filled mostly with persons close to RSS ideology. Taking the plea of the need for rationalization of textbooks to remove irrelevant and outdated material, the lessons reflecting the contributions of the Muslim rulers to Indian heritage are removed or trimmed. Even the lessons titled, 'Key Elements of Democratic Government', 'Democracy and Diversity', 'Challenges to Democracy', 'Challenges of Cultural diversity', 'Rise of Popular Movement', etc., are dropped from the CBSE curriculum. Discussions and references to caste, gender, and religious discrimination are omitted. Karnataka government, which is viewed as the champion of the NEP, went a step further. The Text Book Revision Committee of Karnataka recommended removal of lessons on / writings by revolutionary leaders, social reformers and activists like Bhagat Singh, Savitribha Phule, Narayana Guru, Sufi saints, Kanakadasu, Purandaradasu, Basaveshwara, Sara Abubaker, U.R. Ananthamurthy. The state government's crude efforts to saffronize the curriculum met with popular resistance. Under pressure from the intellectuals and the civil society, Karnataka government had to retract many of the changes proposed by the Committee. In view of the popular opposition to saffronization, the central government is tracing a cautious path. The recent directions to all central universities to organize 'discussions' on a non-academic book titled, 'Modi@22' show that the institutions of higher educational institutions are not above the saffronization experiment.

Critics therefore point out that NEP 2020 and saffronization are not two unconnected exercises. Saffronization is one of the undeclared objectives of the NEP. The persons who are talking about multi-disciplinary curriculum, online digital platforms, vocationalization of education, etc., are also the ones advocating saffronization in the name of preserving and promoting Indian values. Saffronization, if it succeeds, sounds a death knell to secular foundations; promotes dogmatic and unscientific thinking; speeds up the transformation of India into a majoritarian state and threatens our social harmony. It is unfortunate that most intellectuals lending support to NEP, 2020, hardly reflect on the serious implications of saffronization of education for India's democratic and secular fabric.

## Nitish Kumar the new mascot of opposition in 2024 polls

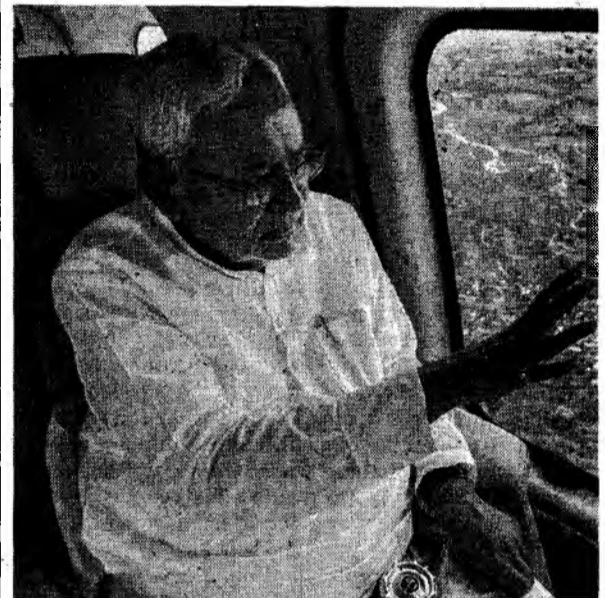
### Bihar CM drawing up plans to unite anti-BJP parties

By Harihar Swarup

Here's something about Nitish and the number 7, Circular Road. As Chief Minister, he has been at 7, Circular Road, while using 1, Anna Marg, the official residence as his office. Now, after severing his five-year-old old alliance with the BJP and walking over to the Mahagathbandhan camp, many point that to a famous Delhi address— 7, Kalyan Marg (Racecourse Road), the official residence of Prime Minister—could be in his mind. After all, as he left NDA, Nitish Kumar, sent out

the run up to the Lok Sabha elections, when it became clear that Narendra Modi would be the prime ministerial candidate. Though he did openly pitch himself for the post, he was evidently uneasy about Modi's growing profile. When he finally parted ways with the BJP in 2013, it was on the grounds that NDA should have a leader with a "clean and secular image".

Then in the run up to 2015 polls, Nitish did the unthinkable by joining hands with his old socialist fel-



dare, couched as prophesy, to the current occupant of 7, Lok Kalyan Marg: "the one who came to power in 2014, would he also return in 2024 to Lok Kalyan".

Though there has been much talk about Nitish's growing discomfort with an "overbearing" BJP, the stark message to have emerged out of Nitish's U-turn is his rekindled national ambition. Though he hasn't spoken openly about his PM hopes and continues to talk about "serving" Bihar, soon after taking oath as CM for the record eighth time, Nitish has urged all opposition parties to start preparing for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. JD(U) sources hint that he may soon start touring other states to explore the chances of a broader national coalition to take on BJP in the 2024 elections.

JD(U) national spokesperson K C Tyagi said, "we have been getting very positive response (about Nitish Kumar walking out of NDA). Just the thought of Nitish Kumar playing an important role in national politics looks exciting. It is too early to say, but Nitish Kumar has recharged the opposition".

Saying Mahagathbandhan, an alliance of seven parties that has the JD(U), RJD and Congress, besides other parties could "offer a template for a national opposition against the BJP", another top JD(U) leader said, "Bihar has been the factory of political experiments and coalition. The BJP is now up against a tough opposition in Bihar. Who knows, there might be a strong opposition at the national level too?"

JD(U) sources point out that Nitish has nothing left to prove in state politics. He is credited with turning around Bihar's fortunes after its long years of decay and for building a formidable social coalition built around women and extremely backward classes among OBCs. He is also state's longest serving CM, having broken the record of 16 years held by Dr. Srikrishna Singh, Bihar's first CM. As a close Nitish aide says now only posts of Deputy PM and PM are left to be achieved.

But those sceptical of a larger national role for Nitish or the possibility of him becoming the Opposition's joint face against Modi point to his "paltu ram" image, the consummate politician who has swung between camps with the ease of a trapeze artiste.

Nitish, who joined hands with the BJP in 1995, first quit the NDA in 2013, in

low travellers and later foe, Lalu Prasad of RJD. In the elections that year, held two years after Nitish quit NDA, the coalition got 178 with the BJP reduced to 53 seats. Nitish had found his sweet revenge against Modi.

Barely two years later, in 2017, he snapped ties with the RJD citing his "no corruption" plank as the CBI booked RJD leader and now his Deputy CM, Tejaswi Yadav, in the IRCTC case.

Now, five years since he left the Mahagathbandhan camp, Nitish is back, rallying the Opposition to prepare for the 2024 polls and ruing his time in the BJP. Another somersault, yet Nitish had managed a clean landing— displaying no unease about the contradictions inherent in his moves. The Nitish of 2022 had clearly travelled a fair distance from the Nitish of 2017.

For someone who would often talk fighting the "triple Cs" of crime, corruption and communalism as the guiding principles of his governance model, Nitish when asked if corruption was no longer an issue, didn't bat an eyelid when he said Tejaswi by his side, "very much so. We cannot compromise on corruption".

JD(U) national president Rajiv Ranjan Singh a.k.a Lalan Singh too defended the party's decision to return to the RJD despite its strident stand on corruption, saying "it has been five years since the IRCTC case. There is hardly any movement in it. It is nothing but an act of political vendetta."

Nitish's last stint in the Mahagathbandhan camp was anything but smooth. Only five months into the arrangement, the stress had started showing with the JD(U) accusing the RJD of interference. Nitish was no longer the last word in the matter of governance, as he had been in the NDA. While the BJP had no strong state leader to match Nitish's charisma, here in the Mahagathbandhan, he had shared space and spotlight with Lalu and family. The RJD leader's constant reference to Nitish as chotte bhai (younger brother) is also believed to have rankled Nitish.

All that, JD(U) sources insist, is behind them now. Nitish and Tejaswi have reportedly worked out a working arrangement. Tejaswi has already been granted Z-plus security, a perk Nitish's deputies in the BJP— Sushil Kumar Modi, Tarkishore Prasad and Renu Devi— never enjoyed. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Traffic jams in Shillong

Editor

The fact that every alternate day there is a letter to you on the subject, from the people of Shillong, shows that the traffic jam is an acute and serious problem for everyone. The gravity of the problem is increasing with each passing day. In each of the letters to you, your reader is suggesting something or other with the hope of easing the traffic congestion. I had also written to you about it earlier suggesting all able-bodied people to walk to their destinations and also suggested for different timings for every office and educational institution so that people will not thong to the street in the same time.

One more thing I would like to suggest is increasing the business/working hours of the people. It is seen that shops and business establishments open up very late in the morning and pull down their shutters early in the evening. Thus, available transacting time for people is very less. Much less during the winter months. As the sun rises about two hours earlier here in Shillong than in Mumbai and about one and half hours earlier than in Delhi, our shops and estab-

lishments can very well start their businesses much earlier in the day than in these two cities. This will surely reduce the rush hour traffic. Also, it is observed that almost all shops pull their shutters down at Barabazar especially and other shopping centers no sooner than the sun sets on the horizon. The utility service centers and OPDs of the hospitals close by 1400 hrs. All these aspects reduce the working hours, thereby causing a heavy rush during the forenoon of a given day.

To lengthen the business/working hours, the intervention of the government or licensing authority may be needed. Further, taxis and buses may be asked to ply till evening. Opening up of evening shift schools and colleges may also be considered. Now that the government is spending a considerable amount to make Shillong a Smart City, some amount may be earmarked towards electrification to make shopping centers illuminated till late evening. I strongly feel my above suggestion may lessen traffic jams to a certain extent. Finally, I would like to say, a desperate situation requires desperate solutions. It is not only the government but all the people of Shillong city have to pull up their socks and sincerely think about ways

and means to ease the traffic congestion in Shillong.

Yours etc.,  
Krishna Chettri  
Shillong -2

#### Decongestion of city traffic: A wishful thinking!

Editor,

Having lived in Shillong since birth, and being 40+ years old now, I am amused to see the different media platforms flooded with opinions on the above subject matter. In my opinion Shillong traffic congestion is a complex affair and stop-gap arrangements are and will be futile.

Our topography is such that junctions are inevitable and such junctions create traffic jams due to the criss-crossing of vehicular traffic.

Those who frequent Guwahati would recall the past where traffic jam in Dispur GNRC junction was horrible during peak hours; but now ever since the new over bridge came into being one could pass the same junction with much less difficulty.

For instance Mawlai petrol Pump, Rilbong point,

Anjali Petrol Pump, Civil Hospital point, Dhankheti Point, Fire Brigade point, Laitumkrah Point, Polo police point, Police Bazar, Motphran besides a few others are junctions and it is impossible to reduce congestion if over-bridges are not constructed;

Therefore flyovers at numerous junctions, irrespective of the size is the need of the hour. And when I say sizes I would like to again draw attention to the GNRC junction where the over bridge is constructed only for a single lane.

There are areas where traffic jams could be minimised had the authority applied their minds.

For instance lets look at Latumkrah Police Point. The vehicles are made to go round about the rotary which becomes the cause of the jam. Traffic would flow better if the vehicular traffic from Poinisuk to Don Bosco is allowed to move double way avoiding the rotary, thereby avoiding a criss-crossing of vehicles coming from or going to Nazareth Hospital or New Colony hence avoiding an unnecessary chaos at the Junction.

A similar logic is also applicable at Fire Brigade junction.

Then comes the Barik and Civil Hospital junctions. This route at times unnecessarily gets clogged because when one route gets jammed then all junctions are clogged also. Avoiding a rotation of vehicles all around the PWD compound is a better option. Thus, when the traffic flow is dragging on one side for instance the Civil - Rhino route then it would not affect much the Dhankheti - Malki Civil Hospital- Police Bazar route.

As such the utmost requirement would be the presence of traffic personnel to signal and control the vehicles because in my personal opinion the present traffic arrangements is less burdensome on the traffic personnel but takes a toll on the smooth functioning of traffic.

Therefore it will be in the fitness of things if those in authority be they political class or departmental personnel to take cognitive measures and especially enhance the manpower in the Traffic Branch if they are really keen to rid of the traffic jams till the overbridges are made.

The bottom line is "NO OVERBRIDGE=TRAFFIC JAM"

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

#### Whither regional party unity?

Editor,

The rumour mills are rife with news that the United Democratic Party (UDP) with its regional centric mandate is now a "divided house" with some within the Party calling it a game between the 'original' and 'non-original' party. What is intriguing about the party is that it goes to the people with a regional centric manifesto but when it comes to regional ethics within the MDA it has no guts or courage to pull out of the ruling coalition. Similarly, the BJP which has been in the news for all the wrong reasons including the empty threats of pulling out of the MDA coalition are toothless tigers. If both these parties have some shame left in them it would be best for them to pull out from the NPP led-government while there is still time. This is what is called political audacity and not political hypocrisy.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar  
Via email

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"Stress is a downward spiral, and you can only overcome it with a positive perspective."  
— Jen Lilley

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LXV No. 14 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24, 2022

**Chimes of 2024 polls**

WITH about 20 months left for the next Parliament polls, the political temperature has begun warming up – this even as the ruling BJP at the Centre continues to remain in pole position and the Opposition fragmented. Rahul Gandhi is starting a Bharat Jodo Yatra a fortnight hence from Kanyakumari and Arvind Kejriwal of the AAP has announced a nation-wide Yatra to drum up support for his attempt to position himself as a rival to PM Modi. There's talk from Bihar to pack off Nitish Kumar to Delhi for him to take the "centre-stage" and rally the anti-BJP forces with an eye on the 2024 Parliament polls.

The BJP has, meanwhile, adopted a two-pronged strategy of winning allies and taking on rivals like Mamata Banerjee of the TMC in Bengal and Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi by unleashing the central investigation agencies to conduct raids and paint these leaders as corrupt. While raid parties hit upon a huge stock of hoarded currency in a flat linked to a Bengal minister, they had no such luck awaiting them at Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia's residence. But the allegations that the AAP government indulged in corruption via its liquor policy won wide publicity. Curiously, the raid on Sisodia took place after Kejriwal made four trips to Gujarat in a month's time to activate the AAP against the BJP in the Modi-Shah bastion. Undaunted, Kejriwal and Sisodia flew down on a two-day visit to Gujarat this week to take forward the AAP campaign for the December polls. Notably, as the BJP lost a powerful ally in Bihar in the form of Nitish Kumar and his JDU, and had lost another strong entity the Akali Dal of the Badals in Punjab, the saffron party is seeking to make it up with an offensive against the ruling TRS in Telangana. Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to the Telugu turf this week was to work the BJP's way through cine stars and media barons to oust the TRS and wrest power there in the assembly polls next year.

Rahul Gandhi might be scheduling his Bharat Jodo Yatra that would culminate at the time the Congress party elects or selects a new president for the party by September 20. During his sojourn through states, he would prepare the ground for the Congress party's foray into the campaign for the 2024 parliament elections as also the string of assembly polls before this. Yet, unity of the Opposition – a sine qua non for their LS electoral success -- remains a distant dream.

**Letters to the Editor**

**MeECL must be privatized**

Editor,  
The MeECL and its subsidiaries should now be completely privatized. This entity has completely failed its consumers and has only become a playground for gold diggers from both within its fold and in the state government! Opposition to such a move from its staff and politicians with vested interests should be totally rejected. This utility has also now become indifferent to the pleas of its paying consumers!

I had in February 2022 submitted a complaint of both low voltage during the evenings and voltage fluctuations at other times in the Nongrah area of Shillong to the Forum for Redressal of Grievances of Consumers, MeECL. In May 2022 I received a reply regarding the low voltage where remedial action will take time. On the question of voltage fluctuations where the voltage at time goes up to 260 volts (also happened yesterday for almost 2 hours), the Forum was silent – this is a fault that must lie on either its substations or the local transformers where rectification could be made immediately. It seems they do not consider this a priority even with the possibility of the household electrical appliances burning

out and posing a threat to life and property!

Further, for some days now, the power in these areas is shut down from 10.30 am to 4 pm without any Shutdown Notice. Yesterday, one could not get through to their complaint landline number for Area-VI (No.2231265) for most part of the day as it said that the number was out of service – I strongly suspect that the receiver was removed from the cradle and placed on the side. Miraculously, this number started working from 3.30 pm just before the power was restored! And to cap it all, when I inquired of the reason of the power outage for almost the whole day, the reply was that Jio Fibre was setting up its poles and lines! Now what has this got to do with the power LT lines is unknown to me, for Jio Fibre has been erecting its poles and lines for a few months now including in my area, and the electricity power was never shut down for this! Today, on the dot at 10.30 am, again power was shut down. On enquiry, I was told that new electricity poles were being erected and new lines drawn – now they have refined their response to something believable! Before any shut down of power in other areas, we always see the Shutdown Notice published a few days ahead in the newspapers, but in the case of Nongrah, Umpling, Mawlynrei and other areas

I'm 74 years old and a genius once said "Count your age by the friends you have not by the number of years". Cool, so I tried to compare between the friends I had 60 years ago and the number I have now. By this comparison I now have thousands while 60 years ago I had a few. Yesterday all my friends had homes and places where they resided and if I ever had the urge to meet them I either I went to their place or they came to mine. We met at the cinema, the theatre, at school or behind the school loo just to share a fag or two. We played together on the football field or simply sat down to talk about everything under the sky. There were just a handful of us but what the Hell, I was happy with the few friends I then had. Today I have more than a thousand. I can talk to them any time of night or day. They can call or write to me any time of the day. They can intrude into my privacy any time they wanted to and I can do the same. Yet I'm still lost; friendless and perhaps on the verge of depression. I have my Face Book friends; My Whatsapp friends; my email and twitter friends. I can literally put all the friends I have in my one pocket, yet I still feel lonely. I console myself with the knowledge that technology has advanced far beyond my understanding yet why does my heart tell me you're a bloody loser; you laugh but still cry when you think no one is watching. Just a passing thought!

Sixty years ago, no let's make it forty, I would rise up with the dawn, put on my jogging shoes, whistle to my dog and together we would run the course from Motphran, via Garrison to Wards Lake and back. It was called exercising one's constitution. Today if I tried the same people would call me loony. Its dangerous today to do what we did yesteryears ago. There is pollution and you can wreck your lungs simply by walking the roads of Shillong. There is the speeding vehicle on the wrong side with a driver who either got his licence because his parents were VIPs or he simply bought his driving licence. Yes today everything is up for sale, and you can even buy an expensive iPhone with the latest GPS to assist your sense of direction. Yet why do I and every one of the indigenous community I belong to feel so completely lost; leaderless; confused and perplexed?

I tried, I sincerely tried to find the moral sense of direction; the guiding principles; the ethics my forefathers held on to and never lost sight

**Passing thoughts**

By Toki Blah

of. Today these values are nowhere to be found. They have simply disappeared; taken leave and vanished. Look I am not trying to sound self-righteous, sanctimonious or holier than thou. Truth is, I am as lost and confused as the next man. I turn to teachers who used to be lighthouses for my generation. Get lost they told me, can't you see we have no time for you. I turn to parents, the bedrock of all society, to only discover that they had relegated their parental responsibilities to 'snowed under' teachers! Children now learn from a soulless uncaring net. I turn to my church for guidance. Sorry My Son, you have come to the wrong place. We provide consultation Sundays only. Rest of the week you're on your own. Clear off, va-moose! Go search for understanding elsewhere. Again just passing thoughts!

I remember passing my IAS in 1972 and being allocated the UP cadre. I was desperate to come back home. In 1977 I was in Delhi looking for a home transfer and by chance came upon Capt WA Sangma, Bah BB Lyngdoh,

low up on their proclaimed love for the Land with a call for independence from India and surprisingly older people who should know better add to this chorus. That needs to be questioned.

The first problem that pops up - Meghalaya has a total of 3,39,217 hectares of cultivable area capable of producing annually only 98,37,293 kgs (9837 MT) food grains. The state needs an extra import of 81,500 MT from outside (through Central assistance) to feed its 32,11,474 population. Where will this shortfall in food grains for an independent Meghalaya come from? From China? The West?

So what do we do now? Here I have a confession to make. The following comments are not the product of a mere passing idle thought. It's what I believe to be the outcome from some serious

*The first problem that pops up - Meghalaya has a total of 3,39,217 hectares of cultivable area capable of producing annually only 98,37,293 kgs (9837 MT) food grains. The state needs an extra import of 81,500 MT from outside (through Central assistance) to feed its 32,11,474 population. Where will this shortfall in food grains for an independent Meghalaya come from? From China? The West?*

Bah Stanley Nichols Roy and Bah GG Swell, all four of them in one place at the same time, sitting together that day in Meghalaya House. It was too good a chance to miss so I approached them. I based my plea on my love for Meghalaya and the need to come back and serve my home state etc. was politely but diplomatically advised that the young state can wait for my return but Meghalaya's practical need then was for time tested bureaucrats. I didn't agree but 45 years down the line I now concur with the sagacious wisdom of those wise elders. Today I find similar absurd irrational sentiments being peddled around our city streets. Youngsters scream from the roof tops about an imagined glorified past. They then fol-

thinking, emerging perhaps from long hours of reading, questioning, discussing and finally coming to some bitter home truths. Fact is we are so engrossed with history, with an imagined glorious past, that we have completely erased the needs of the "future". To be fair to everyone, we first need to define "future". It is the tomorrow of my grandchildren, the era of our future generations! What do these future generations want from us? HOPE I guess. How do we do this? By providing the best quality education they will need to sustain, support and assist themselves in a Globalised World that is rapidly shrinking! And here my friends is where we have miserably failed to provide value based, sustainable educational practices to our

children. Instead our present education system simply emphasises on the mass production of certified literates. Cramming and parrot like repetition are officially acknowledged as education. Reading, understanding and comprehending what has been read actually suppressed and discouraged. This produced in our education system an industry called "Private tuition" which teachers found more lucrative than the meagre salary they are paid to impart knowledge via the classroom. Parents happily welcomed it; teachers encouraged it while the Education Department just turned a blind eye. The educated zombies living in our midst today are its products. No passing thought this. Its stark brutal reality.

The reading habit in our tribal culture is simply not encouraged. Because parents don't read books, the young too weren't nurtured in that environment except perhaps on books that help an "exam-heavy education system". The most that people invest on non-educational reading material, is a newspaper and that too simply to read the latest sensations. With the onset of TV, social media and the mobile phone such investments will further shrink as the social need to gossip is better served through this medium. Yet technologically advanced nations like Israel, smaller in size that Meghalaya, still give extreme importance to reading. On the Sabbath, when everything comes to a halt, the only shops allowed to remain open in the Jewish state are book shops. Books there are pursued for the knowledge they give, for with knowledge comes power. Power brings dignity, self confidence and social elegance. Most of our politicians have tons of money but no social elegance just because they lack depth of knowledge. So we have a self conscious political system, aware of its own educational shortcomings and scared to death of the people ever attaining knowledge. It will mean an end to the political bullshit we have been fed on! So what's to be done? Simple – keep the people from ever achieving power through knowledge. Keep them as illiterate as possible. Killing quality education then becomes a political agenda. No mere passing thought, just the unacceptable truth! Books don't just affect an individual; it affects society as a whole. A great scholar once said: "The history of a person's thought development is his reading history. A race without reading is a race without hope". Damn he must be talking about us!

**No ignominy in importing wheat for our food security**

By Ajit Ranade

There was an extraordinary heat wave in March in northern India which caused wheat yields to go down. The heat wave in Northern Europe was much worse, and has also affected wheat output. As a result of the heat wave, and collapse of exports from Ukraine, the world may be short by around 14 million tonnes of this grain. This has caused wheat prices to spiral. There are frantic efforts by major importers, both diplomatic and commercial, to ensure adequate supplies, including those from last year's crop stored in silos. India's Prime Minister had made an assurance that the country could "feed the world" since we had a bumper crop. But a reassessment after the March heat wave led to a hastily imposed export ban on wheat, something that dismayed the farmers eyeing windfall gains due to high international prices.

trend in changing consumption patterns is more food being served as ready-made food in restaurants and community kitchens. That too is likely on a net basis to lead to an increase in the demand for food.

Thus, if we extrapolate the demand for food grains, taking into account changing consumption patterns, and rising incomes and prosperity, it is clear that domestic availability will not be enough at the current rate of growth of productivity and yields and acreage. Hence sooner or later India has to plan for food security which has a significant linkage with imports, or encouraging Indian companies to own food production in other land abundant countries like Australia or Ethiopia.

Even as India has to plan for food imports due to looming domestic inadequacy (due to changing consumption patterns), the



But by now the situation may be grimmer. This year's output could be ten percent lower than last year's. Thanks to lower procurement combined with higher allocation both to the public distribution system (PDS) and to the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) the current stocks are less than adequate. Between PDS and PMGKAY (free food grain scheme) the total annual requirement is around 32 million tonnes. Add to it a minimum buffer stock of 8 MT that must be maintained for contingencies, emergencies and price stabilisation.

Unfortunately, the current stock which includes carry over stock from last year, and a fresh procurement of 20 MT falls short. This possible shortfall has been denied by the Department of Food and Public Distribution. However, the best indicator of any impending shortage is conveyed by prices. Wheat inflation is running at 12 percent. Traders anticipate an annual production of only 95 MT sharply down from 111 MT last year. Even an independent assessment by the United States agriculture department pegs India's production this year at 98 MT. The PMGKAY commitment was recently extended for a sixth time, to the end of September 2022. The in-kind transfer of free food grain has not only ensured some amount of food security but also protected the recipients from food inflation. That's because the benefit was given in kind rather than in cash. The total incremental outlay for the sixth phase is around Rs 80,000 crore. The government can consider tapering down the benefits of PMGKAY which had begun during the first wave of Covid. But the termination of PMGKAY should not be abrupt. In this context it is worth emphasising that the import of wheat is not a national embarrassment nor should it be politicised. India has been proudly self-sufficient in food grains for several decades, after the initial success of the green revolution, and of policies of public procurement which gives production incentives to farmers. But over the years many distinct changes in consumption patterns of Indians are discernible. Firstly, there is the transition from coarse cereals like jowar and bajra to fine cereals like wheat and rice. Secondly the increase in consumption of meat, dairy and poultry. These require higher production of food grains including corn and soya, as animal feed. In fact, the demand for animal feed has gone up sharply and so has the cost, causing high inflation in milk. The third

current situation of food insecurity is grim. The recently published State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report states that 40.6 percent of India's population suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity during 2019-21. The proportion of those who are severely food insecure has risen from 20.3 percent in 2018-20 to 22.3 percent. The world average is much lower at 10.7 percent. Thus, more than one third of the world's hungry and undernourished people are in India, which is alarming and embarrassing, if not shameful. India's rank in the global hunger index also has dropped to 101 out of 116 countries. The GHI score has been improving in the last few years but the latest score of 27.5 is still considered serious. Even sub-component scores for stunting, wasting and child malnutrition are worrisome. The GHI is computed using three dimensions of child mortality, children malnutrition and food supply adequacy.

In another aspect of its food economy, India has very high dependency on imported edible oils. Even in pulses, a crucial source of proteins, the production has not kept pace and imports of pulses make up 10 to 15 percent of total consumption. That could go up in the future. Milk production is the highest in the world but per capita consumption needs to go up substantially to come up to the world average. For that to happen milk production requires much higher production of animal feedstock like corn. This too implies pressure on increasing agricultural production at a faster pace. It is thus clear that in the near future India's dependence on food imports will rise. This by itself is neither a matter of national prestige nor embarrassment. We are after all big importers of energy, which we hope to reduce with greater use of renewable energy. In a similar way we have to approach the challenge of meeting food security needs, by increasing imports in the coming years, and combining it with strategic planning and coordination. Technology will also play a role in increasing productivity and ensuring crop diversification.

But till we meet the challenge of food security needs; till we have higher technology to increase yields and diversify crops; till we combine strategic planning and coordination in imports, the large scale import of wheat will be necessary to ensure food security and domestic price stability in India.

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

this side of town, it seems we do not deserve this courtesy from the MeECL!

May I request the local MLA and all aspiring candidates from this Nongthymmai constituency, please seriously take up this matter with the MeECL and the state government, otherwise don't waste your time coming to our houses seeking for votes!

Yours etc.,  
Eugene D. Thomas,  
Nongmarboh, Nongrah,  
Shillong -6

**The Khasi Kur System: Signs of Decline**

Editor,  
When we were students we were taught that in the Hynniewtrep society there are no orphans or orphanages because there is the Kur (clan) that looks after the children when their parents die but more precisely when their mother dies even when the father is very much alive, because in this matrilineal system, the mother's Kur will not allow the father to take care of the children after their mother's death, because he belongs to a different Kur. What a sad situation just when the children need their father after their mother's death. This provoked the Maitshaphrang to stage a musical play titled, "Papa

Shano Phi Don" (Father Where Are You) as a mark of protest against the system. This play is now uploaded on Youtube. And now we see so many orphanages coming up even those run by the churches. The question that begs an answer is, from where did all these orphans emerge and where are the Kurs of these orphans that are supposed to take care of them.

We were also taught that because of the existence of the Kur, there are no Old Age Homes in our society because the Kurs are there to look after the elderly in their old age if they have no one to look after them. On August 19, 2022 the Kripa Victoria Senior Citizen Home was inaugurated at Nongsder, Ri Bhoi District, besides the existence of another old age home known as Mercy Home at Nongthymmai. Shillong run by the Sisters of Charity for at least about 40 years. The question again is where are their Kurs?

It's time for the Hynniewtrep people to do some serious introspection, a time to take hard and bold decisions. Which traditions and customs are still relevant today and which need modification or a complete change so that our tradition and customs can keep up with the changing times and strengthen our society to be able to stand up against the different aggressive cultures and fundamentalist teachings confronting us

today. The Maitshaphrang is campaigning for the immediate implementation of the Compulsory Registration of all Marriages in our society and the Equitable Distribution of Ancestral and Self Acquired Property to give both sons and daughters of a family the resources and the responsibility to look after their children as well as their parents as one of the solutions towards a long-term goal.

Yours etc.,  
Michael N Syiem,  
Via email

**Umiam dam and bridge: Is there a Plan B?**

Editor,  
Whenever I happen to cross over the Umiam bridge, there is always a thought in my mind as to what will happen to Shillong City and the people living downstream (Umroi side), should there be any major crack and the dam give way and the whole bridge collapses. Shillong would be totally disconnected and there will be a great disaster for the people living below the dam and the areas surrounding it. We have heard stories across the world of major dam collapse like in Brazil, China and in India too. The miseries and tragedies are unimaginable. There will be loss of power

supply, loss of lives, loss of connectivity. The Umiam Dam, built in the early 1960s has already crossed 50 long years of its existence and service. It is one of the major dams of the North East and the State in particular. The Bridge over the dam is the only connecting link to Shillong.

Heavy and incessant rain in Shillong and nearby areas in the past few days just bring me back to my thoughts on the consequences should the dam collapse owing to the pressure of the volume of water and the heavy traffic (24/7) on the bridge. I am not pessimistic but rather realistic on this issue. My humble request as a citizen to the Power Department and the PWD Department is to have a unified approach and immediate Plan to construct an alternative road linking Shillong with the National Highway. There should be a conscious effort by these departments to think and act right and immediately to avoid any grave consequences should any major mishap arise, which we hope and pray it will not!

Yours etc,  
R N Rymbai,  
Mawroh

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"All wealth is the product of labor."

— John Locke

## The Shillong Times

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### The Fertilizer/Pesticide Imbroglia

A well-thought out Meghalaya Government decision of 2014 declaring that Meghalaya as a state would go organic and do away with chemical fertilisers and pesticides primarily because of the health concerns arising out of the unregulated use of such chemicals by uneducated farmers, is today reversed by the MDA Government. The Green Revolution promoted by Dr MS Swaminathan in the 1960s was meant primarily to overcome India's food production deficit and its dependence on food grain imports. The father of the Green Revolution was Nobel Laureate Norman Borlaug, the American plant breeder and humanitarian. This was a concentrated effort in traditional plant breeding. New strains of corn, rice and wheat, developed over some 20 years of painstaking cross-pollination, were introduced in the third world, along with chemical fertilizers. In India the Green Revolution began in the 1960s during which agriculture was converted into a modern industrial system by the adoption of technology, such as the use of high yielding variety (HYV) of seeds, mechanised farm tools, irrigation facilities, pesticides and fertilizers. Dr Swaminathan, an agricultural scientist relied heavily on the methods initiated by Norman E Borlaug which leveraged agricultural research and technology to increase agricultural productivity in the developing world.

Under Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri the Green Revolution in India started in 1968, leading to an increase in food grain production, especially in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Some of the major milestones in this endeavour were the development of high-yielding varieties of wheat which were also pest-resistant. However, the heavy use of chemicals had a long term effect both on human health and on the environment, primarily the soil quality. Environmentalists like Vandana Shiva have analysed the long-term impacts of the Green Revolution and have come up with evidence-based studies that showed greater environmental, financial and sociological problems like droughts, rural indebtedness and farmer suicides. Reports have also shown soil deterioration from the use of chemicals which has led to the collapse of agricultural systems in many regions of the country, and negatively affected the farmers, food and water supply.

The Congress-led Government under Dr Mukul Sangma rightly decided that it was time to reduce the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides when it was scientifically proven that much of water run-off from agricultural fields landed up in water catchments that were then supplied to homes across the state. A medical doctor by profession Dr Mukul Sangma spoke from a position of safe-guarding public health. He always maintained that soil health was integral to human health because, "we are what we eat." Vegetables absorb chemicals from the soil humans ingest that into their systems leading to large scale affliction by cancer etc. If the policy to reduce chemical fertilisers is to be reversed by the State of Meghalaya it has to be done after meaningful discussion in the Assembly and cannot arbitrarily be reversed by the Government with an eye on appeasing a section of farmers only.

### Letters to the Editor

#### When great minds speak, scientists must remain silent

Editor,  
As citizens of Meghalaya we have reconciled ourselves to the fact that the Agriculture Minister is no scientist. It is a self-confessed statement by the Minister himself, on the floor of the State Assembly itself, hence no one can be blamed for highlighting the Minister's self-acclaimed qualification. This same Minister has again through a video clip that has gone literally viral, yet again demonstrated that he is no Historian either. He has virtually claimed that Indian Independence is 150 years old. Mahatma Gandhi had better make way for a new freshly arisen Father of Free India who has just emerged from the hallowed portals of the MDA Cabinet! Going by NEHU standards nowadays, we should not be surprised that perhaps, someday, some bright research scholar from NEHU History Department will get a PhD by supporting the Agricultural Minister's historical perspective. Academicians by now should realize that in the New India they should know which

side of their political bread is buttered. Otherwise, there's no chance to rise and become VC of NEHU. Anyway, that's besides the point.

The moot point is that this same Minister, with the above brilliant academic qualifications has been advised to come up with a major Policy change in our Agricultural sector. Perhaps because of pressure from the farming lobby of his Mawkyntew constituency or whatever, Meghalaya has already decided to dump its Mission Organic and revert back to Mission No Organic. So we go back to history just like a certain person from ancient Indian history who went by the name of Mohamed Bin Tughluq and who arbitrarily decided to shift India's capital from Delhi to Daulatabad and in the process caused the death of many people.

On August 22, 2022 The Shillong Times decides to drop another political bombshell on its page three with the caption "Organic Farming, Sawkmie defends Govt from charge." Great! I mean it's just great. Another great man to defend the indefensible "today it is white, tomorrow it is black" of this MDA Government. Just to remind ourselves, this same MLA from Mawlai had on one fine memorable day, de-

Democracy, as we are told is meant for the people, by the people, and of the people. In the present context, it looks like the real meaning of democracy has practically zero worth. When we talk of democracy, the first thing that comes to mind is "The Government," followed by the people who run it. We all talk about laws that are equal for all. This is just a hypothetical idea and not the slightest bit pragmatic, yet everybody actually reiterates that laws are the same for all. In 2012, the Supreme Court banned the use of tinted glasses in vehicles, restricting vision beyond the permissible limit as fixed under the Motor Vehicles Act.

The Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989, say that the windshield and rear windows of vehicles should have a visual light transmission of 70 percent, and for side windows it should be at least 50 percent. In the recent news, the Deputy Chief Minister mentioned to the media that tinted glass is required for the security of the VIPs. As ordinary citizens, we can't help thinking about what he implied by VIPs. Who are these "VIPs?" It would be extremely useful if he could expand the meaning and whether the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of the District Councils (MDCs) are listed under the list of VIPs. If so, we request his esteemed office to issue a notification on the same, so that the general public will not blabber on this issue over and over again for years.

It may be mentioned that Prestone Tynsong had said the use of tinted glasses by politicians and VIPs is not an infringement of the Supreme Court Order since it guarantees their safety. Which order of the Supreme Court indicated the above as told by the Dy. CM? Is the safety of politician(s) superior to that of the general public? Does it mean that the lives of ordinary people have no value? Why would the lives of the politicians be at risk? The simple reason is that they are not doing the job they are supposed to, in terms of performance, accessibility, promises etc., And what makes them think their lives are in danger unless they are involved in something that endangers their lives?

How aware is the Dy. CM of the VIP culture? The ones who are no longer eligible are still enjoying the cake, e.g., former MLAs and MDCs, or retired government officials. Post retirement and losing an election, they become ordinary citizens once again. Why are they still allowed to

ply the roads in their private vehicles with tinted glasses? Can Tynsong give a convincing reply to this? He also added that most politicians travel at night, so he believes that having dim glasses in the vehicle is ideal. Who doesn't travel at night? Whose lives are never at stake? His statements make us wonder why the lives of these public servants are important than the public. But what about the women and men that drive alone at night from work after a tiring day to head back home? How certain is he of their safety? Has he ever considered this? We are sure that he has not, and neither will he, as long as he and his flock get to travel safely.

Prestone has been thinking too much about the state's VIPs, but is he aware that, as per a Supreme Court order, tinted glasses are only permitted on the vehicles of people in the Z and Z plus categories? Just to let him know, the people who get Z+ security are Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, Mukesh Ambani, Amit Shah, Salman Khan, Yogi Adityanath, and various others. As of late, we learnt that Billionaire Gautam Adani

Ramachandran, made it clear that government vehicles also fall under the purview of the Supreme Court ban. That was merely a vague comment to defend the government and the ones in power. It was also learnt that many senior government officials do not endorse this decision. A senior government official even threatened that if anybody tried to remove the tinted glasses from his vehicle, he would directly approach the court. Hence it is crystal clear that this order from the apex court would fail miserably and the result is seen playing itself out daily.

The former Home Minister of Meghalaya, Roshan Warjri, in the budget session of the 8th house of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly in 2013, informed that as many as 47 VIPs and VVIPs are allowed to use tinted glass in their vehicles. She never mentioned which category these VIPs/VVIPs were in. By 2022, the number must have increased by 600% substantially.

A very controversial incident happened in August 2019, after the incumbent, MLA of Rambrai-Jyngam constituency, dragged a po-

*A very controversial incident happened in August 2019, after the incumbent, MLA of Rambrai-Jyngam constituency, dragged a police officer to the Assembly Privileges Committee for having been asked to remove the tinted glass from his private vehicle. Wasn't the police official doing his duty?*

is the new entrant to the 'Z' category VIP security club. So under which category do our CM, Ministers, and MLAs/MDCs fall? If they cannot avail themselves of the above category of security, they should do away with the tinted glasses from their official and private vehicles as soon as possible. In some cases, being placed in a category is viewed as a status symbol by politicians, and many use their clout to secure a Z+ security detail. This is nothing but a waste of taxpayers' money.

To recall a decade old news report, on the second day of the drive against tinted glasses continuing across the state on May 16, 2012, it was, however, noticed that government vehicles were left untouched by the traffic police. Eleven years ago, they had already given the public a sign that those in the government were and will always remain above the law. The former, Meghalaya DGP N.

Police officer to the Assembly Privileges Committee for having been asked to remove the tinted glass from his private vehicle. Wasn't the police official doing his duty? When such officials are performing their duty, the ones in power are the ones obstructing them. This is a sad reality that a legislator who should be safeguarding the law is actually breaking it blatantly. Former SP (Traffic) BD Marak said, "If we do not follow the rules, it will be contempt of court." Did he mean 'we,' as ordinary citizens? Or did he mean everyone, including politicians and those in power?

Security cover for individuals, including MPs, is provided only on the basis of individual threat perception. State governments have their own criteria for providing security to MPs. The list of MPs provided security under various categories is not maintained centrally, replied the former Minister of State

in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Haribhai Parthibhai Chaudhary, when asked by Narayan Lal Panchariya in the Rajya Sabha in the winter session of 2015. The apex court order mentions that certain VIPs/VVIPs using black films on their vehicles for security reasons is not supported by law, as no notification by any competent authority has been brought to its notice giving exemption to such vehicles from the operation of Rule 100 or any of its provisions.

The Supreme Court had stated that it would be up to the State Committees to examine such cases for exemption in accordance with the law and after due consideration. These certificates should be provided only in relation to official cars of VIPs or VVIPs, depending upon the category of security that such persons have been awarded by the competent authority. In fact, most public figures, including the CM, his ministers, MLAs, DCs, SPs, etc., and the police officials themselves, do not adhere to the requirements and are seen to have fixed almost 0% transparency (total dark) tinted glasses in their vehicles (both public and private).

Whom should we hold accountable for the failure of the Supreme Court order? Shouldn't the concerned authorities discipline themselves? They are supposed to be the keepers of the law but are themselves, lawbreakers. It is widely understood that laws are made to be implemented. The question is, have they been implemented strictly? If not, why not? It seems that there is no specific law to book those that are flouting the law.

In a different context, Under the Motor Vehicle (Driving) Regulations, 2017, parking a vehicle on a footpath, cycle track, and pedestrian crossing is illegal. However, it is often seen that the ones who should be the attendants of the law are themselves crooks, thus jeopardising the adage, "Practice what you preach". A fresh breach by an army vehicle last week that was parked on a footpath in front of a gate of private property in the Laitumkhrah area is a clear demonstration that law and order has and never will be applicable to the ones who are supposed to set examples for many. If such a violation was committed by a lay person a hefty fine and clamp on the parked vehicle would have followed.

So who is flouting the law? The general public or the ones in power? Who will decide this if not the courts of justice?

and morally.

The whole purpose of all institutions is to work for the welfare of women in ensuring their security and upliftment. On the contrary here is a high-profile case where convicts are being released under the 1992 Remission Policy. The Gujarat's Remission Policy 2014 was implemented with an aim to rectify the inadequacies of the 1992 policy. However, the concerned State chose the 1992 policy over the new Policy which is fallacious in nature. It seems that there is no hope in this country for women, when people at the helm of affairs are going full throttle to suppress the weaker gender. Therefore, I strongly condemn the insensitivities of the State of Gujarat towards securing and giving justice to women which only paves way for other criminals to further exploit the system. I strongly condemn and will never accept that this could be the new normal for women in India.

Yours etc.,  
Deity Majaw,  
Via email

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

# Law Makers or Law Breakers

By Emidao Shylla

## Flood Fury Holistic strategy vital

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Every monsoon season brings with it headlines of flash floods, landslides and the number of people killed or rendered homeless. Floods are most lethal in India as these account for over 40 percent of deaths out of all natural disasters. These are also the costliest among disasters, accounting for around 70 percent of economic losses caused by all disasters. Between 1980 and 2017, India experienced 235 floods, which led to 126,286 deaths and affected 1.93 billion people. The economic losses due to floods stood at a humongous \$58.7 billion.

Moreover, estimates reveal that around 45.35 million hectares of land is vulnerable to floods. It has been found that as per the variable of 'liable to flood prone area as a percentage of State geographical area', Punjab is most prone (over 80 percent) followed by Bihar (73 percent), Haryana (53 percent) and Assam (48.7 percent). The population fatality by floods is the highest in Uttar Pradesh followed by Bihar, Gujarat and Assam with Manipur witnessing the lowest number. However, in recent years, Assam and the north-eastern states have been witness to high levels of inundation.

This year also heavy rainfall has been affecting north-eastern India, particularly in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Meghalaya since early May, triggering landslides and causing river overflow and floods that have resulted in casualties and damage. Media reports indicate several fatalities due to floods and landslides. About 40,000 persons have been displaced to relief camps, while over 197,000 people have been affected. 12 relief distribution centres have also been opened up. Rescue operations are being carried out by National and State Disaster Response Forces (NDRF & SDRF), Fire and Emergency Services and local population. Not just in the North-East but several other states such as Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand not to speak of Maharashtra's capital Mumbai have witnessed heavy rainfall and a flood-like situation. But surprisingly there has been deficient rainfall in West Bengal and Odisha. Obviously, climate change has made this possible as flood prone areas are suffering due to deficiency in rainfall, while drought prone regions are witnessing heavy rainfall. As of 3 August, the death toll reached 1,354 across India, as reported by the National Emergency Response Centre (NDMC).

The worst affected States are: Himachal Pradesh (with 232 fatalities), Assam (199), Madhya Pradesh (162), Gujarat (119) and Maharashtra (112). It needs to be mentioned here that the major flood prone regions in India are Punjab, Haryana, most of the Gangetic plains, including UP, North Bihar and West Bengal, the Brahmaputra valley, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, and southern Gujarat. Now-a-days Kerala and Tamil Nadu also feel the fury of the floods. In September 2014, the Kashmir region witnessed disastrous floods. In June 2013, a multi-day cloudburst centred on the northern state of Uttarakhand, caused devastating floods and landslides in its districts caused by torrential rainfall. The major factors causing floods are obviously meteorological factors such as heavy rainfall, tropical cyclones and cloud burst, physical factors such as large catchment area, and inadequate catchment area; of course, human factors like deforestation, siltation, faulty agricultural practices, bursting and overflow of dams and, accelerated urbanisation.

Coming to the question of impacts of floods, it is a well-known fact that this affects the poorer and marginalised

sections of society, mainly residing in rural areas. These include: one, destructions of human settlements as millions are rendered homeless with serious consequences on the national economy and society; two, destruction of valuable crops almost every year as also damaging physical infrastructure such as roads, rails, bridges etc; and three, spread of diseases like cholera, gastroenteritis, hepatitis and other water-borne diseases spread in the flood-affected areas. However, one cannot deny that floods make a few positive contribution as floods deposit fertile silt over agricultural fields, which helps in soil fertility.

In the NDMA Act, 2005, the responsibilities to act and provide relief flow from the Centre to the bottom (local governance bodies). This means that in a disaster situation, the uniformed forces that go down to the site for relief and response works, which may not be familiar with terrain, find it necessary that local self-governance bodies, such as panchayats, aware of both the area and people much better, would give a helping hand.

With that in mind, after the 2018 Kerala floods, the state government saw the need to alter its disaster management governance.

In January 2020, under the Rebuild Kerala Initiative, the state government passed an order for the "preparation of disaster management plans by local self-government institutions". Reports reveal that including these disaster plans into Gram Panchayats' Annual Plans has been completed successfully. They are currently gearing towards another round of listing down their projects for relief and response, along with mitigation and flood-proofing activities for their villages.

It needs to be understood that over the years, floods, landslides and other natural disasters have led to more refugees than from all the wars we have fought. Thus, though with the advancement of technology such as satellite and remote-sensing equipment, flood waves are being tracked as the water level rises, evacuation and proper rehabilitation is not being successfully carried out. Therefore, the focus of an effective strategy should be on mapping of flood prone areas to give proper indication of water flow during floods and land use control, thereby reducing the danger of life and property, when the waters inundate the flood plains and the coastal areas. At the same time, authorities should strictly monitor that no major development should be permitted in the areas which are subjected to high flooding. The other aspect that needs consideration and which is being neglected is decreasing the amount of run-off with the help of reforestation. Flood diversion includes levees, embankments, dams and channel improvement. Dams can store water and can release water at a manageable rate. But the failure of dams in earthquakes and operation of releasing the water can cause floods in the lower areas. The other aspect is flood proofing measures, which are already under way. As drainage system is generally choked by the construction of roads, canals, railway tracks etc. there is a need to restore floods to the original form of drainage system.

Finally, to mitigate the impact of floods, there is a need for States to devise long-term disaster management policies. While flood forecasting systems need further accuracy, specially in low-lying areas, this needs to reach the rural population. The government should spend more on flood prevention and mitigation measures. Another crucial area is river connectivity and construction of multipurpose cyclones and flood shelters in low lying areas that help mitigate the loss of lives from floods. ---INFA

"A clear and innocent conscience  
fears nothing"

— Elizabeth I

## The Shillong Times

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### Raids and poaching

A palpable sense of uncertainty has gripped the Aam Admi Party (AAP) government led by Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi and a fear of the unknown looms large over it. The government might fall if the BJP's alleged "Operation Lotus" offensive gains success sooner or later. Word spread that the BJP is trying to poach 40 MLAs out of the 60-plus of the ruling AAP, with a "promised offer of gratification" of Rs 20 crore per legislator. The veracity of such allegations cannot be established but fact is, the BJP has grown weary of the Kejriwal enterprise after the Chief Minister began making frequent trips to Gujarat, five in a month's time. Without doubt, by targeting Gujarat, Kejriwal is targeting Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, who lord over the political turf there. Defeating the BJP in Gujarat in the assembly polls in December would mean half the battle won for the national Opposition in the 2024 general elections.

This is not an impossible proposition as the Congress had put the BJP on edge in the last assembly polls in Gujarat. If the AAP too stepped in there in the coming polls, the BJP will be the loser more than the Congress. Kejriwal is aiming to give a platform to the underlings who hardly got any benefit from the BJP rule in the state for the past quarter of a century and those who gained there were the powerful communities like the Patels. So was the case during the previous Congress rules there as well.

The Kejriwal edifice has already taken a hit in the form a raid by CBI on the residence of Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on allegations that something is fishy about the liquor policy that has come under the scanner of the CBI, the caged parrot. Kejriwal himself fears Sisodia might be arrested. Amid the gathering storm, he went up to Rajghat to pray for the safety of the AAP government. The Modi government has acquired a kind of notoriety for the suspected misuse of the CBI and ED to target its political rivals. Bengal's Mamata Banerjee had a bitter taste of it and she's left speechless after the raids on Partha Chatterjee and Anubrata Mondal. Question is, what of the rest of the large army of the corrupt, the looters of public money at every turn. 'Selective amnesia' is unacceptable. Also, the cause of democracy is not being served if the ruling party at the Centre adopts third-degree methods to target rivals and pull down state governments.

# Meghalaya tourism: Headed for a crash

By Patricia Mukhim

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has acclaimed that tourism in Meghalaya is booming. Before he says anything more, I would request him to walk in the shoes of the common man (if he knows what that is considering that he has been a child of privilege throughout his life), and then see how it feels like to travel to Sohra, Dawki, Jowai et al on the weekends. I say that the CM should be a common man so that like the ancient king he can travel incognito to find out the plight of his subjects. And that means he should drive his own vehicle and have no entourage before or after him either of cops or camp followers. Only then will the Chief Minister know that on weekends the local people here have to content themselves with remaining indoors. They can't think of a family outing because every space is invaded by day travelers from the neighbouring state (I don't have to spell the name. It starts with 'A' and is currently ruled by Big Brother - Dada).

Meghalaya is not just any place. It is intended to provide a different experience. The environment is the selling point here. The environment is a living being, not a stone structure or a temple. Here we have resplendent waterfalls, picturesque canyons, green forest canopies and just nature. But what needs special mention are the Living Root Bridges some old and others newly discovered. Every newly discovered destination is assaulted by visitors who don't have the faintest idea on how to value these unique resources. I am not sure if the Tourism graduates we turn out are engaged in creating narratives that give these unique spaces a more nuanced perspective.

Let's take the instance of the Mawphlang Sacred Grove. Tourists enter the forest without understanding the sacredness of that space. 'Sacred' would imply a reverential silence and appreciating the ancient wisdom that made our ancestors conserve the trees inside that space without having been educated on modern environmental concepts that the forest is a feeder of catchments and nourishes rivers downstream. There is no need for the guide to give a running conversation and for the visitors to cackle on and on and disturb the peace of the place. A pamphlet that explains all aspects of the Sacred Grove can be included as part of the entry fee which I feel should be raised to a reasonably higher price. "Law Kynthang" does not translate simply to Sacred Grove because modern man no longer considers anything

sacred. Kynthang means that something is considered holy and deserving of respect especially because of a connection with a god. Are we as locals of Meghalaya even conscious about this sense of sacredness? If we did would we be drinking liquor and other intoxicants just outside the Sacred Grove? But that's because those guarding the place have not been able to instill in visitors this sense of exclusivity. I don't suppose that those guides are trained enough to create that feeling of awe and respect among those visitors into the Sacred Grove.

In a recent article, Albert Thymiang rued the fact that he and his friends had to pay entry fees at the Wards' Lake and the Lady Hydari Park (now called the Phan Nonglait Park). Why not? Every space needs to be maintained; someone has to clean and pick up the garbage and return it to its natural shape after the thoughtless, shameless visitors have dumped all their trash here. In fact, some of the places like Tyche Falls near Jowai charge far too less - a mere Rs 20 - for what is a spectacular waterfall that gushes down about a 100 feet tall precipice. The hills and dales, the waterfalls, caves, forests, living root bridges, and the cleanliness and silence around these spaces are our only tourism resources. If these resources are exploited beyond their capacity to regenerate themselves then we are actually killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

Meghalaya is not meant for mass tourism even if the Chief Minister rejoices in the tourism boom judging only by the footfalls of day tourists that don't spend their nights in homestays or hotels; use their own vehicles and return to their states by evening. All that is added to the Meghalaya eco-sphere is pollution, traffic jams (again something that VIPs like the Chief Ministers are spared of) and a lot of garbage left behind by unthinking, grossly overrated tourists.

What Meghalaya needs is 'Niche' tourism. We need tourists to book online stating the destinations they want to visit and also pay online. Those running these destinations should be able to handle such digital payments and also put a cap on the number of tourists per day they wish to have for the Double Decker Living Root Bridge and other root bridges. We can't have hundreds of tourists on a given day trundling on the fragile "Living" root. Sometimes one wonders whether the

locals themselves understand the meaning of "Living Root" and hence their nonchalance about the number of visitors allowed, so long as they get to pocket the money which is a pittance considering that these bridges are rare and are repositories of ancient wisdom. Without our own people understanding the value of the environment and its bountiful gifts how can we expect tourists to respect the same? I often wonder if we humans can claim the right to sell the environment and who has given us that right? No wonder nature takes her own toll by way of flash floods and landslides and what have you? The more the onslaught on nature the more is the likelihood of it fighting back.

Khasis call nature "Ka Mei Mariang" but they now don't seem to care to exploit it to its bare bones. Everything today boils down to just one thing - MONEY. Sure we need money and we need to create livelihoods through tourism but not in the manner we are doing it now. Right now no place is sacrosanct and everything is lost out to crass commercialism which is what Mass Tourism does. And Mass Tourism is what destroys destinations around the world until people wake up and realise their mistakes and redeem what they have lost. But sometimes that realization comes far too late in the day and regenerating a tourist destination is no longer possible.

So yes, we don't need to be told that the tourism destinations of Meghalaya are over-heated. We see it unfolding before our eyes. Tour operators and hoteliers may think this is pouring cold water on their ambitious plans but some truths have to be told and told plainly. Meghalaya has a Tourism Policy dated 2021. This Policy is generic in nature and over-ambitious. It does not spell out the meaning of "sustainability" mentioned there. So let me tell the Government what is no longer sustainable. Its when the local people dare not come out on weekends and holidays because their sights and senses are assaulted by the ubiquitous tourists. Indeed on weekends, the local populace just cannot venture out to any of the tourist destinations. They are crowded and there's unending traffic jams along the Upper Shillong road right up to Sohra and beyond. People from Assam come on day trips in Assam vehicles and spend close to nothing in Meghalaya. People just discard chips packets and cans and bottles of juices they

have bought from the local vendors.

The beautiful sights and sounds are all sold too cheap. Visitors to the awesome Tyche Falls in Jaintia Hills pay only Rs 20 per head to watch what is one of Meghalaya's luxuriant waterfall whose height is nearly 100 feet. Below the waterfalls are lush green fields of rice fed by the water from the waterfall. Charging Rs 20 for such a delightful natural beauty is short-selling Meghalaya.

The Vision Statement of the Meghalaya Tourism Policy, 2011 is, "To position Meghalaya as a preferred tourist destination by taking advantage of its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty." On the execution part the Policy says, "Tourism development will be undertaken in a manner so as to ensure sustainability and conservation of the state's environment and natural resources. Development of tourism activities around natural resources will be done in conjunction with the relevant Government Departments and in concurrence with any laws relating to protection and conservation. Sustainable development of tourism will also help generate employment for the local people without impacting on environment and local culture. Well, nothing of this is happening. The Policy naturally says all the right things to make it look good but what's on the ground is nothing close to what's on paper.

There is the point on - "Wellness, Health & Herbal Tourism - Spa holidays are becoming popular these days. Meghalaya has immense potential in this segment and can be a leading player in health and wellness tourism where professionally devised programmes can be initiated and delivered like yoga centres, ayurvedic treatments, rejuvenating treatments etc. Bestowed with an abundant variety of medicinal plants, the state could promote Health & Herbal Tourism. The indigenous people with their inherent knowledge for herbal medicines and massages that provide holistic healing and rejuvenation will be encouraged and promoted. Areas and locations having valuable medicinal plants will be identified for the purpose of conducting educational herbal trails. Existing herbal medicinal centres will be encouraged in a regulated manner which shall form part of an important component of wellness tourism.

I have looked high and low and not found a single herbal healing centre!

This part is only wishful thinking on paper. The Tourism Policy needs a massive revamp!

# A nation that is losing its conscience

By Barnes Mawrie

"No loss is more deplorable than the loss of a conscience, a sense of right and wrong." A nation may be economically poor, militarily weak but when it has a great sense of righteousness, it does not lack strength and moral integrity. On the other hand, a country may possess all the wealth in the world but when it is affected by moral depravity, it is a miserable country. In the words of Eraldo Banovac "wealth and power aren't the most important things in life. What is truly important is to have a clear conscience." When those at the helm of state affairs function without a conscience, tragedy is bound to follow the nation. It was because of conscienceless leaders like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini or Emperor Hirohito, that humanity had to suffer the holocaust of World War II. Presently, it is due to such conscienceless leaders like Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping or Kim Jong Un, that innocent people continue to suffer in their countries and neighbouring countries.

Sadly when we turn to our beloved country India today, we cannot but lament the fact that our nation is fast losing its conscience. In these recent years we have witnessed trampling down of the innocent and the glorification of criminals. The case of the release and

fact that in spite of all the ills in the country, there are still many who add fuel to the fire and still many more who just keep silent without coming forward to condemn such acts of injustice and malice, speaks volume of a nation bereft of a conscience. As Albert Einstein had rightly remarked "the world is evil not only because there are evil people, but more because there are many good people who see evil but do nothing about it." When it comes to the Bilkis Bano case, how many Indians have come out to condemn the injustice against her? In our country it is evident that those who are in power or who have close links with the powerful, can always dodge the law and go scot free. The fact that supporters and sympathizers of the BJP government who are guilty of certain crimes are rarely brought before the law, is yet another indication that our country has lost its conscience.

Coming to our own state, we cannot deny the fact that we are no better than the rest. The manner our political leaders and bureaucrats use their privileged positions to achieve their personal agenda, shows that our collective conscience is gradually diminishing. The fact that responsible parties engaged in public developmental projects like

*"The ongoing politics of vendetta that we witness in India today is another proof of a nation robbed of its conscience. What the BJP government is doing to the opposition parties today, namely, sending the CBI and the ED against them and implicating them in criminal acts, is nothing but a politics of vendetta. No one would question the government for probing into corruption and crimes, but to be selective in the choice of victims is highly questionable."*

the glorious welcome of the eleven rapists in Gujarat and the denial of justice to the victim, Bilkis Bano, is a sad manifestation of how our country has lost its sense of right and wrong. To glorify the culprits and victimize the helpless victims is the highest form of injustice and the clearest sign of a conscienceless nation.

The ongoing politics of vendetta that we witness in India today is another proof of a nation robbed of its conscience. What the BJP government is doing to the opposition parties today, namely, sending the CBI and the ED against them and implicating them in criminal acts, is nothing but a politics of vendetta. No one would question the government for probing into corruption and crimes, but to be selective in the choice of victims is highly questionable. A government that thrives on vendetta and demolition of any opposition, is a threat to democracy and a danger to the country. A country that has many of the political leaders tainted with criminal records and are of dubious character, is plainly a country that lacks a good conscience. How can we expect such persons to behave like saints? Consequently, we witness so much of corruption and injustice and lack of probity in public life perpetrated by our politicians. There is a sort of immoral principle that our politicians and bureaucrats seem to adhere to, namely, that "positions and authority are means to their selfish end. The recent surge in hate speeches perpetrated by our political leaders especially against minority groups which have sparked off unending protests and violence in different parts of the country, is another proof that we are fast losing our collective conscience. The

roads, bridges, buildings etc, use substandard materials to enhance their personal profits without considering the safety of the public, is yet another manifestation of a people bereft of a conscience. Another example could be the massive legalization of liquor shops and gambling in Shillong and elsewhere just because the government is reaping a rich revenue from these, without however considering the fact that our young people are the actual victims, is yet another indication of moral degeneration in the state.

The culture of "self enrichment" of those in authority at the cost of the poor and the weak, is a systemic evil in our state which has blunted the conscience of those caught up in the system. We as the children of the hymniewtrep hynhiewskum (seven huts) have long forgotten the great ethical commandment "kamai ta ka hok" (earn righteousness) handed down to us by our ancestors. Today we live as though such a thing did not exist or unheard of. Moral depravity has set in and we seem to have lost our personal as well as our collective conscience altogether. More than the loss of wealth and possession, the loss of conscience is the most lamentable fact.

India is a country of the great Mahatma, a man known and respected for his integrity - a just and righteous man whom the world looks up to. We Meghalayans are descendants of U Tirot Sing and Pa Togan Sangma the great freedom fighters who lived by the principles of justice and righteousness and who were ready to sacrifice themselves for the well-being of others. How come we are drifting farther and farther away from the virtues that they stood for?

### Letters to the Editor

#### NEHU Affairs

Editor,  
Apropos of the news item "Forum panel to study central notices, says NEHU Union" which appeared in The Shillong Times (ST August 23, 2022), I can understand the unhappiness on the part of protesting casual workers as the University Negotiation Committee under my Chairmanship did not give any false hope of accepting their unrealistic demands. This is the reason that they expressed the view that "the current Negotiation committee under the Chairmanship of SB Prasad has failed miserably to address the issue of workers". Their demands have been extensively changing from one letter to another. Most of the possible demands such as fitting of aquaguards, providing safety kits at the time of duty, identity cards, overtime based on performance certificates, etc have been accepted in principle. The protesting workers do not want attendance cum performance certificate to be followed for them by NEHU and they have sent a representation in this regard to Her Excel-

lency the President of India. It should be known that attendance and monitoring of the work are mandatory for even the regular employees of the University. Further, it should be clear that the terms and conditions of the payment of salary/wages to regular workers/casual daily wage workers are governed separately by the Government rules. The protesting casual workers demanded, "our salary to be implemented as per 7th Pay Commission Revision". Is it possible for NEHU or any other central organization to implement the 7th pay commission revision for them? Similarly, the demand that TA should be paid to casual workers as "the majority of these workers spend around Rs. 350 daily in their traveling expenses whereas they receive below Rs. 500 in hand per day" is beyond my understanding, as if, it is the responsibility of the University to bring protesting casual workers daily from their residence and drop them back. NEHU is paying 30/31 days wages to casual workers which is exceeding 26 days of work in a month. The wages are also paid to them for holidays declared by the Government. The negotiation committee

has clarified repeatedly that whatever is possible as per Laws, Rules, and Regulations of Govt. of India applicable to casual workers will be followed regarding their demands. Further, it was also mentioned to them that there are so many Central Universities/Institutions in the North-east and the rest of the country, that have a much greater number of casual workers, so, submit any supporting document concerning your variety of demands, but till date, casual workers have failed to provide a single document in this regard.

Further, as far as the number of representatives to be present from both sides during negotiation is concerned, the protesting workers themselves are behaving very casually as they come differently in numbers such as 6, 11, 15, 17, etc on different occasions for the joint meeting. Sometimes they become adamant to come up with 22 members. Now protesting casual workers want "joint body of experts to be constituted by drawing five members from NEHU and five from the union". This again reflects their hidden agenda as if the 10 members Negotiation committee under my Chairmanship

constituted by the University are not aware of the facts. The casual workers' concern should be to select their representatives cum experts.

Regarding other demands, I have to mention that the Negotiation committee is already examining the cases as per Hon'ble Supreme Court decisions, Government notifications, and also the Hon'ble High Court decision of dismissing the petition filed by the many casual workers of NEHU. It has been "emphasized by the University Negotiation committee to the Casual Workers that if they are not convinced/satisfied with the ongoing Negotiation with regard to the demand of regularization of their services, they are at liberty to seek legal redressal".

The Negotiation Committee appealed several times to agitating casual workers "to withdraw the silent protest so that work in the respective section/Departments does not suffer. Even after the withdrawal of the protest, the talk process may continue with the University Negotiation Committee for an amicable solution of all the demands within the ambit of existing Rules, Regulations of the University and Government of India". I

hereby again humbly appeal to protesting workers to call off their protest in the interest of the University and their own interests.

Yours etc.,  
Prof. S. B. Prasad  
NEHU, Shillong

#### On traffic jams

Editor,  
There have been many letters appearing in The Shillong Times bringing to light the traffic congestion in the city. Citizens are being told to make a conscious effort to lessen this burden by following good traffic discipline. But, what about political parties? Are they above law? Are they allowed to disrupt everything just because they're holding a meeting? A Political Party Office in Lachumiere has been causing unwanted problems almost every week, not just for residents but also for the adjoining schools and offices. They have gone to the extent of calling car owners over the phone to vacate the space so that the most esteemed guests of political parties can park in that space. So much so that traffic policemen are now hanging around the party office with

swipe machines in their hand ready to penalise any offender. They even go to the extent of changing traffic routes, putting no entry signs and throwing the entire traffic of the locality and thereby the city out of gear. And all this happens at the peak of school and office hours.

Taking a cue from this political party, another has set up shop next door. There have also been suggestions that the Lachumiere area shouldn't be further congested, yet we see multiple office buildings cropping up every day. To make the situation worse the new SP's Office has been proposed to be moved to Lachumiere as well. When political leaders are supposed to set an example to the citizens to manage the ever-increasing traffic congestion in the city, why is it that they seem to be worsening the situation instead of behaving responsibly?

Yours etc.,  
Emica Nongkynrih,  
Via email

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



# FUTURE IMPERFECT

If you thought this summer's heat waves were bad, a new study has some disturbing news about dangerous heat in the future

As global temperatures rise, people in the tropics, including places like India and Africa's Sahel region, will likely face dangerously hot conditions almost daily by the end of the century – even as the world reduces its greenhouse gas emissions, a new study shows.

The mid-latitudes, including the U.S., will also face increasing risks. There, the number of dangerously hot days, marked by temperatures and humidity high enough to cause heat exhaustion, is projected to double by the 2050s and continue to rise.

In the study, scientists looked at population growth; economic development patterns, energy choices and climate models to project how heat index levels – the combination of heat and humidity – will change over time. We asked University of Washington atmospheric scientist David Battisti, a co-author of the study, published Aug. 25, 2022, to explain the findings and what they mean for humans around the world.

What does the new study tell us about heat waves in the future, and importantly the impact on people?

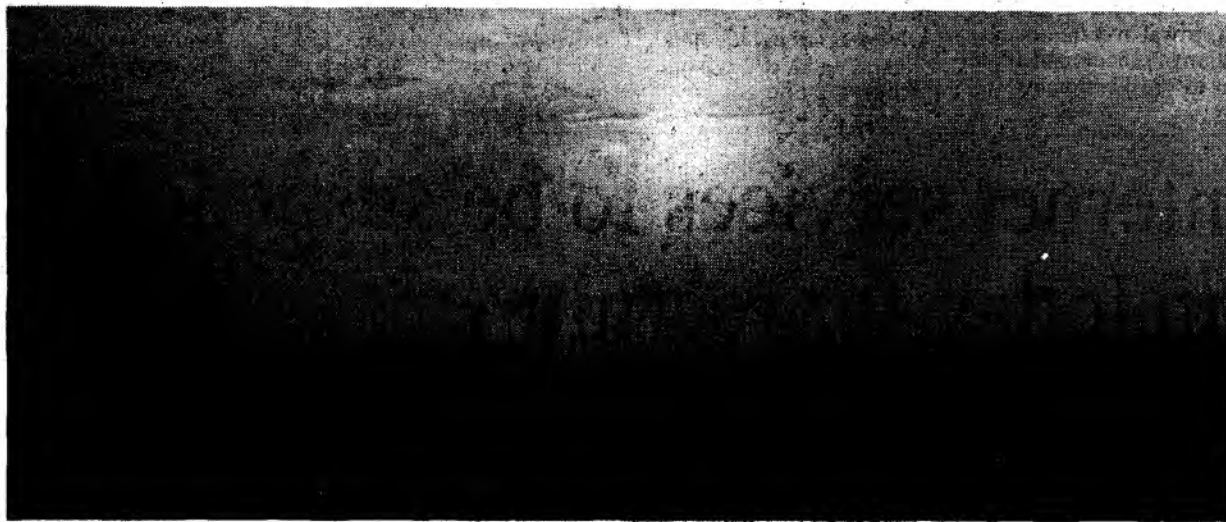
There are two sources of uncertainty when it comes to future temperature. One is how much carbon dioxide humans are going to emit – that depends on things like population, energy choices and how much the economy grows. The other is how much warming those greenhouse gas emissions will cause.

In both, scientists have a really good sense of the likelihood of various scenarios. For this study, we combined those estimates to get a likelihood in the future of having dangerous and life-threatening temperatures.

We looked at what these “dangerously high” and “extremely dangerous” levels on the heat index would mean for daily life in both the tropics and in the mid-latitudes.

“Dangerous” in this case refers to the likelihood of heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion won't kill you if you're able to stop and slow down – it's characterized by fatigue, nausea, a slowed heartbeat, possibly fainting. But you really can't work under these conditions.

The heat index indicates when a person is likely



to reach that threshold. The National Weather Service defines “dangerous” as a heat index of 103 F (39.4 C), and “extremely dangerous” as 125 F (51.7 C). If a person gets to “extremely dangerous” temperatures, that can lead to heat stroke. At that level, you have a few hours to get medical attention to cool your body down, or you die.

“Extremely dangerous” heat index conditions are almost unheard of today. They happen in a few locations near the Gulf of Oman, for example, for maybe a few days in a decade.

But the odds of the number of “dangerous” days are increasing as the planet warms. We'll likely have about the same weather variability as today, but it's all happening on top of a higher average temperature. So, the likelihood of extremely hot conditions increases.

What does your study show for each region?

In the mid-latitudes by 2050, we'll see the number of dangerous heat days double in the most likely future scenario – even under modest greenhouse gas emissions that would meet the Paris climate agreement target of keeping warming under 2 C (3.6 F).

In the Southeastern U.S., the most likely scenario

is that people will experience a month or two of dangerous heat days every year. The same is likely in parts of China, where some regions have been sweating through a summer 2022 heat wave for over two straight months.

We found that by the end of the century, most places in the mid-latitudes will see a three- to tenfold increase in the number of dangerous days.

In the tropics, such as parts of India, the heat index right now can exceed the dangerous level for a few weeks a year. It's been like that for the past 20 to 30 years. By 2050, those conditions are likely to occur over several months each year, we found. And by the end of the century, many places will see those conditions most of the year.

What that means in practice is if you're a rich country like the U.S., most people can afford or find air conditioning. But if you're in the tropics, where about half the world's population lives and poverty is higher, the heat is a more serious problem for a good part of the year. And a large percentage of people there work outside in agriculture.

As we get toward the end of the century, we'll start exceeding “extremely dangerous” conditions in several places, primarily in the tropics.

Northern India could see over a month per year in extremely dangerous conditions. Africa's Sahel region, where poverty is widespread, could see a few weeks of extremely dangerous conditions per year.

Can humans adapt to what sounds like a dystopian future?

If you're a rich country, you can build cooling facilities and generate electricity to run air conditioners – hopefully they won't be powered with fossil fuels, which would further warm the planet.

If you're a developing country, a very large fraction of people work outdoors in agriculture to earn money to buy food. There, if you think about it, there aren't a lot of options.

Migrant workers in the U.S. also face more difficult conditions. A farm might be able to provide cooling facilities, but farmers' margins are pretty small and migrant workers are often paid by volume, so when they aren't picking, they aren't paid.

Eventually, conditions will get to the point that more workers are overheating and dying.

The heat will be a problem for crops, too. We expect most of the major grains to be less productive in the future because of heat stress. In the mid-latitudes right now, we're close to optimal temperatures for growing grains. But as temperatures increase, grain yield goes down. In the tropics, that could be anywhere between a 10% to 15% reduction per degree Celsius increase. That's a pretty big hit.

What can be done to avoid these risks?

Part of our work in this study was determining the odds that the world will actually meet the Paris agreement. We found that to be around 0.1%. Basically, it's not going to happen.

By the end of the century, we found the most likely scenario is that the planet will see 5.4 F (3 C) of warming globally compared to pre-industrial times. Land warms faster than ocean, so that translates to about a 7 F (3.9 C) increase for places where we live, work and play – and you can get a sense of the future.

The faster renewable energy comes online and fossil fuel use is shut down, the better the chances of avoiding that. *(The Conversation)*

## Bonjour: A rendezvous with Pondicherry

The moment you enter Puducherry it seems to greet you with a hearty bonjour, both metaphorically and literally!

The city's warmth, an age-old French Connection, and laid-back vibe are reasons enough for any weary city dweller to fall for Pondy. Whether it is enjoying the beaches, taking a bicycle tour around the picturesque White Town dotted with quirky cafes or enjoying a delightful lunch, Pondy has a lot to offer.

Once you hit the streets of Pondicherry the first thing that will strike you is the happy coexistence of two very distinct cultural identities, Tamil and needless to mention French. Important city landmarks such as the Anglo-French Textiles, French War Memorial, and Statue of Marquis Duplex will pop up from nowhere reminding us every now and then about the rich French heritage and legacy.

I could feel the spirit of the Independence Day countdown as I took a stroll across the little town. Decked in the colours of independence, Pondicherry seemed all set to celebrate Independence Day on August 15. In fact, to mark India's 75th Independence Day, the Pondicherry Police Department also organized a freedom rally of cyclists working in the police department.

India gained independence from British rule in 1947. Soon after, it raised the issue of the French settlements on the continent with the Government of France. It took several years for Pondicherry to unite with independent India. The French colony was liberated on August 16, 1962. Thus, the union territory celebrates Independence Day on both August 15 and 16.

Pondicherry's French connection comes alive the most in the White Town,

Rich in history and culture, Pondicherry (now Puducherry) is not just another beach destination or weekend getaway. A rendezvous with the French town will tell you a story of a town and its people who not only embraced the French culture but have been nurturing and preserving its French-style houses, and bright-colored cafes. Debayani Bose spends a weekend in the beautiful town ahead of Independence Day and shares a glimpse of her traversing through the 'Paris of the East'.



the French quarters in Pondicherry with the place being still home to some of the French families. The White Town gets its name due to the predominant occupation by French communities before Independence and has structures painted in white and bright yellow.

With the passage of time, some of the French houses have been converted into heritage hotels, restaurants, cafes,

and art galleries. One such café in White Town which is housed in an old French colonial building is Café Des Arts. The café exudes an old-world appeal with its walls adorned with antique art pieces including an old rickshaw that lends to its charm. Me and my fellow travel partner Anupam had to wait for quite some time to get a seat at the popular café as tourists queued up to savour a hearty

breakfast after a walk at the beach.

Mesmerized by the unique French architectural design grandeur, I roamed around quite aimlessly in the wee hours of Sunday at the White Town awestruck and trying hard to pronounce the names correctly – Suffren Street, La Bourbonnais Street, Goubert Avenue, Romain Rolland Street, in my broken French.

Like the French old colonial build-

ings and structures, cafes form an integral part of White Town and its French culture with each one having its own unique persona and offering a wide variety of French-inspired dishes to choose from. Touring Pondicherry would be incomplete without trying out the chocolate-laced bread at Bread and Chocolate or the Grilled Cottage Cheese at the famous Hope café in the

heart of White Town. The quirky cafes do not merely offer you a happy space to relax and rejuvenate over good food, it gives you a glimpse of the past and lets you time travel.

As we explored the city on a bike, we headed straight to Auroville, or the Universal Town. Based on the concept of universal peace and harmony, Auroville is situated 15kms from the city of Pondicherry and offers a unique space away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. It also has a beautiful beach known as the Auro beach, which is 10 km from the Ashram.

For those looking for a stay that is peaceful and meditative, Auroville is the right choice. Designed by famous architect Roger Anger, Auroville was started by The Mother, a spiritual guru, and collaborator of Sri Aurobindo, an Indian nationalist and Indian philosopher. He was the founder of Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

What I liked most about our short trip was witnessing the sunrise at Rock beach. With the waves glistening in the golden hues of the rising sun, it was a sight to behold. Drenched in the mellow hues of the rising sun, with the waves caressing the feet gently, we longed to while away the hours at the beach, away from the worries of the world.

After a well-spent weekend lazing around at the beaches and gorging on some delicious food it was time to go home with a bagful of memories. The short and sweet trip to Puducherry gave me a lot this time: some much-needed me-time to reflect and ponder, time to simply stand and stare, and some delicious food to savour, amazing French decor ideas that I am surely going to replicate at home, and most importantly another reason to look forward to this life and my time on earth. *(IBNS)*

# The tide has shifted in favour of sustainable beauty

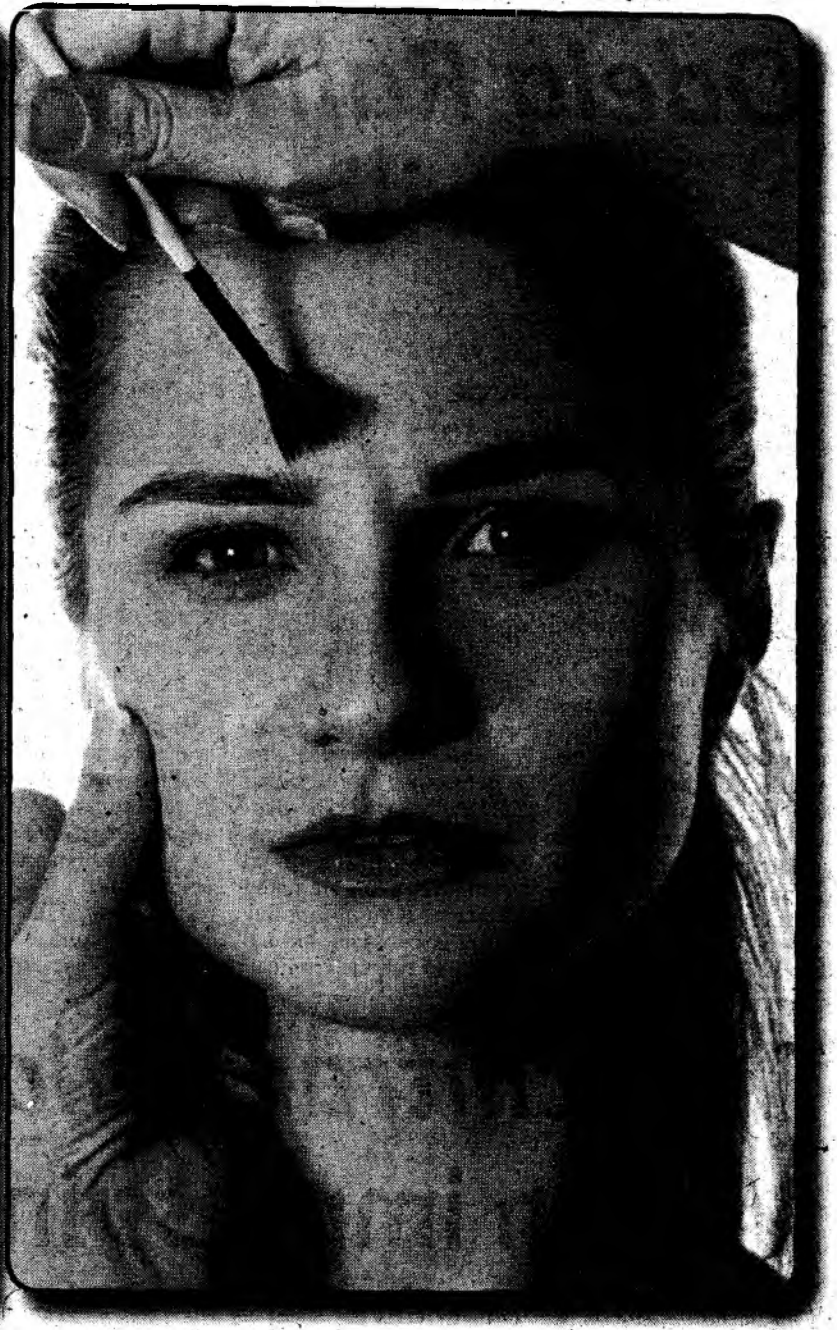
By Dr Deep Lalvani

People have recently started to pay more attention to the cosmetics they choose to use on their skin. Everyone's perception of beauty is and always will be subjective. Brands are raising their standards in response to the changing demands of their customers as the cosmetics business experiences a rise in recent years. Choosing personal care and wellness goods has become a top priority for modern beauty consumers, and this trend towards clean beauty is evidence of this.

Consumers nowadays will choose products that are "natural," "eco-friendly," "toxin-free," and "clean" over those that are packed with chemicals. The tide has undoubtedly shifted in favour of sustainable beauty. Nearly 50 percent of 1000 women surveyed by the prestigious Harper's Bazaar have already included clean, ingredient-focused selections in their regimen, and more than 60% would be willing to spend extra money on them.

Every beauty enthusiast has a legitimate desire to learn more and broaden their knowledge. Anything with "parabens," "silica," "aluminium compounds," "phthalates," and other infamous substances should be avoided. This has caused beauty businesses to concentrate on the substances used in their product formulations and inform all customers about the advantages they provide! Beauty companies should be completely truthful and open with their customers.

And with this rising demand of ingredient-focused products in skincare, haircare, personal care & nutrition; the beauty industry is ready to deliver what is being asked of them. Rather than problem-focused products that used to tackle beauty troubles such as dullness, dehydration, hyperpigmentation, frizz, acne, fatigue (to name a few), the idea has moved onto formulating ingredient-rich products that will, in essence, combat any such beauty issues along with providing var-



ied benefits to one! Gone are the days when a brand could claim something and provide something else. With this transition, and keeping ingredients as the core of the formulas, brands are manufacturing high performance essentials that give the maximum results. Clean beauty, in its wake, has also brought attention to 'sus-

tainability', 'greener' and 'safe for planet' options. Given the advantages and results of this transition from picks that focus on problems to formulae that focus on ingredients, it's reasonable to assume that this move is here to stay! Conscious consumers have the ability to change the beauty business and

receive what they are due! To remain genuine to their customers and satisfy their demands, brands may engage in "greenwashing," which needs to be checked. Because of this, customers may unintentionally contribute to the environment's continued harm. Ingredient-focused products are taking over from problem-

based ones by treating beauty issues while being environmentally sustainable, clean, and mindful. At Sublime Life, we take pride in the fact that we have introduced more than 150 eco-friendly beauty businesses who share our values for pure, environmentally conscious, toxin-free beauty and who are as open and truthful

about their ingredients, their origin, and environmental impact as we are. We all work together on the platform to give our customers the greatest, most effective items possible. Nothing about it is compromised, not even the information or the ingredients we use. (The author is founder, Sublime Life)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, AUGUST 28, 2022

**Moon trine Rahu on your solar return chart and will give favorable results. You will get success in exams/interviews. You will get new job/business offers too. You will be more principled and broadminded. You will work with lot of dedication. You will inherit ancestral property matters. Financially you will be in a very strong and powerful situation. There will be situation of important work related to employment. You will be successful in establishing your business. You will develop interest in meditation and prayers. You will include good habits and good things in your daily routine. There will be an agreement about something in the family. You will be busy in insurance, banking, investment and other such financial activity. Auspicious functions will keep taking place. Those who are single will plan to get married.**

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**  
You will not deviate from your objective. And will take life as a challenge. You will be burdened with responsibilities in your job/work but will not feel tired. Your tasks will get completed within specific time frame. You will also focus on your internal strength and need not look outside for support. You will have gains in business. Your financial condition is going to be good. You will work hard and earn well. You will give maximum time to your family. It will benefit you a lot and you will come close to your near and dear ones. You can also enter into new love ties leading to marriage. You will spend money on luxuries, vehicle, jewellery and house. These things will attract you. Routine work will go on smoothly. You will win people's hearts too.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**  
It is a very special week for you. You will do something new and will be under no tension. You will be easily able to complete your work with the assistance of your colleagues. You will also have financial gains. You will also have interest towards spiritualism and will perform noble deeds. You will have many wealth giving and auspicious days. Your prestige will also increase. You will have new job/business offers. Your communication skills are going to be second to none. Those who are unmarried will get good marriage proposals. You will also like to go to a peaceful place amidst nature to seek some solace. You will be artistic and imaginative. You will also be traditional and fulfill your desires and will also enhance your knowledge.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**  
Time will be satisfactory. Your financial condition is going to be strong and stable. You will make progress in your job/business. You will also implement new ideas and will take decisions with a cool mind. You will also win praise of your colleagues. You will try to balance your professional and domestic life. Now is the time to pay attention to your family needs too. You will be busy with family work. You will also introduce new schemes in business and get opportunities to increase your profits. You will also get an economic advantage. It is appropriate by looking at your work first you need to plan and then implement. You will make all efforts in earnest to increase your income too. Your romantic life is going to be wonderful. Your relations with partner will get better and better. You will have the power to understand people better.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**  
Some positive incidents will occur which will give solace to your mind. You will have gains from all directions. You will pay attention to work plans and achieve success at work. You will also complete your work as a mission. You will be very responsible and will discharge your duties properly. There will be wonderful bonding between brothers and sisters. The time is good. Your mate will support you. You will become the favorite of your family. You will get good opportunities in job/business. It is also time to make profits. You will be busy in romance and love affairs. Those who are single will get suitable marriage proposals. Overall you will be well and enjoy peaceful time. You will have mental peace. You will also undertake some short trips for relaxation. And could be attracted to someone's spiritualism. You will be receptive towards advice.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**  
There will be no obstacles in your progress. Your relatives will help you in your hour of need. You will find close support coming from family too. You will be eager to finish your work. You will also plan to go on a business tour abroad. Your family members will praise you to the skies. And your luck will be with you. The time is advantageous. All the situations will be in your control. Old bitterness will get finished. You will also have new hope in life. You will keep racing ahead in your business/work. Women will be able to establish a balance between work and recreation. Health will be excellent. You will be full of self confidence. You will meet your dear ones. This is the right time to bring future plans into take place.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**  
You will pay attention to your house, property, family and your partnerships. You will have monetary gains. A major expansion in business is round the corner. You will also get a good job offer. You will be mentally agile and fit. There will be a slight inclination towards spiritualism. You

will have some new interests and enjoy yourself. Your personal life will get better because of love and romance. You will make plans to buy a new vehicle. The small worries regarding home will dispel. You should curtail your expenses. Everything that shines is not gold is the saying that should be kept in mind while buying things. Spend only as much as you have in your pocket. After lot of struggles and efforts you will finally succeed in getting a loan.

**Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)**  
Students will do well in exams/interview and will be willing to learn new techniques. You will have good time amidst your close ones. You will come in contact with top officials. You will also buy something new for the house. You will be quite spiritual and ethical during this phase. The reputation, prestige and glory will take an upward plunge. You will not compromise with your ideals and principles come what may. You will recover your long due money held by a party. Your enemies won't be able to scratch you, no matter how hard they try to damage your interest. Your creative talent will be recognized by all. Be vigilant about the evil moves of your enemies, rivals and adversaries. You will travel a lot. You will consolidate your energy and resources.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**  
Your love affair will get better. You will have a wonderful time with your mate. You will also like the company of your own people. You will be happy. You will get lot of job and business offers. It is upto you to make the right choice. There will be an increase in your income. You may also have to make the rounds of hospital in order to see someone. Gradually the works that were stalled will gain momentum once again. You might take out time for entertainment and creative things. Honesty, good character and loyalty will reflect in your work. You will meet some important person and will be greatly influenced by him. You will also get money from such a source that you would not have imagined. Take care of your health.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)**  
Your time will be spent in social activities. All your plans will move in the direction of fructification. Your life will be once again back on track. Delayed and pending works will gather speed. There will be an increase in your prestige. The atmosphere at home will be peaceful. The unemployed will have ample opportunities to get job. Romance with partner will deepen. You will be full of energy and enthusiasm. Income will be good. In money related matters you will move forward with intelligence and cleverness. You will make plans for the future. There will be praise for you from all quarters. This will be the time to travel. Do not trust anyone in business. Keep a distance from strangers. Your health will improve.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**  
If you have political approach, then important leaders will come in contact with you and your respect will increase, as well as get financial benefits. You will feel relaxed. You will do all your work smoothly. At this time, you will not do anything special, but experience mental peace. You will forget all the problems and get involved in the work. You will remember your loved ones in difficult times and miss them too. You may get trapped in any litigation. You will get knowledge, to learn something new. You will be careful about money matters. You will take time for family, food and entertainment. You can take an interest in spiritualism. You will be a position to compromise with the circumstances. You can feel refreshed yourself.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**  
You will earn lot of money. New job offer will come all of a sudden. It is going to a week full of entertainment and prosperity in the family. Your progress too will be in the right direction. You will be successful in acquiring the desired gains on account of your valour and dedication. Your days will pass well. Your enthusiasm will also increase. You will experience pleasure and joy in your romantic ties. Your partner will prove to be the most special person in your life. You will also take care of your health. Some immediate medical attention may be required. Money will flow like water. You will purchase some luxurious items for your house hold needs. Do not trust strangers in financial dealings. Otherwise, you will be taken for a ride.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**  
It is time to enjoy and have lots of fun with your loved ones. You will be busy at weddings and parties. Your income will increase. A job-change looks a possibility. You will also plan to take up your ambitious project and will receive the loan easily from banks. You will work overtime to realize your dreams. There will be an improvement in your attitude and you will be much loved. But some persons will be jealous of your success. You will also save yourself from a big problem. You will also share amazing bonding with your mate. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time. You will also get a wonderful news from somewhere. You will plan to go on a picnic with family. And will have mental peace.

# Healthy snacks for your next road trip

Road trips are a relieving getaway from the daily structured routines we often find ourselves engulfed in, an escape to find new paths in our lives as we slowly cruise down the highway and let the heart wander to find its peace and happiness.

Road trips are happy and can get happier and more enjoyable when we keep our energy levels high and in their healthiest lane.

We all get those drive munchies, the urge to munch on something as our happy bodies drop their energies, craving for the bite of a delicious snack and getting our energies cruising again. It is important to note that eating junk or processed food should be strictly avoided as it can make you sick during your journey.

Rohit Mohan Pugalja, Co-Founder of The Rooted Co shares a list of seven healthy and energy-filled snacks you'd be fighting for right after the fight to shotgun the passenger seat.

**MUESLI BARS:** Snacks made of muesli get your healthy gears up and give you energy for all your fun rides. A Muesli bar is quick to make and delicious to taste. Early morning trip and fancy a healthy snack? Then Muesli with fibre-rich nutrition will warm your heart with happiness and prepare you for the fun trip ahead; just a little prep and you have the bars ready to go.

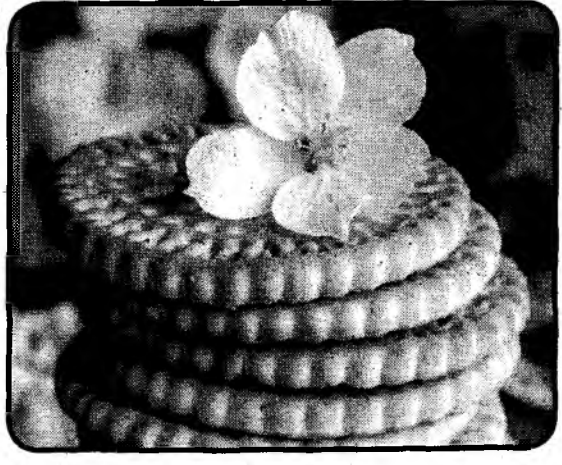
**PEANUT BUTTER GRANOLA:** Filled with fibre-rich rolled oats, protein-packed peanut butter, crunchy roasted peanuts & black raisins, peanut butter granola is rich in essential minerals. It adds a dazzle of deliciousness and health to one's heart. Granola is a must-have snack for a road trip you wish to enjoy to the fullest. A healthy tummy makes a happy heart, and a happy heart knows how to enjoy life's journey through all the trips it makes.

**PROTEIN BARS:** Our next healthy snack on the list are protein bars rich in fibres and protein from nuts, oats, multi-grains, and dry fruits. Protein bars are energy bars that provide an instant energy boost during the tiring leg of road trips. Just grab your favourite protein bar recipe and start making a protein bar of your choice.

**MIXED DRY FRUIT:** Add a little masala, use

them for garnishing or have them as they are! When mixed, a combination of dry fruits such as almonds, cashew nuts, dried dates, dried figs, walnuts, pistachios, etc., become an Indian snack that everyone has always loved to munch on during trips of all kinds. With different flavours hitting the taste buds, this snack gets better every time you eat it. Dry fruits are packed with rich fibres, protein, and vitamins. They help lift your immunity and maintain a healthy heart.

**GRANOLA COOKIES:** Cookies for those who love texture, crackles, and a taste that lifts your mood, a layer of texture on the outside covers the wholesome health benefits of granola baked on the inside, these cookies made out of healthy granola will keep you energised and the drift the junk cravings away.



**HUMMUS AND CARROT** are excellent protein-packed, fibre-rich and nutritional value snacks that will help keep your belly full and happy. One of the reasons to suggest this as a road trip snack is that you often want to eat something simply because you're bored on the road. In addition, hummus is full of B vitamins which may increase energy and reduce fatigue as your body is already running on low energy since all you've been doing is sitting in the same spot for hours. And carrots are the perfect dipping stick that will keep you busy without making a mess; your body will love this hummus-carrot combo.

**LOTUS SEEDS**, popularly called Makhana, can be an ideal option for road trips. These fluffy and delectable small bits are gluten-free; the best part is that they're super tasty. You can easily pack roasted and spiced makhanas for your road trip. Lotus seeds are a highly nutritious snack packed with essential components, including proteins, fibres, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Makhana is an ideal addition to the diet to boost mental and physical wellness.

A road trip doesn't end anywhere; it stays with you as a memory of joy and happiness. Filled with fun, laughter, adventure, stories, and, to top it all off, are healthy snacks filled with love to share and cherish forever. No one said it, but healthy snacks make a happy road trip happier. (IANSlife)

*A crust eaten in peace is better than a banquet partaken in anxiety.*

—Aesop

The Shillong Times

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**Ambitious Azad**

THE resignation of Ghulam Nabi Azad from the Congress party hardly surprised anyone. It was in the coming and his hobnobbing with the BJP was in the realm of suspicion. When most people look at Congress as a sinking ship, the tendency is naturally to run out of it or to hang on to a fig leaf of respectability by blaming the Congress leadership. Survival is first priority for all politicians. Yet, the lack of grace with which Azad did the exit was rather shameful for a politician of such a long standing as a Congress leader and parliamentarian -- for which too, he has now demonstrated a lack of gratitude. This is another proof that most politicians of today lack both character and dignity.

The way Azad chose to bad-mouth and rub-bish Rahul Gandhi should surprise one and all. All the accusations he made against the scion of the Nehru family -- that ironically labels itself as Gandhis -- were old wine. Azad was in the forefront to sing paeans of the family and the party they have been leading for almost the entire history of India's Independence. Yet, he was badly in need of excuses for his exit and Rahul Gandhi came as the scapegoat. It is well-known that after the G23 offensive, Azad missed the bus for another Rajya Sabha innings. Also, chances for the Congress were dim both in Jammu and Kashmir and at national level. Ambitious Azad, aged 73, aims at forming his own party. His strategy is also to eventually ally with the BJP and become the Chief Minister. The plot is getting thicker and thicker.

In the final analysis, the fact is also that Jammu and Kashmir set for assembly polls by year-end must have a new leader to take it forward; and that leader must be a Muslim. This is time to end the stranglehold of the Abdullahs, a family that ruled the province for three generations and obviously made a mess of it; so did another dynast Mehbooba Mufti, who failed to check militancy and continued violence during her tenure. It was during her tenure as Chief Minister that the stone-pelting saga against security forces started and truned into an obsession. Azad on the contrary is a nationalist by all counts and it's time perhaps to give him a chance to maintain the present peace in Kashmir and to further promote it. A new leader for the region must meet the aspirations of the locals through fast-paced industrialization and promotion of tourism. Azad has the conditioning as also stature and he might enjoy the goodwill of the people in sufficient measure there.

**Bilkis Bano and the fault in our criminal justice system**

By Manish Tewari

The Supreme Court has issued a notice on a petition challenging the recent decision of the Gujarat government to remit the sentences of 11 rape and murder convicts. It has thrown into sharp relief certain important legal questions. What does life imprisonment mean? Is the power to remit sentences unfettered? Was the law followed in Bilkis Bano's case by the remission board? Finally, how about the different standards followed by different state governments in the application of remission policies?

legal infirmities apparent in the remissions granted in the Bilkis Bano case there is an important question that must be asked, is it morally appropriate to remit a rape sentence? Rape and murder are heinous crimes; this brooks no disagreement. There has been an understanding in our society, particularly after the Nirbhaya case, that rape must be dealt with by a strong hand. Even the Centre's recent remission policy for release of prisoners on Inde-

reinterpreted the language of the statute and perhaps even the intent of the legislature when it held that the appropriate government would be the state where the crime was committed.

It holds to reason that if a trial is transferred from State A to State B because there were apprehensions of bias in State A, should this logic not extend to the grant of remission as well? Would it be appropriate if the government accused of bias during

the Constitution. Remission policies should not be left to the vagaries of Jail Advisory Committees on remission.

Dissents in death penalty cases: There is another related but important issue that needs to be considered -- dissents in death penalty cases. Should a person be put to death if the very people deciding on the question disagree fundamentally? The death penalty is the epitome of the state's coercive power and it happens to be irreversible. Should the order decreeing the use of this power not be unanimous? What if the other,



pendence Day excluded rape convicts from its purview. Why the remission in Bilkis Bano is incorrect: From a purely legal standpoint, the remissions stand on tenuous ground. First, there is the issue of consultation with the Central government before granting remission as the investigation was carried out by the CBI. It is unclear whether the state government carried out this consultation. If not, then the remission suffers from an apparent illegality as it runs counter to Section 435 of the CrPC. This consultation is important because cases investigated by the CBI cannot be left to the fancies of the Jail Advisory Committees on remission.

Second, did the apex court correctly interpret the law when it decided to give the power to consider the remission in this particular case back to the Gujarat government? On this issue, Section 432(7) (b) could not be clearer. It explicitly states that the appropriate government is the state where the offender is sentenced or the sentencing order is passed. The offenders in this case were sentenced in Maharashtra and the Maharashtra government ought to be the appropriate government. The Supreme Court, with great respect, seems to have

the trial were given the power of remission post trial?

Third, Section 432 requires that the opinion of the judge who convicted the accused be taken into consideration before granting remission. Indeed, the Supreme Court has held that the government's decision on remission should be guided by the opinion of the presiding officer. There is nothing on record to suggest the advisory board in Gujarat did this. The CBI judge who convicted the accused has come out and criticised the grant of remission.

Arbitrariness in the application of remission: The judicial system today is confronted with a spectre where some prisoners are languishing in jail interminably and yet others -- who raped women and murdered children -- are out. A case in point is of certain Sikh prisoners who continue to be in jail for more than 25 years. This despite consistent demands to release them on compassionate grounds. A country governed by the rule of law must -- at a minimum -- have some semblance of uniformity in its application of the law. The disparate ways in which remission policies are applied in different states is arbitrary and contrary to Article 14 of

equally competent judge, turns out to be correct? Indeed, in his dissent in Glossip v. Gross, Justice Breyer of the United States Supreme Court noted that those sentenced to death are 130 times more likely to be exonerated than those convicted of non-capital offences.

In Bachan Singh's case, the Supreme Court emphasised the need for scrupulous care in deciding death penalty cases. This argument could very well extend to imply that death penalty can be imposed only when there is not a shred of doubt regarding the quantum of sentence imposed. This issue came out starkly in Devinder Pal Singh Bhullar's case in which the senior most judge in the three-judge bench, Justice M.B. Shah, had found Bhullar innocent and acquitted of any guilt.

At the cutting edge level, it is apparent that our criminal justice system seems to be shot through with wide discretion that is bound to lead to situations where some are let out of jail while others continue to serve without any possibility of parole or remission. (The writer is former Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting and currently MP, Lok Sabha and a practising lawyer)

**Continuing outbursts of class anger point to a changing India**  
**Two recent incidents in Noida indicate a bigger malaise**

By Harihar Swarup

In 2008, an Indian author (proper Indian, not just Indian-origin) won the Booker prize. Usually, this prestigious international literary award comes with an exaggerated sense of adulation. Not so, for Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. In reviews, essays and the quite supercilious conversations at parties of English speaking India, the story about a driver who kills, cheats and steals his way to a better life was subtly denigrated. Its artificiality, its lack of literary merit and even the act of trying to write in English, in the first person, of invisible "servants" who subsidize our comforts -- there were a plethora of reasons to hate the book, in accents that pronounce consonants with the lightest of emphasis.

But at least one of the reasons that so many "people like us" found the *White Tiger* uncomfortable was

His actions, too, were caught on video.

What is apparent in both cases is the use of humanitarianism as a tool against people considered "lesser" and its seeming acceptability. Through threats and abuse both Tyagi and Roy are seen shouting at their victims -- in words that are too offensive to print -- are of the same order as heard across casteist and misogynistic conversations all over north India.

What these incidents highlight, once again, is that feudal sense of entitlement continues to be the defining characteristic of Indian society. The resident of a certain housing society who is used to foreign holidays polices the boundaries of her privileges with as much force as the villainous Brahmin in Satyajit Ray's *Sagati*. The qualitative difference

*On August 21, the Noida police arrested Bhavya Roy for misbehaving with a security guard at the gate of the luxury condominium where she resides. In a video of the incident, she can be seen threatening him and some other guards with violence, shoving them, saying she will castrate them and using slurs against the people from a particular state. Her sleeves are rolled up in a demeanour that's dangerously aggressive.*

this: Despite the veneer of modernity, sophistication and the liberal conceit of "global citizenship", Adiga's book held up a mirror to the truth we dare not truly acknowledge. We are, so many of us, exploiters.

Sometimes, though, a viral video is worth more than a Booker.

On August 21, the Noida police arrested Bhavya Roy for misbehaving with a security guard at the gate of the luxury condominium where she resides. In a video of the incident, she can be seen threatening him and some other guards with violence, shoving them, saying she will castrate them and using slurs against the people from a particular state. Her sleeves

between the casual sense of superiority of the past and now, of urban India and "civilized Bharat" though, is an enhanced fear.

This is the same fear that Adiga's novel dives into: One day, the underpaid maid, security guard, nanny or cook who is treated with disrespect will get fed up with the people and system that exploits them and they will claim their due. This fear surrounds us, even if it is not often articulated. It is because of this fear that condominiums and bungalows need round-the-clock security, high walls and concertina wire. Because those living there know the country has changed and the under-privileged,

*What these incidents highlight, once again, is that feudal sense of entitlement continues to be the defining characteristic of Indian society. The resident of a certain housing society who is used to foreign holidays polices the boundaries of her privileges with as much force as the villainous Brahmin in Satyajit Ray's Sagati. The qualitative difference between the casual sense of superiority of the past and now, of urban India and "civilized Bharat" though, is an enhanced fear.*

are rolled up in a demeanour that's dangerously aggressive. Behind this confidence is a simple truth, which Ms. Roy -- like many others -- knows instinctively, even if she cannot justify it intellectually: The system and society provide an impunity that allows the sort of unforgivable behaviour that would never be deployed against people who are considered equals.

On the same day Roy's video went viral, traffic in large parts of Noida came to a standstill. About 4,000 police personnel were reportedly deployed in the area because thousands of people from the Tyagi community -- with support from the RSS backed Bharatiya Kisan Union -- held a Mahapanchayat in support of Shrikant Tyagi. Tyagi was arrested earlier this month for misbehaving with a woman in his Noida condominium.

working class are angry. The security guard can hope to become a supervisor, and his daughter can be an academic. With urban life increasingly becoming the norm and aspiration becoming wide spread, there is less deference from the working class. It is increasingly only through force and abuse that a working person can be shown "aukaad". Political power and bullying (as in Tyagi's case whose community is an important vote bank for the BJP in U.P.) and exhortation to a "harmonious" varna society from the powers that be may make it seem like the clock is turning back. The videos of abuse and exploitation can make one feel despondent about the regressive tendencies in Indian society. But that isn't the whole, or even the larger, story. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**MeECL: A plethora of sordid affairs**

Editor, It is no surprise for every one of us out there that the MeECL is a Corporation that has been clouded by anomalies and irregularities of various kinds right from payment of outstanding dues, and Smart Meters, to the erratic power supply and power shortages. The list goes on and on. Recently, I came across a report in a section of the media under the Caption "Power Companies asked to slash power sale to Meghalaya" (Aug 7, 2022). The Power System Operation Corporation Ltd (POSOCO) had directed NEEPCO, NTPC, NHPC, and ONGC to reduce electricity sales to Meghalaya by 25 percent of the contract quantum from August 7. Now, it would seem that the effect of this directive by POSOCO, given the fact that MePGCL is having only hydel power generation coupled with the fact that this step was being taken during the monsoon season would result in a sizeable decrease in the power generation (due to unavailability of transmission facilities provided by POSOCO for banking of Power). This is evident from the fact that during that time

the generation of MePGCL was reduced to an average of 3.5 mu per day, whereas the average generation is about 5.3 mu during this time of the year. If we go by calculations in monetary terms, this means that MeECL lost almost 1.8 mu daily at the rate of Rs 4 per unit which would come to a total of Rs 72 lakhs per day. Sadly, this scenario of power generation continued for 5 days which would bring the total loss incurred by MeECL (already struggling with its finances) to a whopping Rs. 3.60 Crores.

As a citizen I cannot help but poke my nose into such affairs because power (electricity) is dear to the common man. However, this makes me wonder (although without much hope) firstly, whether anyone in the Power Department has taken any steps so that such instances can be avoided in the future. Secondly, have they fixed responsibility for this fiasco and taken appropriate action against the persons responsible in the MeECL? Surprisingly to my knowledge and from what I can gather, it is also alleged that MePGCL under the present Director (Generation) is in utter shambles. And I don't even have to go into the rampant nepotism going on. Everybody knows that most of the work under MePGCL is unfortunately allotted to his close relatives.

To add to this, the work of the Riango Hydel Project given to his relative has not started, despite the work order being allotted a few years back. It is alleged that even now, he is busy trying to allot some more work orders to his relatives only. If this is the case, then what happens to our youth who are in dire need of employment, but their opportunities are being cut off only because of nepotism that is alive and kicking in the MeECL? This is uncalled for and unfair to them -- one of the many reasons why our youth are losing trust.

How can we forget that the maintenance of Power Houses is also of very poor quality as is evident from the frequent breakdowns that take place. The inquiry report by Mr Macolm David Roy, Retired Executive Director, NEEPCO is gathering dust as no one has taken notice of the relevant and good recommendations (for obvious reasons). I think MeECL should start identifying its liabilities and weaknesses whenever and wherever they are detected, whether in its human resources, infrastructure, or administration and deal with them comprehensively and firmly.

I have also come across many employees of the MeECL stating that the conditions of housekeeping and upkeep of Power stations are

extremely poor and unsatisfactory. This fact is verified by the frequent failure of generating machines. As of now also, one of the units in the Myntdu Leshka Hydel Project is out of order. And I am sure we all remember what happened when the load shedding was imposed by MeECL during the month of June 2022 due to the failure of the Power Generating Machines of Umtru and other Power Houses. Because of this rampant and obvious mismanagement, the President of the Association of Power Engineers, despite being part of the system, has interestingly demanded a probe into the generation shortfall. This obviously points to the fact that this is a very serious matter and at a critical stage. I just hope that the people in power (pun intended) read this and take appropriate action.

Yours etc.,  
Khrav Sutnga  
Shillong - I

**Rejoinder to NEHU affairs**

Editor, Apropos the letter to the editor, "NEHU Affairs" by Mr. SB Prasad (ST Aug 26, 2022) the writer seems to have a personal vendetta and grudge against the hapless and meek casual workers

who work day and night to make their ends meet. The characterization of their demands to be "unrealistic" and charging them with altering their demands time and again to negating their daily chores by false accusing them of dereliction of duty in spite of the constitutional right to protest, only exemplifies the situation in which NEHU finds itself today. The incumbent Vice-Chancellor being a tenure old is surrounded by politicians and disruptive forces who have tarnished the image of the University since time immemorial by shifting camps from one regime to another. It comes as an utter shock as the main culprits of instigating strikes, locking Vice-Chancellor offices and even going to the extent of missing their daily lectures to insinuate hatred, have come publicly to denounce a group who have been fighting for their rights.

The flawed approaches of the negotiating committee headed by the same person concerned was rightly put forth by the ANEHUWU. Is the writer doing a favour when he mentions that the Government is paying them even on leaves? What if the same question was asked to him, if he missed his classes to engage with agitation, would he forego his salary for the day? A little research will reveal that the person con-

cerned is on the verge of retirement and ready to pack off with his remuneration while we the permanent dwellers in this state suffer. Hence, there's a hidden agenda in this letter against the workers who earn less than what the same person earns in a few hours of office.

Universities are meant to be cradles of academic thrust and innovation, while NEHU seems to prop up new activists and dramatists time and again. Ego and bossism seem to have crept into a varsity where the old adage of "Few fish, spoil the entire pond" comes to the fore. And, with all of this, sadly the reputation of the University and the Vice-Chancellor goes for a toss while the main players remain latent with their anarchistic activities.

I hereby humbly request the Vice-Chancellor to appoint a Chairperson in the future who is deeply rooted and in tune with the demands and grievances of the workforce rather than persons with no idea nor whiff of running a negotiation committee.

Yours etc.,  
Gareth Tariang  
ex-student of NEHU,  
Via email

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*"Most powerful is he who has himself  
in his own power."  
—Lucius Annaeus Seneca*

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 20 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, AUGUST 30, 2022

### SC to the rescue of citizens

THE demolition of the 100 meters tall Supertech twin towers in Noida on Sunday August 28 is the victory of justice over violation of laws and corruption. The cost of demolition was approximately Rs 20 crore, which was paid by the builders, Supertech. The CMD, Supertech claimed that the Noida authority had approved the building plans which included the 100 meter tall twin towers on 48,263 sq metres land, which was a part of Plot No 4 in Sector 93A and that the plans met with the Building Bye Laws of the then UP Government. Problems started after Supertech changed the building plans in March 2012 and built a complex of 15 buildings, with each building having 11 stories instead of nine. The changed plan also included the two towers that would rise to 40 floors above the ground. This was the reason for the legal battle between Supertech and the residents who had earlier been promised a green area where the tower stood.

Residents of Emerald Court demanded that the twin towers be demolished claiming that it was constructed illegally and asked the Noida Authority to cancel the approvals granted for the construction of these towers. The residents then appealed to the Allahabad High Court, which agreed to the demands of the Emerald Court's residents. In 2014 the High Court ordered the demolition of the twin towers. However, the developer appealed against the verdict and the matter reached the Supreme Court of India. The apex court stood with the citizens stating that the Supertech developer's construction violated the minimum distance requirement and the buildings were built illegally without taking the consent of the individual flat owners as required under Uttar Pradesh Apartment Act.

Further the Supreme Court ordered the demolition of the twin towers in August last year but the developers sought extension. Hence the demolition happened only this year. The apex court said the buildings will be demolished by the company at its own expense under the guidance of the Noida Authority. The judiciary is the last resort for aggrieved citizens since the executive is increasingly seen to abdicate its duties towards the governed and to also violate its own laws and yielding to corruption. In such dire situations citizens are compelled to knock on the doors of the court. Citizens here in Meghalaya too look up to the Meghalaya High Court to cleanse up the putrid system that has taken roots in the State and in no less than a Department meant to uphold the rule of law. There is a growing dystopia among citizens that government can do nothing right because it benefits more from doing what's wrong.

# Shillong Traffic Congestion

By Toki Blah

The agony of the common citizen of Shillong as far as his day to day experience with the prevailing traffic conditions in the city, are increasing day by day. Correspondingly any hope or prospect of these pains lessening in the days to come grow dimmer and dimmer. There are those usual social pessimists who foresee the day when movement of any sort, within Shillong City, whether you have a red light or not; whether you are an uncouth government official who simply bullies his way through traffic or not; in political power or outside political power; with the assistance of a police rifle or without; these prophets of doom foresee a day when all traffic will come to a standstill. And to truth be told they might not be far off the mark either. When this happens one should not be surprised to see the usual "I told you so" individuals gleefully preening themselves in the middle of a traffic jam. Such is life!

But to get back to the problem of Shillong Traffic, the problem has reached such proportions, that not a single day passes without some comment or the other on the subject in the Letter to the Editor columns of The Shillong Times. Varied suggestions, some pie-in-the-sky and some down-to-earth have been offered for improving the situation. These proposals range from closing of roads for pedestrian use only; the introduction of school buses; to construction of flyovers etc. To give credit to authorities concerned, various regulatory measures too had been tried in the past. They ranged from engaging local durbars in traffic control to the installation of traffic lights. Sadly they failed. The focus of this essay will therefore be mainly be on the reasons for this failure.

Shillong is fast becoming if it has not already become a cosmopolitan city and the concerns expressed about its traffic woes are cosmopolitan — coming from every strata of society. These suggestions however are highly compartmentalized, addressing one or at most two aspects of the problem at a time, not the problem in its entirety. Here to my mind lies the root cause to our inability to come out with a comprehensive solution on Shillong Traffic problem. The problem calls for a

comprehensive identification and analysis of the causes before we can come up with a suitable comprehensive plan of action towards problem solution.

The main cause for unruly, disorderly, unmanageable and chaotic traffic conditions in Shillong City spring from the very nature of this Hill Station, its unplanned existence and growth! Its narrow roads remained the same since British times as no one ever cared to foresee the need for their expansion to cater to the traffic requirements of the 21st century. This is called visioning, we didn't have it and we still don't have it and the price to pay for this lack of foresight will be the inheritance we bequeath to our children. They will curse us! And whatever profanity they use then, we deserve in full measure!

There is this story about a leading political figure of the state in the heady days post January 1972, when approached by a visionary technocrat from the PWD on the need to now plan for the expansion of Shillong roads, scoffed at the official, saying that the inevitable shifting of the Assam Capital from Shillong and resulting exodus of the Assamese from this city will make it so desolate that finding a dog in the streets might now be a problem. So much for Urban Planning! Added to this is the failure of the PWD to enforce its rules on distances of private buildings from the centre of the road. Walls of buildings sometimes end where the road begins. Hardly any space has been spared for footpaths or pedestrian amenities. We also find the inexplicable establishment of schools right at the edge of the public road with literally no space for student recreation and with a total disregard for parking space, for vehicles that pick and drop students. Such vehicles now park on the road adding to its already deficient width.

All this because of another misconceived approach that an elected Shillong Municipality is a threat to our indigenous identity. How this can be has never been satisfactorily explained but it has clearly left the city, for the last 50 years, bereft of an elected, Urban management body, to look after its welfare.

Well we are paying for supporting such unfounded, stupid beliefs and if relief from our traffic sufferings are to be found, we simply have to search our own hearts. Perhaps, just perhaps we might just find answers there.

Then there is the daily ever increase of vehicles on our roads, mostly newly acquired private vehicles. There are some who grumble against this trend and who argue for regulations to curb easy bank loans for cars. Time we accept that times have changed. People, the common people are no longer keen to walk. They feel more comfortable to travel by car however short the distance might be and is a distinct trait of modern urban existence. The trouble here is not the cars they use but the destinations they travel to. Most of these destinations are offices and work places; educational institutions; markets and entertainment areas. Problem is with the rapid increase of population and urbanization and the narrow existing roads and these public utility areas continue to be concentrated in the small congested locations where they had been established ages ago.

Our relief will lie only in our ability to disperse them to new areas. New Shillong is there but only a few Government departments seem interested in shifting there. Others like schools, markets and other recreational institutions continue to concentrate in Old Shillong. This was where MUDA could have played a big role in regulating urbanization between Old and New Shillong. That it has failed is because of the narrow, severely restricted vision of Khasi leadership, both in the Political and Traditional field. Some people with vested political interests started the whole unnecessary controversy between KHADC and MUDA and the Dorbar Shnong that should have known better joined in the chorus of supporting the KHADC. So where are we today? Nowhere! All of us stuck in KHADC incompetence to come up with any meaningful solutions to Shillong's urban problems and its inability to find answers for Urbanisation in 6th Schedule areas. Well if we continue to wait for KHADC deliverance then we should

be prepared to wait for another 50 maybe 100 years more. Those who initiated this uncalled for controversy ought to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. When public interest is sacrificed for personal political advancement, it is also another form of corruption in public life.

We started off with highlighting the urban pains of the common citizens of Shillong primarily because of the city's chaotic traffic. We ended up with the sad story of petty unsightly political squabbles trumping over genuine needs of the city and its citizens. The root of it all is control of the financial resources an urbanized Shillong brings in and unless we get out of this, "only I should do it," syndrome and unless we can think of a paradigm where, "all of us need to do it together," then Shillong shall forever continue to wallow in its own filth and grime.

The need for Shillong activities to relocate to New Shillong cannot be over emphasized. It has become a public necessity. Yet one still hear rumours of malls being planned in Police Bazar in the PWD office at Barik. Its only fools and morons who can't see the stupidity of such thinking. When one thinks about the person who decides on such silly ventures one can't help thinking that some village somewhere must really be missing their village idiot! Government, KHADC and the Durbars of Greater Shillong need to sit together not as rival pirates quarrelling over the spoils of a hapless victim but as family members planning together how to repair the house. We need out-of-the-box thinking; participatory planning together with a united political will to get Shillong out of the quagmire it finds itself in today. Fears of loss of tribal identity; fear of increased Government intervention into 6th Schedule areas; of urban bodies like the Municipality being hijacked by non-tribals, are all fear mongering tactics to allow emotions to rule over reason and logic. They are typical of a political system that has no other vision but to capture, power by simply invoking fear. It's the usual endemic plague of fear that Meghalaya suffers from. Come to think of it it's really stupid. But stupid it shall remain if we are not prepared to come out of our stupor.

## Demolition of Noida Twin Towers height of corruption in New India Both SP and BJP must own responsibility for the sordid affairs

By Sushil Kutty

"Towers of corruption demolished", the shrill voice rising above the plumes of billowing dust. Somebody called it "spectacle demolition", no less symbolic than the 1992 demolition of a 500-year-old mosque. The voice had its roots in Uttar Pradesh. The Supertech Twin Towers of corruption were brought down at the Supreme Court's intervention.

If the top court hadn't stood with the residents, corruption would have had a free run. That said, the apex court doesn't always notice corruption. Graft has to be pointed out to the top court. But for the persistent citizens, the corrupt builders of the Twin Towers would have gotten away, and made a clean getaway with nobody getting any the wiser.

Our "Pyara Desh Hindustan" stands on four tottering pillars of corruption.

tion continues circulate under multiple names. The corruption of the class III and class IV government babus, in the name of the British-Rajera 'bakshish', continues unabated in the bureaucratic corridors of corruption. 'Dens of corruption' was an 'older' construct.

Narendra Modi rode 2G horsepower to become Prime Minister of India. That was the last we heard of the '2G Ghotala'. Signed affidavits to the Election Commission had shown how much BJP MPs, who contested a second time in 2019, had risen in wealth.

Every single BJP Member of Parliament made manna from heaven in the first five years. How? The only Indians who made more (by far more) were the 'lakhpatists' who became 'crorepatis', and the 'crorepatis' who joined the tribe of the 'arabpatists'. However, nobody



Corruption is like a living organism in India's innards, and a festering wound on the outward. The demolition of the Supertech Twin Towers brought to an end a decade-old battle between 'Supertech' and residents of the towers ringing the Twin Towers.

The residents had gone to court protesting the rise of the Twin Towers from an expanse of green patch that they said belonged to the "community". This was a case of citizen-activism. The top court just happened to be there to facilitate. Left

can point a finger at the billionaires who are so-conveniently Modi-friendly.

And, there is nothing to show that India's crony capitalists got to become billionaires, courtesy corruption. But then, what is crony capitalism, if it is not a form of corruption? Doesn't facilitating relatives and friends to get rich overnight amount to corruption? Doesn't crony capitalism amount to playing dirty? The two-time Narendra Modi regime has turned crony capitalism into an art, the science of which is never spoken about. The Tatas

*"Every single BJP Member of Parliament made manna from heaven in the first five years. How? The only Indians who made more (by far more) were the 'lakhpatists' who became 'crorepatis', and the 'crorepatis' who joined the tribe of the 'arabpatists'. However, nobody can point a finger at the billionaires who are so-conveniently Modi-friendly."*

to the bureaucrats and the politicians, with the police thrown in for good measure, the Twin Towers would still be rubbernecking with taunting contempt.

The Supreme Court wasn't doing any favours to anybody. This is a second time so-called "towers of corruption" have been brought down. An earlier instance was in Kochi, Kerala—the so-called 100 percent literate state. Corruption is no stranger to 'God's Own Country', the name given to Kerala by a brand-guru.

The brand stuck and Malayalis took it to heart, for real! The Kochi tower, demolished by the same artists who did the Noida Supertech in, has become a movie, which was released recently to lousy reviews. If anything, the press reports of the demolition were by far more exciting. The Kochi tower movie flopped. And it is unlikely 'Supertech' will ever be filmed to hit multiple screens worldwide. The real story is, there is no escaping corruption in India even with escapist films. After Narendra Modi came to power, corruption has been brushed under the carpet.

Like a bad coin corrup-

made everything, from 'pins' to 'powerhouse', but the current crop of billionaires is invested in owning media, and making movies, too. In Spectrum, and on smartphones. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal rode to power riding Anna Hazare's 'India Against Corruption'. Today, a decade later, Kejriwal's AAP ministers are battling anti-incumbency less than they are fighting charges of corruption.

Whatever happened to 'IAC'? Whether it's the BJP or the Aam Aadmi Party, it was the corruption issue that brought them to power, and pelf. Arvind Kejriwal is eight years after facing Modi in a Lok Sabha contest, challenging Modi to a repeat contest in the 2024 Lok Sabha general elections.

The Congress, which lost its pre-eminence in the eight years since 2014, is free of corruption charges because it's not in power! Corruption eludes power when power slips out. To the Congress party's eternal shame, it's not in the league of corrupt because it lost power! Like the Supertech Twin Towers, which no longer counts as it no longer exists. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Settle Harijans in more spacious area

Editor,

How can anyone eat food on a full stomach. If we overstuff ourselves we will have indigestion and vomiting. Not just that, it will take away our peace of mind too. Similar will be the case if we try to force the swarm of aggrieved residents of the Harijan colony into Mawbah. The locality is already very densely populated with no health care facilities to talk of and a poor sanitation system. Hence crowding the same "cramped" area and its vicinity will have serious repercussions.

Residents are already very anxious because the area already lacks the basic amenities and conveniences and just does not have the space to accommodate more residents. One is actually hoping that the government explores ways and means to "decongest" this overcrowded village.

With roads remaining static and with no scope of widening them and with the same sub-standard drainage and sanitation and the same crowded market, it is complete short-sightedness to think of adding more people to the localities. This will only add to miseries of the existing and new settlers leading to rise of multiple problems which we cannot

even imagine now.

Moreover, Mawbah houses the only TB Hospital in the state, which, in fact, needs a serene and healthy environment for lung healing. Most of the TB patients from across the state depend on this hospital. The crowding in the locality is fraught with unpleasant circumstances. We need to be practical, not impulsive. A resident of the adjoining locality, who is a medical doctor by profession, rues that the government has already embarrassed itself by selecting this area with a TB Hospital to set up the electric crematorium, which he believes goes against the guidelines of medical science. Air in the atmosphere around the crematorium areas up to 200 meters or more is considerably toxic and laden with various germs and bacteria. No sane citizen will disagree with this.

Thus, we should take a decision that should not exacerbate the health hazards or allow the flaring up of social tensions. A better roadmap must be drawn up for a proper settlement for the residents of Harijan Colony keeping in mind the mutual amity and co-existence among the communities. Identifying the ideal place with appropriate infrastructure is a must. The administration should make sure that the arrangement

will not pose any kind of threat to the health, beauty and civic environment of the town. Come what may, the decision taken should not make us regret at leisure.

Yours etc.,  
Saili Gwali,  
Shillong-2

#### Save our rivers now!

Editor,

Apropos the front page news headlined 'Umkhrah, Umshyri rivers among polluted water bodies,' (ST Aug 28, 2022), as a deeply concerned senior citizen who has witnessed the degeneration of the above pristine rivers to those of filthy drains that they're today without an iota of hope in sight for their rejuvenation I am distressed and compelled to pen down this letter. My hope is that the authorities do something worthwhile immediately instead of just paying lip service or in this instant news item convey what's on paper and being supposedly done only for public consumption like dutiful clerks. It's obvious that little has been achieved and nothing more expected considering the present lackadaisical attitude of concerned authorities right from the top to the lowest levels of government and local traditional bodies, unless the government of the day decides to be serious

with rejuvenation of these rivers.

Instead of squandering precious resources from the public exchequer for meaningless extravaganzas to attract tourists, serious efforts are necessary instead to marshal resources and agencies for effective implementation of schemes for the rejuvenation of these rivers. Then and only then can we justify having these now meaningless and fruitless extravaganzas galore with a lame duck excuse of attracting tourists.

Yours etc.,  
Fearless Warji,  
Via email

#### NTA exam centres a torture for students

Editor,

National Testing Agency (NTA) has been established as a premier, specialist, autonomous and self-sustained testing organization to conduct entrance examinations for admissions to and fellowships in higher educational institutions. However, as students if we apply for any examination we are allocated the centre at Guwahati. I have applied for NTA, NET examinations and my centre was Guwahati, whereas my friend was allocated a centre in Mizoram. As a general candidate, after paying Rs

1000 to Rs 1500 for the examination fees we also have to spend extra money to travel to other states for the examination. This time I have applied for SWAYAM exam and again I was allocated a centre in the interior area of Guwahati. This is causing a lot of problems for the students. The mail address for grievances is not being responded to by the NTA. The helpline number 011 6922 7700 is also not being attended to. The State Government, particularly the Education Department is urged to please look into the matter and help resolve the problems faced by students from Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,  
RK Sarki,  
Shillong

#### Bilkis Bano case: Loss of faith in judicial system

Editor,

It was heart-breaking to hear the news that the 11 rapists convicted in the Bilkis Bano case were released early by the Gujarat Government. The state has the power to release them early and people deserve a second chance in life and legally there's nothing wrong with releasing of a convict prior to the completion of their term of punishment. However, their felicitation and gar-

landing is something that's not only distasteful but also morally wrong. The release of these convicts and their felicitation has only shaken the belief of the public in the judiciary. Calling these convicts as "Sanskari" will only encourage more crime and the society to once again rethink about the laws.

Our country still follows penal laws that are more than a hundred and sixty years old. The society has developed a lot from that time and so have the crimes, therefore it is must for the country to also amend or renew their penal laws and codes, so that crime rates may also reduce. The main aim of punishment is to either reform a person or to deter them from committing crime. However, it seems like in this case neither were the convicts reformed nor is the society deterred from committing heinous crimes like rape. There is an urgent need for all the three organs of government to engage on this issue so that the public can still have faith in the justice system.

Yours etc.,  
Reakor Shisha  
Kharkrang,  
Laitmynsaw Village,  
Upper Shillong

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"Exploring the unknown requires tolerating uncertainty."

— Brian Greene

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No.21 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31, 2022

### Gadkari's travails

UNION Roads and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari is deeply distressed and this is evident from the hints coming from him in recent weeks. He has started off by saying at an event in Nagpur, his own home turf and the base of the RSS, that politics interests him less now as it is cent per cent power play and that he's started thinking as to when he must quit politics. He said at another event, again in Nagpur, that it was bad policy to "use and throw" those around us. His audience comprised majorly of young entrepreneurs, but many read between the lines and saw a personal agony behind it. They linked this to his removal from the top BJP decision-making bodies -- the parliamentary board and central election commission a week ago.

Gadkari, a former BJP chief who had also functioned as a minister in Maharashtra long ago, is a seasoned politician. Many had thought he, with his close connections with the RSS top brass in Nagpur, could be PM one day. As minister for roads, Gadkari's performance was exemplary. The infra push he gave in recent years stands out and demonstrates his administrative and leadership acumen. His recent comment, that officers need only say "Yes Sir" and follow what their boss wants, has been part of his grand strategy to produce results. At the same time, under the Modi-Shah dispensation, his voice was largely muted at the top levels of party and government. With his long experience in party and governance his views perhaps did not get the importance they deserved now. He is known to have reduced his interventions at such high-level discussions.

Clearly, Gadkari could not be eliminated from the top BJP decision-making bodies without the tacit approval of the RSS, the ideological superstructure of the saffron political establishment. New influences are evident in the RSS leadership itself though Mohan Bhagwat remains at its head. What must be stressed is that the RSS is a well-knit entity and plans its strategies well in advance; its role in the selection of Narendra Modi as PM nominee, for instance, was a well-thought out plan. This is time for the BJP and the RSS to look at the future after the Modi era. Allegations were that Gadkari made money. A perception was also gaining ground that another Brahmin leader from Maharashtra, Devendra Fadnavis needed more importance than Gadkari in the party now. It is perhaps logical to suspect that the RSS has zeroed in on someone else as Modi's successor for the future and hence wants to systematically reduce the eminence of Gadkari.

## PM candidate Sunak becomes victim of Boris's machinations

# Conservative Tory voters not prepared to accept a non-white

By Arun Srivastava

Prime Ministerial candidate of the British Conservative Party Rishi Sunak has been consistently outperforming Truss in debates yet he continues to lag behind his challenger among the voters of the Party. Senior Tory leaders say that he is not having a good time. Sunak who made a robust start finds himself trailing behind Truss. Since he appears to be losing the race, his supporters have started the process to identify the reasons so that he may succeed in overcoming his deficiencies.

His supporters nevertheless zero on three counts; his first mistake was to turn over aggressive from the very beginning, second, former prime minister Boris Johnson has been consistently using his influence and support base against him and third, his move to identify with the Indian government to rope in the support of the British Indians.

Sunak had said that he wanted to change the UK-India relationship to make it a more two-way exchange that opens up easy access to UK students and companies in India. At a campaign meeting hosted by the Conservative Friends of India (CFIN) he had greeted the largely British Indian gathering with a mix of traditional greetings such as namaste, salaam, khemcho, and kidda. He even broke into Hindi: Aap sab mere parivar ho (you all are my family).

In the initial phase of the campaigning it did not appear that racism would have any impact on the Conservative members. But gradually it took over the psyche of the party members and they shifted their allegiance to Truss, who notwithstanding her wavering stand on most of the important issues managed to identify herself with the aspirations of the rightist Conservatives. It is ironic that the same group of the Conservative members have been raising the bogey that after his defeat Sunak will move out to USA.

This falsehood no doubt will have very adverse impact on Sunak's electoral prospects and his political career. Though a large number of Conservatives have cast their votes, there are some waiting

for the final round. It is not that he has landed in bad days just because he is haunted by the spectre of losing. The bad days have been created by the supporters and aides of Boris. They are fanning the propaganda that Sunak's policy on tax would ruin the Britons. His stand on inflation is not tenable.

While Sunak has become the victim of larger failure of the "modern non-ideological conservative", his efforts to salvage the situation is being described as against the principles of Conservatism. These people are not even ready to acknowledge him as an ideologue, for whom politics is merely another branch of finance. The hard core Conservatives are scared of this political line of Sunak. For them it smacks of some socialist idea.

Nonetheless his supporters firmly hold that Britain will be put in a bind under the premiership of Truss. His rejection by the Conservative members will invite perils for them as well for Britain. His defeat will signal a self-destructive Conservative party which indulges in fantasy. Economists nurse that ignoring the warning from Sunak and playing down his caution signs would invite bad days for Britain. They also argue that rightist policies would not bail out the country from the present crisis that has engulfed the country.

Politics is fundamentally about choices. It defines the dynamics of the growth and sustenance of the economy. Since the Conservative law makers are pragmatic and see the nature of the emerging global economic scenario from close quarters, they favour Sunak. But the orthodox Conservatives lack this perspective. They are carried away by the utopian concepts of Truss. According to the economists and experts an effective political strategy is about defining those choices on your own terms. But the signs and images that have emerged on the political horizon of Britain underline that after September the choice in British politics will change.

In his last ditch effort to win over the Conservative members Sunak assured

them that as Prime Minister he would scrap the 5 per cent Value Added Tax (VAT) rate on household energy bills if prices continue to rise later this year. He also described the action as a "temporary and targeted" tax cut that would save average households GBP 160 a year, and ensure people get "the support they need" while also "bearing down on price pressures".

Haunted by the racist propaganda Sunak said he was "not going to apologise" for his background, adding that his parents had worked hard and saved for him and his siblings to get a good, if expensive, education. "Such aspirational values are Conservative," he declared. Significantly Truss chose the occasion to downplay her camp's jibes at the British Indian ex-minister's choice of attire, saying she did not have "any issue with how expensive anybody else's clothes are" and is "not going to give Rishi fashion advice", adding that she is a "great admirer of his dress sense".

What is being admired about Sunak in the Conservative members circle is his firm commitment that he would rather lose the Conservative Party leadership race to replace Boris Johnson than win on a false promise on how he plans to tackle the economic crisis. His supporters nurse the impression that this emphasis might have forced some members to rethink on their priorities and they might have gone for Sunak.

However Sunak's supporters strongly feel that Truss as the leader would not ensure the victory of the party during the general election as her policies and programmes are untenable and unacceptable to the people. On the contrary Sunak has made a place for him self among the Britons by pledging; "I am committed to helping the most vulnerable families with the cost-of-living crisis and have moral responsibility to go further". He said; "I know millions of people are worried about inflation, particularly the cost of their energy bills. What I've said if I'm Prime Minister I will

go further in supporting those families who most need support because the situation is worse than when I announced those measures earlier this year".

Truss's support is particularly strong among older Conservative members, while Sunak's is far higher among younger ones. The old Conservatives are least concerned of the issues like tax and inflation. They have huge resources and nurse purely rightist ideas and philosophy. Truss acquiring a lead over Sunak primarily owes to her over dependence on Boris. A big chunk of the members appreciate her for her loyalty to Boris. Around 7 per cent of Tory members cited race or ethnicity as a reason for supporting Truss and not Sunak.

The animosity between Boris and Sunak has reached to such a level that the former has not been responding to Sunak's calls or messages. Boris nurses strong hatred for Sunak for triggering his downfall by resigning from the cabinet. Like the Indian God media, the media of Britain has been out to ensure the defeat of Sunak. Even though Sunak outwits his rival in debates, they accuse him of performing badly. The party sources reveal that the Conservatives are split on the pro and anti Boris line. A senior Conservative Party MP and former minister Michael Gove predicted Rishi Sunak to succeed Boris Johnson as the Tory leader and the British Prime Minister, saying the former Chancellor has what the top job requires. Michael Gove was dramatically sacked by Boris after he called for him to quit amid a mounting Cabinet rebellion.

"Even more important is what a future government will adopt as its central economic plan. And here I am deeply concerned that the framing of the leadership debate by many has been a holiday from reality. The answer to the cost-of-living cannot be simply to reject further handouts and cut tax," said the veteran Tory politician. But the final word will come from nearly two lakh voting members of the Conservative Party who are not yet ready for a non-white Prime Minister to lead Britain. (IPA Service)

## Snake Bites a Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD)

By Maitphang Syiem

Seeing a slithering movement of snakes would definitely frighten us and leave us with an uneasy feeling. Humans in general have contradictory perceptions about snakes, but the nature of snakes is that they are reclusive, cold blooded creatures that are more afraid of us and at all costs would avoid confrontations. However the case of man-animal conflict is a never ending issue. In humans, spotting a snake triggers fear and panic that sends out programs to our brain to kill the snake even if it means no harm to us. However we need to know that these creatures are also protected by the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 under various schedules.

Incidents and the outcomes of confrontations with snakes is a neglected subject which is under reported and undocumented. During the pre-independence era Joseph Fayer a Surgeon General of India firstly documented snake bite deaths in 1869 and accounted for about 11,416 incidents. This is something which we need to carry on in understanding and formulating policies to prevent snake bites. As we read we might question the relation of snake bites and NTD. The WHO classified and re-designated snake bites in Category A as NTD in 2017 for the obvious reason of under reporting. As with the current scenario much of the reports are of verbal autopsies, therefore this presents a challenge and an opportunity to refine such studies.

The wildlife researchers, herpetologists such as Padma Shree Romulus Whitaker, Ashok Captain and many more have done a commendable job in helping to understand about snakes. We should leave no stone unturned to learn from them.

Coming down to the statistics as per WHO estimation globally there are 5.4 million snake bites resulting in 1.8 to 2.7 million envenoming cases and roughly around 81,410 to 1,37,880 deaths with many of the case being reported from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Snake bites in general are related to occupational health hazards. Further more if we go by the geographical context much of the world are highly affected as cases have been associated with famers engaged in farming, plantation etc. The tropical, sub-tropical regions undoubtedly are the locations of many snake bite deaths and in particular the South and South East Asia regions which account for 95% of snake bites.

In India as per the Million Death Study (2000-2014) an estimated figure of 1.2 million snake bite deaths from 2000-2019 were reported averaging to about 58,000 per year. If one would look at the National Health Profile 2021 report for the (Jan-Dec 2020) time period India has 1,26,927 cases and 626 deaths where Meghalaya stands at 186 cases and 2 deaths from snake bite. As observed by researchers higher percentage of snake bites occur during the hot monsoon period and lesser during hibernating winter season since snakes are ectotherms or cold blooded creatures that require external heat source for body heat regulation. Snakes usually bask in the sun.

However as mentioned earlier much of the incidences of snake bites are under reported which may have anomalies in the estimated figures. Hence the ongoing initiatives to study snake bites comprehensively by ICMR as reported in the Shillong Times is indeed a noble step. The study will cover five zones consisting of 13 Indian States and 31 Districts of which Meghalaya is included. Such epidemiological based study will definitely help in understanding areas of Meghalaya where incidences are high, to mobilise local capacity building and to formulate effective snake bite preventive policies.

India has a rich biodiversity across the sub-continent. The climatic and topographical setup is such that it makes conducive environment for species propagation. As for the snake species they are ecologically important. There are about 300 odd species out of which 60 are venomous in nature and for the record we do not call a snake "poisonous." We call it "venomous snake". By and large in India much of the lethal bites are inflicted by the "Big Four," namely the Spectacled Cobra (Naja naja), Russell's Viper (Daboia russelli), Common Krait (Bungarus caeruleus) and Saw Scaled Viper (Echis carinatus carinatus). As mentioned earlier, snakes are reclusive, shy reptiles but if provoked they will retaliate lethally. One might question about their venom but their toxicity is a subject of high concern as it is geo-specific and differs from region to region. Based on their toxicity they have Hemotoxins, Neurotoxins, Cardiotoxins, Myotoxins and Cytotoxins and going by the natural way they use it for their self defence and preying. However, cases of snake bite accidents are acts of self defence by snakes as they don't want to be confronted. Researchers have reported that The "Big Four" are medically potent species as the polyvalent Anti Snake Venom (ASV) are produced by injecting their venom into animals like horses and collecting the serum to produce ASV which comes in liquid and dried form.

So does Meghalaya have the presence of the "Big Four"? No we do not have them but we have other closely related snake species that are equally highly venomous which is something to not fret about though. We need to be aware of this to understand and mitigate snake bite incidents. If we run through the snake database maintained by wildlife conservation organizations, snake species like King Cobra (Ophiophagus hannah), Monocled Cobra (Naja kaouthia), Greater Black Krait, (Bungarus niger), Mountain Pit Viper (Ovophis monticola), Banded Krait (Bungarus fasciatus), and Pope's Pit Viper (Trimeresurus popeia) peoporium are found here. Recently a new venomous viper species was found from Umroi Cantonment and was named as Maya's Pit Viper (Trimeresurus Maya) after the late mother of an army officer. Apart from the mentioned snake species we have the King Cobra which is the deadliest. A single venomous bite can kill at least 20 people but by nature they hardly attack humans as they are reclusive.

Another concerning matter is that the Monovalent Antivenom (OhMAV) is not available in India; it is only manufactured in Thailand and the usage against the King Cobra Species found in India poses efficacy issues. For all of us to know, the effective way of treating snakebite medically is through the usage of ASV only. However snake bites as an occupational hazard open huge opportunities for research in finding antidotes from the ethno-botanical context too. The Indian Vaidyas have used indigenous approach using herbs, plants leaves, roots etc to treat snake bites. There are a list of plant names that are used for snake bite treatment. We cannot deny that the phytochemicals present in plants have a huge potential to neutralise poisons or venoms but the efficacy of really using it needs to be scientifically tested and medically proven. Meghalaya has bountiful medicinal plant species but just knowing them through folklore and verbal transcriptions is not enough. There is a need for rigorous intensive scientific research. (The writer is a Geo-spatial Expert - maitphangsyiem@gmail.com)

### Letters to the Editor

#### With Police in the docks, who prosecutes?

Editor,  
For the past 3-4 days in a row now, the front page news headlines in The Shillong Times has all been about GK Langrai, Assistant Inspector General of Police (Administration) who is rapidly emerging as One Hell of a desperate Black Sheep within the IPS/MPS flock. If reports are to be believed this cop manages to control and manipulate over 29 vehicles (apparently all new vehicles) of the police department. Who uses these vehicles, Police officials or private citizens; when, how long and for what purposes is yet to be clarified. It's just one of the layers upon layers of inexplicable acts unbecoming that of a Government servant perpetrated by this man. He misuses a police truck for his own personal benefit. He draws POL bills on his own signature and thousands of unaccounted liters of fuel. A large chunk of the police budget has been kept at his discretion. At the same time he also is heading the elite SF-10, a counter-insurgency commando force within the Meghalaya Police. Most probably the personnel of this cream-of-the-crop force will end up running domestic errands for the family of the AIG. To top the icing he also appears to be the favorite of the ex-DGP and there are insinuations of yet to be proven connections with and acting as henchman of greasy palmed Ministers of the Govt.

And all the above facts have emerged from an in-house inquiry report by a group of senior police officers.

It's no made up yarn by some sensation seeking newspaper. Going through this cop's CV is like going through the biodata of some super Tihar inmate; only here it happens to be the CV of one of Meghalaya's top cops.

Well, the above is as far as allegations go, but that they are allegations against a senior police officer of the state and one who will be heading the elite SF-10 force and this makes it imperative that they be taken with the seriousness they demand. No one is guilty until proven guilty is accepted. But there is also the possibility of one remaining in a position of power to cover up his own crimes. This however seems to be the furthest from the Govt's mind as the Chief Minister himself has stepped in to give the suspected cop a clean chit. On what grounds that is this certificate of exonerated given by the Head of the Govt is not clear. The CM preferred to put his faith on one accused man than on the report compiled by his own senior police officers of the state! Strange, really strange! Why the alleged tainted cop was not removed so as to enable an unbiased probe into the matter is also not clear. More intriguing is the complete silence by the Home Department on this issue. The Home Minister, true to form, has decided that discretion is better than valour and has apparently decided to go underground on the issue. So what does all this moving around in circles on an apparently open and shut case indicate?

Either the top guns in the police force itself are protecting their man or a more serious and dangerous drama of political involvement and

political cover-up attempt is what the public is seeing. If those in the know are to be believed then the underwear of politicians involved are tainted and smeared with the complicity in corruption. A more than likely turn of events knowing the sticky fingers most of the senior political people in this Govt are reputed to have.

Yours etc.,  
Pramod Chandra Pradhan,  
Via email

#### Unfair treatment to ICSE topper

Editor,  
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I would like to draw your kind attention to what is going on in the academic manifest of St. Edmund's School, Shillong. I am writing this with a lot of grief and anger but I believe that writing this would do justice to so many people who would be taking education seriously. A month ago my son's ICSE results had been declared and he completed his entire 10th education with flying colours. Knowing this we were elated and wanted everyone to know about this piece of information that was so precious to us and our son. But we couldn't blatantly put this out publicly because we had to get the school's confirmation. A month of the results went by but the school never reached out to us and never contacted us with anything related to our son's results. Normally it is the school that instantly makes the announcement and is excited about the results. They are the ones that put in the efforts for the child that has done well and has

put their school on the top list. But even after multiple efforts by multiple sources we could never get in contact with the Principal or anyone in the administration. The Principal would not pick up our calls and would never reply to our messages. We were so sad and angered that we decided after so long that it is our right to understand the situation. We mailed our grievances to the institution and in reply we got a message from the administration that they were "apparently" sorry as they couldn't put our son's name in the academic merit list. They "allegedly" had a Principals meet after a whole academic year in the month of August of this year out of all months and they decided that a topper would be chosen from the boy who actually embodies the heart of the school and it's founder.

Our only question is, in which institution and in which educational language does "academic" topper fall under a school's definition of embodying the essence of a school. An academic topper is always chosen over the marks that the student obtains. We came to the conclusion that the school does not want to give our son the pedestal that he has got through his hard work and instead wants to degrade the position of the academic topper by making lame excuses. We have never heard that an academic topper is "chosen;" we have always known that an academic topper "becomes" the topper through their hard work. It is difficult to understand this administrative decision. We believe that for every future student of St. Edmund's it is very important that this bit of justice is done to our son. We

repeat that the administration of St Edmund's school is depleting and degrading the essence of our ward's hard work and all we want is justice for our son's efforts. We hope this message travels far and wide. The world must understand what goes on behind the flowery walls of such a prestigious institution.

Yours etc.,  
Sazeed Zamal,  
Via email

#### Conservation of unique fish species

Editor,  
Through The Shillong Times, in particular and through other media, I wish to draw attention to the precious new species of Catfish found in Rongkil and Rongdal streams of North Garo Hills near Rajasimla. These require immediate protection. They should be conserved and meticulously monitored and propagated. Some of these new endangered species like Pseudolaguvia megalayaensis which are new diminutive sisorid catfish (Domain) can be conserved and multiplied by propagation. I call upon the Fisheries Department of the Government of Meghalaya to take special protection and care of these species by declaring these two streams at least as Catfish sanctuaries. In fact, these type of Catfishes and other types of indigenous varieties were available in huge numbers in many streams and rivers in Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills and Khasi Hills prior to 1960-65. But due to human indiscriminate destructive practices of fishing many Pseudolaguvia megalayaensis became extinct. These types

of Catfish if conserved and left undisturbed in bigger and deeper rocky strong current flow rivers can grow very big and fishermen cannot catch them with bare hands without proper protection even after firmly hooked by fishing hooks because these fishes have sharp protected armoured fins on both sides along with antennae of the hammer like elongated hard head. Even now some are found in lower reaches of strong current flows of Rilang, Kynshi, Wahblei, Umngi, Umngot, and the upper courses of Simsang, perhaps in some courses of Ganol and other strong current flow rivers. Fishermen sometimes still get also Anguilla bengalensis (Kha Triang) in deep wide rocky spaces with certain amount of sand deposit rivers.

The rivers of Meghalaya used to have so many types of fishes and aquatic lives but due to human indiscriminate destruction of the environment these precious fishes, flora and fauna are all lost. The Fisheries Department in collaboration with the communities in villages and environmentalists should step up their joint efforts to ensure protection and conservation of the precious aquatic lives and flora and fauna of the State by ensuring protection from pollution and by stopping indiscriminate poisoning of rivers and their catchment areas.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Sr. Journalist,  
Shillong-2

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