

“Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them; that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like. ”

--- Lao Tzu

The Shillong Times

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The missing voices

IN Meghalaya the only voice heard is that of the Chief Minister. At the moment he is busy inaugurating/ launching new programmes/projects in different regions of the state but more so in Garo Hills. There is no quarrel on that! The Chief Minister represents Garo aspirations more than he does that of the entire state. That is because he requires the support of the 24 MLAs from Garo Hills to return to power. MLAs from the Khasi-Jaintia hills have been uncharacteristically silent. We don't get to hear of them or from them. This deafening silence from representatives in whom people have reposed their implicit faith to lead them for five years is a betrayal of trust. There are problems galore that beset the people of Khasi-Jaintia Hills and it starts from the capital city of Shillong. On a daily basis, citizens suffer unexplained power cuts that disrupt their lives and livelihoods and increase their dependence on polluting generators and invertors that only the affluent can afford. Power cuts in the villages are even more frequent and last for days, before being restored. People have no agency other than to go to their elected representatives with their grouse. But they are disappointed.

Roads - the index of progress and development have never been in a worse condition than they are today. Even the road leading to the one and only regional institute of health and medical sciences in New Shillong is in complete shambles. The Chief Minister will not know the condition of most roads since he hardly travels within Shillong. Most times he takes the helicopter for his travels to different parts of the state to lay foundation stones. A wise man, the CM is laying the base for the 2018 election much ahead of the Election Commission's bar on free use of official transportation for political purposes. He must be admired for this but what about the 59 other MLAs and especially those from the urban constituencies of Greater Shillong? Why are their lips sealed?

Other basic needs like potable water continue to be a challenge in urban and rural Meghalaya. The lesser we talk of health care the better! Even basic civic amenities are at breaking point. The Meghalaya Health Insurance Scheme cannot be the answer to our poor health infrastructure. Will these critical issues ever be addressed in Meghalaya?

TO THE EDITOR

Faux pas, gaucherie and gaffes by Pakistan

Editor,

It is another faux pas for Pakistan after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) stayed the execution of Kulbhushan Jadhav. The violation of the court's order may attract UN sanction. The ICJ has directed Pakistan to open consular access. Earlier the Pakistan argument was that Jadhav being a spy denied any legal help. But the Vienna Convention has provisions for consular access to an accused even in cases of terror and espionage. They convicted Kulbhushan in military court and forced him to declare voluntary confession. The interim order of ICJ is a significant win for India. But Pakistan however refused to change the status of Jadhav's case in any manner.

This is not the first time that Pakistan committed real gaffes. Pakistan has a history of using terrorism as a state policy. US Navy Seal

70 years and what have we got? Another day older and deeper in rot.

By Toki Blah

We are about to celebrate our 70 Independence and my mind goes back to Dr Barnes Mawrie's article titled 'The Hynniewtrep Dilemma' (ST Jan 29, 2014) It was about some of us who are really beginning to worry about the destiny and future of the Hynniewtrep people. This worry is greatly caused by the impression that as a community we are going round in circles if not hopelessly groping in the dark. There is no vision of hope. No leadership towards a predetermined goal. No sense of destiny about the future. On the contrary the community is constantly fed on fear. Continuously being counselled and advised about the dangers (jingma) that lie ahead. What these dangers are, how they will happen and why they should happen has never actually been satisfactorily explained. What's really funny, if it were not so tragic, is that the prophets of doom themselves are as vague as the next person as to the exact nature of the threat we all face. For 45 long years we have been fed the same rubbish. For 45 long years, unfounded fear has prevented us from moving ahead. Today we are back where we started 45 years ago, pulled back by saviours of the Jaitbynriew. This is collective social gullibility at its best !

One thing's for sure- that these warnings about the looming danger and threat to the community will continue into the foreseeable future. They will continue to rouse passions, of fear or of anger; they will continue to excite; they will continue to cause unnecessary bloodshed and mayhem; and to be sure they will continue to project public leaders with 20x20 vision on the dangers we face but with a 0x20 eyesight on the basic issues and steps needed to propel the community into overall development and growth. The educational and intellectual profile of these self proclaimed saviours of Meghalaya is a matter of great concern. Most of them are educational dropouts posing as thinkers. People scared of their own shadows become leaders! How did we let this happen?

At this stage of this ridiculous catharsis an obvious question arises. Why do we as a reasonable community (jaitbynriew tip briew tip blei) tolerate such nonsense? I believe that Dr Mawrie has provided the clue to the question. We are a society caught in the process of change but without the vision as to

where this change will lead to. The world around us is changing. It is a relentless reality which no amount of wishful thinking nor hysterical breast beating will stop. Things that our forefathers took for granted no longer prevail or exist. The egalitarian society we were once so proud of is gone. We continue to cling on to a land tenure system that has profited only the rich and the powerful. Employment opportunities of 30 years ago are no longer available to our youth, yet our education system continues to churn up white collared products. Our political system refuses to or is simply incapable of providing hope for the future. We realise we are truly stuck. Question is, what do we do?

Now without someone capable of visualising and articulating the blessings of the future; without the wisdom and ability to see both the plus and minus aspects of change; prospects of change can be frightening. Change can be traumatic; it can be terrifying especially when we don't know where this change is taking us; what it will bring ; what it portends. Panic sets in; society lashes out wildly when the only voice heard is the voice of cynics and prophets of doom. They themselves don't know what to do so they end up frightening everyone else. It's what is happening in Meghalaya. Such people refuse to acknowledge that it is natural to change. They refuse to prepare for change. This is why visionary and capable leadership becomes so crucial. Tragedy is Meghalaya does not have it!

Does it then mean that other states; other communities have leaders capable of leading? Regrettably the answer is, Yes. We on the other hand have rejected visionary leadership and have allowed charlatans and imposters to fill in the leadership void in our Hynniewtrep society. There are those who declare that our salvation lies only in going back to an imaginary past. This claim is never questioned! There are those who shout from the roof tops that salvation will only come about if we cut and isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. It is the voice of people without vision.

Many, especially our frustrated youth, unquestioningly swallow this unfounded yarn! They come in droves to meetings and public gatherings called by those who thrive by simply saying 'NO' to everything. Even anarchists and nihilists have large followings in Meghalaya, in a society driven by fear not by hope.

One of the major changes that has taken place in Hynniewtrep society, is the rapid urbanisation of our habitations and the migration of population from rural to urban centres. Dr Mawrie has politely referred to it as a dilemma. Truth is it's a first class catastrophe in the making! It is happening because of three basic reasons. Firstly, rural indigenous population literally exploded in the last three decades. 27.92% growth rate against the national 17.64%. A triumph of unruly libido over sensible family planning! Secondly there were no contingencies; no planning on how to absorb this huge sudden increase in population. No one foresaw it; therefore no one was prepared for it. Rural livelihoods continued to stagnate and the only option for the literate (not necessarily educated) rural youth is to migrate to the towns where they rot and frustrate even more. Thirdly, urban Civil Society in Meghalaya stubbornly refuses to recognise the crisis and to prepare for it. The point being made is that, in 40 years of statehood, population explosion literally caught us with our pants down. So, the real question is, does the real danger emanate from an insipid, visionless, inward looking leadership within or from some vague unspecified threat lurking round the corner from outside? Take your pick.

As a community most of us have been told that change, any change that upsets the status quo, is a threat. Most of us accept this without questioning its veracity. Does this mean that we are a society that has never undergone change in the past? Change must have happened in the distant past and the most recent was the introduction of the written script into these hills. It happened not too long ago and it completely changed our society from what we were 150 years ago to what we are today. A momentous change in so short a period! The surprise is that both the Hynniewtrep as well as the

Border Security: Capacity building and the way forward

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

The paramilitary forces of the nation play a crucial role in nation building and protecting the frontiers of the nation from both the internal and external threats. And one of the most foundational and pivotal role towards this is played by the Border Security Force or the BSF for short.

The BSF, established on December 1, 1965 is one of the largest border guarding forces of the world. Since its inception it has kept India's borders safe and secure. It has played pivotal a role in maintaining peace and security across borders and provided assistance to maintenance of law and order within the nation whenever called for. Not only has it stood in the borders and defended the nation during Kargil War, it has also helped in counter insurgency operations in Manipur. It was the first force to reach Gujarat after the devastating earthquake in Bhuj. The peacetime record of the force has been immaculate as well which is signalled by the fact that a large contingent of the force is sent to UN Peacekeeping Missions every year. Other forces like Assam Rifles , Coastal Security, SSB too play pivotal roles in protecting the borders of the nation.

However with changing times it has become important to equip the forces with latest weapons and also ensure capacity building of the force. It is in this regard that the Standing Committee on Home Affairs recently submitted a report on "Border Security: Capacity Building and Institutions". The report contains measures which would not only strengthen and augment the skills of the forces guarding the borders but also work towards securing the borders and internal security of the nation. Major recommendations made by the Committee are elucidated below.

The first and the most crucial component of border security is the condition of the Border Outposts. The Committee noted various issues with border infrastructure, such as outposts, fencing and floodlighting. It recommended that the proposal to construct 509 outposts must be followed expeditiously since it would allow for inter-border outpost distance to be reduced to 3.5 km. All old border outposts especially in the Indo Bangladesh border must be completed on an urgent basis. Since the Indo Bangladesh border is a critical issue there is an urgent need to complete the same.

The Committee also commented that the pace of border fencing along the India-Bangladesh border was not progressing on expected levels and it must be ensured that the fencing sticks to the deadline. The Committee observed that the fencing in the Thar Desert region had proved to be ineffective because of the shifting sand dunes. It asked for a technical expert committee to be set up to examine all solutions, such as the fencing used along the US-Mexico border.

The second most important issue relates to the question of road connectivity. The Committee noted that some border areas had poor road connectivity and road projects were being delayed. This includes areas in Jammu, Punjab, and along the India-China and Nepal borders. It stated that the Border Roads Organisation was ill-equipped to implement these projects, and recommended that a joint venture with a private company be set up to carry

out such construction.

The third important question relates to the question of jawans guarding the borders. The Committee observed that the Assam Rifles was not a dedicated border guarding force for the India-Myanmar border. It recommended that the government finalise a dedicated force for this border. The Committee also found that due to shortage of personnel, jawans across border guarding forces perform 16-18 hours of duty in a day. It recommended that this system be changed, such that jawans perform two shifts of 4 hours each with a gap of 8 to 10 hours in between. Yet one must keep in mind that falling recruitment is not a problem of the AR or the BSF alone rather across all military and para- military forces such numbers are visible. The situation is far worse in the Army which has been suffering from shortage of officers for some time now.

On the question of Coastal Security the Committee noted that phase II of the Coastal Security Scheme had not been completed by March 2016 as per the target. It recommended that it be completed at the earliest. Under the scheme, various coastal states are to be outfitted with marine police stations, jetties, boats, vehicles, etc. Further, it expressed displeasure regarding non-implementation of its recommendations from the 177th Report on the scheme.

The new world has thrown new challenges in the form of Counter Intelligence. The Committee observed that there is no single unified authority to coordinate the operations of National Investigation Agency (NIA), Intelligence Bureau, Multi-Agency Centre and National Security Guard. It noted that a notification had been issued for setting up of the National Centre for Counter Terrorism (NCTC) in 2012, but it had been kept in abeyance because of federalism-related concerns expressed by states. It recommended that the notification be re-issued to revive the NCTC as the nodal counter-terrorism agency.

On the question of intelligence the Committee observed that while implementation of the NATGRID project was approved in November 2013, it was still in its nascent stage. It noted that though the project is to be operational by September 2018, there will only be minimal data sharing and basic analytics by that date. It also stated that the infrastructure for the project must be put in place and the process kickstarted so that NATGRID can act as the crucial data centre to combat all forms of terrorism.

The Committee also highlighted some issues with regard to the Multi-Agency Centre, which facilitates sharing of intelligence across central agencies and states. It noted that there is a low contribution of state agencies in the overall inputs received, and recommended that the bottlenecks be assessed.

The Committee expressed concern regarding new denomination fake currency notes being recovered from the border areas. It observed that no measures had been taken to replace the detection machines available with the border guarding forces to make them compatible with the new denomination notes. *(Views expressed by the author are personal)*

recent case was the Atlantique Incident of 1999 when Pakistan dragged India to the ICJ after India shot down a Pak Navy aircraft. The rogue state Pakistan has now been exposed globally as a banana republic where the Government and Constitution are under scanner from the Army. Pakistan refused to seek consular access to the lone surviving terrorist of 26/11 Ajmal Kasab. Now it is India's priority to ensure that Kulbhushan Jadhav gets justice.

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah,
Via email

Chinese imperialism at the frontiers

Editor,

The great Himalayan range detaches India from the Tibet plateau. In 1959, Tibet revolted against Chinese occupation. Dalai Lama's escape from Lhasa to Tawang marks the start of Tibetan struggle for independence. And that led to Chinese misadventure in 1962. Afterwards China got busy in capacity building in Tibet, POK and Myanmar. The recent face- off at Doklam is an enduring sore point between the two countries. India just cannot ignore these harsh ground realities. All of a sudden NE region is in the limelight with the realisation of this strategic significance. The forgotten corner of India is gradually in the process of emerging as a gateway to East Asia. NE region is geologically isolated by 20 km narrow route of Siliguri corridor. China's road construction at Doklam is another undisputed Chinese philosophy of governance and warfare. Like Tibet, China has a geo-strategic plan for Bhutan and Myanmar too.

Taksing is a border village of upper Subansiri dist placed at 8000 feet. A memorial to Arunachalee, Shere Thapa reminds of the heroic act against Chinese charge. Today this frontier land still relies on helicopters. India is battling

time and geology to get a 34 mile mountain road stretch. IAF is the only hope for this deceptive mountain. India has left this region untouched. The fear is that a road would help Chinese descend into our territory. Now India has changed tack and accelerated work on strategic roads for troops movement and supply. The 1800 km long national highway to Tawang will connect this sparsely populated hill community to the mainstream. Organic crops and medicinal herbs may open up a new vistas for neighbouring states. Should India agree to develop the BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar) highway for economic corridor it will help integrate our economies and open up huge opportunities for developing the under-developed frontier provinces.

China opened up an airport at Nyingchi, very close to east Arunachal. Also the rail route from Lhasa is under construction. They reach Gwadar port of Arabian Sea through POK. To thwart Chinese imperialism, now

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

--- Harold Wilson

The Shillong Times

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Trump and ObamaCare

PRESIDENT Donald Trump received a big blow when Senate Republicans failed to muster votes to repeal parts of the Affordable Care Act passed by his predecessor Barack Obama. But Trump is not one to admit defeat. He has threatened to end government payments to health insurers if Congress does not pass a healthcare bill and to urge it to get on with the campaign to replace ObamaCare. He referred to the \$8billion cost-sharing reduction subsidies that the Government pays to insurers to lower the price of health coverage for low income Americans. He has also threatened to end the employer contribution for Congress members and their staff who were shifted from the normal federal employee health-care programmes onto the ObamaCare insurance exchanges as part of the 2010 Healthcare Law. Donald Trump had also previously threatened to suspend payments to insurers. He said in April that such payments will be stopped if Democrats refuse to cut a deal over the Healthcare Bill.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said that if the President carried out his threat, insurance premiums will go up and healthcare will be more expensive. Trump is playing politics with people's lives and healthcare. Many insurers are waiting for Trump's decision on whether they will continue to fund the annual subsidies. Many plan to raise rates an additional 20%. A survey of 1,136 people shows that 61% respondents want Medicare in its present form to continue. Trump's policy is at odds with his compassion for the poor and jobless Americans and is pro-rich and the rich may have to bear a heavier tax burden.

LOOKING BACK

April 26, 1989

Buffer stock for North East

The Union Minister of State for Civil Supplies, Mr. Sukh Ram's recent announcement in Shillong that a bufferstock for two months would be created for the hill states of the North East before the onset of monsoon will be highly welcomed.

This is particularly so in view of the past experiences, especially that of last year when several parts of the North East remained to be landslides result-ing from excessive rainfall.

The National Highway 44, which is widely regarded as the life line of North East, re-mained out of commission following a massive land-slide near Sonapur in Meghalaya.

This put tremen-dous economic pressure on Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and two southern districts of Barak Valley in Assam. In Meghalaya, too, the ex-traordinarily high rainfall tore life asunder. And to cap it all, the recurring floods in Assam, the gate-way to the entire region completely disrupt all sur-face transport every monsoon.

Viewed against this backdrop, Mr Sukh Ram's announcement will be endorsed by every State Govt in the region. The Ministers however made it clear that timely creation of ware-housing facility for the storage of food grains would much depend on the co-op-eration of the State Govern-ments concerned.

TO THE EDITOR

Penny wise, pound foolish !

Editor,

Whenever the rainy season arrives invariably the roads of Shillong city bear the brunt. Pot holes appear in different parts of the city roads. The causes for this annual damage are, shabby or slipshod road repairs and lack of proper drainage system. PWD repairs are often only cosmetic repairs. In Khasi there is a popular saying, "Ka PWD kam siangrong hynrei ka airong ÿa ki surok" (PWD does not do blacktopping of roads but only paints them black). This is true because the layer of tar that is laid over the roads is so thin that it is not worth the effort. This is the reason why roads in Shillong have to be repaired every year. It has become an annual event for the PWD, almost like a sacred ritual. I was just roughly calculating how much is spent in yearly repairs. Perhaps the amount would cross a few crores of rupees. Just imagine in a period of ten years, the amount spent would be scandalously high. With all

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,

Caught between Nitish’s maverick ways and Lalu’s machinations

By Arun Srivastava

Nitish Kumar betrayed secularism, if not the secular forces, but in the process has gifted a young and dynamic secular face in the form of Tejashvi Yadav. The way he lambasted Nitish on the floor of the Bihar assembly, while speaking on the confidence motion put by the chief minister in favour of his government, made it abundantly clear that Nitish, Sushil Modi and Narendra Modi have erred in their political assessment of this young lad of 29 years.

Tejashvi is certainly not Lalu Yadav or Nitish Kumar. His speech reflected he is away from the caste nuances and is not a hypocrite. Usually politicians avoid using hard words even against their sworn enemies as they are not sure on which turning they will come face to face and would need the help of the other. But Tejashvi was unsparing when he sought to know from Nitish on the floor of the house; "did not you feel ashamed at sitting by the side of Sushil Modi?" Certainly by any standards this was harsh. Even some of the JD(U) and BJP legislators had described it as un-parliamentary and had requested the Speaker to expunge it from the proceedings. These words came from a boy who till hours back used to address him as "chacha ji" (uncle).

To be honest, the BJP and Sangh leadership, have come to realise the potential of this young chap. They could comprehend that a new face of secular force was waiting in the wings to show its presence on the stage. Basically that was the reason why they had planned to implicate him in what is viewed as frivolous cases and malign him. Their strategy was to push him out of the political frame of the state to oblivion. But their calculation was based on parameters and inputs which were basically flawed. They never expected that he would come out of the shadow of his father so soon and in such a ferocious manner.

Nitish did reply to his accusations while summing up the debate but it was insipid. It lacked thrust and conviction. He mocked at the charge leveled by Tejashvi that he had betrayed the mandate of the people given in 2015. On his part, he tried to put the blame on Lalu and Tejashvi. He said: "The mandate given by the people was for a clean and transparent governance. My commitment is to serve the

people and not one family". Nitish wanted to tell the house that he had become captive to Lalu. He even charged that the RJD was living in "ahankar (arrogance) and illusion", obviously implying Lalu.

Interestingly at no stage did Nitish raise accusing fingers at Lalu during his 20 month rule. To be fair to Nitish he should have placed the facts in the public domain, as he did on the day he resigned. If Nitish was really concerned about charges of corruption against all the family members of Lalu, he should have taken up the issue with Lalu and tried to find a way out of the impasse. He claimed to have maintained the alliance dharma. But it surely does not imply that he should hide the misdeeds of his partner.

Plain speaking has its own dynamics and ironically politicians never indulge in it. They simply maintain the façade of it. While Nitish himself admitted, "I had to face a lot of difficulties. But I tried to deal with it. I resigned only when I thought I could not run the government. I did not ask for Tejashvi's resignation. But I asked him for an explanation. He did not have an explanation." So how come his spokespersons maintain that Nitish had asked Tejashvi to resign?" Certainly this is against the ethics of coalition dharma. It is obvious Nitish had been preparing his grounds to strike at Lalu, which he did once the NDA got his own man as the President of the country. Lingering apprehensions were there in the minds of the central BJP leaders on the attitude of the former president towards this, which is why they deferred its execution till Ram Nath Kovind took over.

No doubt Nitish intended to give a strong rebuff. But it lacked punch. Tejashvi put him on the defensive. While Tejashvi addressed him as "Boss" he took Nitish to task on issues ranging from corruption to lust for power and questioned his motive behind forming four different governments. Even a senior BJP MLA was forced to concede: "We did not expect such a good retort from Tejashvi." He hit Nitish where it hurt most. Through his

command, body language and speech, he made it clear that a new opposition leader had been born in his own right. The use of the word "boss" drew hisses from the treasury benches, but Tejashvi shot back: "Have you no shame in taking oath again?"

Nitish's allegation that he was forced to tolerate the activities of the RJD leadership was aptly exposed by Tejashvi, who told the house: "During these 20 months, Nitishji usually told me that he had grown old and I and Ashok Choudhary were the future of Bihar politics. He also warned us against the BJP and described it as an expert in conspiracies. What happened to your vow that you would rather die than rejoin the BJP? While I was deputy chief minister I did my work honestly. I held the road construction department and moved a proposal that no file related to the award of contracts or to variation of bills would come to the minister. Everybody knows what happens with these files, and had I disposed of these files I would have been framed. Nitishji knows who opposed the move in the cabinet."

He was quite caustic; "everybody knows what a large social base Nitishji has. In the 1995 Assembly elections... his party ended up with just seven seats.... In the 2014 Lok Sabha polls he ended up with just two seats. Nitishji needs the crutch of either the BJP or the RJD." According to Tejashvi, his father Lalu "was not obsessed with putramoh (love for son). It was bhaimoh (love for brother)."

After three days of the high voltage moral drama, the situation has started returning to normalcy. The political picture is now taking a shape. The people too have started reacting to the development. One thing is clear. There are few takers for Nitish's claims and exhortations. A senior government officer used a metaphor used for TV serials and quipped "his TRP has fallen substantially."

In fact, tribal leaders from the neighbouring state Jharkhand, who were contemplating to float a joint front with Nitish, had developed cold feet and accused him of betraying their trust. Nitish Kumar may have won the trust vote but has lost the trust of the tribals in Jharkhand. He often

visited Jharkhand and shared the dais with tribal leaders to attack the state BJP government on giving tribal land to big corporate houses. He had also spoken against the BJP government's decisions to amend tenancy law and local residents' policy that they believed diluted tribal claims to land and government jobs.

No doubt Lalu is involved in scams, he has been the Godfather of scamsters and has amassed a huge fortune out of his nasty operations, but it was certainly not politically correct to paint Tejashvi with the same brush. Attempts are being made to project Nitish's parting of ways as the dying declaration of secularism in India. This is simply a ploy to present Nitish as the sole saviour of secularism in the prevailing political scenario.

The fact of the matter is that the entire episode that took place outside the sprawling palace of the governor has once again exposed the politician's greed and lust for the power and above all the acute sense of insecurity that grips them for being out of power. Indian politics is littered with state leaders who thought they could easily become national figures.

Those who have watched Nitish grow in state politics vouch that his first instinct has always been survival. He has an enviable track record of managing to remain indispensable and also at the same time a firm believer in a weak party organisation that ensured he is never challenged from the inside. Look at the way he dropped George Fernandes, Sharad Yadav and many other leaders. He always prefers to ride piggy back on one or the other leader to reach his destination. This time he was desperate to get Congress to acquire a national image.

He has been striving to fructify his mission without an organisation of his own, without a pan-India ideology, without years of national outreach and of course without exhausting too much of sweat and blood. He intended to position himself as a conscience keeper and crusader against corruption to serve his political maneuvering to ride the Modi bandwagon. (IPA Service)

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Native truths

Editor

HH Mohmen's article, "The joy of learning and its cost," (ST July 10, 2017) was very interesting. It reminded me of a famous Cherokee story where a chieftain was talking to a group of young children about life as he normally did every evening. He said, "Inside all of us there are two wolves and they are always fighting. One wolf stands for compassion, integrity, diligence, tolerance and harmony and the other one stands for hatred, envy, greed, sloth and violence." After a while a child got up and asked, "Who will win?" The chieftain replied, "The one you feed."

Yours etc.
Bijoya Sawian
via email

Ahmed Patel may lose Rajya Sabha seat

Trouble for Gujarat Congress brewing

By Kalyani Shankar

It is said that trouble never comes singly but in a row and the grand old party, the Indian National Congress, is presently experiencing this. Since 2014 when the party won just 44 seats in the Lok Sabha polls, (the lowest ever), the Congress has been sliding continuously except for a good showing in Bihar in 2015 and in Punjab in 2017. Now, after the blow by Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar by breaking the Bihar Mahagathbandhan last week and joining with the BJP, the Congress is facing trouble from its own stable in Gujarat as the party legislators are in a rebel mood. Six of them have already resigned and more

Congress was hoping to do well in the ensuing Assembly polls depending mainly on the anti-incumbency factor faced by the BJP and also on its consistent 30 per cent vote share. The BJP and the Congress are the two main parties in the state and the Congress has been out of power for three decades now. In the last couple of years, Gujarat has witnessed some major agitations, which attracted the support of huge crowds. The Hardik Patel-led Patel agitation, the counter-agitation of OBC Kshatriyas led by Alpesh Thakor, the atrocities by the cow vigilante groups

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The Congress is in a catch-22 situation. In Gujarat, where Assembly elections are due later this year, the ruling BJP is pursuing a plan to embarrass the Congress and expose its weakness. One way of doing this was to break the Congress legislature party and get some MLAs to its fold. It reached out to its one-time leader Shankarsinh Vaghela, who has now resigned from Congress. The trouble started last week when he resigned from the party and also as the Leader of the Opposition from Gujarat Assembly. Vaghela however continues to be an MLA and is said to have the support of at least 11 Congress legislators. The Congress has 57 MLAs in the 182-seat Gujarat Assembly. Patel needs the support of 47 votes to win. Six MLAs, supporters of Vaghela, have already resigned, including its chief whip Balwantsinh Rajput and spokesperson Tajeshriben Rajput, a one-time right hand man of Ahmed Patel. Balwantsinh Rajput is now contesting for the third seat with the BJP support.

Sharad Pawar's NCP and Nitish Kumar's JD(U) have reportedly offered the support of three members. Even if that happens, it's a close call for Ahmed Patel. For BJP, Patel's defeat in the Rajya Sabha election would mean a big political victory.

Why is Gujarat important for the Congress? The

against Dalits in Una and the massive anti-GST protests in Surat and elsewhere by the textile and diamond merchants, had given issues for the Congress for. The party had been hopeful of substantial gains in Gujarat till just a few months ago to make use of the discontent.

Why did the Congress lose its advantage over the BJP? First of all, it failed to control the dissidence within the party, which was simmering for some time. Ahmed Patel had complete control of the state. The local Congress leaders were unhappy that they were sidelined. Not recognizing the ground level situation, the Congress leadership did not see the rebellion coming and might lose its golden opportunity by sheer negligence.

Secondly, even after Vaghela camp asserted itself, the party leadership failed to placate the dissidents knowing that the party needed the 11 MLAs belonging to Vaghela camp for its Rajya Sabha seat. Vaghela, who had been a tall leader, had been upset that the party was not willing to nominate him as the chief ministerial candidate. He became the magnate for other disgruntled elements. The result was that he left the party with the BJP wooing him.

Thirdly, the Congress leadership did not see the continuous danger signals in the past month or so. It emanated early this month when 11 Congress legislators belonging to Vaghela camp cross-voted and supported the NDA presidential candidate Ram Nath Kovind. After the spate of resignations, belated though, the Congress has flown its flock of 44 MLAs to Bengaluru to a five-star resort. The defections spell trouble for Ahmed Patel.

Gujarat is the home state of both Prime Minister Modi and the BJP chief Amit Shah and the stakes are high. Both are putting all their efforts to retain the state and overcome the anti-incumbency. With hardly a few months left for the polls, the BJP is using all its tricks to win the state and the Congress has fallen into its trap by neglecting the organisational interests. Ahmed Patel might scrape through if he is lucky but things are not looking good for the Congress.

(IPA Service)

“*Ambition if it feeds at all, does so on the ambition of others.*”
--- Edward Dahlberg

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LIX No. 352 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2017

Importance of PAC

THE Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is a body created by the legislature to ensure transparency and accountability in the utilization of public funds. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) scrutinizes the annual accounts of all Government departments and gives his comments/strictures when there are irregularities such as non-submission of utilization certificates by respective departments, there is over-spending by any department or when the spending does not match the claims of physical achievements of a project. The PAC studies the CAG reports and is authorised to summon ministers, parliamentary secretaries and officials to the Committee for questioning, and clarification on the irregularities pointed out by the CAG. The findings of the PAC, their remarks and recommendations to the respective departments are supposed to be placed in the Assembly for further discussion and the government is required to report back to the legislature on PAC recommendations within a definite time line. Based on their findings, PACs often make recommendations to government department asking them to change certain policies and processes and improve their mode of implementation such as construction and other public works.

Recently the PAC headed by Paul Lyngdoh, MLA has been doing commendable work in tracking tardy implementation of projects and poor utilization of public money. The Kiang Nangbah College hostel for boys is only 60 % complete owing to non-release of funds. The girls' hostel is non-functional. The attrition rate of teachers is very high and teachers have either not been paid or poorly paid. All these are indicators of a very poorly functioning Education Department. This has a deleterious effect on students who attend college with dreams of going places someday. Who is to be blamed for the poor educational outcomes in the state if not the Education Department? Though the PAC often is referred to as a post-mortem committee, it has a significant role as the very fact that there is someone who will scrutinise what has been done is a great check on the slackness, or negligence of the government apart from checking fiscal misconduct. Earlier the PAC in Meghalaya functioned like a toothless tiger. It neither carried out physical inspection of schemes and projects or even if it did, it compromised by not pursuing certain wrongdoings. The example of non-functioning chakki mills in Meghalaya which were later certified to be functional by the PAC is just one example. Others abound. We can only hope that the PAC continues to carry out its duties diligently in public interest.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

Arunachal Border Incident
No police excess: Assam

The Assam Government today denied of any excess committed by the state armed police on the Arunachalis in border areas as being alleged by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Mr Gegong Apang. An official spokesman told newsmen here that the Assam never violated any agreement in respect of constitutional boundary of both the states nor did it allow its police force to commit excess in other border states. He charged the Arunachal Pradesh Government of repeatedly violating the constitutional boundary of Assam.

He said a sample survey by the Survey of India in 1979 clearly showed Likabali as part of Assam's territory. Map of the country has been drawn on the basis of the Constitution and law and not mere tradition, he held. Citing an instance, the

spokesman referred to the incident when the demarcation party of the Survey of India was resisted by the Arunachalis and local administration in March 1984 although Mr Apang gave firm assurance that he would restraint he people from encroaching and creating law and order problem.

The spokesman said the high power tripartite committee constituted by the Government of India in 1979 delineated a new map on the basis of the notifications and the existing map of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The same was signed by the representatives of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and the Survey of India. He said the Assam police had not gone beyond the constitutional boundary of Assam in maintaining law and order.

Wanted Data Protection
Privacy in age of publicity

By S.Saraswathi

Constitution Bench to fix limits of the right to privacy and the power of State intervention. This is urgent as Aadhaar is being used as proof of identity for various purposes.

Notably, Aadhaar contains vital personal details like date of birth, sex, address, finger prints, iris scan, photo etc to provide complete identity of a person. Bio-metric or physiological characteristics collected for it are unique to individuals and reliable for identity and hence raise concerns about their ultimate use and storage security.

Moreover, the Aadhaar project has drawn assistance of private contractors and gone on without specific consent of citizens who have furnished personal data san even knowledge of its possible uses and misuses.

The right to privacy was first recognized in the US

The law adopted in Peru which expressly guarantees freedom of expression and personal privacy is considered strongest in protecting privacy --- a rather vague right --- broadly in line with international standards.

in 1890 by Warren and Brandies who described it as "the right to be left alone - the most comprehensive and the most valued by civilized men". It has always defied strict legal definition. In many countries, the concept has been fused with data protection in which privacy is interpreted in terms of management of personal information.

The US Supreme Court first recognized the Constitutional right of privacy drawn from the Bill of Rights on protecting the security of home and person as well as freedom of association in 1965. The Court struck down a State law prohibiting the use of contraceptives by a married couple.

However, right to privacy is not an enumerated right under the American Constitution. It remains an indirect right as invasion into privacy is made a "statutory wrong".

The Australian Government passed the

confirmed that the right to privacy is not recognized in the Constitution as a Fundamental Right.

However, in 1962 the Apex Court unanimously ruled that the right to privacy was integral to right to life and in 1994 put this right as part of personal liberty. This was reiterated in 1996 and further extended to the right to communication with an order that the said right could not be curtailed except according to the procedure established by law.

Certain guidelines were also laid down by the Court. Thus, no law has been passed and the term "privacy" has also remained undefined.

Indeed, the right to privacy has never been strong in India in law or practice. The Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which protects territorial and communications privacy and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) which specifically contains the right to privacy are often

cited as proof of India's adherence to the right to privacy. But, they are not effective defenders of this right though India is party to these international instruments.

Interestingly, collection and retention of bio-metric data are impermissible in UK and France. Threat to privacy posed by creation of massive centralized databases has led to shelving of Aadhaar-like programmes in these countries.

No democratic Government is interested in intruding into the privacy of its citizens for fun. It wants data about its citizens and residents for public and social purposes. The centre of the controversy is about the safety of the data collected and preserved centrally.

Arguably, privacy consciousness is rather low in India compared to western countries. Indian institutions like joint family, temple festivals, marriage celebrations and community life do not encourage privacy.

In such an environment the threat to privacy in Aadhaar has to be seen from the angle of threat to nation's security, leakage of information to unfriendly countries and terrorist organizations, possible thefts and impersonation etc. These are real and dangerous and have to be guarded against much more than vague attachment to personal data.

Therefore, our problem is to devise a foolproof data security system and utilization of data strictly for the purposes envisaged and approved by competent authorities. The responsibility of the Government and its agencies including contractors engaged in the Aadhaar project and in protecting databases is immense and needs to be watched.

While linking Aadhaar with PAN and ration cards in many cases several mistakes are exposed causing repetition of the exercise. The project must be conducted efficiently. The data generated belong to the nation and must be carefully protected. --- INFA

(The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

may, I, for one, foresee that the solution of the on-going traffic problems has become next to impossible unless those at the helm adopt radical measures.

Coincidentally, on the same evening I occasioned to see in one of the news channels of cable networks, a field report on Madhya Pradesh, a saffron ruled state for more than 10 years which demonstrated a deplorable state of affairs of schools that beggars all description in terms of bare need-based infrastructures where students have had to counter insurmountable inconvenience to pursue their much desired educational pursuits thereby making the much vaunted Right to Education a gross misnomer ! Hence, can Mr. Kohli be answerable for such glaring disconnect in social sectors that probably also bedevils the other BJP ruled states as exemplified by Madhya Pradesh?

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh,
Via email

Dump the Dynasty to save Congress
Era of Nehru-Gandhis must end now

By Amulya Ganguli

Nitish Kumar's departure from the "secular" camp has been a body blow to the Opposition, but it's even more so for Rahul Gandhi.

The Bihar chief minister is the third person in the last two years to have deserted Narendra Modi's opponents. The first was Himanta Biswa Sarma in Assam, who is now a minister in the BJP government in the state. He famously said that when he went to meet Rahul Gandhi before deciding to leave the Congress, the latter hardly listened to him while playing with his dog.

It is possible that the Congress vice-president either did not think that Sarma was someone of consequence, or that Assam was too far and its politics too complicated for him to take any interest.

The second person for whom Rahul Gandhi had no time was Shankar Sinh Vaghela in Gujarat, who has now left the Congress although he hasn't joined the BJP - as yet.

Then, there are several

him refer more often to the poor, the cutting remark has reinforced the Congress's reputation as a party which believes in socialism and is against the supposedly pro-rich economic reforms.

However, the propagation of this belief is likely to hurt the Congress more than cause any discomfiture to Modi because the younger generation still appears to put their faith in the reforms improving the living conditions even if The Economist thinks they are illusionary. Nevertheless, it is because of this faith that the prime minister continues to enjoy 70-plus per cent popular ratings.

If Rahul Gandhi's ascent to the president's post has been put on hold, it is a blessing in disguise, for it cannot but make an increasing number in the Congress, including the inveterate sycophants, realize that the dynasty is not the answer to the party's problems. Even those who have been saying that instead of dilly-dallying,

The only option for it at present is to bid farewell to the dynasty. A suggestion was once made by a party member for the Nehru-Gandhi family to take a sabbatical. But, in general, the Congressmen seem to cling to the belief that their party will fall apart in the absence of the dynasty at the top. Perhaps this perception is correct where Sonia Gandhi is concerned. But not Rahul Gandhi. That the Congress can perform creditably under a leader who does not belong to the First Family was proved emphatically in Punjab and to some extent in Goa and Manipur, where it was the first party till the BJP grabbed some of its legislators.

MLAs in Gujarat who have crossed over to the BJP - a parting of ways which has persuaded the Congress to ferry the remainder of its flock to a secure location in Bengaluru far from the poachers.

It is Nitish Kumar's departure, however, which has given rise to the speculation that more than any other exit, it has put paid - at least for the foreseeable future - to the possibility of Rahul Gandhi's elevation to the party president's post.

As it is, his intellectual and temperamental inadequacies to shoulder such a responsibility when the party is going downhill have long been apparent. Perhaps even his doting mother has realized by now that her son is not quite fit for the job.

It is not only that most of the senior leaders in the opposition camp, like Sharad Pawar, for instance, are reluctant to deal with him. It is also clear that his attention span is short and his understanding of the political and economic scene is rudimentary.

All that he is apparently capable of is lambasting Modi now and then. But, except for his "suit-boot ka sarkar" jibe, which Nitish Kumar is said to have appreciated, Rahul Gandhi's castigations do not seem to have made much of an impact.

Instead, the feeling has grown that he and the Congress must present an alternate credible narrative with clear-cut ideas about the way forward, especially in the field of economics. For instance, though the "suit-boot ka sarkar" taunt is said to have made Modi careful about being seen as business-friendly and made

TO THE EDITOR
On Meghalaya tourism!

Editor,
Apropos the article "Meghalaya Tourism turns freakish" (ST July 28, 2017), I wish to say that the article was very carefully written after much observation and first-hand knowledge of the ground realities in the most tourist traffic routes and destinations. I could not but fully appreciate the writer, Patricia Mukhim, for bringing into the public domain the various defects in Meghalaya Tourism with the sole purpose of how to remove the aberrations and improve this sector further. She has also pointed out many areas on how to sustain tourism and one of the many ways is that tourism has to be made eco-friendly by both the stakeholders of the infrastructure and the tourists (visitors) themselves.

About the daily traffic jam between the Umiam Lake up to Rhino Point in Rilbong locality and from Rhino Point to the Seventh Mile in Upper Shillong along the NH 40, I would like to suggest that this can be

eased by expansion and converting this portion into a grand three lane road. The other thing that should be implemented is the "Sikkim model" for tourist vehicles. Tourist vehicles ferrying tourists to Shillong before proceeding for local site seeing or to Sohra or to other tourist destinations should be parked in Shillong. Tourists should then take local tourist vehicles only before going to the tourist' spots. This will help to enhance the income of drivers and owners of these vehicles and even the local taxis. Moreover, it will also uplift the income of the local people out of tourist inflow. About the entry fees to tourist spots, I fully agree with Ms Mukhim that entry fees should be substantially increased.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Shillong-2

Can Kohli be answerable?

Editor,
On July 22nd last when Mr. Nalin Kohli one of BJP's spokesmen who is

also appointed as the one in-charge of the Meghalaya forthcoming Assembly elections slated for 2018 came to Shillong had found himself stranded in a tediously long traffic snarl up near the Umiam lake from around twelve noon and arrived Shillong at 3 p.m. and that too on being fetched by a two wheeler sent from the city. And upon arriving in Shillong, Mr. Kohli gave full vent to his feelings to the media team of the utter failure of the Congress led government in Meghalaya under Dr. Mukul Sangma for the latter's abysmal failure in dealing with such acute vehicular jams. In a word, Kohli opined that our State Government has miserably failed the common citizens in ameliorating this vital sector of communication line thereby throwing things out of gear and unleashing desperation to all and sundry. Mr. Kohli further iterated that such public negligence in other saffron ruled states is few and far between. If that being so, I hope that Meghalaya will get a BJP government in the next term. By articulating such statements, Mr. Kohli has undoubtedly hit the nail on the head; but be that as it

“ *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*”

--- Margaret Mead

The Shillong Times

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Food v/s Privacy

IN a Supreme Court hearing, a senior advocate, CA Sundaram asserted that basic needs should take precedence over the right to privacy. The Judges ruled that economic rights should not curtail fundamental rights. The emphasis on economic rights is an argument for Communist authoritarianism. Amartya Sen has contended that famines are less widespread in democratic countries as freedom of expression ensures that famine reports cannot be suppressed. It is true that projects like Jan Dhan, Aadhar and Mobile Governance require collection of citizens’ data for facilitating welfare measures. But the authorities doing it should avoid misuse. Digital India calls for firm data protection by the Government. That means the apex court should always defend the right to privacy. At the same time, legislation is necessary to protect data privacy.

The law should make it necessary that an individual’s consent is obtained before collecting and processing personal data. But there should be exceptions. There should be strict accountability in case of data breaches. Procedures and punishments should be laid down in detail. India is a signatory to international treaties guaranteeing the right to privacy. A BJP MP has tabled a Data (Privacy and Protection) bill, 2017 in Parliament to protect citizens’ data. In such cases, private legislation may be called for. In the final analysis, however, the choice between food and privacy seems unreal. What is food security worth with a sizeable BPL population in the country? And the right to privacy can mean refusal to disclose real income and salting away of black money. The opposite may mean disinformation and harassment.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

Nehru centenary run celebrated

Over 250,000 peoplepounded down the historicalRaj path here as the nationgave a unique salute toIndia’s first prime ministerthrough the JawaharlalNehru Centenary run today.

Down the slope in front ofRasshtrapati Bhavan andthrough the Dalhousie roadand Parliament house sideentrances people of all ageskept pouring and it was twohours before the sounds ofeffect were silenced at VijayChowk.

Prime Minister RajivGandhi, who led the lastbatch of runners down theRaj Path earlier flagged offthe more serious Intab DelhiInternational marathon andpresented awards to sportsPrakash Padukone, VijayAmritraj and BhuvaneshwariKumari.Shillong

Meghalaya’s parochial political culture

By Patricia Mukhim

This time politicians have started the electioneering process a little early. We will be hearing high-pitched political rhetoric in every nook and corner of our state. Such political noises are devoid of a vision for 21st century Meghalaya. The cacophony is centred around the failures of the present government with no formula for doing things differently. The problem with Meghalaya is that those with cerebral stamina and the ability to think rationally don’t speak in street corner meetings because the crowd will not listen to them. The crowd has for 40 odd years learnt to tune in to hysteria; to shout out hyperboles and to sing so-called “patriotic songs” where Tirot Sing will be lauded to the skies and some of the political wannabes will assume the role of imaginary heroes who will redeem their people (jaidbynriew) from the woes inflicted by political leaders of the past. There is no new roadmap because that requires rigorous political, economic and social research which no one will invest in. None of the political parties have a reliable think-tank they can pick ideas from. One is in fact appalled at the lack of thinking in this state. A society that does not think dies an intellectual, political and economical death. Inviting consultants with no idea about our societal dilemmas to pour out wisdom gathered from some obscure books is not going to help and I hope the next government stops spending money on consultancy services. The need for consultants is an admission that our government has no expertise and specialty. That specialty may be required in the preparation of detailed project proposals. And if one looks at the condition of our roads one is forced to believe that perhaps the PWD itself is best outsourced to road construction experts and the Department itself be winded up because it has become the number one money guzzler.

Meghalaya has suffered from a parochial political climate where people lay the blame for all failures on the ‘other’ – the non tribal – the convenient scapegoat. Societal introspection is absent. The reason is because introspection might unearth unpleasant facts about our own selves which we have never been ready to face up to. The non-tribal is, however, also a piggy bank from where all the ethnocentric groups that castigate them at the drop of a hat, draw their resources from in order to carry out their overt and covert agenda. Try tapping the tribal businessman for money repeatedly and see if

he/she will not throw a fit! In fact parochial politics is the undoing of Meghalaya. For decades the non-tribal is caricatured as the exploiter of our resources, our jobs, our businesses et al. Even if the non-tribal resident and his ancestors are born here, he is not entitled to participate in our civic management because that is the last vestige of parochialism and is given the name “traditional institution,” so that exclusion of the “others” become a legitimate excuse and gets societal sanction. The argument is that including a non-tribal in the traditional body would defile the purity and sanctity of the institution. Hence for a long time, the genuine non-tribals who wished to contribute to state building activities upfront have had no opportunity to do so except through inclusive organizations like the Lions Club or the Rotary Club.

Can a society survive when interest and pressure groups operating in a pluralistic environment claim to work only for the interest of one ethnic group? Isn’t this what leads to societal schizophrenia? Take the case of the Khasi Students Union, what happens to students who need help but are non-Khasis? And if such students wish to form an organization to look at the issues of education would they be allowed to do so? Hence when such ethnocentric interest groups speak of principles and ideological convictions in this climate it invites a horse laugh.

Meghalaya is yet to witness inclusive development 45 years after its creation. This can be attributed to the occupation of sensitive state offices by a crop of visionless men and women who are only concerned about how to appropriate and grab collective wealth for personal aggrandizement. The state is basically constituted for the development of its citizens. The state is supposed to formulate policies, provide infrastructure, provide resources for education, (vocational, moral and political), create enabling environment for investments and economic growth, provide employment opportunities, mobilize a sense of inclusiveness etc. But the role a state plays in economic development and how it plays that role are determined by the prevailing political ideology and political culture among other factors. The fact that a good number of Meghalayans now live below poverty levels in a society so blessed by natural resources amounts to monumental injustice, and failure of leadership. This is purely because of the political culture of Meghalaya. We have not had political leaders who espoused a spirit of pluralism. Every self-styled leader has ridden the wave of ethnocentrism and parochialism of “I, me and mine.”

The parochial political culture breeds instrumental leadership. Most leaders are mired in the pursuit of selfish and personal goals at the expense of larger public interest (check out their properties). Terri Apter, psychologist writer and senior tutor at Cambridge has aptly branded such leaders as “Consumetory leaders”. They use official power and influence primarily in the pursuit of private goals. To such leaders, the progress and growth of Meghalaya is secondary as they are merely concerned about using official position to achieve personal objectives. And because citizens are largely passive and lack knowledge about their own roles in a democracy, they seem to expect little or nothing from the government. They are not interested in what happens in the political system and are happy to be paid money during elections or before them. People of Meghalaya find it very difficult to challenge or criticize authority and ironically MLAs/MDCs insist on being treated as tinnogods even when they are not performing.

In a democracy, society is not expected to accord undue and undeserved respect to public officials and political office holders. Prof Chinua Achebe rightly stated that no society can function well with fools, rascals, or non leaders in leadership positions. That is the crux of the matter. In fact Samuel Johnson summed it even better when he said, “integrity without knowledge is weak and useless and knowledge without integrity is dangerous.”

Every year, huge sums of money are budgeted for the construction of roads and its maintenance but the money usually disappears into few pockets. The health sector is in a deplorable state, infant and maternal mortality are on the increase; hospitals are not well equipped. The education sector is in shambles as reflected by the Public Accounts Committee

Are Our Cities Liveable? No, Thanks to Rising Slums

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The plight of Indian cities has been deteriorating over the years in spite of the Government’s best efforts. Eminent experts including urban planners are deeply concerned about this and it is being discussed at seminars and workshops. The dilemma clearly is the migration from villages and neighbouring areas to bigger cities in search of livelihood thereby worsening the urban situation.

Undoubtedly, the high density of population in cities has become a humongous problem resulting in many municipal corporations finding it impossible to provide the necessary facilities for a huge population. Recall, India’s Registrar General in a 2006 report had underscored a rise of 248 million people living in cities between 2001-2026.

In 2010 another report ‘India’s Urban Awakening’ by the McKinsey Global Institute Report suggested a rise of 250 million citizens between 2008- 2030. In other words, between 10 million and 11.4 million new people had to be accommodated in cities every year.

Predictably, this has led to slums and slummish type of settlements in metros and big cities notwithstanding improvement of sanitary conditions over the years. Consequently, improved amenities have resulted in more migration to cities. This relocation had been warned by Prof. M. N. Srinivash decades back resulting in “slummification of cities which seems unavoidable unless drastic steps are taken immediately to prevent it.

Think. In Mumbai and Kolkata around 2000 migrant families move every week while Delhi gets its share with over one-and-a-half lakhs intake every year. In cities like Kanpur, Jabalpur and Visakhapatnam over 40 per cent of the population live in large slums or as migrants waiting to make their own ‘slummish’ settlements.

This is exactly what has happened and though the minimum standards of living are evident in recognized slums, these are not there in unrecognized ones. Also, most metros have expanded but slums and squatter settlements are very much manifest in the older city. Those who once advocated a no slum city in the eighties and nineties realized that this was not possible. Moreover, the urban poor have a right to live in the city.

It needs to be pointed out that the continued influx to metro centres has primarily been due to employment and income opportunities that exist in cities. Over the years surveys have pointed out this fact given that agricultural income being stagnant and incapable of providing employment to all family members they are forced to seek alternative sources of livelihood in nearby cities. Figures reveal that compared to the late twentieth century, employment in agriculture and allied sectors has been dwindling.

While creation of ‘smart cities’ might improve infrastructure facilities in urban areas, it would have been desirable if the plan of PURA (providing urban facilities in rural areas) propounded by our late President, Dr Abdul Kalam was taken up on a war footing.

Of course, there are Central Government planned schemes for sanitation, water supply and building rural houses but these are mainly concentrated in certain districts and those residing

in remote areas are not benefitting to the desired extent. Undeniably, there has to be an integrated plan of transforming the blocks and sub-divisional towns where all amenities that are available in big cities are accessible.

Clearly, the most important challenge at this juncture is to ensure that employment opportunities are created in the rural and semi-urban areas of the country. The emphasis on ‘Make in India’ and skill development programme, initiated by the Government are positive indicators to resist the flow of people from the rural and semi-urban areas to big cities.

Simultaneously, there is need to develop urban infrastructure to keep pace with the ever increasing demands. In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals agreed upon by all 192 UN member countries (“United Nations MDGs” 2010) stated in Goal 7 the need to ensure environmental sustainability.

Reportedly, one of the targets under this goal was “to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers”. As the MDGs touched on the issue of slums, it refocused attention on how to alleviate the problem of slums.

Hence, the most important task is the need for slum upgradation and making available facilities like potable tap water and proper sanitation. Though urban planners have been talking about this there is need to ensure the transformation of slums and squatter settlements in designing smart cities.

According to the 2006-2007 UN Habitat State of the World’s Cities Report Egypt, South Africa, Mexico, Tunisia and Thailand stand out in their efforts towards slum upgrading. Indeed, their slum growth rates have fallen markedly despite the fact that the growth rate is still positive, highlights that slums are not going away or even shrinking.

The report also states that in order to stem or at least slow down the growth of slums in the world’s cities, countries are going to have to make some hard decisions and major financial commitments, perhaps with the help of the World Bank which is a major player in promoting efforts at slum upgrading in order to accomplish the MDGs.

Importantly, the challenge before India is quite grave due to the huge density of population living in cities. Obviously, huge resources would be needed to make these liveable for those residing in slums, squatter settlements and colonies. True, the Government is aware of the dimension of the problem and is expected to take up the matter seriously.

In this connection, the NDA Government has accorded housing top priority. Not only the poor and the economically weaker sections but also the lower income groups have been encouraged to build their own homes for which incentives and loans have been made available.

Recently a meeting was held wherein Prime Minister Modi via video conferencing with State Chief Secretaries expressed unhappiness over the progress of the Pradhan Awas Yojana (Urban) and asked officials to accord top priority to the implementation of the scheme. In fact the States were directed that houses sanctioned for construction in 2016-2017 should be completed before the end of this financial year by March 2018. --- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Can we redeem Shillong?

Editor,

Recently while going to work in the morning it took me one hour to reach Laban from Rynjah, a distance of 5 to 6 kms. This is not an exception but has become a routine affair in Shillong. When stranded in these traffic snarls it becomes almost impossible to reach our workplaces on time which in turn means loss of valuable time.

Having put some thought into it, I came up with a few remedial measures which I would like to share.

Since the population of Shillong is on the rise and the number of vehicles plying on these roads has i n c r e a s e d disproportionately there is urgent need to construct new roads/ overbridges/ flyovers/ tunnels to ease the traffic on these already overburdened, narrow existing roads. Technical

institutions should be relocated to sub-divisional headquarters or other towns. Good schools and colleges should be constructed by the Government in all sub-divisional headquarters, to start with, with affordable fee structures (free schooling up to SSLC Level). This will help in reducing the urban migration. At the same time employment will be generated locally which in turn will reduce the need for people to flock to the state capital in search of work, thereby reducing the load on the capital city.

2. While giving permission for construction of residential or other institutional infrastructure it should be made mandatory to provide adequate parking space within the premises. This will help in reducing roadside parking to a great extent and in turn ease traffic congestion ..

3. Schools, colleges, hospitals and other institutions should be made to provide parking spaces within their premises, for the

parents/ attendants/ others so that important thoroughfares are not clogged with rampant parking. Schools should be asked to provide school buses to ply their students to and from school to ease traffic congestion.

4. Traffic police should be more vigilant and enforce traffic rules more strictly. Cab drivers should be instructed to pick up/ drop passengers only at designated places barring which they should be penalized. The help of CCTV cameras can be of great use in enforcing these directives. Private vehicles should also be discouraged from parking at odd places. The Traffic Police should not put up NO ENTRY signs at the drop of a hat (e.g Malki Point at 1.30 P.M., near Pine Mount School during their exams, declaration of results, school functions) as it causes more confusion among commuters rather than ease traffic congestion. Schools, colleges, religious institutions should not be

allowed to put up No Entry signs during functions/ celebrations/any other reason on public thoroughfares.

5. The State Government, in consultation with the various Dorbars should allot adequate spaces for building parking lots in all localities of the city to help people, who sometimes are at their wits end as to where to park their cars.

To conclude, I request all the esteemed readers and others to come forward with their valuable inputs to help ease this menace. After all this is our own beautiful city.

Yours etc.,
Dr. G. Kar Purkayastha
Shillong - 6

On Hindu mission

Editor,

Apropos the letter, “Vulgar roar of Hindu Mission” (ST July 24, 2017) wherein a plethora of

allegations were leveled against the Mission, it evident from the selection of title for the letter that it is an attempt to malign the image of the Hindu Mission. To refute the allegations involving the Mission, I state that at my request the Mission authority had allowed me to hold the marriage ceremony of my daughter at is premises on 19th and 20th July, 2017 as I am financially not sound enough to hire any other banquet Hall.

The Mission authorities permitted me to use their premises with other facilities attached thereto against a token amount stating further among other terms and conditions not to use any PA system after 10:00 PM in compliance to the standing guidelines of the Hon’ble Apex Court.

As per Almanac, the time of marriage was at midnight and on completion of the ritual of seven steps, the invitees, relatives and members of the bridegroom

party cheered by bursting few fire crackers which was however, stopped at the intervention of the Mission guard on duty during the time. Thereafter the yagna was performed amidst recital of Vedic chants.

Barring the grant of permission to use its premises Mission had no involvement in the celebration hence it would be improper to entangle the Mission with any incident occurring on the said days. No alcoholic drink was served in the function. However, I hold myself singularly responsible for all that happened and apologise for the same.

Yours etc.,
Kanu Paul
Shillong-2

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

“*Ambition is an idol, on whose wings great minds are carried only to extreme; to be sublimely great or to be nothing.*”

--- Sir John Denham

The Shillong Times

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Government make-over

CABINET reshuffle essentially means dropping some ministers and inducting new ones. The basis for dropping or retaining ministers should depend on their performance. Non-performing ministers who don't pull their weight have to be dropped. There is no two ways about it. Unfortunately, in Meghalaya, the performance of ministers is the least of the imperatives in the Chief Minister's scheme of things. Sniawbhalang Dhar first held the portfolio of PWD (Roads). He is a businessman by profession and his first priority is to enhance his business. With Dhar as Minister PWD (Roads) the roads of Shillong city and other areas of the State have degenerated at a very rapid pace. Beyond Shillong city, roads in some parts of Ri Bhoi and East Khasi Hills district have become mud paths. The budget provision for 2015-16 was Rs 828.48 and the expenditure for that year was Rs 775.68. The problem is that there are no mechanisms to measure outcomes and no detailed report of expenditures are available unless one files an RTI. But RTI answers by the PWD are made so technical that it is hard for the common person to comprehend which contractor is doing which job and how. After a series of newspaper reports on the dilapidated condition of all roads in Meghalaya under Dhar's supervision, the Department was taken away from him and handed over to Martin Danggo whose track record for credibility remains a question mark.

A cursory glance into the CAG observations vis-a- vis the Public Works Department suggests absence of diligence leading to wasteful expenditure of several crores of rupees. Such lapses are possible because there is no penalty for poor project execution such as non-testing of soil profile before constructing roads and bridges thereby leading to collapse of roads and bridges after a cloudburst. The Department can only be held accountable by a scrupulous minister. That is the missing factor in Meghalaya. As far as Prestone Tynsong is concerned, the reason for jettisoning him is his proximity to the National People's Party (NPP). So too, Sniawbhalang Dhar. And the NPP and its leadership are beta-noire of Dr Mukul Sangma. Hence the axing of Tynsong and Dhar were both expected. Cabinet ministers are not inducted because of their capability. They are in the cabinet because of their loyalty to the Chief Minister! Period.

TO THE EDITOR

Education needs serious soul-searching

Editor,
An initiative by an institution like Lady Keane College of Shillong to initiate a professional course in travel and tourism management is a great leap in the education sector and we hope that other institutions would take a leaf or two out of this college. However, I would disagree with what the Chief Minister stated that education in Meghalaya has opportunities to offer to young people. If that was the case then why are families sending their children to different states immediately after completion of their higher secondary exams? We have teachers protesting on the streets and haggling with the government for their dues while students are made scapegoats. Is this the education system that the Chief Minister wants the young generation to inherit? The RTE Act has not been fully implemented in letter and spirit. If it was done why are we still seeing young kids out on the streets and especially in the

villages? And why are most schools not able to accommodate talented yet under-privileged children? We do not even have a top-class agriculture college, leave alone a dental college or engineering institution of our own. How long and when shall the future generation strive with all these maladies around? We have an education system which facilitates "institutes" which are more or less fly by-night operators and nothing more. But we have heard nothing on the need to review and revisit the education curriculum and teaching methodology in these past years. Perhaps some soul-searching should be done on this subject.

Yours etc,
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong

Undemocratic Party!

Editor,
Apropos to the letter of Philip Marwein (ST July 26, 2017) I would like to state that the boycott of the recently held Presidential elections by the HSPDP reveals the uncivilized and parochial mindset of the party. It is in fact a very sad state of affairs for a

An uncertain future awaits Nitish

BJP may extract heavy price for his delicate situation

No one can find fault with Nitish Kumar for eulogising Narendra Modi. He has followed the beaten track. Often the turn coats sing paeans in praise of their new leader. Nitish is not an exception. He is politically correct in his assessment that no one is capable of defeating Modi in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Looking at the prevalent political situation, with Congress in a bind, it is utopian to expect that it would lead a comprehensive opposition to unseat Modi. Ever since its rout in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress leadership has failed to revive and resurrect the party. There are many reasons but one primary factor is the changing contours of political economics in the country. Nitish, being a shrewd politician, ought to comprehend that it is the economic condition of the particular time that defines the character and nature of the politics. Till 2013 no one had imagined that Congress would meet its Waterloo in 2014. The situation was not so worrisome for Congress. But tearing of the ordinance paper by Rahul Gandhi comprehensively changed the peoples' perception and paradigm of politics. He was not just tearing a paper; instead he was shredding the authority of the prime minister. He wanted to send the message that he was a guy who desired to weed out injustice. But in the process he sent the wrong message. His action was received wrongly by the people; here is a guy who has no respect for the prime minister and has lowered the prestige of the office. Then again his directives to the prime minister at the AICC meet to increase the number of cylinders for the poor was yet another wrong move. His thrust on the rural poor and morality in public life failed to convince the people, especially the urban middle class about his virtuous intentions. The damage has already been inflicted. People did not subscribe to what he said. His thrust on the rural poor in fact split the people on class line and pushed the party away from them. While his action of tearing the ordinance paper and proletariat turned the urban middle class and rich suspicious of the Congress's moves and

By Arun Srivastava

desire, the poor also could not repose their trust in a party complying to the dictates of the rich and following the capitalist mode of economic policies. Congress lost both; the rural poor and the burgeoning urban middle class. What an irony, both these classes, which were once close to the Congress at heart, deserted it. The urban middle class, which had immensely benefitted under Dr Manmohan Singh government, failed to trust him. Rahul made his image and stature susceptible in their eyes. He lost his economic and political relevance in their eyes. Coinciding with this development, unearthing of some of the serious scams made the people nurse the view that Congress leadership kept Dr Singh in office only to conceal its wrong doings. The inability of the Congress to follow one political economic line and remain committed to it caused gigantic damage to it. Unfortunately, while it failed to win over the rural poor and proletariat it could also not convince the urban middle class of its true intentions. The Congress became the victim of its own machinations and contradictions. What was most unfortunate was that while it did not give full liberty to Dr Manmohan Singh to implement his capitalist economic agenda; the leadership failed to carry out well defined pro-poor policies. A closer look at the functioning of Narendra Modi will make it absolutely clear that he has also been trying to sail on two boats. While he has been working overtime to reach the benefits of his government and also governance to his capitalist and corporate friends, he has also been trying to appease the rural poor, dalit and proletariat. He has been following in the footsteps of the Congress. To be fair to him, he has no alternative; he is prisoner of Sangh's politicking. At this juncture the Sangh cannot force him to experiment with its Swadeshi agenda. There are virtually no takers for it. The Indian psyche, developed on the Nehruvian economy and liberal centrist ethics, will find it incomprehensible to

accept Swadeshi economic philosophy. Politically too, in a semi feudal and semi colonial structure, the Swadeshi scripture is not an ideal document. The burgeoning middle class is desperate for following the capitalist dialect. This was the primary motivation that after Narendra Modi took over as the prime minister expectations for a boost in reforms soared. But instead of carrying out surgical reforms the government and Sangh parivar engaged peoples' attention to other fringe issues like lynching, beef, conversion; the issues which were Hindutva oriented. This was a tactical move to convince the people that unless India ushers into a Hindutva polity, nothing substantial could be achieved; no fundamental changes can be made. It was tempting for a short duration, but had little relevance for the future. In fact, Modi has been caught in a muddle, a creation of the Sangh. Recent decisions and actions of Modi make it clear that he is not on the same page with RSS on many issues. The fear that stalks the Sangh and BJP is that if Modi continues with his assertive style of functioning, the Sangh-BJP relation may undergo a change well before 2019. Some of the hard core Sanghis, in fact, have been waiting in the wings for that scenario to emerge soon. It was undoubtedly the involvement in the case of the murder of a voter, Sitaram Singh, on November 16, 1991, during an election in Mokama Assembly constituency that made Nitish sceptical of his future, the changing political equation and relation inside the BJP and Sangh parivar and jump into the lap of the BJP. The Supreme Court will hear on August 14 a PIL seeking prosecution of chief minister Nitish Kumar for alleged involvement in the 1991 murder and a directive to the CBI to take up further investigations into the matter. Besides seeking criminal prosecution of Nitish, the petition also wants the apex court to determine the larger issue of whether persons with criminal cases can be allowed to hold any constitutional post like that of a chief minister. Fighting corruption and criminals has merely been a façade for Nitish. His claim that he is against corruption

and criminals does not hold good as more than three-fourths of the ministers in his government have criminal cases against them, higher than what it was in the previous Grand Alliance cabinet, a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) underlined. According to ADR, 22 ministers out of 29 in the present government have criminal cases against them. In the Grand Alliance cabinet, 19 out of a total of 28 ministers had cases registered against them. Though Nitish claims to provide a good governance, Sushassan, the fact is the IAS and IPS officers are reluctant to come to Bihar. According to figures available a total of 1,470 posts of IAS officers are lying vacant across the country. Bihar tops the list with 128 vacancies. Undeniably Bihar is grappling with a severe shortage of IAS and IPS officers and it could cripple or slow down the state's development. Nitish tries to put the blame for his leaving the mahagathbandhan on Lalu Yadav and to some extent on Rahul Gandhi, but the brute fact is that it is his yearn for survival that made him quit. The situation has turned so scary that he even preferred to ignore criticism, especially from the intelligentsia. His argument: "I would have faced more criticism if I had supported corruption. Secularism is an idea but it should not be used as a cover for acquiring illegal assets" does not have enough punch. Lalu was convicted many years back but it was his caste-based strength that conjured Nitish to approach him for the mahagathbandhan. One thing is absolutely clear: Nitish's gamble will not pay him in future. The BJP would under no circumstances concede him Lok Sabha seats as it would most likely keep intact its 2014 gains. The maximum it will do is to promise to accommodate his request in the 2020 assembly elections. But in case the BJP performs well in 2019, there is a danger that it may dump Nitish and go alone in the assembly elections. If Nitish is then found knocking at the door of the secular forces, he would become a laughing stock in public perception. (IPA Service)

A critique of religion

By Barnes Mawrie

"If there were no religion" is a question that many critics of religion ask themselves. Can human beings survive without a religion? From an anthropological and theological perspective it would seem impossible to think of humanity without religion. Man by nature is a "theological being" which means that naturally he seeks to commune with a supernatural being in whatever manner it could be. Human existence is so full of paradoxes of happiness and sadness, well-being and suffering, life and death etc. It is this paradoxical existence that naturally leads a human being to seek for answers. Does he really find such answers? He asks ontological questions about his existence and the culmination of it. He seeks answers to the problems of suffering and death. Man has never and will never find scientific answers to these fundamental

As seen today in many Muslim countries and presently in India, such religious fundamentalism is dangerously gaining momentum. The RSS, the BD and other Hindu fundamentalists today tend to identify Hindu religion with Indian culture and so their attempt is to establish Hindutva. Anyone who professes a religion other than this is deemed an enemy of the country. The so called garh wapsi is not merely a forced conversion but a cultural imposition as well. Is there such a thing as "Hindu culture?" We know there is a Hindu way of life, a Hindu religion, a Hindu community etc, but there is no such a thing as Hindu culture. In fact culture in India is a complex reality because it is characterized by a spectrum of variety. It is utterly foolish to speak of Hindu or Indian culture as such. Perhaps every religion needs to focus more on the

The belief in some kind of supreme divinity is present even in most polytheistic religions. Man's relationship with this Being is what manifests itself in laws of moral conduct, spiritual attitude and rituals. So the question is: why do we fight and kill each other because one does not believe in Allah or one does not respect a cow? Is the Supreme Being divided in himself as Allah, God, Yahweh or Brahman? Perhaps when we go to the other world, we may be surprised to behold that the God we call by different names, is the same one Supreme Being.

questions. No science or philosophy has come forth with a satisfactory and credible answer to these issues. In fact, as Paul Tillich has rightly said: "man is a question mark turning to God for the answer." It is precisely because man cannot find answers in human knowledge, that he realizes the role of the divine reality in furnishing such answers. Man has long ago acknowledged that he has no capability to generate such answers without the involvement of the divine. It is here that man enters into a theological investigation and reflection and comes to acknowledge the existence of a "Being" much superior to himself and in whom he could repose his ultimate hope and aspirations. Even an atheist who denies the existence of God, is unconsciously moved to believe in some sort of supernatural power. Every human being who comes face to face with the fundamental reality of suffering and death, turns to the Ultimate Being for the answer. From these theological questions emerges man's religion. So religion is therefore inevitable and indispensable. Although the belief in a supreme being is universal irrespective of race and place, yet the manifestation of this belief varies from one culture to the other. Therefore we have different kinds of religion from the well organized to the more primitive ones. At times, this cultural variation in religions causes serious relational problems. It leads to inter-religious bickering and even wars and bloodshed as history has amply shown. When these cultural religious variations are overemphasized in any particular religion, it tends to nurture religious bigots who show absolute contempt for other religions.

basic beliefs than on the cultural religious variations. The former is the core while the latter is the garb. If every religion investigates into its core belief, it will find that there is only one common element "acceptance of the existence of a supreme Being and man's ways to relate with that Being." The belief in some kind of supreme divinity is present even in most polytheistic religions. Man's relationship with this Being is what manifests itself in laws of moral conduct, spiritual attitude and rituals. So the question is: why do we fight and kill each other because one does not believe in Allah or one does not respect a cow? Is the Supreme Being divided in himself as Allah, God, Yahweh or Brahman? Perhaps when we go to the other world, we may be surprised to behold that the God we call by different names, is the same one Supreme Being. It is clear that religious fundamentalists have forgotten the basics of their religions because if they know them, they would not behave as they do now. The basics of any religion are "truth, goodness and love." Take any scripture of any great religion, you will find these divine principles enunciated in different ways. So finally what makes us enemies to each other, is not the core belief (that is so universal) but the variations that we seem to care more. This is what we term a "pseudo religiosity" which compels us to hold on to the periphery and let go the centre. It is time for adherents of every religion to go back to the origin of their religions and discover the basic common beliefs that could unite us all as one human race and de-emphasize those accidental variations which only make us less human in our attitude and behaviour.

Meghalaya & modified vehicles

Automobile lovers in State hit the road in style but more than money it’s innovation that drives them

By Azera Parveen Rahman

There is an endless splendour of natural beauty that would strike you on a visit to Meghalaya. Thick pine forests, green hills, countless waterfalls gushing down the slopes, low-hanging clouds and the like. One, however, also cannot miss the passion of the ordinary people — their love for potted plants, for instance. Or modified cars.

Spotting a Maruti-800 converted into something like an SUV, or a tractor into a jeep, the possibilities of seeing something unique whizzing past you on the winding roads of this hill station are very high.

In case you are wondering, this craze has nothing to do with money. It’s all creativity. Most of the vehicles you spot are not very high-end, but turning something ordinary into something that is bound to grab eyeballs without spending too much money is what the challenge is. And Meghalaya definitely wins on this one.

The most visible example would be one of the most common sights in Shillong — the black Maruti-800s that serve as taxis. Most of them flaunt their alloys and big tyres, at times making the car itself look smaller. The most basic of the four-wheelers can turn heads with colourful graphic art popping out of the body or other forms of modification, and shops selling automobile accessories are found by the dozen.

But it’s not just a passion for car owners. Bikers too get their two-wheelers modified to a whole new level. Among the better known names in this field is a youngster, Arhunki Laloo. What began as a passion — he first modified his own Royal Enfield Desert Storm Classic and then a friend’s Thunderbird 500 — soon made way for offers from strangers to modify their bikes.

Laloo, who comes from a family of



doctors, says that he had to wait patiently for his first bike before realising his dream of turning it into something unique. And when he finally did, in 2012, he gave it all his heart. From tyres to the tool box, he tweaked everything. He also put in a bigger petrol tank to store extra fuel for long rides and a tank-bag grill for better protection. It also made the bike look better.

There are others like Laloo who have their own workshops in which imagination runs wild as bikes get painted with skulls and flames, guitars, and anything else that the owner may fancy.

Not all kinds of modification, however, are pleasing to the senses. Some car and bike owners, for instance, have modified silencers that can jar the day-lights out of anyone. In one instance, the District Transport Officer in Jaintia Hills issued a warning to all such vehicle owners and those with multi-tone horns, coloured bulbs, and additional woofers with blasting music that can cause inconvenience and a distraction to other people.

Meghalaya’s love affair with modified vehicles, however, has waded past these roadblocks. A cafe in Upper Shil-



long, ML05, which opened its doors last year, has best paid tribute to this ever-green affair by conceptualising its interiors on automobiles and the heady addiction that travel bugs suffer from.

From number plates hanging at the entrance, tyre tracks lining the floors, a car’s steering wheel working as the knob of the door to car headlights recycled as ceiling lights, the place breathes passion for anything related to automobiles. One of course cannot miss the central installation: A bulky black Bullet suspended in the air with the number plate, ML05 (the prefix of licence numbers of vehi-

cles from East Khasi Hills).

Vatsala Tibrewala and her brother, Deval Tibrewala, who own and manage the cafe, said that they hit upon the idea after the instant success of Dylan’s Cafe — claimed to be Shillong’s first theme cafe dedicated to the music legend, Bob Dylan.

As the sister-brother duo thought of the next venture which similarly captures Shillong’s affinity, they zeroed in on the automobile theme. It helped that Deval, a hotelier by profession, is also an avid motorsports enthusiast and a big car lover.

In her words, the cafe celebrates the common love that an average Shillong local — be it a taxi owner, a student, or a luxury car owner — has.

In case you are still not convinced, probably the constant sight of taxi owners scrubbing their cars squeaking clean near every stream or waterfall will definitely make you believe the love between man and his machine of this beautiful northeast state. (IANS)

(Azera Rahman is a freelance journalist. She can be contacted at azera.rahman@gmail.com)

‘Drugs more of a social issue’

Davis NR Marak took over as the superintendent of police of East Khasi Hills at a crucial time when crime against women and children was creating ripples of anger in the city and law and order was deteriorating. Coming from insurgency-hit Garo Hills (Williamnagar) the challenges for Marak in Shillong, where he grew up, were aplenty.

The alumnus of St Anthony’s College says life as a cop is tough and there is no time to socialise. “The only time we socialise is at official functions,” Marak smiles. But what keeps him going is the love for the job and the thrill that it has. In a tête-à-tête with The Shillong Times, Marak talks about the changed priorities on field, the department’s readiness in time of crisis and plans for better service.

As the new SP of East Khasi Hills what are the challenges that you are facing? Having worked in the militancy zone, is it easier for you to tackle problems here?

In the Garo Hills region, it was mainly counter-insurgency and the focus on militancy. Be it a kidnap or murder, it was all related to militancy but crimes here are of different types. There (in Williamnagar) it was a rural setting with poor communications and broken roads. Here we are exposed to so many problems like traffic, law and order due to agitations by various groups. Protocol duties are also part of the duty in the capital city. So the challenges are not comparable and priorities are different.

The number of theft cases has increased in the city. But night patrolling is scarce. How are you planning to tackle the problem?

It is wrong to say that there are no night patrols. Of course there is. But we have to strategise things at night, especially in the wake of the recent arson cases. So we identify the entry and exit points of localities and utilise our men. There are patrol cars in every police outpost and beat house. Also, night patrol teams have women officers. Police cannot cover all areas at all times. Patrol teams visit localities periodically. I wish we had more manpower. Nonetheless, we strategise our work even with less resource as we cannot always complain about what we have got.

Also, there are no night kiosks in the city...

True, there are no police kiosks in the city but there are night officers at outposts and beat houses. Also, we have a 24x7 helpline number. We are planning to set up computerized information kiosks and might get help from a few business entities.

What about drunken driving? Does the police department have modern equipment like breath analysers?

Strict and prompt action is taken against drunken driving. Yes, we do have breath analysers but some of them do not function. In that case we forward the offender for medical tests. However, we will get more breath analysers for effective and fast result.

What are the challenges for the depart-



TALKING POINT

ment?

Manpower crisis is a perennial problem. Lack of modern equipment is another factor. Like in cases of cyber crime, we do not have the set-up to handle sophisticated cases.

There are other job hazards like stress and little time for family. But you have to love the job to not consider these as hazards.

Agitations by various groups are a common feature in the city. How do you cope with it?

We are not against agitations provided it is done peacefully. There is a procedure that every group planning to take out a rally or agitate in the city has to follow. It has to first seek permission from the deputy commissioner’s office and then the SP office. It has to follow certain guidelines. Some agitations are unconstitutional and in such cases we treat protesters as criminals, like the recent arsonists.

What about the rising drug-related cases in the city? Peddlers manage to get bail because of the weak investigation. Why?

Drug abuse is more of a social issue. Addiction leads to all forms of crime, including peddling. The problem needs to be treated in totality and not merely a crime. The Government should build rehabilitation centres so that addicts can be cured. Awareness on the ill

effects of drugs is important and we often conduct such programmes in schools, colleges and localities.

Talking about arrests, we had had good catches in the past. If we arrest an addict, we get some information from him about the source of the drugs seized. But Shillong is only a transit point and not producer of drugs, so tracking the kingpins become a problem. Also, drug business has become sophisticated. However, we are co-ordinating with various agencies and neighbouring states to check the problem.

Crime against women and children is a major issue now. How are you planning to tackle this problem and what is the conviction rate? What about juvenile delinquents and their rehabilitation?

We have one women police station at Sadar. Some of the other police stations have women officers but not all. We will set up more such facilities in future. Also, there are child welfare sections at police stations and I personally monitor it. We also have an active missing desk.

Child welfare officers look into cases of juvenile delinquents. They investigate into the nature of crime and accordingly forward the cases to the Juvenile Justice Board. In case of petty crime, parents are summoned and they are counselled along with the child. The dis-

trict child protection units also co-operate in the rehabilitation process.

David Marshallong, a habitual offender, was recently arrested from the city. Why is he managing to get bail every time?

Marshallong was arrested more than 25 times earlier. Though he was charge-sheeted several times, there was no conviction, which is in the judiciary’s ambit.

How do you maintain discipline in the force in the wake of incidents like suicides and fratricides?

Discipline is ingrained in the force when it is trained. However, all of them are working under stress. So we counsel them. The seniors listen to the subordinates and discuss their problems. We have two counsellors in the Social Welfare Department who help victims of crime. Sometimes they too help in counseling stressed out personnel.

Is there any tourism police?

No, the concept of tourism police is new and it requires separate training. Again, the problem of manpower crisis arises. To have tourism policing, we have to train a different group. However, our officers help tourists and strangers in the city when help is sought.

What is the status of HNLC?

There is no physical existence of the group here. There are a few sympathisers and members who work from Bangladesh and are only active on social media.

US editor who found Anne Frank’s diary dies at 93

Judith Jones, the legendary editor who rescued Anne Frank’s diary from a US publisher’s rejection pile, died. She was 93.

Jones, a luminary of the publishing world, who also introduced the world to American culinary writer Julia Child, was close to literary giants such as John Updike, Anne Tyler, William Maxwell, John Hersey, Peter Taylor and Sharon Olds. She passed away today at her home in Vermont, the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group said in a statement.

She worked for Knopf for more than 50 years, joining the company in 1957 and officially retiring only in 2011. “Judith was a legend in book publishing,” said Sonny Mehta, chairman and editor-in-chief, paying tribute to the once young assistant who rescued Frank’s “Diary of a Young Girl” from a rejection pile in Paris.

The diary, which the young Jewish girl had written while hiding from the Nazis between June 1942 and August 1944, is one of the most famous testimonies of life in World War II and one of the most famous diaries of all time.

Frank, who was born in Germany and lived with her family in the Netherlands, died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp aged 15, just months before the war ended. Her diary was first published in the Netherlands in 1947, followed by French and German editions in 1950 before appearing in Britain and the US in 1952. The first US edition of ‘Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl’ ran a modest 5,000 copies and contained a preface from former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Doubleday reputedly spent little on publicity, but sales quickly took off. A subsequent US play ‘Diary of Anne Frank’ was a Broadway hit and won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1956.

A 1959 Hollywood movie won three Oscars. The diary has been a fixture on school curricula since the 1960s. Worldwide, the diary has sold more than 30 million copies in 67 languages.

Jones was also instrumental in persuading Alfred Knopf to publish in 1961 ‘Mastering the Art of French Cooking’ — a tome that introduced generations of American home cooks to French food and to now legendary chef Julia Child.

“It is no exaggeration to say that she profoundly influenced not only the way America reads but also the way we cook,” Mehta said.

Jones won five Pulitzer Prizes, five National Book Awards and three National Book Critics Circle Awards, and her cookbook authors won dozens and dozens of prizes, said Knopf Doubleday. (AFP)



Message on trafficking



A scene from *Free Trade* and (inset) playwright and director Naomi Bhuyan

By Our Reporter

Human trafficking is a growing menace in developing countries and has its roots in poverty, greed and discrimination.

A government data released last year showed that incidents of trafficking have increased 25 per cent in one year and the victims were women and children from economically backward families who were sold in the illegal market either for flesh trade or organ smuggling.

Free Trade, a play written and directed by Naomi Bhuyan, associate professor in the English Department of Sankardev College, was recently staged in the city for public awareness. The drama vividly depicted the trauma that a victim goes through and the darkness that is engulfing thousands of vulnerable women and children.

“*Free Trade* is the voice of Asia and Africa as the cast comprised Indians and foreign students from Asia and Africa,” said Bhuyan, who got a request from a group of youth last year to write something on the issue. The name *Free Trade* denotes how humans have become commercial commodity, explained the playwright and director.

Students from different colleges and institutes — Sankardev College, St Anthony’s, Shillong College, St Edmund’s, Bissau College, Lady Keane, Umshyrpi College, Seven Set Higher Secondary School, IIAD Delhi, IGNOU and NIOS — were part of the 28-member cast. Bhuyan said she started her research on the topic months before she penned down the play, which won accolades from bureaucrats and other prominent citizens for its realistic story-telling.

“It was very intense and tough to handle the topic due to the seriousness of the subject. For case studies, I had to approach Impulse NGO Network, senior journalists like Grassroots Options, well-wishers from abroad who were involved in the play who also authenticated the script regarding this problem in their country and finally, members of the public who shared their views. Then intuitively and through my creativity the script of

Free Trade was finally completed,” she added.

Artistes rehearsed daily for one month (April-May) and during college semesters in June, they would meet thrice a week.

The story was about four trafficked victims who were taken to a kinkin for prostitution. There was a male prostitute who faced the threat of organ harvesting from traffickers, for whom trading in human is only a “cattle herding practice”.

Each victim had his or her story to tell. For instance, one victim, a young girl, went to a metro in search of job and was trafficked. Another girl fell in love with a man on internet and eloped with him. Love ended in tragedy and the girl became a sex slave.

Eventually, two police personnel working with the trafficker under cover led to the arrest of the gang. The final scene focused on reporters, the police and the NGO lady who had a discussion on trafficking.

The actors portrayed the characters perfectly and were widely applauded by the audience. Theatre grooms each participant in character building, personality development, team building and the holistic growth of the actor and those involved in the drama experienced this in completeness, the playwright said with pride.

“First of all the public were amazed with the realism depicted in the play and the way the actors authenticated their roles. It was shocking and painful, they said. Regarding the authorities they were very impressed with the realism of the performance as stated and the truth depicted in the theme. They wanted more of such awareness programmes in the future and said they would extend help to get access to any details I would require,” Bhuyan said but instantly added that *Free Trade* was just the tip of the iceberg and “there is so much to write and explore about this dark theme”.

When asked whether she would work on the issue in future, Bhuyan said, “Yes, I would definitely like to pursue more of such awareness ventures in the future about this field and also other social evils. I hope people will extend their help to make it a reality.”

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, August 6, 2017

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon square Uranus on your solar return chart denotes a mixed year. Partnerships of all kinds will be your focus this year, and the opportunity to connect with others in more intimate ways will improve both your personal and business connections. Your finances could be subject to extreme up and down cycles, so make sure you put aside a few dollars as a cushion for slower times. Money will continue to fluctuate until mid of this year, but then should reach a more stable place. A cruise or overseas vacation will be on your agenda in December, so honor your adventurous nature by making the plans, and then ask the Universe to help you figure out how you'll pay for it.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) This phase brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relations. You gain money and influence through business ventures and partnerships. You dominate the professional scene as you bring together divergent forces. You would express yourself with charm and grace in professional life. Quality time is spent at home bringing balance and perspective into your life. You have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. You feel full of energy and indulge in sports, physical activities and a structured exercise routine.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity. This phase heralds cordial relations with extended family and friends. Cooperation and focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation in public relations. You need to curb comparisons and rivalry as it adds to stress. Personal relationships cannot be resolved through discussion and analysis but through love, acceptance and freedom. Changes in personal relationships and attitudes happen by themselves, with natural ease, rather than by your pursuing. You would regroup your energy and thoughts and focus on the basics, which brings achievement.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) This is a phase when you are more responsible, hard working, dutiful, and serious. This enhances the ability to achieve desired goals. You would take up tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation and teamwork. You would have positive feels towards religion and related aspects. You are socially active, although you display a seriousness and self-discipline. You extend hospitality to family and friends as you entertain and organize meetings and get -togethers.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) This is an excellent period under which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones as suffering and negativity will be eliminated once you make a significant change in a personal relationship. You would expand your social circle and make more contact with groups and friends. It is advisable to be prudent in professional and work related matters. Avoid hasty and rash decisions when it comes to change. Give the matter due thought and consider the entire matter with care. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) This phase brings confidence, pleasure and involvement in personal and professional relations. There are deadlines to be met and presentations to be made. Your confidence and eloquence stand you in good stead as you take centre stage. Networking could help to boost your career. The support you receive from colleagues will help you gather and process more information. You enjoy doing jobs and tasks with your partner; however mundane they may be. You turn your attention on fitness and balanced diet programs, as these efforts would bring positive results.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) You are more focused and hard working which reflects in the results that you achieve. On the financial front, progress would be steady. This

enhances self-confidence and enables you to take well thought out risks. You are likely to get business and work opportunities from hitherto unknown sources. The ability to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you. For you home is where the heart is as you do the extra bit and our close ones see you in a most positive way. You may be tempted to spend extra money on things that will make your life more comfortable and pleasant and represent a sense of security.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) The planetary configuration brings good financial returns as you communicate well specially with team members and other co-workers. This is an excellent time where you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your peer relationships. You would spend time with your beloved and enjoy the feeling of togetherness. You would spend on clothes, furniture, and entertainment. Domestic relationships and the home environment would be harmonious and peaceful. You may have a desire to re-decorate your home would buy expensive household items. There may be minor health ailment as you need to give more attention to your health.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) You would take a more practical and disciplined approach towards work and on the domestic front. You assume a leadership role and take control of matters both at work and home. Those in the field of art or using their creative prowess would give a fresh dynamism to their work. You are drawn to intellectual pursuits. You take pride in your work and the thinking process helps you come up with ideas to infuse energy in the work at hand. This is an excellent week under which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) You use wisdom to overcome any misgivings in your professional field. Inner focus helps you feel enlightened as your thoughts undergo a transformation and become stronger and more positive. Strong existing relationships are likely to grow and transform. Your finances could also improve as long as you deploy well tried out strategies. There are also some unexpected expenses on family front. In love and romance your personal relationship takes on a special quality as you communicate and express your views beautifully. Physical energy and good health enable you to keep up with a busy schedule and work commitments.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) It is time to heal old friendships with tender, love, care and move into new relationships with love and sensitivity. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships. New ideas and concepts floated by you at your work place will be appreciated. At work, you may take up new assignments and project that would bring creativity and new ideas. You understand that nothing can replace diligence. There may be gains from property, shares and assets in hand.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) You would work in association with the young and this brings confidence and you use your best talents and inspired by the youthful energy you coordinate all activities with a joie de vivre. You express inner feelings, ideas and future plans without being afraid of results and consequences. You will be creative, adventurous and unconventional at work and this brings appreciation from senior colleagues. Changes in your lifestyle can now be incorporated with long term benefits. Any unresolved argument may create a rift in your relationships; take a softer approach in your interactions with people at work and home.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This period brings more efficiency and creativity in your work in an unconventional way. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes may come. Your family would be more supportive and you will feel more comfortable. You exhibit individualism in handling business ventures and collaborations. You may take up assignments and projects and this would end on a winning note for you during the week. Your efforts to reach out to new people will be accepted and welcomed as you get success in matters connected to foreign lands too.

Bard’s last journey

By Uma Purkayastha

Rabindranath Tagore expired on August 7, 1941, at his ancestral house in Kolkata’s Jorasanko. Since September 1940, Tagore had been suffering from various physical problems, including fistula, and needed a surgery. The daily toll of suffering went on rising; fever rose higher each evening, and the nights were increasingly restless.

The team of leading physicians and surgeons who used to come periodically from Kolkata, insisted on his removal to Kolkata for a major operation. The decision upset the poet who had little faith in allopathic claims and resented the idea of physical mutilation perpetrated on him in the name of scientific surgery. He humbly protested, “Why can’t I be allowed to die in peace? Haven’t lived enough?”

With his surer instinct, he knew that the end was near, that it was “time for the bird to fly”. As he had said earlier in one of his poems. “Momently I feel the time/draws near for me to leave.”.....

Sometimes in sick bed, he murmured in frustration, ‘My feet revolt to bear the weight of my body, the fingers revolt to hold pen, my ears and eyes do not carry out my orders. What a tragedy!’ (Ref: ‘Rog Sajjyay Rabindranath’ by Buddhadev Basu)

Tagore, at the twilight of his life journey, desired a very smooth and peaceful ending, like a tree, shedding old leaves without pain. In a word he disliked surgery upon his body. But the learned physicians around him and his son Rathindranath were adamant to miss no chance of saving his life, so valuable; however feeble might be he.

Tagore could not reject the importunities of his dear and near ones, and yielded.

Tagore’s ardent desire was to breathe his last in Santiniketan surrounded by those who loved him best; men, women and children and the trees and birds whom he loved most dearly. He was unhappy to leave the site he had cherished so dearly and where almost every tree had grown under his care. At the moment of departure from Santiniketan, he murmured, “Perhaps I shall not see these trees again”!

It was July 25, 1941, Tagore was taken to Kolkata. He had to leave his most beloved Santiniketan for good. He knew well that it was his last departure from his dearly shelter Santiniken, the abode of peace, his own creation!

Since early morning he was sitting on the chair, he used so long and had been looking vacantly. It was his very favourite chair which was presented to him by Victoria Ocampo, more than 16 years ago.

Observing, how relaxed and comfort-



able he had felt in that chair, his hostess Victoria had insisted on the chair accompanying him when he sailed from Buenos Aires. Since then this chair had been his favourite seat of repose at Santiniketan. It is still preserved in the museum.

Tagore did not express any anguish or unwillingness in words. He kept mum but his eyes looked unhappy and helpless.

On July 30, 1941, at 11am the surgery was performed in his residence at Jorasanko. While he was being carried to the operation table, he dictated his last poem, his final offering to his Muse, the last of his many tete-a-tetes with his beloved God, and perhaps the most intimate and heart-wrung of them all. (Ref:- Tagore A Life by Krishna Kripalini)

‘Your creation’s path you have covered/With a varied net of wiles, Thou Guileful One/False belief’s snare you have laid with skilful hands/in simple lives. With this deceit have you left a mark on Greatness; for him kept no secret night./The path that is shown to him by yours star/Is the path of his own heart ever lucid;/Which his simple faith makes eternally shine/The unwavering right to peace’!

The poem was originally dictated in Bengali by the setting poet at morning 9:30, on July 30, 1941, just one-and-a-half hour before his surgery. After operation, his condition worsened and gradually he lost his consciousness, never to regain. Within a week of the surgery he expired.

Three months prior to his demise, on

May 6, 1941, on the eve of his last birth anniversary, Tagore wrote a letter from Santiniketan, addressed to poet Annada Shankar Roy and attached the following poem —

I am lost on this Birthday celebration/I only desire my friends on this occasion;/Whose warm caress of love and affection,/Nourished me with ultimate satisfaction/I shall take with me those divine things/Love of people and their last blessings!/ My bag is empty today/Whatever I had, I gave them away/If anything gets rebounded mere./Will be a drop of love and care./I shall carry them along with me,/On my very speechless last journey! (Translated from Bengali)

The poem is deeply touching in its appeal and humility. He keenly desired only the touch of love and affection of human heart as his parting gift.

“On August 7 at 10 minute past mid-day, he breathed his last in the same old Jorasanko House where he had first opened his eyes eighty years and three months earlier.

It was the day of the full moon of Sravana, the month of rain so often celebrated in his verse and song” (Tagore A Life by Krishna Kripalini).

Tagore had composed a song earlier and desired that the song should be sung at his death. It was —

‘Sammukhe Shanti Parabar/Bhasaw Tarani, Hey Kornadhar’ (In front of me lies the ocean of peace/Launch the boat, Oh Helmsman,/You will be the comrade ever!)

Till today, on his death anniversary the song is sung by Rabindra devotees.

Be a food advisor

By Ranjan K Baruah

Life diseases are increasing in many parts of the world, including India. Most of the people are leading a fast life. Work pressure and new trends of employment are indirectly affecting our health. At this juncture we are concerned about diet and more importantly balanced diet.

Balanced diet means good health that leads to positive things around us. We might be wondering about the connection of diet and career. Dietetics is the science of managing food and nutrition to promote health.

From a normal day to the time when we are sick or people are admitted in hospital, dieticians or nutritionists play an important role. Dieticians or nutritionists advise people on diets and food habit which keep them healthy in life. Dietetics is related to food management, nutrition is related to promotion of health.

It not only deals with individuals or patient but there is more demand of this career option these days. Dieticians or nutritionists are hired in many places like in hospitals, hotels, educational institutes, etc. Organisations involved in food product manufacture use the services of a nutritionist or dietician to plan and research new products. The nutritionists also have excellent prospects in the mass media where top of priority is given to disseminating vital information on healthy living.

There are many courses like B.Sc. in Clinical Nutrition, Dietetics and Catering Management, B.Sc. Food and Nutrition, B.Sc. Food Science, Nutrition and Food Quality Control, B.Sc. Nutrition and Dietetics. There are also certificate courses like Certificate Course in Food and Nutrition, Certificate Course in Nutrition and Dietetics, etc. There are



master level courses as well as short term courses like diploma, post graduate diploma.

Career opportunities can be found in government sector, sports and health clubs, teaching, research and development, some might also get opportunities to work with various media houses, gyms and slimming centres.

Some can start their own venture as consultant or start their own enterprise related to the field. The National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, is a premier institute under Indian Council of Medical Research, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Health and Family welfare, Government of India that offers regular nutrition training courses every year.

As lifestyle has changed or is changing, this career brings tremendous opportunities for the youth from the region. One should not think that it limits to only people who are sick but there are tremendous potential of this career opportunities. As people are becoming concern about health so this area

shall bring more options and opportunities in near future.

Updates

Project Udaan for Girls: Girls students currently enrolled in class XI in PCM from government schools /KV’s/INVs or CBSE affiliated private schools may enroll for Project Udaan for girls to prepare for admission in premier centrally funded engineering colleges/ technical institutes in India . CBSE provides free of cost tutorials, lectures and study material to selected girl students on the basis of merit and prescribed eligibility criteria. Last date is 7th August.

Grant for Life Science: BIRAC-BIG Scheme (Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council -Biotechnology Ignition Grant Scheme) designed for Individuals/ entrepreneurs & Academicians and start-ups to establish proof-of-concept data for their exciting ideas in the field of life sciences. The grant amount is Rupees 50 lakhs for 18 months and Guwahati Biotech Park is providing R & D platform to start the entrepreneurial venture under this schemes and others. Last date for sending application is 16th August.

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

“*Ambition is a poor excuse for not having sense enough to be lazy.*”
--- Michel Eyquem de Montaigne

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The Doklam Crisis

IN a Rajya Sabha debate, India’s External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj once again stressed the need for diplomacy to resolve the Doklam crisis embittering relations between India and China. She said that there was a need for dialogue as China contributed to India’s economic growth and is its major economic partner. She may not be popular in a climate of jingoism. However, there is no denying that China and India should not undermine economic ties over prestige issues. The interests of billions of people depend on peace. Russia, China and India have a shared responsibility to shape the security architecture in Asia. Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee highlighted the importance of creating such a troika. But the continuance of the dispute over Doklam dashes hopes of addressing the complex conflict over hydro-carbons, water and wealth. Swaraj may have antagonized the hawks in the NDA. But it demonstrates the sagacity of Indian leadership.

The debate in the Rajya Sabha cast doubts on the direction of India’s foreign policy. The Congress has blamed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for leaving India’s borders with China vulnerable. Swaraj said that while Jawaharlal Nehru enhanced his personal image, Modi has enhanced the national image through his initiatives. Crisis erupted also during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s time. Of course, Nehru’s nationalism is above all criticism. But the world has transformed. Foreign policy needs a core of political consensus over India’s interest. It is significant that the Chinese Consul General in Kolkata has also referred to India’s shared interests with China which far outweigh differences.

LOOKING BACK

April 26, 1989

Panel to explore Sikkim-Centre tax wrangle

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

TO THE EDITOR

Hindu Mission should uphold Dharma

Editor,
Apropos the letter “On Hindu Mission” (ST, Aug 4, 2017), in the same tone and term of the writer, I reaffirm that no good man will ever “malign” any sacred institution. Perhaps the writer has not understood the content of my letter- “Vulgar roar of Hindu Mission” (ST, July 24, 2017) Being an ardent follower of the spiritual values, I have just spoken out what glaring aberrations I have noticed over the years. Moreover, it is morally and spiritually wrong to speak against any institution. However, if a hallowed institution starts to depart from the set values and becomes a bane to others around then the management should not expect the public to shut its mouth either. Should the management not be extra careful not to let anyone desecrate its premises and disturb others? I also reiterate -- the holy objective of the “Hindu Mission” is to uphold “Dharma” and not “adharma” (irreligiosity). The morning devotees at the gate should be greeted by the holy ambience, not by empty liquor bottles thrown away by the party revellers, which I have seen

Bad Management

How can Industry survive incompetent policies? The answer is ‘not very well’. In the case of Meghalaya we see this very clearly. Industry has never been a thrust area for this (and hardly any preceding) government. This is probably down to the fact that massive profiteering is easier when industry is unorganized and unarmed. If the industrial policy were 'proper', industrial organization would have to be proper. The result as things stand has been a 'doomscape' of inconsistent production and subsidy pilfering. No “planner” in the Meghalaya government talks about industry but rather individual capability, that is, an individual person or firm’s ability to raise capital, invest, generate income, and occasionally (very rarely) give employment to the local population. The truth is a wealthy individual or company does not constitute an industry. Industry involves both Management AND Labour. Today when one talks about industry in the popular press, it is usually along the dictates of the management cadre. This cuts across public and private sectors. MNC management, IAS and PSU officers can often be seen together on TV deliberating upon industry, pointing to stats and speculating about growth and trajectory. They are at home in each other’s company in spite of the alleged animosity PSUs have with private undertakings. In fact, it appears, management within many PSUs seems hell-bent on capitulating and acquiescing towards private sector desires. Divestment, for instance, looks set to be a high priority agenda for this government at the Centre. I have heard all the arguments for divestment a thousand times before. There are just a few compelling ones. However, that aside, my main point for contention in all of this is simple: where does Labour figure in any of these plans? Forget about the fact that robots can now do the work of a hundred men, forget about mass production and cost effectiveness for a second. Those are not too much of a factor at the moment in Meghalaya where statistically most employment is in the area of non-mechanised, intensive agriculture. What efforts has

By Avner Pariat

the government made in this sector at this current juncton? It sends officers, engineers and ministers on ‘exposure tours’, ‘technical workshops’, ‘seminars’ etc. These in turn have a gala time clicking selfies and visiting (ahem, ahem) interesting “districts”. All this would be fine if they actually brought knowledge back and didn’t waste government money i.e. my money, your money. Now I am sure to a European, our Meghalaya officers, engineers and ministers might seem like the lumpen ignorant mass of savages they were told to expect but we, the ones from within the state, know their true nature and perhaps thought of themselves as separate from the various trade union and labour movements that were underway in different industrial sectors throughout the country. Now, I think it is safe to say, there can be no illusions. They might have felt safe at one point in time but their type of employment is under threat; the younger employees especially are increasingly drawn from the huge contract/casual reservoir and many no longer have any of the protections that their seniors enjoy. On the other hand, Management i.e. IAS, IPS, MCS, MPS etc have been gaining more and more benefits and perks at great

The attitudes and world-views of our work-force have been shaped by years of anti-labour policy and departmental inactivity. Instead of organizing within their respective sectors, our employees and workers have had to outsource their grievance redressal to outfits like the various pressure groups.

privilege. We know very well that our farmers, orchardists, artisans etc should be the ones going on these “tours”. After all, these are the people who actually work and struggle within these sectors. They are not a bunch of salaried, unprofessional louts who have been mismanaging the resources and futures of this state’s people. I am not saying everyone within administration is like that, there are many hard-working people within the government. However the striking thing is how easily it is to become demotivated within such a system. But that being said, I am hopeful that young energy shall eventually surge its way through the depressing, greyish, banal corridors of the Secretariat. These too have a role to play as an important cog within the wheels of Labour. Up until to a few years ago, employees of the government did not feel the need to worry about organizing themselves. After all, the task had already been done for them especially within Central government offices. They expense to the Exchequer. A progressive government must redress this and narrow the income and benefits gap. Eventually, a lot of jobs might become redundant. But again, perhaps this depends on the system of production and consumerism that we choose as a society. In Meghalaya, it is unclear what sort of economic development model the administration is aiming for. Will it be large scale and mechanised? Or maybe artisanal and sustainable? The government lazily waits around for some tycoon or firm to approach them and it is he/they who set the terms and conditions for investment. It is, clearly, management that is calling the shots at that stage. Between government and investor, management is speaking to management. The work force have no say in the process. And that is where shifts have to be made. Re-schooling labour and assigning more managerial roles to them should be the top priority of any progressive government. Major threats to trade unions come from within, from the complacency and reactionary attitude many

have towards their own industry. Most of the time, negotiations happen after an event has been initiated by management, but who says that should be the case? Labour always needs re-skilling. Meghalaya is suffering because Labour is suffering. The attitudes and world-views of our work-force have been shaped by years of anti-labour policy and departmental inactivity. Instead of organizing within their respective sectors, our employees and workers have had to outsource their grievance redressal to outfits like the various pressure groups. Instead of coal miners organising, we call the KSU; instead of cement plant workers coming together, we call FKJGP. These outfits have never empowered the sectors from within by instructing Labour to organize itself. Instead, they have assisted them just enough so that a dependency is created. Thus labour unions have never really taken the stage for themselves in this place. They have simply become part of the noise. The greed of the management cadre coupled with their inefficiency stemming out of their ignorance has been disastrous for the state economy. Officers might sanction the creation of a farmer’s market place for example but will not pursue plans for marketing of the products there. The chain between farm and fridge is never realised and the project ultimately ends in a quagmire. As a manager shouldn’t one seek the organization of Labour for the sake of smooth functioning and efficient production? But that is where it gets interesting. I personally don’t think just organizing labour into unions is such a great idea. We need the unions to think along the lines of the managerial cadre as well. Simply organizing worker into a union might not always be such a great idea. They are not automatons after all. But in no small measure, the future seems to be headed towards making them as such. Intervening now and infusing new ideas into them would be a crucial task. it the cobbler’s son or the grand-daughter of the ex-Chief Minister of the State! The second interesting comment on the newsfeed of the sister of the arrested Doctor that caught my attention was, from a police officer. The lady Addl. S.P. of SF-10, Ms Aprillish Sangma, had the audacity to call the Lady S.I.(who was on duty that day) names that no sane, decent, respectable officer would ever utter against her subordinate or anyone for that matter. She called her a “bitch” a “ghatia” “classless” and someone who has “no ethics”. Now look who’s talking! Surely the lady S.I’s silence can sometimes be the most eloquent reply!. The Addl. SP, Ms Aprillish Sangma, instead of walking a neutral line, implied that the Police was acting stupidly. She took an anti Police stance and implied that the cops were guilty of some wrongdoing even before the facts are fully known or vetted by the court. This in turn gives the anti-police faction some grist. The appropriate thing to do would be to summon the lady Addl. SP and take her to task, by calling her before the Disciplinary Committee. Yours etc., Hedrington Sangma, Dakopgre, Tura.

Rangjyrteh-A Forgotten heritage site of Sohra

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

On March 26th 2013 while everyone in Meghalaya was busy and overwhelmed by the election outcome and government formation, one of the national dailies, ‘The Telegraph’ made some significant reporting about Khasi Hills concerning evidences pertaining to iron smelting that have been practiced and traded here 2000 years ago and may be more. The discovery was reported by two scientists, Pawel Prakov and Ireneusz Suliga from the Department of Geo-environmental Research, Polish Academy of Science and co-sponsored by Indian National Science Academy. The period of the research work was from 2007 to 2010, and the paper was published in 2012-2013. The sites where extractions of slag samples were taken were from Nongkrem and Raikteng. And for the benefit of all, Raikteng is a small hamlet after Sa-i-mi-ka Park on the way to Dainthlen Falls. This land of ours that nature has carved with excellent features has many historical events and tragedies associated with it. But most of these historical facts are extremely difficult to authenticate because they are interpreted in varied versions by many people. But the fact remains that some substance of truth is stored and preserved somewhere in the form of stories being told from generation to generation. It is obvious that this is the only option available in those days to transfer legacy to the subsequent generation. And what will make tourism spots or location more significant and meaningful apart from beauty and wonder are the historical events associated with that particular place. Coming back to the purpose of this writing, just seven kilometers away from proper Sohra on the western side, lies an extinct ancient settlement, a place rarely appearing in Khasi literature but which has many historical and mythological events associated with significance and direct references to various aspects of Khasi culture and society. Believed to be the ancient industrial centre for iron smelting, people also adopted orange cultivation as a major activity. Located exactly opposite to Dainthlen Falls, this ancient settlement is known as ‘Rangjyrteh’ an indigenous name which currently falls within the jurisdiction of Laitduh village under Sohra Syiemship. But before the formation of Hima Sohra, Rangjyrteh was very much part and parcel of the then Hima Khathynriew Shnong (a conglomerate of several villages on the slope where the Umiam Mawphlang river flows). And for the purpose of historical correctness and information, the name ‘Khathynriew’ (sixteen) was derived from the ‘Khathynriew Shyngiar’ (sixteen water springs or aquifers) located in various locations within these villages. Nine of them are at Thieddieng village, five are at Mawphu village, and two are at Umblai village alongside the Umiam Mawphlang River. Interestingly, the famous orange of Sohra comes from these villages. It was told that the production and yield in those years was enormous and all the production was transported to erstwhile East Bengal later (East Pakistan and now Bangladesh) by people through Shella. But as far as the historical aspects of ‘Rangjyrteh’ are concerned, it can be construed as the centre for forging iron which lasted till the 17th century. From the remains it shows that there was a generation of industrialized community long time ago in these hills. But the reason for the collapse of this indigenous ancient industry as was narrated by older people was primarily the incapability to compete with the products coming from then East Bengal under the British. Iron smelting was the main trade and activity of this place. Besides, the famous Nohkalikai Falls too has derived its name from the person of this hamlet (Rangjyrteh). The other controversial and contentious issues plaguing our society such as U Thlen (mysterious serpent) or Menshohnoh (hired killer and kidnapper) has found its origin in this place. This place is seldom visited due to improper development except minor maintenance. Later the Block Development Office has helped to protect and preserve to some extent some of the ancient equipments carved from stone such as crucibles etc. Ranjyrteh is a very much part of the Khasi legacy. Its strategic location with fantastic viewpoints can be constructed here and many others to get a glimpse of the entire Ri War and the cloud that overshadows many villages. If this place were to have been located somewhere in China or other country of the world, it would have formed part of the adrenaline tourism of modern world. The sad thing to see is the failure of everyone to preserve and protect the beauty and valuable gift that nature has bestowed on us. The very nook and corner surrounding this place and most part of Dainthlen Falls are being abused by both people from within the state and outside who ruthlessly spilled the ground and streams with waste and broken bottles after they have completed their picnic trip. This is the filthy scene in many of the places of interest which is not properly managed and regulated. If this trend continues, sooner or later our tourism spots will be dry places and visitors will dwindle because of bad manners and behavior. Therefore, it is high time for the tourism authority to come out openly with some guidelines or instruction that will prevent people from misusing their liberties while enjoying the beauty of a particular place. Considering the plurality of history associated with ‘Rangjyrteh’, I wonder if it could ever be included in the list of heritage sites presented to UNESCO for possible funding. The factuality and merit of the place defines it and it deserves to be treated as a priority as far as preservation of evidence associated with our ancient socio-economic system is concerned. The present and future generation should become aware on all these things. Therefore, when we have something as clear evidence connected with our past generation, we should attempt to explore and unearth the mysteries associated with our own origin. This one piece of ancient heritage will one day disappear and be overtaken by other development activities unless serious efforts are taken to protect and improve its surrounding and landscape. As far as Rangjyrteh is concerned, including the culture and activities that existed there long time ago, we should be proud of it as a community and this particular spot on this region belongs not only to a particular Hima or Raid or Village but to the entire Khasi community.

“Women who seek to be equal with men lack ambition.”
--- Charlie McCarthy

The Shillong Times

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Gross sense of entitlement

THE stalking of a young lady in Chandigarh with the intent of abducting and then violating her modesty brings home the fact that the space for young, independent women in India is rapidly shrinking. They live very precarious lives and are prey to a new kind of machismo that gives the male a sense of impunity and entitlement to rape and molest. That the victim of the stalking incident is the daughter of a senior IAS officer of Haryana and the man who led the pack and stalked her like a predator is the son of the President of the BJP State Unit of the same state also means that justice is likely to be compromised. Else why would a stalker be released on bail just a few hours after he was arrested? While the police must be commended for responding to the young lady's distress call, beyond a point they have had to yield to political pressure. While there is an attempt to politicise the issue and strong statements have emanated from Congress and CPI (M) spokespersons, it would be more appropriate for civil society groups and women's organisations to take up the matter with the seriousness it deserves.

The father of the young lady, Mr V Kundu, has had to resort to social media to get justice for his daughter. He has given details of the harrowing experience as narrated by her which included jumping the street lights and driving furiously even while trying to call the police, to escape the clutches of her predators. Kundu says he has to fight for justice since he is the father of two daughters and that he needed to support his traumatized daughter who survived the ordeal only because of her grit and courage. It remains to be seen whether the BJP central leadership will take action against the wrongdoers in this horrific incident especially since Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised zero tolerance to crimes against women.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

A thousand every year!

‘Meghalaya adds 1000 vehicles every year’ may sound rather a screaming headline and yet need not prove to be as much nerve-breaking. Actually, it is not carrying the same meaning as that the State has added 6,000 vehicles in a span of 16 years of Meghalaya's separate existence. Neither is the prospect of this fast-growing number as a palling, considering that the State has to depend exclusively on roads for its internal movement of goods and passengers. Moreover, it can seasonably be expected that Meghalaya has registered a degree of progress in all spheres of surcharged indigenious

activity and all this naturally get reflected in a steep rise in number of vehicles in the State. Shillong city's number is not separately given in the Deputy CM's & AIR talk, but this could be more revealing and disquieting too. Shillong's population has grown three-fold during this given period, but vehicles must have increased many times more. The traffic control, as also the average citizen's civic sense, can jointly take pride in the fact that road accidents in the city are not as frequent or numerous as the otherwise adverse circumstances would normally have indicated.

TO THE EDITOR

Army authorities lack foresight!

Editor,
The 119 Infantry Battalion (Territorial Army) Assam, Recruitment rally for persons hailing from North Eastern region, West Bengal and Andaman and Nicobar Island for the post of Soldier General Duty and Clerk Staff Duties displays a lack of vision and responsibility towards fellow human beings on the part of the Army authorities. The number of young men that arrived in Shillong on the 2nd of this month was humongous. They congregated in large numbers in areas like Laban Last Stop, Kenches Trace and Bishnupur. Granted that the Army recruitment is essential and it is legitimate to have this recruitment in Shillong but the concern is mainly because of the way these young men were treated. They were clueless about the venue and even when they managed to reach the place, they were not allowed to stay in the

vicinity. Hence they were thrown helter-skelter and congregated in street corners and wherever they could find shelter. This added to the chaos and commotion on the streets. People, vehicles, pedestrians all converged at one place. These young men had come in search of employment and by their physical appearance and attire it did not look like they could afford to stay in hotels/ guest houses even if there was sufficient accommodation. As such these poor people were left with no other alternative but to make the streets their home for the night; spread their sheets outside shops, verandas, pavements, etc. Thank God it did not rain. But more alarming was the thought of where these people would answer nature's call. While our Prime Minister is vehemently campaigning for Swachh Bharat and the need to keep the country clean, the 2nd and 3rd of Aug defeats the purpose and intention of the programme. The lack of public conveniences has forced them to defecate

Mawlynnong: Issues through a dramatic lens

For north-east India, Mawlynnong is a household name. At a wider national and international scope, it has a meaningful visibility. With World Tourism Day (27th September) fast approaching, one cannot but highlight this PEARL of tourism, Meghalaya. Indeed and at least in the context of north-east India, Mawlynnong is as rare and valuable as a pearl. However, this brings in itself the challenges of sustainability. Consequently, there are pressing questions; How far can it go? To what extent can it support livelihoods? What are the numerous issues limiting its tourism? Most importantly, how to mitigate and manage them? As such, this writing is an attempt to present issues of tourism in Mawlynnong through the lens of drama; all with the good intent of contributing towards its development. As in any drama there is a protagonist. Here, the protagonist is Pyrkhat Khuslai (a fictitious name for a real person responsible for the management of tourism operations at Mawlynnong). Critically, solutions are not provided here. Rather, solutions and answers are for all to delve upon and self assess. As such, the drama unfolds as follows -

Nestled in a remote pocket of East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya and near the Indo-Bangladesh border, lies Mawlynnong village at a distance of around 80 kilometres from the capital city Shillong. It is a small and quiet hamlet with 102 households and a population of around 550 people. For the populace, community-based social capital is strong thereby propagating a vibrant and dynamic community cohesiveness. Against this backdrop of cooperation and cohesiveness, Mawlynnong has a shared belief on the appeals of beauty and artistic taste. The values of cleanliness and hygiene are a way of life and a natural practice. These are not confined to the household and ones premises alone, rather collectively to the entire village and across its geographical limits. As such, aesthetic sense is a commonsense at Mawlynnong. The floral plantations are a common sight at every household coupled with intricately cleaned street ways and footpaths. In terms of vocation and economic activities, the residents were primarily into agriculture

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

and trading of their produce. However, till the year 2003 marketing and selling of the products was a challenge due to the non-availability of a proper black-topped approach towards the village. This was at a distance of three kilometres. As such, till that time Mawlynnong was relatively isolated. The village was not visible, let alone being popular. Accordingly, there were no tourists visiting the place. Hence, the upholding of values like beauty, artistic presentations, cleanliness, hygiene and the sense of aesthetics is nothing but a normal way of life. None of these practices were executed and maintained with the thought of tourism and tourism-related revenue generation in mind. This presents as a DNA and the heart and soul of the village. Critically, the year 2003 was also a watershed moment. It was the year when Mawlynnong was declared as 'Asia's cleanest village' by Discover India Magazine. Coinciding with the advent of a proper approach road towards the village a personality of the magazine visited the place and narrated extensively on the aesthetic practices and features aptly bestowing the prestigious title. Once the title was awarded, there was no turning back for Mawlynnong. It shot into stardom overnight. It became known and gained popularity in no time. It was the talk of the tourism clientele. Accordingly, tourists started thronging the village. This initial interest from the tourist was further supplemented with print and electronic news and documentaries on the village. This only further catapulted publicity and marketing to a far wider clientele. In particular, the coverage by an international media like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) acted as a major fillip to the entire advertising of Mawlynnong. Amidst all this, there was joy at the village at the achievement of this unique distinction. In addition, it was coupled with gladness at the thoughts of the myriad tourism-related economic opportunities that would open up gradually. Importantly, the well wishers and tourism development agencies personnel advised the residents of Mawlynnong to be prepared for a flood

of visitors. They were sensitized on the assured possibility that tourists from far and wide, both domestic and international will now make a serious foot-fall on their reputed village. Gradually and since that landmark year of 2003, Mawlynnong has seen a steady and increased flow of tourists. These are a combination of local (Meghalaya only), domestic (Indians from other states) and international tourists. The inflow was to the tune of 200 to 250 tourists per day during the years 2004-2005. However, this changed drastically to the degree of 1200 to 1600 tourists daily depicting an increase of 500 per cent to 540 per cent currently. Clearly, the sudden rise in publicity and widespread visibility opened the floodgates and percolated into mass visitors at the village. In addition, on average around 300 to 400 small vehicles travel to and from Mawlynnong daily. On the positive side, the sudden increase in the inflow of tourist shook the residents to prepare and provide for tourism-related products and services through tourism-related entrepreneurship. The residents engaged in businesses like bed and breakfast, home stays, resorts, cafes, restaurants, retail stores, souvenir outlets and so forth. These businesses are a vital source of income and sustenance of livelihoods for the residents. Importantly, out of the total number of households (102 numbers) around 40 per cent are dedicatedly engaged in tourism-related businesses. The majority of the remaining 60 per cent of the households have at least a member(s) engaged in one or the other tourism-related vocations like sweeping of the village footpaths and streets, waste collection and disposal, aesthetic improvements and so forth. Hence, the model of tourism practiced at Mawlynnong is community-based tourism. Further, the growth in tourism activity also led to the improvements in the basic infrastructure of the village. The economics of tourism increased the revenue and sources of funds thereby providing opportunities for maintenance, construction and development of footpaths, streets, roads, electricity, community halls and structures and so forth. Importantly, the upsurge in tourism and related activities called upon the community to behave in a professional, responsible and accountable manner.

In the midst of this rosy journey, dark clouds of concerns started to creep up in the recent two years. There are reported incidents of tourists going hungry during their tryst with Mawlynnong. The tourism-related businesses were incapable of meeting the food demands of the tourists. In addition, accommodation was becoming a serious challenge. In some instances, visitors who came with an intention of stay had to return back disappointed and peeved. The mass arrival of tourists into the village was putting undue pressure on the provision of products and services. Moreover, preserving and nurturing of the environment was becoming more and more of a problem. As such, Mawlynnong has exceeded its 'carrying capacity'. However, this was not the end of the woes. Depressingly, there is a negative feedback from a group of tourists who recently visited. The food, accommodation, the range of tourism resources and attractions are being questioned. Time has caught up with Mawlynnong.

The morning of 15th July, 2017 was the 'clarion call'. It was a decisive moment that would determine the future of Mawlynnong. Amidst an air of uncertainty, the villagers sat with Mr. Pyrkhat Khuslai discussing and dissecting the issues and the reasons thereof. Accordingly, solutions would creep up but to what degree are they tenable? There were definitely more questions than answers. Depressingly, these questions are a threat on the livelihood and sustenance of the residents. Vividly listening to the concerns, discussions, possible remedies and challenges and while clutching the feedback in his hand, Pyrkhat Khuslai sat confused and perplexed with questions on how to handle the issues. The pressing point is why has this situation arisen? Where did things go wrong and where to start with a remedy? In fact, to start with, the question itself is the remedy and most importantly, what may be the most favourable path forward. Readers who have visited Mawlynnong many help provide answers!

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

The Banking Regulation Amendment Bill (Ordinance) -An analysis

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

The recently announced Banking Regulation Amendment Bill (Ordinance) has taken forward the fight to combat bad loans. In the last two years the problems of NPA or Non Performing Assets has badly affected the capacity of banking institutions especially public sector banks. A large part of the public sector banks have classified a large part of its loans as non-performing assets or difficult to recover. With such assets threatening to damage the balance sheet of the banks the government had to take notice of the problem. In the past two years a number of measures have been announced to combat the same and the recently announced Bill is an extension of the fight. The Ordinance amends the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 to insert provisions for recovery of

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016. In case banks cannot recover a part of the loan, the unrecovered amount will have to be written off as a loss. Currently, the RBI may issue directions to banks on grounds such as 'public interest' and 'in the interest of banking policy'. The Bill gives RBI additional powers to direct banks to initiate recovery proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016. This will undoubtedly augment the existing powers of RBI are sufficient which makes this Ordinance towards the issue of solving stressed assets. As the banking regulator and the central bank, the RBI is responsible for maintaining financial stability, while banks have the flexibility to make business decisions. This Bill puts that relationship in a new paradigm which needs

The idea to make RBI a part of the stressed assets process would bring much more transparency in the process. While RBI would not interfere in the day to day working of Banks it would undoubtedly seek greater compatibility from banks in question of assets which become stressed over a period of time. Currently, banks face certain challenges as part of recovery proceedings such as the lack of incentives among public sector bankers to recognize losses, the fear of investigation in case of low recoveries and third and most important issues of insufficient capital to absorb losses.

outstanding loans. Under these provisions the central government would have the power to authorize the Reserve Bank of India to direct banks to initiate recovery proceedings against loan defaulters. This will make RBI a direct stakeholder towards resolving the issues of stressed assets. Non-performing assets (NPAs) are loans given by banks, where the borrower defaults on repayment. According to the Reserve Bank of India, loans are classified as NPAs 90 days after default. Over the last decade, NPAs as a proportion of total loans extended by banks have increased from 2.3% in 2008 to 7.5% in 2016 (Rs 6.11lakh crore or 4.5% of GDP).At these levels, India's NPAs are higher than other emerging markets. A rise in NPAs adversely affects the lending capacity of banks, thereby impacting credit availability, investment and economic growth. These recovery proceedings will be under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.The Code provides for a time bound process to resolve defaults by either restructuring the loan e.g restructuring the loan repayment schedule of liquidating the defaulter's assets. The Bill also empowers the RBI to issue directions to banks from time to time for resolving stressed assets. The RBI may specify authorities or committees to advise banks on resolving stressed assets. Members on these committees will be appointed or approved by the RBI.

to be redrawn to accommodate in the light of changing concerns. The idea to make RBI a part of the stressed assets process would bring much more transparency in the process. While RBI would not interfere in the day to day working of Banks it would undoubtedly seek greater compatibility from banks in question of assets which become stressed over a period of time. Currently, banks face certain challenges as part of recovery proceedings such as the lack of incentives among public sector bankers to recognize losses, the fear of investigation in case of low recoveries and third and most important issues of insufficient capital to absorb losses. The Ordinance undoubtedly positions itself in a unique place to be able to nudge banks on all three actions with the intervention of the central bank. Also by limiting the role of central bank only to the question of stressed assets the Bill does not seek to restrict the independence of banks. While detractors argue that the power given within this Bill may harm the independence of the banks yet the RBI to issue directions to banks for recovery of loans may be justified on grounds that NPAs impact economic stability. A rising trend in loan defaults affects the lending capacity of banks, investment potential in the country and may have wider economic implications. In this situation the role of greater intervention of RBI is required to resolve the situation and recover the outstanding amount. Thus this Bill would undoubtedly give an impetus towards combating the problem of rising NPA's in the country. (Views expressed by the author are personal)

wherever they could find a convenient place. The impact is there for all to see! In the first place wasn't it the duty of the Army authorities to have set up temporary camps within their jurisdiction even though the young men were not entitled to TA/DA? The least they could have done for these people coming from outside the state was to provide them shelter. Ironically they were not allowed to even go near the venue before the allotted time. What other alternative did the young men have but to loiter in the vicinity? Will the Army authorities be more visionary and more considerate next time they hold a recruitment rally? This will spare the local residents much uncalled for stress and hassle!

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Countering our fears

Editor,
Generally, we have a very long list of fears ~ of losing what we already have at

present, like our lives, our near and dear ones, jobs, savings, properties, health, youth, beauty, fame, reputation and so on. Another list consists of our fears for the future and what we may not be able to achieve in proportion to our ambitions, efforts and expectations. With the advancement of our age, the length of the second list gets shorter and the first one bigger. Also, there is a third list that contains our phobias ~ from claustrophobia (morbid dread of close spaces) to agoraphobia (morbid dread of open spaces), from aquaphobia (morbid dread of water) to pyrophobia (morbid dread of fire) and from astraphobia (morbid dread of lightning) to nyctophobia (morbid dread of darkness). It is difficult for us to select just one item as our worst fear. But what we need to fear is the fear itself because it only makes matters worse in crisis situations. We must remember what the Mother (spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo) said about fear, ~ "Fear is always a very bad

adviser." We can only manage a crisis by keeping ourselves cool. But how can we overcome fear? How can we control a rapid hammering heartbeat? The Mother said, "You can be entirely free from fear only when you have driven out of you all violence." To drive out violence from within is very difficult as we are enamored by macho qualities. Thanks to some movies and some loud TV channels, we have been brainwashed into thinking that loud talk as well as verbal violence is a signature of leadership qualities. However, the world is slowly realizing that only cooperation and compassion can take humanity forward. This is the reason why Helen Keller and Stephen Hawking are shining examples of Who's Who. This is the reason why many countries have graduated from being police states to welfare states. Is there any exact location of fear? Sri Aurobindo said, "Really speaking, fear is in the vital being. When you have thrown it away from your mind and other parts of

your being you can see it still passing through you, below the navel. There is a connection between fear and your intestines." Interestingly, to have butterflies in someone's stomach means that someone has a nervous feelings. Indeed, fear causes bowel disorder. To overcome fear and to become free, we are to realize what Sri Aurobindo had said, "Infinite, we are free from death; for life then becomes a play of our immortal existence. We are free from weakness; for we are the whole sea enjoying the myriad shock of its waves. We are free from grief and pain; for we learn how to harmonise our being with all that touches it and to find in all things action and reaction of the delight of existence."

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

“Certain things, they should stay the way they are. You ought to be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and just leave them alone.”
--- J.D. Salinger

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LIX No. 358 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 9, 2017

Nail biting Rajya Sabha election
NEVER before has a Rajya Sabha election been such a highly surcharged game. At the time of writing this editorial the result had not been declared (12.30 am, Wednesday). A week ago the Congress MLAs of Gujarat were taken away to Karnakata because they could not be trusted not to succumb to the lure of the BJP. So even while Gujarat was in spate and people suffered, their MLAs were enjoying a paid holiday elsewhere. This in itself is unprecedented. As someone correctly observed this was an actual Game of Thrones on which hinges Sonia Gandhi's prestige and that of the Congress. Sonia's close aide Ahmed Patel's return to the Rajya Sabha for the fifth time, which seems likely, it is a boost for her and the Congress. Patel's fate became clear the moment the votes of two Congress MLAs who voted for the BJP were disqualified for showing their ballot papers to unauthorised persons, and thereby violating the code of conduct. Interestingly the EC raised no point of order on this until it was challenged by the Congress Party. The BJP accused Congress of crying foul because it knew Ahmed Patel has lost since there was cross voting and open declaration by several Congressmen including Congress leader Shanker Singh Vaghela that they would not vote for Patel.

Ahmed Patel's win (which seems clear now) is a blow for BJP President Amit Shah. For him this contest is not merely about politics and securing one more Rajya Sabha seat from his home state of Gujarat but about avenging the humiliation and incarceration meted out to him by the UPA Government, post the Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case where Shah as Home Minister of Gujarat, was accused of orchestrating the killing. This is a battle Shah intended to win at all costs but things went awry.

The Election Commission must be commended for not succumbing to pressure and upholding its freedom to take the correct decision as per precedents set in the past. Whatever be the final verdict, it is important for institutions like the Election Commission to remain neutral and free from external pressures for democracy to sustain.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

6 held after assaultat Wards Lake

Police picked up six youths following an incident of assault on Sunday at Ward's Lake in Shillong. According to reports, one group of youths picked up a quarrelwith the other group,apparently without anyprovocation. The argumenton no time turned intofistfights. A police patrolparty which was

stationed nearby intervened. At the sight of the police, the youths tried to flee. After a hot chase, the police managed to nab six of them who were lodged at the Shillong Police station lockup. An armed police picket was posted at the Ward's Lake immediatelyafter the incident.

Any major political or military event in Pakistan concerns India inasmuch as both countries are at daggers drawn on Kashmir. The ouster of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif should certainly worry India for a good many reasons. He had dealt with six Indian Prime Ministers and had developed working relations with all of them.

With his business background, Sharif had realised that good trade and economic relations with India would ensure peace and harmony between the two nations. It is him more than any Pakistani Prime Minister who wanted to rein in on anti-India Pakistani military. In his second stint in 1997-99, Sharif had removed two army chiefs in one year. He had appointed Pervez Musharraf after superseding other senior officers. It is another matter that Musharraf later staged a military coup and forced Sharif into exile.

The Pakistan Army thrives on antagonism with India and now Afghanistan as it believes such a stance brings it political and pecuniary gains. Furthermore, Sharif had taken on the pro-army Supreme Court which has the controversial habit of dismissing elected civilian governments. Although accused of rigging and manipulating elections, Sharif strove to establish the supremacy of the democratic State. Remember, Pakistan's politic is based on three pillars -- the Islamic Groups, the Army and Kashmir-- all the three confront, bedevil and squeeze political democracy in the country.

Pakistan has a fledgling democracy which is yet to take firm roots. No civilian government in that country has ever completed its five-year term. Sharif too did not run the full term in his three stints as Prime Minister-- 1990-93, 1997-99 and 2013-17. Earlier, he was ejected by Army and now by the Supreme Court. His disproportionate income and assets were exposed by the Panama Papers leaked by law firm Mossack Fonesca. He has amassed wealth beyond his stated income, and his children had flats in expensive parts of London. Sharif did not disclose his firm in UAE during filing his nominations for the National Assembly is another charge. Even his bête noir Imran Khan of Tehreek-e-Insaf party, too had made faulty declarations of assets as a candidate. One recalls that Sharif was used in the past

Sharif's ouster
Should India be worried?

By D K Giri

by the Army to attack Benazir Bhutto, and now Khan is being used against him.

The Supreme Court took cognizance of the Panama leaks and instituted a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) that included two army officials. The presence of the army in JIT confirms that it was pursuing Sharif, who had tried to muscle into the Army's turf, the Kashmir policy etc. The JIT submitted its report on 10 July and the Supreme Court gave its verdict without wasting time, on the 28th. Invoking a clause of the

the Lower House, Sharif installed one of his loyalist-Ministers Shahid Khaqan Abbasi as the Prime Minister. The buzz now is that Shahbaz has been ditched in the family feud; Maryam and her mother did not want Shahbaz to have greater hold of the party at the centre and in Punjab where Shahbaz wanted his son Hamza to succeed him.

The big question is what will happen to Sharif, Pakistani politics and India-Pakistan ties in the post-Sharif period? His immediate future has become uncertain. He had confronted the power

“ The army had planned to corner Sharif. There are limited options for Sharif to escape the conspiratorial clutches of Courts, the Army and the Jihadists. As he is still popular with the people, he may call for an early election and win. He has steadied the economy, built closer relations with China, drawn \$54 billion in FDI for the China-Pakistan economic corridor, mitigated the acute electricity shortages etc. ”

Constitution that stressed Islamic virtues that a Prime Minister "be sagacious, righteous, non-profligate, honest and upright", the apex Court decreed that Sharif was 'no longer fit to be the Prime Minister'. It asked the Election Commission to de-notify him from the National Assembly and ordered the National Accountability Bureau, an anti-corruption body to file charges within six weeks for the trial to be completed in six months. Unmistakably, the court has thrown Pakistan's politics into turmoil as the General elections are due in a year.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has the majority in the Lower House to elect Sharif's successor. Ideally, he would have liked his daughter Maryam to succeed him if she was not besmirched in the Panama saga. His second option was to bring in his younger brother Shahbaz, the current Chief Minister of Punjab province, the political stronghold of Nawaz's family. Until Shahbaz was inducted into

centers in the past. At one point, he ransacked the Supreme Court, challenged the political might of the powerful military, and ordered the removal of General Musharraf in 1999 when he felt that the army chief had bypassed him on Kargil. He had even planned to arrest Musharraf on his return from Sri Lanka. And as Musharraf was flying back into Pakistan in a commercial flight, Sharif had got the Jinah airport cordoned off, but the flight, on the pretext of refueling landed in another airport.

Then Musharraf turned the tables on Sharif, contacted his military colleagues, quickly organized a coup, and put Sharif under arrest. He was handed a life imprisonment and was to be given a death sentence by the military courts. However, in a deal brokered by King Fahd of Saudi Arabia Sharif escaped death and was exiled for 21 years. Ironically, again another deal with the army brought him back to Pakistan in 2007.

By most accounts, Sharif had tenuous relations with the Army. On 30 October

2016, he had issued two stern messages to the army. One, the army should not interfere in the civilian administration and second, as Pakistan was getting internationally isolated for being soft on terrorists, the army should expeditiously conclude the investigation and trial on Pathankot and Mumbai attacks. The messages delivered in a closed-door meeting were leaked to the media, much to the outrage of the army. Although, later on, Sharif tried to mend it with the army by dismissing his officials responsible for leaking the deliberations to the media, it was too late. The army had planned to corner Sharif.

There are limited options for Sharif to escape the conspiratorial clutches of Courts, the Army and the Jihadists. As he is still popular with the people, he may call for an early election and win. He has steadied the economy, built closer relations with China, drawn \$54 billion in FDI for the China-Pakistan economic corridor, mitigated the acute electricity shortages etc. So the voters may still agree with him.

On the other hand, the army is not sure if Imran Khan is mature enough to rule Pakistan. Worse, he is caught in sexual harassment complaints by the women workers in his party. The army may leave it to the voters, as from General Kiyani to General Bazwa, the army is not keen on a take-over. Also the Supreme Court's activism with a Messianic complex may not go down well with the voters who would want full democracy.

(The writers is Professor of International Politics, JMI)

On India-Pakistan relations, there may not be much of an impact although a stable democratic government is better for dialogue than the army. But on Kashmir, Sharif is on the same page as the army and the Jihadists whose raison d'être is fomenting trouble in India. Sharif had somewhat kept the doors for dialogue open, but these may now be fully shut. However, India need not worry as the US and China, the big influencers in the region, will not like, for different reasons, the India-Pakistan conflict to spiral out of control. --- INFA

China's loutish conduct

By Kanwal Sibal

China gets a level of international esteem that it does not deserve. The explanation lies in the West's long standing fascination for China that overlooks or tolerates its frequent misconduct.

Despite its bullying and intimidatory tactics in dealing with others, its assertion of territorial claims contrary to international law, its open rejection of democracy and western values, its curbs on the internet, its enormous internal security apparatus, its intolerance of internal dissent, its suppression of the rights of the Tibetans and the Uighurs, the expansive military doctrines it is adopting, the hegemonic ambitions in Asia that the Belt and Road Initiative represents, western opinion at large is not only unwilling to actively deplore this reality, there is a tendency to find reasons why China behaves as such, show a degree of comprehension for its conduct and even sympathise with it as a victim of historical violation of its rights by outside powers.

The ASEAN countries are surprisingly timid towards China, even though their collective strength is not negligible and China's divisive tactics can be foiled if they acted with greater unity. If ASEAN was initially built as a bulwark against communist China, it can

any serious show-down with it. Europe is too far away geographically, has no significant military involvement in the western Pacific, and is therefore focused on its economic ties with China in the hope to expand mutual trade and benefit from Chinese investments. Australian opinion is divided on policy towards China, torn between its security links with the US and its economic links with China as its biggest trade partner. With Russia now willing to play second fiddle to China on the economic front, and US/EU sanctions pushing it further into the arms of China and weakening its position vis a vis the latter even more, China's tail is up. Africa and Latin America are too far away to feel the impact of China's hegemonic ambitions.

All this has given China considerable room to conduct itself in its extensive neighbourhood with a sense of impunity. It is baring the ugly face of its diplomacy more and more, using unbecoming language, adopting condescending postures, crowing about the disparity in power between it and others and unashamedly acting as a bully where it thinks it can. The churning created by rapid transformation of China from poverty to enormous

“ Summoning India to withdraw humbly and unconditionally from the plateau before China teaches it a lesson worse than in 1962, warning that its patience is running out and that Indian forces will be evicted by force, brandishing its military might as a tool of intimidation, shows that the Chinese have lost all sense of proportion.”

fulfill its purpose in the changed context of a hegemony seeking, national power obsessed, mercantilist China. The West has maneuvered itself into a weak position vis a vis China by fuelling its economic rise and forging deep trade and financial links with it that now inhibit any really strong response to Chinese muscle-flexing.

Whether it was the romantic notion that as China develops economically and becomes more prosperous, the political aspirations of its growing middle class will make it more democratic and the country will become more wedded to the existing world order, or whether it was the business interests of western multinational corporations that in driving the agenda of economic globalisation focused on China as an untapped market of vast proportions for their products and technology, can be debated. The US does not as yet feel seriously threatened by China as the military gap between the two remains vast and China is for the time being pushing against US power in its periphery and is not endangering US national security by dominating the Pacific. For the US the challenge is to preserve its alliance system in the region by retaining the confidence of its allies in the security cover it provides, keep China bottled up in the western Pacific, and to the extent China tries to escape these constraints, expands its naval power and extend its presence to the Indian Ocean, to work together with countries like India and Japan to limit this.

Given its huge investments and other links with China- far more than with India- Japan too is careful in handling China and would want to avoid

wealth seems to have thrown up towards the top the many base elements in its society that have known how to profit most from the change. This might explain the boorishness and lack of refinement in its diplomatic conduct.

The statements coming from the Chinese Foreign Office and the People's Liberation Army spokespersons on the Doklam stand-off are illustrative of the coarseness of Chinese diplomacy. Summoning India to withdraw humbly and unconditionally from the plateau before China teaches it a lesson worse than in 1962, warning that its patience is running out and that Indian forces will be evicted by force, brandishing its military might as a tool of intimidation, shows that the Chinese have lost all sense of proportion. China's diplomatic loutishness has reached a point that its number two diplomat in Delhi in a show of professional incompetence has the temerity to threaten India from Indian soil with consequences if India does not withdraw from Doklam.

In normal circumstances, he should be recalled or expelled, but the government has decided, not wrongly, to avoid escalation, abjure low-level polemics, state our position firmly but leave the door open for diplomacy, discreetly warn China of the economic costs it will bear if it is reckless. The absence of a matching Indian response to China's fulminations conveys a sense of quiet confidence on our part which no doubt unhinges the northern bully even more.

(Courtesy Mail Today)
(The writer is former Foreign Secretary)

Need for multi-discipline in sports

Editor,
As the state prepares itself to host the National Games in 2021-2022 we hope that this time it would be far better from the last sporting event that took place here. Apart from soccer, there are various other sporting disciplines that this state can produce from amongst the local talents, ranging from soccer to boxing to martial arts etc. However what our sportsmen and women need is the state government's support both from the financial point as well as for infrastructure and facilities. If those in the sports department want and think that this state has enough talent then the authorities in question should also involve experts to be able to advise and guide them as to what is necessary. We require a world-class multi-sporting stadium which is equivalent to the Games Village in Guwahati, and to create that

we must develop various multi-sporting disciplines. Our local sporting clubs should be encouraged to inculcate other disciplines like cricket, hockey, table tennis, lawn tennis, volleyball, kabaddi etc....these can definitely come up if there is course correction in the Government. People like John.F.Kharshiing, Clive Dunai, Naba Bhattacharjee, Lorenzo Pearson Warjri, Larsing Ming Sawian etc are involved in various sporting disciplines and they can be more involved from their part in identifying grassroots talent and bring it to a significant level closer to the National Games.

Yours etc...
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong

On Hindu Mission

Editor,
With a deep sense of regret I would like to share a few facts with reference to the letter, "Vulgar roar of Hindu Mission" (ST July

24, 2017). We are some of the immediate victims of the frequent nuisance emanating from the Mawprem Hindu Mission. As residents our main concern is why in a residential area, where every household has minimum 2 to 5 School going children, such noisy parties are allowed. We feel extremely awkward when the passers-by from other faiths see the empty liquor bottles on the side of the pavement right outside the Mission's premises. The situation is very embarrassing as we are from the same Hindu faith. Don't the other people laugh at us?

Due to the frequent parties in the Hindu Mission our children can hardly "focus" on their academic studies. Their attention gets easily distracted by loud Bollywood songs - some of which are very dirty numbers. Are not the studies of our children more important than the boisterous parties?

As children we have fond memories of this Hindu Mission. We had a strong attachment to the temple

here. Our family never missed to visit the temple in its premise. But for past about 6/7 years we have even stopped entering its gate since we lost all our faith. Who is responsible for this, if not members of the management who all have been polluting this sacred mission and causing problem to others? It is no more a holy institution. I hope the State Pollution Control Board will also take the notice of the residents' concerns regarding the sound pollution in the residential areas.

Yours etc.,
Concerned citizens,
Name withheld on request

A full scale war with China soon?

Editor,
The 2000 year old historical Silk Road linked China with Central Asia and the Arab world. Silk was the most important export then. Now China

proposed a modern network of railways, roads and, waterways that would cover entire Asia. One Belt One Road (OBOR) aims to create the world's largest platform for economic and cultural cooperation. India is opposed to the Chinese initiative since China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through POK that concerns India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. India's non commitment to OBOR [now Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)] hampered China's mega initiative. India is already upset over China's refusal to NSG and blocking UN sanction on Masood Azhar of JeM.

The billion dollar initiative is expected to cement China's dominance over Asia. To thwart this India should develop rail/sea connectivity and mutual cooperation with SAARC countries. It is regrettable to hear Chinese President Xi Jinping's remarks amid heightened tensions at Doklam. Will there be a full time war as Lord Meghnad Desai predicted? China is

already at loggerheads with her neighbour Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam. China's geo-political tension for maritime claims over South China Sea could break anytime. Indian Ocean is a pivot for India's growth. It has been a key determining factor of India's cultural footprint in Africa, the Middle East and SE Asia. Unlike Chinese imperialism, India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative is for trust and transparency. New Delhi needs to get closer to Nay Pi Taw as Myanmar is not just a little corridor for trade but the gateway to SE Asia. Is that India's answer to OBOR?

Yours etc.
Kamal Baruah
Rukmingiaon,
Guwahati

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.

“Ambition and love are the wings to great deeds.”
--- Sir Walter Scott

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 1 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, AUGUST 10, 2017

Anglo-American hand

THE Niti Ayog was set up in January 2015. A month later a government document stated that the people of India lived in a global village with modern transport, communications, media along with networked international markets and institutions. Today however, the agency's new Vice-Chairman, Rajiv Kumar has a completely different perspective. He has attacked Anglo-American influence on Indian policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. According to him, policy making establishments which came up in the last few decades are losing influence. The Niti Ayog document of 2015 highlighted the imperatives of globalization. The new Vice Chairman has strongly criticized the idea bringing in foreign experts. His attitude betrays an unhealthy insularity. He also decries the influence of multinational institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. He has referred to the special experience of China which listens to these institutions but has formulated its policies independently.

There is no doubt that Indian economic policy should be based on ground realities in the country. But it will be sheer folly to turn a blind eye on foreign expertise and to be immune from the influence of foreign academic wisdom. Kumar's attitude reveals a narrow-minded chauvinism which can only be counterproductive. The Niti Ayog should benefit from the achievements of the last 25 years but also adapt policies to the changing demands of globalisation. GST, Make in India, Swachh Bharat, Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change Targets- these go to India's credit. But these are not totally insulated from foreign influence. The Niti Ayog's Vision document was crafted on the right lines and should guide future action.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

PM announces launching of Jawahar Rozgar Yojana

Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi today announced in the Lok Sabha the launching of the massive rural employment programme, "Jawahar Rozgar Yojana," in every panchayat. Mr Gandhi said in a statement under the scheme for which Rs. 2100 crores of central assistance would be provided in the current year, thirty per cent of the employment generated would be for women. The Prime Minister said all existing rural wage employment programmes would stand merged into the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana .

The scheme would reach out all over the country to 44 million families in rural

India living below poverty line. "We expect to be able to provide employment to at least one member of each poor rural family for fifty to a hundred days of a year at a workplace near his residence", Mr Gandhi said.

The Prime Minister was repeatedly cheered as he made the statement. Mr Gandhi said it was a programme aimed at placing in the hands of the village panchayats around the country adequate funds to run their own rural employment schemes in the interest of the vast masses of the rural poor, constituting the bulk of rural India.

In This Bewildering Time

By Debasish Chowdhury

would instantly recall, did provide a heart-rending account of what racist hostility may truly signify. Pathetic real life stories in which America starkly negated its fabled democratic principles by using lynch law remains a blot not on America alone but on humanity as a whole. To its credit, we must, however, admit that it was the Americans again who came forward first to protest against blatant use of the lynch law. It is no surprise then that in 1939, when Billie Holiday lent his voice to the famed 'Strange Fruit' song capturing the ugly brutality of the hydra-headed undying racism, in particular, the racism against African-Americans in America, the song received a resounding response.

Penned by Abel Meeropol, a poet teacher, this song continues to inspire artistes of diverse hues even to date as a protest song that once used to resonate in venues across New York City including the famous Madison Square Ground where sometime back our own Prime minister too was accorded a warm public reception.

In India, thanks to the interperate tendencies dictating our contemporary times, mob lynching on flimsy pretexts seem also to have struck a root in a rather unwarranted fashion. Even a bland academic discourse that dares to tease the now dominant far rightist perception remains fraught with the risk of a violent flare ups. Discourses on nationalism or ferrying bovines from one place to the other, in recent times, has often resulted in violent upsurge. Ringside appreciations of this dramas is being played out at regular intervals and across the territorial spread of the country can ill afford to ignore this sad contemporary reality. Indeed, ours is an impatient and unforgiving time in which compassion and concern for a dissenting voice often is a sign of weakness or absurd stupidity.

Propaganda aimed at serving oblique interests, history tells us, have often been an effective tool in fanning mass passion. Shrewdly tailor picked words from great books usually work wonders in this respect. For instance, if we only say, "The world is a family," while actually Maha-Upanishad says, "Small men discriminate against people as relatives or strangers; only the magnanimous see the world as family," the subtle suppression of the preceding qualifiers

wittingly distorts the original's theme spirit. By slyly highlighting only a limited context, this distortion tacitly underplays the fact that such high philosophic striving is never a given. To accept the 'world as a family' as life-philosophy is not subservient to small mindedness by any stretch of imagination. To claim such loftiness as real can indeed be blatantly misleading.

Lessons of history are generally hard earned and yet, we seldom take enough care to give them the due they deserve. Falling prey to misguided propaganda or responding to impulsive emotions seems to have been a general sickness for humanity in all ages or else, why do men indulge over and over again in repeating past mistakes. Through the ages, we kept learning that peace and cooperation ensures progress and yet, our fallibility to transient impulses often leads us into acts of mindless violence at our own peril.

Enriching our creative self through quality education that does not swell our information base alone could have made a real difference. Education can only be our vehicle of progress; progress of a kind that ensure quality living not bounded and defined in terms of redoubtable statistics on growth and development. In India, for centuries, education was a prerogative only of the privileged castes. Keeping it out of purview of the larger segment of her people (women included) has been India's bane for too long a time to discount.

Onset of the colonial period enabled the people of India to override, though in a limited extent, the then prevalent caste hierarchy to reclaim its rightful entry into the realm of education. The scope of learning science and liberal philosophies returned in people's lives through the educational edifice that largely was a western missionary creation. The coverage of that educational edifice was hardly commensurate to the needs on the ground but that the door of education was at last flung open for all deserves a humble acknowledgment.

The colonial educational setup obviously did not envisage equipping its recipients with the ability to live and evolve on their own. It was planned to create a reasonably competent workforce from within that would serve the interests of the colonial regime. Ensuring loyalty and subservience to the ruling regime, therefore, was a key concern of the colonial educational scheme. Creating liberated, free thinking, competent and confident people who would

be able to take destiny in their own hands never was in its agenda.

It was only natural therefore to expect that post independence, India would devote herself full scale to promote for her people a self empowering education system. Sadly, seven decades down the line and after scores of recommendations from education commissions, the educational setup of the land still continues to languish with basic flaws. The emphases on rote learning, the inability to design and dispense education from the perspective of its recipients, lack of functional autonomy are some of the basic weaknesses that keep our educational setup under siege.

Designed largely in the intellectual culture of the period of enlightenment, the education system of India fundamentally stresses on a learning mode that is high on ordaining its recipients rather than enabling them to inculcate a spirit of independent and divergent thinking. The real delivery expected from today's education system, however, lies not in the spirit of "filling the buckets" approach "but in lighting the fire" of independent and divergent thinking in its recipients.

The learning activities in India today warrant a full scale reorientation in their approach. With enhanced stress on globalization and a rapidly expanding virtual market increasingly engaging itself in trans-border transactions of resources and expertise, it is an absolute necessity now that our manpower resources strive to match the global standards to remain relevant. The fast changing and rather unpredictable global economy makes it imperative that products of any modern day education system remain increasingly creative and capable of divergent thinking.

Reorient our educational setup we must. To make that happen, it is imperative that we recreate in all our institutions of learning an ambience that ensures functional autonomy and encourages responsible free thinking. For reclaiming the glory we claim as our heritage, that would be the first step towards a new beginning. Whether we would take the call or not, of course, is a tale altogether different.

(Debasish Chowdhury is currently working as the Controller of Examinations, Sikkim University)

BJP's baffling climb down in anti-Mamata campaign
Inquisitive media tamed; others managed

By Ashis Biswas

Has the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) aborted its relentless campaign to expose the financial irregularities and corruption among Mamata Banerjee's family members? The question has arisen over the sudden silence on the part of the ruling party at the Centre, after it launched its strongest and most vitriolic media campaign against the Trinamool Congress (TMC) some days ago.

Even as Kolkata-based observers seek an answer, public opinion in West Bengal remains sharply divided regarding the impact of the BJP-sponsored expose in selected national TV channels. Political responses have been intriguing, to put it mildly.

For the record, two national TV channels displayed documents that showed how Leaps and Bounds, a company owned by TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee and his kin received Rs 1.15 crore by way of commission from a real estate operator with a police record, apparently to ensure protection from official harassment. The transaction took place after Mamata Banerjee became chief minister. Apart from Abhishek, who resigned from the directorship sometime later, three other 'directors' were his wife and parents. They cited the residential address of the chief minister as their own in all official declarations relating to the company.

Political reactions to this extraordinary disclosure linking a chief minister in power directly to financial corruption, a first in Bengal, followed no settled pattern. At one level, it reflects the utter confusion and lack of direction within the political functioning in the state .This in turn leaves common people and voters utterly confused, hardly knowing whom to believe.

Take the state BJP unit: despite claims of following up the expose with peoples' protests on the streets, no mass actions have been seen in the State yet! None seems to be planned for the future either.

It is the same with the state Congress. With its own existential crisis at the centre and in the states, perhaps nothing can be expected from a party currently reduced to seeking the support of the TMC at the national level.

Ironically, in contrast to the state BJP and the Congress, it is the weakened Left parties that have shown more enterprise. Left leaders have demanded immediate action against both the Chief Minister and her nephew for the murky financial dealings in their public meetings. A Left-affiliated students' protest was organised some days ago, seeking the Chief Minister's resignation.

And that has been the sum total of political reaction to Bengal's most dramatic political exposure in decades, involving the alleged involvement of the Chief Minister's family!

Another major surprise has been the near total silence of the Bengal-based print and electronic media to report the matter at all. Only the briefest, highly sanitized references made in the Lok Sabha by BJP ministers and members, scrupulously avoiding all mention of the chief minister or her nephew by name, have been carried in only two out of nearly 20 dailies! Bengali language TV channels have been deafeningly silent, with producers laboriously focusing on health hazards

like diabetes and the lack of pure drinking water, as major problems afflicting Bengal!

Even during the 1975 emergency, we could get more sensitive stuff published one way or the other,' recalled a veteran scribe. 'This conspiracy of total silence, obviously driven by a physical fear of the ruling party among newsmen and media controllers, is unprecedented.'

However, one reason for the media silence was discernible on the very first day of the national TV coverage. The channel's local correspondent was unceremoniously summoned to report at the local thana by telephone and later, by special messenger, without any assigned reason!

The next day, as the coverage continued and TMC leaders ranging from MP Saugata Ray, Derek O'brien and Dinesh Trivedi ran for cover from media persons, a lawyer representing Abhishek Banerjee threatened to file a libel suit because the right of reply had not apparently been exercised. Banerjee was having his eyes checked at a Hyderabad hospital, (although the state government prides itself on the quality of government-run hospitals in Kolkata). By way of providing security for him, the state had sent over six policemen, five cars and arranged for two fire tenders!

Up to this point, matters were proceeding normally. NDA minister Prakash Javdekar called for Mamata's resignation and wanted clear answers from the TMC on the allegations made against it. Kailash Vijaybargia told media persons that more instances of the TMC's corruption would be exposed in the days ahead. BJP MP Kirit Somaya referred to the disclosures in the Lok Sabha.

By now, coming in the wake of Tejashwi Yadav's alleged illegal financial dealings in Bihar, the dubious dealings of the Leaps and Bounds company had come to be called the 'Bhatijagate scam'! The total silence on part of the TMC leaders has been remarkable, but it also strengthens fears among TMC loyalists that the exposure cannot be denied effectively, with documents and correspondence available in the public domain.

'We understand TMC's position, it is on the back foot. We also understand the limitations of the Congress. But what about the BJP, why has it gone all silent on the issue? Are they really serious about fighting the TMC?' ---- has been a question asked by political observers and commoners alike.

Perhaps CPI(M) MP Mohammad Salim had correctly summed up the situation: 'I won't be surprised if Modi-bhai and Mamata-behen will still work out an understanding, each protecting the other: look at the record of the so-called Lok Sabha Ethics Committee set up to explore the Narada-sting scam, showing TMC MPs, minister and leaders pocketing large sums of cash. Did chairman L.K Advani call for a single meeting of the committee? No. I wonder why not,' he told newsmen.

As of now, political analysts can only share Salim's bemusement. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

The Doklam issue: China intimidates India

Editor,

Apropos the news item, "Withdraw from Doklam to avoid confrontation" (ST Aug 8,2017), I would like to state here that China flexes its military might everywhere vis-à-vis its neighbours without consideration whatsoever. This clearly demonstrates its expansionist character just like it did with Tibet. China has repeatedly shown its expansionist blood in several border areas with India especially in Arunachal Pradesh. India on the other hand is docile, non-expansionist, non-aligned, non-interfering in other borders including that of Pakistan. This is seen by other countries as a sign of weakness and timidity. It is this kind of timidity that made the powers that be in New Delhi has almost given up the entire North East India to China in 1962, under the leadership of Nehru. This is why China is taking advantage of India; so too Pakistan. India cannot take

such intimidatory tactics lying down. India has already spent maximum financial resources and men to keep Jammu and Kashmir within its territory, though much has been lost to Pakistan over the last 70 years. How much more land can India lose to Pakistan and how many more men, bombardments, destruction should India suffer to keep the country in one piece? How long can we tolerate terrorism perpetrated by the Pakistanis and Islamic Jihadis in our land? Again India should act and act decisively and swiftly to show to the world that it does not fear anyone and that should come from the political masters who are ruling India.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Gender stereotyping

Editor,

Your editorial, "Gross sense of entitlement" (ST, August 8, 2017), is right in pointing out that a new kind of machismo gives the male a sense of impunity and entitlement to rape and

molest. In many popular movies, courtship begins with eve teasing and that helps those movies get huge box-office success because both men and women (yes, women too!) are comfortable with such gender models. We have created male stereotypes after baboon males and female stereotypes after baboon females. Indeed, baboon males are often aggressive towards females. This also explains why boys outnumber girls when it comes to ragging and bullying.

We have been brainwashed with such gender stereotypes as, 'a real man should not cry.' A man can be angry, vulgar and violent to prove his masculinity but he cannot be emotional. If he becomes emotional, he is branded as effeminate. If he is naughty it adds a feather to his cap. So, molestations are well suited to such male - baboon stereotypes. Our popular belief and prejudices are reflected not only in our comments and actions and by our films and advertisements, but also by actions and utterances of our political representatives.

Thus, baboon male stereotyping is endorsed by our political leaders as well. One of our political leaders said, "Rape accused should not be hanged. Boys make mistakes." Another political heavyweight commenting on rape said, 'it is sometimes right and sometimes wrong. Yet another one said that the boy and the girl should both be punished in a rape case.

To free our boys from such animal tags, we should ask our sons how they feel when faced with cruel ragging and what must they say about those brutes. We should remind them that there is no reason to suppose such sadists and rapists are human beings. Instead of making our son a "man", we must try to make him a "human". The author of the book "Chase the rainbow", Poorna Bell had asked all male stereotypes a very candid question, "If we are capable of softness and strength, then why do we imagine you aren't?"

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Compassionate ground appointment!

Editor,

Apropos the news item published in your paper on the pay commission recommendation that compassionate appointments should be reopened I like to say the following.

1. Government servants are a pampered lot. Life is easy for them compared to others. Most of the deaths occur in Government service due to bad habits specially excessive drinking. They have all the time to drink and be merry.

2. Compassionate appointment is not based on merit. Most of the time incompetent and over aged persons are considered for compassionate appointment. One day they will supervise the work of much more qualified and more competent persons!

3. The family of the deceased Government servant at his death receives family pension and other perks.

4. Vast majority of the families in the state don't have Government employees and as an average have much lesser income than a government servant family and are less privileged.

5. Compassionate appointments will be at the cost of availability of posts to vast majority and deprive the more deserving job aspirants in all aspects from the state.

In the light of the facts stated I urge the Government not to accept such a biased and unfair recommendation of the Pay Commission at the cost of vast majority of unemployed youth in the state like me. One has to bear in mind that every job counts in the current scenario of job availability in the state.

Yours etc.,
Desmond Lyngdoh,
Shillong -4

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

“The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.”
--- Denis Waitley

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 2 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, AUGUST 11, 2017

Congress Party in existential crisis

SENIOR Congressman, Jairam Ramesh recently told the media that the Congress Party is facing an existential crisis. He went further to state that while the sultanate has long disappeared, Congress leaders continued to behave like sultans. But even the outspoken Ramesh did not dare challenge the real dynasts - Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. He ended his long tirade against his own party with a damp squib that Rahul Gandhi will make a great leader. Rahul Gandhi is precisely the reason for the rapid downfall of the Congress Party. The BJP has succeeded to caricature him as a national comic figure. In fact, the BJP feels that as long as Rahul is around to lead the Congress it makes that party's task that much easier. The caricaturing of the Gandhi scion is also a strategic political move. The BJP and its propaganda machine and trolls have been doing damning spoofs of him for quite a while now, so much so that even before Rahul Gandhi can utter a word the unwary listener starts giggling. Social media has only aggravated the situation for the Congress! This is the level to which the Vice President of the Congress Party is reduced to. And with him the Congress Party!

However, the BJP's war cry of Congress Mukht Bharat is dangerous for democracy. How will democracy survive with only one macho ruling party? For the sake of democracy alone, the Congress needs to reinvent itself but Congressmen and women should have the gumption to tell it like it is - that Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are no longer appealing to the public. They have become liabilities. Their names are associated with dynasty, the VVIP entitlements and absence of inner party democracy. People are looking at younger leaders with no history of corruption to come up and lead the party now and to brace themselves for 2019. They don't want the Chidambarams and the Ghulam Nabi Azads or the Kamal Nath's to lead the Congress. As Ramesh says, the Congress is imploding and it is this clash of ideology between the young leadership and the old guards that is the Party's biggest dilemma.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

Congress (I) List to be Announced On Jan 6

The Congress(I) Parliamentary Board is expected to release the list of party nominees for Meghalaya on January 6, the day the Prime Minister is scheduled to re-turn from his sojourn in Lakswadeep. The Pradesh Election Committee earlier in its meeting held here at the Chief Minister's Bungalow, finalised the draft list after a lengthy discussion. The committee took into account the sub committee report on the three "general" seats of Shillong. Meanwhile, the Union Minister of State for

Surface Transport Mr. Rajesh Pilot and the AICC (I) General Secretary Mr. Oscar Fernandes arrived here on Sunday morning. They are reported to have met a large number of party-men and discussed organisational matters. Mr. Pilot, who leaves for Delhi on Monday morning, is scheduled to open party's campaign at Jowai on Jan 13. The following day he will address a meeting at Tura. The Prime Minister is expected to arrive here for campaigning in to laps.

Lets all be optimistic because the boss says so!
Dream, dream, dream...
By Patricia Mukhim

While inaugurating a multi-utility centre at Mawkhar, Dr Mukul Sangma got a bit of the blues. He urged the people of Meghalaya (or is it Mawkhar) to be optimistic and dream big. The he sang, "Imagine." Another Congress sycophant lauded the CM as being numero uno. And in the same day's paper Deborah Marak and Ronnie Lyngdoh declare in Amir Khan style (Three Idiots) "All is Well." There's really no dearth of comedy in Meghalaya! And just as mothers ask their babies, "How much do you love Mamma and the baby says, "hundred much." so too if the CM says people here are pessimistic, Ronnie Lyngdoh will have bolster up his boss's comment. Hence his snarly remark, "People here don't see anything concrete on the ground." Where is the concrete Mr Lyngdoh? Have you tried driving to NEIGRIHMS in recent times? The road leading to that important health institution is now devoid of black topping. It's all gravel and sand. Do you want us to dig for diamonds there? Is that what optimism is all about? Jairam Ramesh had aptly remarked that the Congress Party is facing existential crisis. Well, the Congress in Meghalaya is sleepwalking through that crisis. As far as they are concerned, "all's well with their world."

And then we have a pedestrian shouting, "Pavements are my birthright. I need to walk on them or be killed by motorists or the crazy bikers." The hawkers replies, "Pavements are ours. We have every right to peddle our goods here. We are poor and poverty gives us the right to claim every free space in this city. So you pedestrian can walk on the wide road or go to hell." Applause applause! The pedestrian succumbs to pressure from the hawker. Her life is a nightmare. She is pessimistic about anything good happening in this life. The hawkers meanwhile is optimistic because she has won the day. After all the Government is on her side! Good! So Mr Ronnie Lyngdoh must be seeing the happiness in the hawkers' demeanour and the optimism in their jaunty steps as Urban Affairs minister. Yes, Mr Lyngdoh you are right. A lot is happening on the ground that we the blind don't see. So could you list out those achievements? Are they at the level of the state, constituency or locality?

We citizens can list out a whole host of things that have gone from bad to worse under the MUA dispensation. But first the

ROADS. Never before have the roads in Shillong city and its suburbs been so dilapidated. The elderly fear a slipped disc. So should roads last one season only? What is the amount spent on construction of roads and bridges in the last four years? What is the amount spent on repairs? What is the list of road contractors in Shillong city? To be more specific, who is the contractor/contractors that took up the construction of the Nongmynsong - Itshyrawat- NEIGRIHMS road? The last time we sought RTI answers on this matter the replies we got were astounding. Roads were divided into a couple of kilometres between several contractors, each of whom profited from the construction since the quality of the road was never ascertained. Is the PWD an employment agency or a technical department whose engineers are supposed to know how to make all-weather roads? So for a road that's about 10 kms in length you would have to haul up several contractors each doing his/her own thing to give a thin slice of black topping so that the bulk of the money is shared between the PWD minister, the engineer and the MLA. How long can we suffer this ignominy and drive on roads at 10 KMPH speed? And pray who told the PWD that we need railings on footpaths? And who owns the iron welding and fabrication industry that's supplying these railings? We need roads to drive on and footpaths to walk on. Period!

Coming back to Dr Mukul Sangma, he believes he is a motivational speaker (and I wonder why all motivational speakers I have met are suited-booted types that drive SUVs), and he tells us to dream big. I would request the CM to take the road to NEIGRIHMS on which seriously ill patients are taken on ambulances every half an hour and because of which they have to slow down considerably since the road has disappeared. Let us then see if he can still sit in his car (not SUV) and dream. People who suffer the pain of living a cruel life cannot dream. They have nightmares!

Then let's take POWER (Electricity not political power). This is a Department Dr Sangma held many moons ago. He knows exactly what's ailing this monstrous, money guzzling monolith that shuts down power any time

of the day and night. Obviously Dr Sangma does not suffer intermittent power cuts and so he can sing, "Dream, dream, dream" like the Everly brothers and also push us to dream. But no... dreaming doesn't happen when the journey is back-breaking and gut-wrenching and when you're groping in the dark. Power is one Department that we are most pessimistic about. Its going to collapse very soon. Only the Chairman and others down the line who draw their pay despite the disgustingly poor services are optimistic. In the private sector the MeECL employees and its engineers would not survive a day.

Now let's come to the PHE Department. This is yet another money guzzling department whose engineers have literally gotten away with blue murder. Corruption in this Department goes back a long way. That corruption has multiplied several times over and the engineer who headed it for many years was left completely free to do what he pleased. Obviously he was greasing several palms. And who is left to suffer the consequences? The public obviously! And we deserve it too for remaining silent on these crucial issues and relying too much on pressure groups with fancy acronyms.

Then there's EDUCATION. It's in the pits and that is why the CM's children (barring one) don't study in Meghalaya. So too the kids of ministers, bureaucrats and technocrats! They study in the US, UK, Australia or in the best schools/colleges/universities in Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Mumbai, you name it. We cannot therefore expect these policy makers to know what's wrong with education since they don't have kids struggling with an overload of homework or breaking their heads over an equation badly taught in the classroom. Today the first thing most well-to-do parents do is to pack their kids out of Meghalaya. It means they know that Education here has gone kaput. But Government doesn't care! So thousands of students are churned out of this decrepit system year after year and become no-gooders since the education they were imparted does not equip them to deal with life. And that's because Meghalaya does not even have a vision for education! So I am not too sure what Dr Mukul Sangma is dreaming about when he has left Education to wither away.

Next comes TOURISM which is a no brainer. Most

tourist locations are at breaking point thanks to a "No Policy" Department yet again! Tourism cannot be left to communities and individuals without any regulations. That's why we have a Government! Since the CM is also the Tourism Minister I wonder what his dream for Tourism is before it crashes.

Dr Sangma, the greatest problem with "leaders" is that they talk a lot but don't listen. If you don't listen to people how will you know what's bugging them? If you listen you would know why people have stopped dreaming. Also political leaders tend to surround themselves with creepy sycophants who tell them what they love to hear only to extract their pound of flesh. That's lethal!

So if you ask me, and I represent many voices, we all want change in 2018. I have no love for the BJP or Congress or indeed any of the regional parties. But we don't have to fall in love with either of them. We only need to vote. We need a government that will focus on good, durable roads and outsource the PWD and PHE departments to business sharks and thieves. We need to rejuvenate our rivers particularly the ones closest to us. We need a sustainable tourism policy. We want a health system that does not end up with a health insurance. And for God's sake take ownership of NEIGRIHMS. It's not here for nothing!

As a tailpiece, let me share a few sentences from the book, "When God Went to Hell," by Ravi Gupta. It reminds me of political parties. The book says, "Hell operates using fear as its tool and not dialogue. Hell allows no expression which therefore gives one the impression of a very homogenous, well organized well-functioning institution through it is highly misleading and completely incorrect. Unfortunately the leader of Hell, in the absence of free speech and expression lives under the illusion that 'All is well with Hell.'"

To be fair to the CM he has done one thing right. He has been able to handle the pressure groups and done away with the bandh culture. In this the Meghalaya High Court too has been helpful. But Dr Sangma runs a presidential form of Government which is a one-man army. Do we want such a Government in 2018. Think people...think

Don't dismiss Modi's make in India just yet

Flagship scheme will bear fruits by 2018

By Subrata Majumder

Media and political analysts are blaming Modi's Make in India for turning out to be a jobless initiative. His several schemes to generate employment opportunities were mocked. They argued that his Make in India - committed for job creation through manufacturing - has failed. It failed to stimulate domestic investors. Foreign investment boomed. But foreign investment was not the prime target to expand job opportunities.

Under the Make in India initiative, Modi administration acted swiftly to ensure "Ease of Doing Business", cutting down several procedural hassles, curbing bureaucracy and red tape by enlarging E-systems. Several-growth oriented schemes, such as Start-up India, Digital India and Smart City concepts, were introduced. But, all failed to impact and show the desired results in employment generation, according to media analysts. During July 2014 to December 2016, only 641,000 jobs were created. In comparison, 1,280,000 jobs were created during July 2011 - December 2013, during UPA regime.

Why didn't domestic investors respond to Make in India initiative, while the foreign investors were upbeat? Despite the big flow of foreign investment during Modi regime, why did it fail to generate more employment? Why did the schemes for development and modernization not catalyze more employment? These are the some of the questions which were thrown up for public debate to figure out Modi's leadership in the job sector and employment generation. Mr Modi had committed to creating one crore jobs a year.

India achieved a sustainable and highest global growth in GDP during Modi regime. But it succumbed to the catchphrase of "jobless growth". Why have all the development schemes proved to be a dud in case of employment generation?

During the three-year period of Modi administration, India witnessed a gushing flow of foreign direct investment. It boomed to US\$113.8 billion over the period of three years. On a single year basis - India received foreign direct investment of US\$ 46 billion in 2016 and US \$ 39 billion in 2015 - a whopping leap by about 18percent. The growth reflects foreign investors' assertiveness in the growth trajectory of India.

In contrast, the domestic investors were shying away. Registering a spur in investment in 2014-15, a growth by 71 percent, domestic investment in new projects dipped to almost zero growth in 2016-17.

Given the spur in foreign direct investment, which represents investment in manufacturing and allied services mainly, the critics raised eyebrows, asking questions as to why they haven't increased job opportunities.

The moot point for the lackluster growth in employment opportunities was the time period taken to assess the impact. The first three years of Modi administration was not enough to generate more employment opportunities, even though large foreign direct investment flowed in the country. About 85 percent of the foreign direct investment is in the greenfield areas. It takes about 2 to 3 years or more as gestation period for the new factories to commence production. Employment is generated in the post-

manufacturing phase. Resultantly, the green shoots of employment generation in the foreign invested plants will be visible only after 3 to 4 years. Hence, the rise in the employment generation in foreign invested firms will be visible from 2018-19 onwards.

Start-up is not the major creator of mass employment generation. Digital India and Smart Cities are the long-term projects of generating employment opportunities. All these schemes are at the native stages in terms of policy formations and implementations. Under the Smart City initiatives, so far 60 out 100 cities could determine the projects costs. Of these, only 16 projects are in the implementations and the remaining 44 are at various stages of tendering.

Digitization is not the springboard for volume employment opportunities. It is the turf for opportunity for IT sectors and the process for modernization to keep every citizen, especially in urban areas, in the loop through internet-enabled services.

The year 2018 will be the turning point of Indian manufacturing sector under Make in India initiative. With BJP and its allies making a big inroad in Rajya Sabha after one-third of the members retire, the two major pending reforms, amenable to trigger manufacturing, will find easy access for Parliamentary approval. They are land acquisition Bill and labour reform.

Pending land acquisition amendment Bill has become the major obstacle for land availability and gear up the new investment in manufacturing. The new land acquisition bill under Modi administration, which overturned the mandatory obligations of farmers' consent of 80 per cent and Social Impact Assessment (SIA), will now find passage for Parliamentary approval to become the Act. Till now, few State governments have enacted their own land acquisition laws, which are effective within the periphery their own state boundaries. These restricted the new investors to invest in the state of their own preferences.

Labour reform is a long pending issue since it was pondered in the first term of NDA at the Centre in between 1999 to 2004. Labour reform in the form of "hire and fire" is a long pending demand of investors. Under the Industrial Disputes Act, a company employing more than 100 workers, is not free to adopt 'hire and fire' system. With the fast growth in industrialization and greater participation of bigger houses, this law has become obsolete. A new thinking was brewed to relax the workers' cap and provide more power to the investors for industrial harmony and growth.

With sustainable growth in the economy, which waned supply constraint, the country has entered into a comfortable zone of inflation. Resultantly, RBI relaxed its tight monetary policy. More easing in the rate of interests are in the offing. These will have positive impact on the domestic investors, who have long been out crying for easing of monetary policies.

Many new challenges are afoot to generate employment opportunities. One such is setting up of Coastal Employment Zone (CEZs), proposed in Three Year Action Agenda by NITI Aayog. It is a first time challenge to generate more employment in the coastal areas. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Disaster in waiting

Editor,
Driving or walking through the busy streets of Shillong during the windy or rainy seasons is like gambling with your life and property. Trees, branches, twigs, even fruits fall on top of your head or on top of your car if it's your day. We've witnessed from the past how fallen branches and trees can create havoc. Luckily no lost souls are reported yet. My humble request to the concerned department is to urgently look into the matter so as to avoid any unnecessary mishaps. What I've noticed is that on the entire stretch from Fire Brigade to Anjalee petrol pump there are enormous sized trees with overhanging branches and these Amazon jungle like trees are dangerously lined up along with the electric

lines. Chopping off these threatening branches or even trees will do a world of good to the confidence of daily commuters. Although we need to keep Shillong clean and green, we also need to be safe than sorry. Let's not wait for things to happen when we have all the resources to deal with such exigencies.

Yours etc.,
D. Warshong.
Viaemail

What an imposition!

Editor,
Shillong has come a long way from the dictatorial calls of bandhs and boycott of both Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations. People now come out on such days and enjoy these National Holidays with the spirit of freedom and patriotism. Having said that, one piece of news makes me

believe that life has come full circle. A very prominent boys' school in Shillong, St Edmund's, has scheduled a unit test for the kids on August 15. The Reason? So that the kids come to school and don't miss the celebrations that the school is planning to observe. Now isn't that dictatorial too? A day when you are supposed to celebrate, you are forced to appear for a test? Can't the school come out with more creative ideas which will motivate the children to be part of the celebration rather than imposing a test on them so that they come? I am saddened beyond words at this attitude and approach of the school. The little minds of the children should be free at least on Independence Day and not bogged down, as always, with studies, task and assignments. I hope better sense would prevail.

Yours etc.
Name withheld on

request
(A concerned parent).

Misplaced idea of compassion

Editor,
Apropos the news item of August 7, 2017 regarding the recommendation of the Pay Commission to reopen c o m p a s s i o n a t e appointments I like to say that more than 50% of families in the state live below poverty line (BPL) and no Government employee is eligible to be included as BPL. What we need is much more compassion for these families and not for Government employees. The Government is not an employment agency even though that seems to be the perception. It is there to serve the citizens of Meghalaya. Most Government employees,

particularly the fourth grade staff are known to become alcoholics and die in service. So should the Pay Commission reward them by r e c o m m e n d i n g compassionate appointment at the cost of jobs to the vast majority who deserve much more compassion? A Government employee's family also gets pension benefits on his death while others get nothing at all. Even when a government employee dies in harness because of the nature of duty such as being killed by terrorists etc. the Government can think of adequate monetary compensation without resorting to compassionate appointments at the cost of other deserving persons. In a state like ours Government is the major employer and jobs are difficult to come by today. Unemployment is rising every day. The general impression one has about a

Government job is that it is highly secured, much better paid and where the employee can be laid back plus receive all kinds of privileges. These days in the private sector the driver also doubles up as a peon since drivers are mostly idle when their officers are at work. I urge the government not to add to this list of privileges in the form of c o m p a s s i o n a t e appointments at the cost of vast majority who are unemployed and are of a much higher caliber than any of these privileged class compassionate appointees.

Yours etc.,
D Wahlang
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.

“Ambition - it is the last infirmity of noble minds.”

--- Benjamin Franklin

The Shillong Times

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Male chauvinism

VARNIKA Kundu has won the battle and the two stalkers who harassed her have been finally arrested. But the incident has exposed the male chauvinist mindset of Union Minister Babul Supriyo who is from an enlightened state like Bengal. He made light of the crime for which Haryana BJP Chief’s son was accused and arrested along with his associate. He questioned the validity of the kidnapping accusation made by Varnika. He also criticized the logic of highlighting the political credentials of the Haryana BJP Chief, Subhash Barala. He cannot be unaware of the political influence frequently exercised by leaders of all parties in such sordid cases. What is amazing is his jibe about the tragic act being comparable to the ‘boy chase girl’ habit among college students. The leader from Bengal in fact justified stalking and attempted abduction. He is close to movie circles and that may explain his comparison of the case to movie reels. It is really shocking. Such a mindset can pollute the administration and police. Women are hapless victims of sexual crimes and have to suffer the consequences.

Being a Union Minister, Babul Supriyo should know that stalking is a serious offence and that it is non-bailable. It is not a scene from film reels. It is the tragedy of real life in India. It is good that the Chandigarh police intervened in a timely manner and action was taken. Otherwise, Varnika would have been stigmatized. The finale of the sordid occurrence lends strength to the emphasis that the BJP leadership puts on women’s empowerment. How the BJP leadership would react to Supriyo’s unfeeling attitude remains to be seen.

LOOKING BACK

April 26, 1989

Silver coins, gems seized from bus passenger in Jowai

The police seized a veritable treasure-trove of silver bars, coins and precious stones from five passengers of a night super bus at Jowai on Thursday. Two hundred & sixty nine silver bars weighing about 54 kgs and valued at more than Rs. 4 lakh, 280 silver coins of the British period and four kgs of precious stones were recovered from the men who were arrested. The police stumbled upon the valuable during one of their special detection drives. The bus was reportedly on its way to Guwahati from Silchar. Preliminary investigations revealed that the arrested persons, who were resident of Champai district of Mizoram, had links with Burma and had obtained the silver and precious stones from that country. While all

the stones were uncut and unpolished rubies except one set of nine rubies which were cut and polished, the silver coins have not been evaluated as yet. Last week, the police recovered four VCPs and two VCRs from a private car on its way from Silchar to Guwahat. The four occupants of the car were arrested and have since been handed over to the Customs authorities. Earlier this month, the Jowai police made a major break through in its drive against illegal arms with the recovery of a few country made revolvers and about 105 rounds of 22 ammunition. A few persons were arrested in this connection while investigation are still on and the police are hopeful of a few more arms hauls.

Understanding Culture and Civilization

By FabianLyngdoh

There seems to be a need to understand the concepts of culture and civilization not only from the scholars and academics’ view-points but also from the common man’s perspective. Though there has been a burgeoning interest in the concept of culture, but there has not been much precision in its use, and the concept has been used in a number of ways which tend to overlap with one another. At times, culture refers to the finer things of life, refinement, achievement and appreciation of the fine arts, music and literature. But culture is also widely defined by scholars as the pattern of behaviour, attitude, value or belief, and skills that human beings learned as members of a human group. It is the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Civilization is different from culture though sometimes the two concepts seem to overlap. According to some views, civilization refers to the sum total of attainment of the characteristics of life in an organized city or state. It covers not only social organisations but all other achievements which distinguishes man from the animals. The term ‘civilization’ is also used to distinguish levels of human development, to mark off civilized peoples from barbarians, or nature-peoples from culture-peoples. But in German social thought, it is culture that was held to be the repository of human excellence, artistic achievement and perfection, while civilization was regarded as a process of material development which threatened individual culture by creating an urban mass society. For the Enlightenment thinkers, the notion of civilization was inextricably connected with the idea of social progress, that is, the triumph of rationality over religion, the decline of local particular customs and the rise of natural science. Civilization is also associated with the growth of absolutist state, and therefore with the reduction of local political autonomy, and with greater cultural uniformity within states. That is the reason why minority cultural communities are apprehensive of any signs of civilization and cling more on the ideas of tradition and culture. Scholars of various disciplines have defined culture and civilization in a

number of ways according to their own points of view. Let us here try to understand culture and civilization from a different perspective. Cultural ways has the past in view and maintains a close link with it, while civilization concerns more with the sacredness of established way of life, while civilization concerns more with facing and challenging the emerging problems of life. From the point of view of culture, customs and traditions are sacred and more important than man, but from the point of view of civilization, man is more important than laws and customs which are only the means to serve the needs of man. “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark, 2:27). In cultural societies, the basis of all laws in the society lie with the traditional socio-religious code prescribed by people who are dead and gone, but in a civilized society, the basis of all laws lie with the will of the living people, understood as the ‘civil society’. In the context of culture, man is expected to condition his behaviour according to established customs and traditions, while in the context of civilization, laws and customs are expected to be made according to the present need of man. That is the reason why the constitutions and laws of civilized nations are always provided with amendment clauses, so that the law may be amended from time to time according to emerging conditions and circumstances of life. So, a cultured person is one who is refined in the art of living according to established customs, but a civilized person is one who is refined in the knowledge and skills of dealing with the present problems of life. Some scholars opined that civilization is the decaying phase of culture, the phase in which culture loses its creativity and becomes mechanical and imitative. But I would like to present the idea on the contrary that it is culture which is the decaying phase of civilization. We learned from history that every nation started from a certain level of civilization and it was built on the effort of civilization, but later it got transformed into a cultural system and people began to live in luxury and sloth. They converted their

founders or conquering heroes into gods and goddesses and some sort of social religion was started and priesthood was instituted to perform religious rites to honour or placate the spirits of the deified ancestors. Thus socio-religious culture was established in which the past is holier than the present, and the dead are given more importance than the living. The socio-religious codes became the infallible laws of the state to maintain the absolute rule of the king and the special privileges of the priestly hierarchy. Then they were overrun by new adventurous conquerors who are driven more by the spirit of the present than that of the culture of the past. Thus, civilization decayed into culture, and culture was conquered by fresh agency of civilization that gives more importance to facts and actions than to ideas and feelings. Culture is also understood as relative in the sense that different societies or cultures ought to be analysed objectively without using the values of one culture to judge the worth of another, and that the practices of a society should be described from the point of view of its members, as the beliefs are relative to particular society and are not comparable between societies. There are therefore no absolute values common to all humanity. Hence we cannot say that the culture of such and such a community is superior to the other. For this reason, it was sometimes opined that cultural communities should not be made civilized because they are happy as they are in their own culture. However, though every human society has sufficient elements of culture to sustain itself in its particular territory, but it is only at a particular level of civilization. It is true that the apes and primitive peoples are happy as they are. Yet, we would kindly train and educate the apes to civilize them if we have the means to do so. Why should we then think of leaving primitive peoples as they are on the pretext of respect for cultural relativity or on grounds of conserving models of human primitiveness for the interests of scholars? Every human community must be liberated from the conditions of uncivilized life. Their kind of happiness is dishonourable to the whole of human race. It is the happiness of eternal slaves of ignorance. Peoples of all races and tribes should avail

the facilities of modern education, not for the sake of culture, because they already have that, but for the sake of civilization. The cultures of all communities are equal, but the level of civilization of one community may not be equal to that of the other. Granted that all cultures are equal, the civilization of a community is measured by how far its life is determined by its capabilities to meet the needs of the present situation than by the cultural values of the past. A particular tribal community may be alive and intact by the force of its cultural resources, but it may lack far behind other communities in civilization if it considers the honour of the ancestors who are dead as more important than the life of its members who are living. Civilisation concerns the growth of knowledge and the technical command over the forces of nature which is valid not only for a particular community as culture is, but it is valid for all humanity. Civilization is ever changing and improving, while culture tends to remain static and sometimes stands as hindrance to civilization. Redundant but obstinate customs are negative social resources which add extra burden or even hindrance to human development. So, redundant traditional beliefs and customs though may not be easily ignored or be discarded right away, should not be counted as central and determining elements in the life of the society. To be a civilized society is not to be refined in the cultural precepts of the past, but to be able to harness scientific knowledge and technological skills to battle the odds of life and to be governed by the sociological principles of the present. Cultural precepts of the past must be integrated with the scientific and technological knowledge of the present in order that they may retain their relevance, because in the last analysis the present is the actual sovereign. Our cultural differences may sustain us as petty communities in various parts of the world, but it is not culture but modern civilization which sustains us as human beings through a system of political, social and economic interrelationships.

I have travelled extensively in Garo Hills and have many friends there and I know for a fact that major parts of Garo Hills are still undeveloped despite producing great Chief Ministers like Capt. W.A Sangma, Purno Sangma, Mukul Sangma, many Ministers and officers whose terms lasted for many years. It is a wonder why Garo Hills is still lagging behind. However, Garo Hills has other forte and it will not be a surprise that very soon it will beat the Khasi-Jaintia Hills in many sectors of the economy. Those key areas are that (a) they are united (b) they know a leader when they see one and they follow him.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

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

Creating New India Plan a bigger cake

By Shivaji Sarkar

The 71st year of Independence begins with the call by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for eradication of corruption, poverty, terrorism, casteism, communalism to create a new India. This is significant to reshape the contours of Indian society and economy. Since the first Independence Day such calls are being given. It is true that the nation has made progress. The standard of living has improved. In 1970s, even the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said so. But it is also true that disparity has also increased. It is a fact that social discontent, may not be the strife, is on the rise. Else on the day of August Kranti, (August 9, 2017) Mumbai would not have witnessed a silent rally by reportedly five lakh Marathas. Yes, clannish, casteist protests of supposedly powerful social groups like Patidars in Gujarat, Jats in Haryana, Gujjars in Rajasthan, farmers and other communities across the country have become the norm. They all are demanding jobs, reservations, loan waivers and other concessions. This is despite a functional government since 2014.

The Modi government has instilled hopes and flooded the nation with a number of programmes from ‘Skill India’, ‘Mudra’, ‘Make in India’ and so many others for almost every different group. The Prime Minister’s August 9 call is significant. He wants to transform the nation. The accumulated problems, the burgeoning population, scarce resources, the vast expanse of the country come in the way. So would the nation’s wishes to change it in another five years remain a dream? It should not be so. But wishes alone cannot be horses. Why during the last decades the nation could not achieve what it wanted? The answer is the countrymen achieved it piecemeal. Some got it and many did not. Why? The governments could not bake a cake that is big and sufficient for all. Those who could pounce upon got a slice or more, others just lustily pined for it. As they did not get, they got together in the name of castes, communities, other groups to express their discontent.

The socialistic slogans, licence-permit raj, high taxes that rob the earners, neglect of agriculture and it being treated separate from the economic process, big industries, planning commission-NITI Ayog, liberalisation-globalisation, anti-China protests have not helped. The cake has remained small. The equity remains elusive. The high earner is as dissatisfied at the taxes as the lowest one who also shells out as high as him. India has not tried to get rid of its impoverishing income tax – an average salaried person loses four to five months’ wages. Higher tax collection (19 per cent more direct tax now) has not added to the pace of growth. And the governments crib that production is slowing down! How can production go up if people have to pay irrational taxes and continuously face an inflationary situation? Except for 1998-2004, India rarely had a stable price regime or real low inflation with adequate productivity and high job growth. Despite difficulties, India is awake and making strides almost in all spheres. Its GDP in 1950 was Rs 10,536 crore and now Rs 1.68 lakh crore. The First Plan, a concept first espoused by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose in 1938 when he was the

president of the Congress party after the Haripura Congress and later implemented by Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister was considered to be revolutionary. It has helped the nation achieve success in space technology, nuclear energy, industrialisation, IT, education, women’s emancipation and overall improvement in living conditions. In 1947 life expectancy was 32, now it is 68, a per capita income of Rs 249.6 has become Rs 1.03 lakh (\$1575), and in terms of GDP India ranks third after China and the US. In 1947 only 1500 villages, 0.025 per cent was electrified, now 97 per cent of villages have electricity. Only 12 per cent of the population had school education and now 74 per cent are literate. It is also true that CAG has found fault with every government department big or small. The latest RBI consumer survey in six cities of Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai and New Delhi for June 2017 shows the percentage of people who said their income growth was lower than in December 2013 and March 2014, when the disenchantment with the UPA government was at its peak.

The net responses have been negative for six consecutive quarters now. Manufacturers have marginally increased employment. The RBI surveys despite this points out that the people largely still are hopeful of the job and other conditions improving by the next year. The median forecast of gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) for 2018-19 is 29 per cent of GDP at current market prices, says the RBI. The GFCF in 2013-14 at current prices was 31.3 per cent of GDP. Investment demand will get better, but it’s likely to be a slow uphill task. It means the cake is getting smaller but hope remains. This is what not just the government but even the opposition, planners, policy makers and the common people have to give a concerted thought to.

The road ahead is well known though not marked. The NITI Ayog was supposed to play a pivotal role. However, its vision document under Arvind Panagariya was flawed. It has to change its style of functioning. Instead of coming out with documents in a hurry, it should hold parleys across the country to find out the solutions to the social and economic ailments. The GST is a beginning but unless other taxes and cess are drastically reduced and a humane approach to taxation is adopted, the projected transformation may not be there. The GST has also not eliminated tax on tax. The solution is not simple. Neither is it complex. The goal has to be increasing opportunities, protecting bank deposits, make banking cost-free, keeping utility prices like electricity and petroleum low and taking investment out of the private coffers. It needs a centric approach with people having differences coming together. Modi has the acumen and charisma to create the societal dialogue and make all the moves together. The road is ahead. It has to be trudged with all others. India is ready for the transformation. The threads have to be put together. – INFA

TO THE EDITOR

True Independence

Editor,
15th August 1947 marks the beginning of a ‘new happy era’ and end of British Rule in India. Undoubtedly, the country became a free and independent nation yet we still are slaves to oppression, poverty and exploitation especially of women and children. The country still bears the brunt of hate and unrest. We all are familiar with the saying “Unity is strength” and that love is the fruit of peace and happiness. This is what the country needs - Peace, Harmony and Unity are the key ingredients for the country to prosper. If we citizens respect each other and remember that we have fundamental rights along with fundamental duties, the country will be peaceful and more prosperous. Sadly when we look around us, it appears that all the rights & duties are only in black & white as nobody seems to care for or respect

anybody’s rights. Yes, we are happy and proud at having got independence but it’s time that we spread awareness amongst all citizens about true independence especially to our youth. We can motivate and guide them to grow to be good and responsible citizens. Institutions may perhaps organize programmes on Independence Day not just to commemorate the occasion with the usual flag hoisting and parade but with an aim to enlighten the children about the mission, vision of the freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for their love of the country and for our freedom. It must be made mandatory for all students to attend such programmes so as to inculcate in them the spirit of patriotism. Irrespective of gender, caste, creed or religion, let us take pride to be Indians and show the world that we are one nation. Everybody talks about wanting change and progress. We must remember that ‘we’ are the ‘change’. We need to change our habits just as Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam

rightly said “But you can change your habit. If you can change your habit, you can change your future.” We need to stop being narrow minded and communal. Let us broaden our minds and perspectives for our country to progress and prosper. Light up the spirit of oneness and mutual respect for each other which is the need of the hour. Let us all open up our minds and hearts to make a better and shining India. Long live India. Jai Hind!
Yours etc.,
Phyllis Rani,
Shillong - 4.

Clamour for development!

Editor,
Apropos the news item, “Rongjeng Body demands development from CM” (ST July 25, 2017), first of all, I must congratulate the Rongjeng Area Citizens’ Forum for asserting itself by coming forward to demand development

packages from the Chief Minister not only for Rongjeng village itself but for the whole Rongjeng Constituency. Other citizens’ bodies of Garo Hills’ villages and constituencies should have been very assertive, aggressive and even sometimes belligerent some 45 years ago in order to secure their rights to development of their respective areas, since much money has been spent from the public exchequer for the development Garo Hills and the whole state. The main reason for the germination and growth of underground outfits (elements) in the Garo Hills is because of the lack of development and its complete absence especially in nearly all pockets of Garo Hills except Ampati, the favoured constituency. In fact, many of the MLAs from that region of Meghalaya spend most of their time elsewhere than in their respective constituencies. It is a fact that proper attention was not given by majority of MLAs from Garo Hills to

their respective Assembly segments, hence the underdevelopment of Garo Hills. This does not mean that the MLAs from Khasi and Jaintia Hills are more caring of their constituencies than their counterparts from Garo Hills. Most MLA representing the rural constituencies live in the capital city and are only infrequent visitors to their constituencies. Now, what the Rongjeng Citizens’ Forum should have done was to put pressure on the local MLA and MDCs to bring about development in their area and if they fail to do so then they have ample option to forget them in the upcoming general election which is just six months away. This also applies to other constituencies of Garo Hills and Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Of course, demanding development package from the CM is legitimate as he is more powerful as the Chief Executive of the State. But the sole responsibility for the development of the constituency of Rongjeng rests with the local MLA with the co-operation of the people there.

AUGUST KRANTI

By Dr John Chelladurai

Quit India” resolution of August 8, 1942, marked a decisive moment in the history of India’s freedom struggle. Gandhiji found the tenet of truth and non-violence put to most severe test.

It was world war. The unrelenting colonial power bestriding on India; Axis forces were threatening to invade our land. In the midst, the freedom fighters were contemplating a humane methodology, beyond killing, destruction and betrayal to set all the wrongs right. And they proved them right coming out victorious and gave humanity a unique civilisational learning.

The Axis forces decimated the British and the Allies so thoroughly in the East Asian theatres and marched close to the Indian border. There was a widespread fear that Japan would invade India any time. Axis’ interest in Indian territory was primarily due to the British presence here. In the absence of the British, it was believed, India would have been of least interest to the Axis forces.

The Mission led by Sir Stafford Cripps in the early 1942 had offered what Gandhi quipped as a ‘post-dated cheque on a bank largely failing’. The sole purpose of Cripps Mission was to convince India to support the British war by supplying the wherewithal to their army, soldiers in particular. The dominion status it promised India in return after the war was quite vague and without a definite time frame. Indian leaders felt deceived when the mission announced that the British would hold complete control over Indian affairs in the meantime.

This created a political urgency. It was essentially a British war. They were turning India into a battlefield using people as cannon fodder in a mission they had been only losing and appeared to let us doom in the same way they did in the East.

Trekking with the British anymore would be allowing ourselves to be dragged into a war in which we had no business to do, and siding with a party that was bound to

sink and drown us along with. To top it all, our solidarity and sacrifices would be rewarded with the resumption of colonial subjugation.

We could neither remain quiet for a moment. Even if we did not cooperate but stayed away from the war, we’d have ended up being a mute witness to the fall of India at the defeat of Britain in the hands of the fascist forces.

The compulsive situation demanded us to act. The national leaders chose to defend nation’s honor on their own; let the destiny of the nation be decided by our merit or the lack of it, and not by the despairing British.

They called the British to ‘Quit India’, not for the sake of independence, but to extricate us from the perilous situation the British had led us into. We ought to tear away the British mask stuck on the face of India upon which the fascist forces are raring to fire.

The national leaders and Gandhiji in particular had moral dilemma. It was part of Satyagraha ethics not to attack the opponent at their distress; it amounts to be a betrayal of the tenet of Truth.

Whereas in 1942, the British forced us into a Pyrrhic situation, in which supporting the British is tantamount to siding with violence only to our own demise. The question before us was, whether we should enter into war, if at all yes, why not on our own terms. There was another dilemma: whether we could wage the whole war without our people turning violent. The explosive situation, Gandhi apprehended, would lead to widespread violence, if he called for mass satyagraha.

The year before, in 1941, when the negotiations failed, he took recourse to his avowed means and declared that the fight would be waged by only those who were non-violent to the core. And he called it Individual Satyagraha. And the Satyagraha would be decisive, he declared. Thousands of freedom fighters were put behind bars. However, they were all released in a couple of months as a gesture of goodwill by the British war cabinet, towards renegotiating war collaboration.

Post Cripps Mission, the situation was fast deteriorating that Gandhiji even reconciled to waging satyagraha

against the forces even if it means few go astray on the way.

Thus out of that deep frustration was born the “Quit India” cry, at the All India Congress session on August 8, 1942, in Bombay. In his resolute speech from the Gowalia Tank Maidan, he called it a mission to ‘do or die’ with the emphasis on the ‘do’.

Even then, Gandhiji was particular on his position vis-à-vis the fascist. He did not want the people out of sheer bitterness and frustration to disgrace themselves by welcoming the Japanese invaders. It was for him a moral issue — an act of faith. Come what may, India must not lose her soul.

Gandhiji and over a hundred thousand freedom fighters were arrested within a few days. With the call for ‘do or die’, it was reported, Gandhi told his compatriots, he would go on fast until death, if put behind bars. Having heard this, Vinobha who too was arrested started fasting. He told his fellow inmates, ‘Ram commanded, Hanuman complied’. Gandhiji had to send an emissary to end Vinobha’s fasting with a promise he would not fast himself. The struggle was fortified with iron will yet humane.

World opinion in India’s favour started mounting. US President Franklin D Roosevelt pressured Churchill to give in to Indian demand. Churchill used his trump card. “I would resign than concede to India.”

In Pyarelal Nayar’s words, “In less than five years the seditious slogan of August 1942 became the official programme of action of the British Government, and before long even ‘Quit India’ was outmoded and gave place to ‘Quit Asia’.” Thus Quit India movement gave India freedom and to the world a non-violent method that works even in a dire situation such as the one India was placed in 1942.

(An alumnus of Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Dr D John Chelladurai is currently the Dean of Gandhi Research Foundation, Jalgaon, Maharashtra)

(Views expressed in the article are the author’s personal)



(Above) Mahatma Gandhi in a public rally and (below left) with Jawaharlal Nehru in 1942

Have we lost momentum?

By Anil K. Rajvanshi

My father went to jail in the 1942 Quit India movement. He was interned for 2.5 years in Delhi and Lucknow jails and was released in 1946.

I often used to ask him whether he and hundreds and thousands of Indians like him who sacrificed their lives for India’s independence ever thought that it will become such a chaotic and corrupt country and whether his sacrifice was in vain. We started with such a high moral ground in 1947 and where have we brought our country to? He used to fumble with the answer and was clueless about it.

This is the same question I still ask myself when giving lectures to youngsters in innumerable universities, IITs and other colleges. Yet these youngsters are the future of our country and we should educate and inspire them to do better.

At the time when we are celebrating 75 years of the Quit India movement and 70 years of independent India we should perhaps give a new slogan for Quit India: Banish from India poverty, hunger, hatred and violence. Freedom from these will be true independence for our country.

How do we achieve this? Not by slogans or posters or Twitter! But by solid hard work for changing India from the bottom up.

Poverty can be reduced drastically by creating wealth from the land. When 55 per cent of India’s population is dependent on farming, it is important that we focus very intensely on agriculture and improving the lot of farmers.

Some of the poorest in the rural population are farmers. By giving them proper incentives and regulating the mandis so that the middlemen give them good prices for their produce, the government can really help the farmers increase their income and create wealth for the country.

Our survival depends on eating food

and not nuts and bolts or software! A proper farming policy and its implementation can be the real game changer for the country and can be the biggest industry.

With increased food availability and wealth of the farmers, the issues of hunger can also be mitigated. India has the dubious distinction of having one-third of its population malnourished. A country which has a massive space programme but cannot take care of its millions of malnourished citizens is really a matter of shame for all of us and needs introspection.

Hatred and violence are linked and come from the lack of resources and hence the desire to control them. These tendencies exist in all humans but when the resources get diminished, because of overpopulation or for other reasons, then the desire to control and horde them becomes strong. This leads to insecurity and ultimately to violence. The control is practised in the name of religion, caste, belief or anything which allows a group of people to indulge in violence.

Spirituality can reduce insecurity and help us in becoming tolerant to others’ points of view and hence less violent. With the country’s increased wealth because of excellent farming, this tendency of control and hatred can be further reduced and checked. At the same time there has to be a very conscious effort to teach good moral science and value system in schools. A complete overhaul of the schooling system, which is at present based on passing examinations, is required. It should be more focused on imparting value-based education together with skill development.

True independence will be when we all work together to produce a sustainable and holistic India. (IANS)

(Anil K. Rajvanshi is Director of the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute at Phaltan in Maharashtra. The views expressed are personal)



A tricolour kite being made ahead of the 70th Independence Day in Kolkata on Saturday. (PTI)



The movement in new light

By Ratan Bhattacharjee

There is a plethora of books published on Quit India Movement of 1942. Some are well-documented and well-researched and they provide fresh angles.

One such book is “Days of Decision” by Jen Green published by Heinemann Education Books in 2013. Jen in this book raised the question why Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi campaigned so strongly for Indian independence from the British Empire at a time when Japan was threatening the country’s borders during World War II.

This book looks at a controversial event from the angle of modern history. Everyone knows that the Quit India Movement was launched at the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee by Gandhi when the Cripps Mission failed and on August 8, 1942, Gandhi made a call ‘do or die’ in his speech.

It was wartime and Japan was near the borders of India. Subhas Chandra Bose was supporting the Axis powers and only America supported the demand for Indian independence when Franklin D Roosevelt pressurised Prime Minister Winston Churchill to give in to some of the Indian demands which the British in India did not agree to grant. They advised the political protesters to wait till the end of the War. The American support is well analysed in the book Quit India: The American Response to the 1942 Struggle by M.S. Venkataramani and B.K. Shrivastava.

Democracy in India has always been of peripheral interest to America. Indian leaders as well as common people who were on the streets demanding the ouster

of the British expected America to extend huge support as it posed as a democratic continent. But unfortunately India was not included in the Atlantic Charter. America, like the British, only eyed the raw materials for their factories. It is true that Cripps Mission was appointed under indirect American pressure on Winston

The American response came less from sympathy at India’s plight, but more because of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour. The necessity of Indo-British pact was felt by America at that time. It was a wartime necessity more than a consideration of the democratic demands of the Indians.



Yusuf Meherally (right), the man who is credited for coining the slogan ‘Quit India’, with Jayprakash Narayan

Churchill. But when Gandhi and other Indian national leaders rejected the proposals of Cripps Mission, along with the proposals from the American envoy sent by Roosevelt, America described the rejection of the Cripps Mission proposals as “irresponsible and reckless”.

Defence of Britain from German and Japanese aggression was the main reason behind the Cripps Mission. Roosevelt and Churchill administration were more interested in short-term benefits. The situation is more critically analysed in the book India’s Revolution: Gandhi and the

Quit India Movement by Francis Hutchins from the papers of Gandhi Memorial Museum and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library documents of the National Archives of India.

According to this book, ‘Quit India Movement’ is the climax of a nationalist revolutionary movement which sought freedom on India’s own terms. The focus is on the point that India does not want independence as a benevolent grant from the British imperial regime.

For the first time, this book traces the moves of the British Government in suppressing the desires of the freedom loving Indians. England had openly proclaimed that India would one day become independent with the tacit assumption that it was a remote eventuality.

Only after the Quit India call, Britain’s political parties accepted the harsh truth that they should immediately leave India and give more attention to World War II. The book is an impressive analysis of the revolutionary nature of colonial nationalism.

Quit India Movement in Assam by Anil Kumar Sharma is a wonderful assessment of the underground activities of the revolutionaries in Assam. They include the martyrs and protesters during the movement.

Anil Kumar Sharma gives a detailed description of the sacrifices of men and women for the cause. Thus these books look at controversial but very significant events from modern history showing different angles of a particular course of actions of the revolutionaries of India.

(The author is Associate Professor and Head of PG English, Dum Dum Motijheel College, Kolkata. He may be reached at profatanbhattacharjee.com)

‘Relationship is still old seven course meal for me’

The Badshaah of Bollywood, Shah Rukh Khan was at his quirky best discussing his new film and relationships with Shilpa Salwan. Excerpts:

You are literally dancing and jumping around in the movie, how do you have such energy at 51?
No, I am 51 and I feel it every moment of my breathing day but when you have to do what you have to do, I think, the director, the choreographer and so many other people in the film, they work very hard and make sure you look like highly energetic in the film and I too try to do my best.

Why did you choose to do a journey film?
When one is not looking for a film is when a film finds you. I was in a state of mind when I just felt it would be an interesting thing to make a journey film, Imtiaz met me at that point of time. I know fully well that Imtiaz’s stories are not mostly straight and they have a lot of internalisation in terms of the struggle in between characters, plot points and so on.

Your first day opening is approximately Rs 15.9 crore, so what do you think of that?
I think that keeping the genre in mind which is a love story and is a journey film with two people in it that generally is a little constricted as a target audience and for that I think it is really nice. If I would compare it with a regular film on a holiday, then it would be different. So, this is extremely encouraging.

From Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi to Jab Harry Met Sejal, how was the journey with Anushka Sharma as a co star?
When you have an actor who started a little later than you, their experiences of life are very different and the first film that we did, there were different kinds of scenes and at the release, we did not meet the press so much but I remember saying this to a lot of people that because of her new take on things it made me react as an actor. Now, it is nine years for Anushka in the industry and still that newness, freshness, earnestness is there. I am extremely happy every time and feel at home that Anushka Sharma is doing a film with me.

What is Harinder Nehra seeking in



the movie? Love or home?
I have read the most beautiful thing about love. I have said many romantic lines in films but this is one line that nobody has made me say. It is “I feel that you are my home and I love you so much” because you know, your house, city, nation, that verandah, that terrace makes you feel safe, warm and welcome. I travel around the world in the best of places and so many people love me, including yourself, and yet the house bed gives the best sleep. So, I think home and love both are quiet equitable you feel at home with the person you love.

According to you, what should someone seek from their partners in relationships today?
(laughs) About today, I don’t know. I am pretty yesterday. I think relationships today have become a little more,

umm (smirking at Anushka Sharma), not hers, but it has become a little more practical. I think love should be impractical, unreasonable as reasons can change and so will love. Small issues become too much nowadays. But mine could be an old-fashioned point of view. The world is changing and everybody has less time. So maybe everything needs to be done kind of like fast food but I am not too sure. I, like Harry still believe in the old seven course meal kind of situation.

Being the romantic Badshaah of Bollywood, you were into that genre from the beginning and then you started experimenting with other forms. Are you coming back to romance and staying with it or further experiments are on?
I will be really honest. It’s very nice that people analyse so much of the moves that I make. It is actually very simple. Neither am I coming back to something nor am I going anywhere. Like the song, “Safar ka hi tha main safar ka raha.” For me all this is a journey and I am not trying to figure out anything. I am an actor and directors must assume I can do different things. I did not try to achieve anything with my choice of films, I just did it because as Sir Edmund Hillary once said, “I climbed the Mount Everest because it was there” and so, I just do it because it is there. Of course, in retrospect, good thinking people, like you want to analyse and suggest. So, thank you for those. I feel excited to do it because if I am not excited, I will never be able to excite you even with the dimplest smile of mine (smiles). (TWF-IBNS)

Play to die: Blue Whale fear spreads

By BK Mishra

The term “Blue Whale” comes from the phenomenon of beached whales, which is linked to suicide.
The Blue Whale online suicide challenge game originated in Russia in 2013. The game was invented by Phillip Budeikin, a former psychology student who was expelled from his university. The group’s administrators are believed to set members, mostly comprising teenagers, a set of 50 tasks to be carried out over 50 days which increase in their intensity and difficulty. Participants are expected to share the photos of the challenge/task completed by them.

These daily tasks start off easy — such as listening to certain genres of music, waking up at odd hours, watching a horror movie, among others, and then slowly escalate to carving out shapes of Blue Whale on one’s skin, self-mutilation and eventually suicide.
In Russia alone, the challenge is reported to have claimed 130 lives so far.
It must be noted, however, that there is no confirmation of the existence of the game and the suicides linked to it are from personal accounts of families/friends of those deceased.

There is still uncertainty over how a participant plays the game. While some say the user has to install some app on his smart phone, others say it’s via social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook where administrators get in touch with the participant.
There is no download link available in the search engine and links are basically shared in Russian and Chinese languages. So the search engine with server in India cannot locate them. It is believed that the developers of the game with its server in China or Russia circulate the link through chat group gaming forum among teenagers who are already suffering from suicidal tendency and brainwash them into hurting themselves and taking their lives.

The familiarity with foreign gamers and international chat forum is what makes the victims more vulnerable.
Since the players share their personal phone numbers and email addresses, the developers keep using different psychological tactics to get them back by sending emails and messages. Hence once the game is started it’s difficult to quit.
The game is difficult to track and hunt down.

The “Blue Whale Challenge” found its first victim in India after finding its victim in Spain, Portugal, Ukraine, Britain, France and Russia
That is what rumoured after a 14-year-old teen, Manpreet, allegedly committed suicide in Andheri recently by jumping off the terrace of his seven-storeyed apartment.
While locals said the boy played a suicide game named Blue Whale, the police are yet to reach a conclusion over the motive for committing suicide.
The police are also looking through Manpreet’s cellphone and computer for



signs to confirm that he played the game.
There is nothing much as of today that the government or police can do to stop the spread of Blue Whale challenge, says gamers and IT experts.

Preventing cyber bullying

Teenage is the most vulnerable time in the life of a person as the person is struggling with identity issues and still trying to figure out who he or she is. This makes them especially susceptible to online crime and emotional abuse, such as the Blue Whale.
Teens are known to experiment and take risks because of peer-pressure, parental and school expectations or media influence. Now with their accessibility to the virtual world they are being attacked and bullied via social media platforms.

Most of the crime happens in the ‘real’ world where the perpetrator and the victim occupy the same space. But now, we have another world to worry about — the virtual world. One in which it sometimes becomes impossible to tell who the perpetrator is.
Cybercrimes and bullying are becoming serious concerns. Although they are conducted in the virtual world, they hold the power to impact the physical world.
The most vulnerable to online bullying and cyber crimes are children and teenagers who have access to all manner of information on the internet, but are not always mature enough to be able to handle it.

Hence, it is imperative to educate not only children and teens but also adults on how to be responsible and how to guard themselves against these crimes.
The Blue Whale Challenge is not very different from what any criminal in history has tried to do in the physical world. One man takes upon him to rid the world of the people he thinks don’t deserve to live.
Parents, teachers and care-givers must understand that once we help them in the real world to reduce these issues, they are less likely to fall prey to such crimes online. They will then have the strength to

say no, stand up for themselves, identify and report abuse not only in the physical world but also on the virtual world.
There has to be a more active role that each one of us needs to play in spreading awareness about how to combat these crimes and protect ourselves and our loved ones.

Low self-esteem, disconnecting with friends, wanting to be alone, withdrawal from family members, reluctance to leave their electronic gadgets unattended, avoiding school or work, changes in personality (anger, sadness, crying), drastic changes in appearance or weight, fresh marks on the skin or wearing clothes that hide these marks even in summers, are some of the signs that may help a caregiver, friend or family member to identify a need for help.

In such cases, it becomes important to make the person feel that help is available without judgement. Encouraging expressing one’s feelings either in spoken words, a letter or a journal helps in releasing these amped up emotions. We must convince such teenagers that their pain is understood, that they are brave, that we respect them for who they are, and that they have done nothing wrong.
We must challenge their belief that they deserve pain by showing them compassion and support. This will help the person move a step away from harm.

Also, spreading awareness about how to report abuse online, taking screen shots or saving IP addresses as proof will let them know that help is available.
We need to remember that at the end of the day we are humans, be it in the real or the virtual world. Our struggles and concerns may seem vastly different from one another but they are very similar.
We all have a need to be accepted and loved; and accepting and loving oneself is the first step to that. To know that it is okay to be confused or scared, but to always believe that we are worthy.

(The author, an officer in the Meghalaya Police Department, can be contacted at mishrabasant24@yahoo.in)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, August 13, 2017

Mercury retrograde on your solar return chart denotes a mixed year. Encourage yourself to express itself with a class or workshop that stimulates your investigative or artistic side. You possess a natural psychic gift and you’ll be encouraged to explore it more this year. When you lead with your heart instead of your head, wonderful miracles are sure to come your way. However, you may encounter a few roadblocks at work. To break through them, you’ll have to speak up and ask for what you want, rather than waiting for someone to notice you’re unhappy. Surround yourself with blue, as it carries the power to increase self-knowledge and improve your ability to express yourself more authentically. Travel will be highlighted over the summer months, both for business as well as pleasure.
Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You bring a powerful and energetic approach to resolve professional projects in hand. Your leadership qualities come to the fore as you organize professional activities with great élan. You are in your element in your interactions while meeting with business associates. As you travel you will find that it brings in luck in another aspect of your life too. You need not over analyze personal relationships but rather respond with your heart and feelings; as a new understanding gives you added perspective. It is time to express your feelings and ideas and share what you have learned through a variety of experiences of late.
Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This period finds you responsible, hard working, dutiful, and serious when it comes to finances, investments and issues related to the family. You would move on the path of success in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth. You feel the need to be appreciated by family members, and the need for togetherness with others comes into focus. New contacts may also occur. Events are such that you move towards a more objective approach to your life and you cultivate true friendships. Meditation is needed for gaining deeper insight into personal relations and complex situations.
Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You are fun loving, energetic, and willing to explore new ideas. Financial benefits may come your way this week. Self-confidence and action are highlighted and you instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. Excellent work opportunities for those working with associates from overseas and you may travel for business dealings. At home, you accept the individuality of your spouse and that would be helpful to resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation. .
Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Stars favor people in the field of show business and fine arts. Excellent professional opportunities for students in fine arts, music, singing and creative writing will open up new doors. Personal relations are rejuvenated and your romance moves more rapidly as you relate well on the intellectual level as well and move towards a long-term commitment. Home and family matters capture your attention and are a strong source of pride. It’s a time when worldly matters are not as important to you. Use this energy to find ways to improve your family relations and your home environment.
Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You would be more determined and hard working. This is an excellent period in your life in which to get organized and to stick with projects through to the end. You would spend money on clothes, furniture, and entertainment. You initiate a force of energy to achieve success in an important venture. You are bold, courageous and frank while dealing with controversial, professional matters. You encounter people who are very considerate and understanding in your personal life. You are also likely to form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. You are in touch with your more sensitive and spiritual qualities. You are able to express a greater level of sensitivity and discipline.
Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You would adopt a realistic, practical and disciplined approach towards work and domestic relations. People in fine arts, creative lines and communication related fields would give a traditional blend to their contemporary creations. You assume a leadership role and take control of matters both at work and home. Your communication abilities will largely be applied to professional

ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects and financial matters. You are proud of your ideas, and very good at expressing them to family members smoothly now. You tend to entertain them with your conversation, and your sense of humor. This is an excellent phase in which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones.
Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent. An arduous yet stimulating project should be taken as a challenge which would further promote business prospects. Physical energy and good health enable you handle a busy schedule and complete work commitments. Responsibilities and commitments may take up more time than usual, so set some time aside. Also, arrange your schedule so that you don’t take on too much and you don’t end up handling more errands and odd jobs than you can effectively manage.
Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You feel fresh and re-energized as a blast of personal energy comes your way and exhibiting your leadership skills works for you now. You are at your most convincing, as others accept you at face value. You may take up new assignments and projects that would bring creativity and projection of new ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. There may be gains from property, shares and fixed assets. You are nurturing and caring in personal relationships. A short vacation allows you to enjoy the gifts of nature with a loved one.
Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

Your credibility is important and efforts at self-promotion could be made now. It’s an excellent period to make a lifestyle change and get extra mileage. Any unresolved argument may create rifts in your relationships; take a softer approach in your interactions when it comes to the family and romance related matters. A new set-up in the existing house or a new house altogether may be part of the picture in the coming months, as well as a sense of renewal and reinvigoration. It is time to come back to your inner center to regain physical strength, mental balance, emotional harmony and spiritual awareness.
Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You would be able to make an impact on business associates with your hard work and sincere efforts. Your creativity will assist in your output at work and help you undertake new or existing challenges. You would be successful in the entertainment industry or in any field that requires a lot of imagination and vision. You may especially enjoy experiencing different cultures and ethnic styles. Your ideas are higher than usual, religious teaching may be part of the picture, and your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background than you are indicated during this phase.
Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The current planetary combination lets you be responsible, hard working, dutiful, and serious in finances and investments. This is an especially spiritual time for you—a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you. This time proves good for long term investments and finances. It’s a good time to join organizations and groups with a social purpose. You move on the path of success and there is betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction. It’s time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Students of computer hardware and engineering achieve better results.
Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You have intellectual vibration and ability to adapt to most situations. This phase brings a change in professional patterns and there is no more ambiguity about these matters. You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional choices or difficult situations. You experience cooperation and synergy at your place of work. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives, drawing respect from them. It’s a good time to join organizations and groups and to attend meetings or social events. You would come back to your inner center to regain physical strength, mental balance, emotional harmony and spiritual awareness.

Know the new species

By Ranjan K Baruah

Our lifestyle and perspectives are changing with technology. We cannot compare many things with the past because there has been a change in the last few decades from technological perspectives.

The advancement of science and technology has changed the world. There was a day when there were few gadgets and there is now when we cannot live without mobile phones. Technology has been changing and it will change more in near future. In today’s edition we are publishing about robotics as career options.

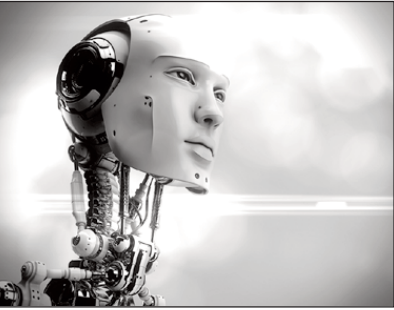
Simply put, a robot is a machine, especially one programmable by a computer capable of carrying out a complex series of actions automatically.

Robots can be guided by an external control device or the control may be embedded within. Robots may be constructed to take on human form but most robots are machines designed to perform a task with no regard to how they look.

Robotics is the interdisciplinary branch of engineering and science that includes mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, computer science and others. Robotics deals with the design, construction, operation and use of robots, as well as computer systems for their control, sensory feedback, and information processing.

These technologies are used to develop machines that can substitute for humans. Robots can be used in any situation and for any purpose, but today many are used in dangerous environments (including bomb detection and de-activation), manufacturing processes, or where humans cannot survive.

Let’s have a look at areas in which robotics is shaping the future: -



Medical Science: Tiny robots are now being used to monitor a human body from inside. Robots are performing operations where human hands are unable to operate accurately. There are a number of robots being used in the medical science to increase human life safety.

Industries: The day since industrial revolution has hit the world, we are dependent on mega machines to meet our needs. But with the introduction of Robots by Kuka and others, the industrial revolution has skyrocketed. Many companies are completely relying upon robots in their assembly line for massive production.

Automotive Industry: The fight is on

between the top tech companies for self-driving automated cars and trucks. Tesla Motors, Google and Mercedes Benz have already achieved a feat in it, and they have successfully tested cars that can drive themselves without the need of any human intervention.

Farming: Even the farming sector is now not untouched with Robotics. Robots are implanted to irrigate, plough, collection of final product and many more.

Space: Space exploration is the field where robots are being used in plenty. From Mars rover to the Lunar robots, space is full of multiple robots that are working outrageously to help us in exploring the space at full pace.

The global robotics industry is growing rapidly and the trend towards its adoption is increasing in India as students. Robotics will play a major role in the future so it is important that our present generation of students think it as their career option. Students after passing senior secondary level with Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics may study this course. There are graduation and post graduation courses.

We are aware that users of robotics are the automobile, aerospace industries, food processing and electronics industries, among others. Apart from the industrial robots, are the service robots for professional use such as surgical robots and those that assist disabled persons; terrestrial, aquatic and aerial robots used in military operations for surveillance, mine detection, counter insurgency, etc. Robots are also being used in rescue missions following natural disasters such as earthquakes, avalanches and floods.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 9864055558 for any career related queries)

Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present.”
--- Bil Keane

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 5 SHILLONG, MONDAY, AUGUST 14, 2017

Nature’s fury or human neglect

A letter to the editor appearing in this newspaper on Friday, just a day before the disaster adjacent to the Shillong Raj Bhavan, cautioning that the trees in and around Shillong city which are precariously perched and very old should be sawed down, is clairvoyant. It’s almost as if the person sensed that something was going to happen. That an old tree whose girth is immense had indeed crashed and fallen on the main road on Saturday and taken away three precious lives is a sad commentary on the state of affairs in Meghalaya. The Government’s pathetic response is to offer the bereaved family a token financial settlement as if human lives can be measured by money. The State Forest Department is the major offender here. It is the duty of the officers in charge of the city, in collaboration with the Urban Affairs Department/Shillong Municipal Board to undertake regular checks on the health of the trees and their ability to bear the onslaught of heavy winds, and incessant rains as is being witnessed now in the state.

In this aspect the Raj Bhavan and other institutions which contain within their premises trees that are several decades old, should be proactive about taking stock of whether there has been erosion around the roots that could lead to their collapse. That is what the Forest Department staff are trained in, but, as usual this is yet another case of gross negligence. The question all are asking is who will be held accountable for the three lives lost on Saturday. Will responsibility be fixed? Will a judicial enquiry be held or shall we end up blaming nature for a calamity that was preventable. The heavy rains have revealed the shortcuts taken by the PWD in road making and maintenance. The road from Polo to Police Bazar, inaugurated with much fanfare by the Chief Minister a couple of months ago, also gave way on Saturday due to a landslip owing to poor soil testing and weak fencing. All this is the result of bad governance and a very slipshod and poor monitoring system that can hold individuals, departments and the Government responsible. When will citizens wake up?

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

Jamir apprises PM of steps to diffuse situation

Nagaland Chief Minister Mr S C Jamir today apprised Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi of the steps taken by his Government to defuse the "tense situation" along the state's border with Assam.

He is understood to have informed Mr Gandhi about the recent meeting he had with Assam Chief Minister Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta

to review the situation arising from the massacre in the Rajaphukari area in Assam in April 7.

Assam and Nagaland have decided to launch a coordinated scheme to apprehend those responsible for the massacre under an agreement arrived between the two Chief Ministers a few days ago in Guwahati.

TO THE EDITOR

Need some imaginative town planning

Editor,

Traffic in the city has become a menace. Looks like its also an accepted way of life. I fear that sooner than letters we may reach a point where driving or using vehicles to reach ones destination on time may be next to impossible. Many suggestions from several quarters ‘have poured in like the widening of roads, constructions of flyovers, etc. to help ease congestion.

The question that comes to mind is, whynot make efforts to make use of the roads that are already in existence. I am in absolute agreement with the news item that appeared in your daily dated 11th August 2017 on the need to re-open roads that are within the jurisdiction of the army like the road inside the military area adjacent to Lady Keane College which leads all the way to Keating Road and Police Bazar. This particular road was used by vehicles in the 70s and 80s though now it is totally closed,

restricting even the pedestrians. One is certain that even if the road is closed now, something can be done if our government is willing to discuss and come to an understanding with the army authorities (of course within stipulated timings) and provided the government is serious enough about easing traffic congestion at least in areas where it is possible.

The road can be used by smaller vehicles heading towards Police Bazar. This will surely ease traffic considerably as a large chunk of vehicles can use this road thereby easing traffic along Civil Hospital, IGP Point, Barik, etc. Another road that could help reduce traffic is the one from Lawsohtun Block – I to 2nd and 3rd Mile via military area that will ease traffic from Rhino Point to Upper Shillong. This would again entail talks with Lawsohtun Dorbar Shnong as well as the military authorities regarding the feasibility of the project. One is hopeful that as the army authority had opened their gates and had been part and parcel of a plan to make way for a Parking Lot at Khlieh Iewduh, they will

Freedom for Women in a Matrilineal Society

The country is celebrating Independence Day tomorrow, but the questions that begs for an answer is: Are we really free or how free are we? Is every section of the society in the country really free? The one section of the society that is not free and constantly lives in the shadow of fear is the equal half of the population of the community. The female members of the society which constitute more than half of the state’s population are not free because they live in constant fear.

Women are not free to walk alone in the dark; there is imminent threat to their own being because of what they are. They are not free to dress as they like and they are expected to wear their traditional jainsem or the jain kyrshah although men can dress as they wishes. It is mandatory for women to wear their traditional dress but men are free to wear their two pieces western costume. We feel proud that recently the jainsem received so much limelight albeit for the wrong reason, but the pertinent question is; are women in the matrilineal society really free?

Traditionally; women were held in high esteem in the culture of the people in the area, and this goes back to the genesis of the clan itself. Every clan in the community is believed to have originated from the (lawbei) or the progenitors who are (chitein i bru chitein i blai) half-human half-divine and in their respective narratives, all the progenitors have immense superpowers. The story about ka lawchibidi the progenitor of the Laloo, Lamin and Diengdoh clan is believed to have a superpower which helped her survived the constant attack of the enemy who followed her from lapngar in the Ribhoi district (from where she fled) to Nongbareh and Nongtalang in the War Jaintia area. The four sisters ka Wet, ka Bon, ka Tein and ka Doh the progenitors of the first four clans to settle in Jowai are also half-human half-divine, Ka Bor of the Passah clan, ka Chyrkiang Talang of the Talang Nongtdu clan and ka Rymbai bahkhla of the Rymbai clan all have divine origin and possessed superpowers. They not only have divine origin and

By H H Mohrmen

superpower, but till now the descendants of these progenitors (in the traditional religion) still worship them as deities.

Therefore it is not wrong to say that since all Khasi-Pnar women are children of these divine progenitors they should also have inherited some semblance of this godly features in them. It is in this context that the Pnars called every woman ‘ka blai iung’ because she is like a deity of the house but now women do not hold that same status anymore. Women are not only molested and raped but the community in general and the male’s attitude towards women has changed drastically in the so called matrilineal society.

A case of a young lady who tried to prevent the youths of certain locality in Shillong from attacking a non tribal man in the city is one example of this male dominated attitude towards the fairer sex. According to the video uploaded, the woman is only doing her duty as a citizen of the country and as a good Christian when she saw that a fellow human was attacked. As a good citizen, she reached out and request the bystanders to call the police, which should give others the idea that nobody can take the law in their own hands. But the bystanders on the pretext that they are ‘khyannah shnong’ give us the implication that since the young lady is an outsider and not from the locality she has no right and has no business in what has happened in the area.

Now this is a very dangerous proposition because if a crime is committed, the law does not differentiate one citizen from the other. Everybody is equal in the eyes of the law. It does not matter if you are khyannah shnong or not; your duty is prevent the crime from happening and to report the same to the police and that was exactly what the young lady did. It so happened that the accused in the crime was a non tribal and in almost all social media platforms the lady was called protector of the non tribal or one who

sympathise with the outsiders. The keyboard warriors (as many would like to call them) were quick to call her turncoat or somebody who is ready to sell her country for doing what a good citizen should do.

We even have a similar situation in the Bible in which the mob were about to stone the lady who they condemned to be a prostitute. The lady was lucky that Jesus arrived just in the nick of time and saved her from imminent death. Jesus looked around and simply said, “He who has no sin cast the first stone,” and all the stones fell from the hands of the mob one after the other. What the young lady did was legally and morally right, but she unfortunately was the one who was stoned by the Khasi-Pnar who are mostly Christians just because the victim happened to be a non tribal.

After this incident, I doubt if any young woman would dare to repeat what this young lady has done on that fateful day. The situation came to such a pass because the lady is an outsider and more importantly because she is a woman. Khasi-Pnar men cannot accept that a woman would have the guts to challenge them especially in matters related to administration of the village (kam synshar shnong). Woman should only wear her jain kyrshah and her rightful place is in the kitchen and to procreate. She should not to mess in affairs which are the domain of the male members of the society was the message behind the entire fiasco.

This same attitude was obvious when the community where the incident occurred clarified on what has happened. The Rangbah Shnong no doubt made it clear that the community always inculcate in the youth that they should not take the law in their own hands (which was also what the lady was trying to do) but he also said that it was the lady who created the scene as was obvious from the video. But it was the statement of the gentleman who spoke after the RS which raises more questions than answers. He tried to give a character certificate to the young man who was involved in the mess and was

also seen touching the young lady. He also claimed that he arrived later and even ordered the traffic warden who was recording the video to do her job.

I think it is the duty of the guardians of the law to at least record the crime she witnessed even if she is not able to stop it. What makes the gentleman think that he can order the traffic warden what to do? Even if he is the assistant Rangbah Shnong of the area, he has no right to order the traffic warden because she is not under his command anyway. Besides that, when people collect around any place it will certainly affect the flow of traffic and that is her job by the way.

Again this is because the traffic warden who filmed the incident was a woman. Had it been a male warden, it would have been a different story altogether. In a matrilineal society, even a woman in uniform is not expected to challenge a male member of the society especially if he happens to be a member of the Dorbar Shnong. We talk about being gender sensitive but the entire team of the Dorbar Shnong which met the press comprised of male members only. Even the channel which did the story took the statements of male members of the community only and not a singles female was interviewed. Where have all the females gone?

The crux of the matter is because the people involved in the entanglement are female and women are not free to say what they want and do what they think is right in the matrilineal society. Are women really free in the contemporary matrilineal society? The majority would like you to think that they are, but are they? Join any Dorbar Shnong where women are also allowed to attend the meeting, see how many women speak or take part in the meeting? This is first lesson on equality in matrilineal society.

How and when did women fall from grace? How did women who were once considered divine lose their equal status with men in the matrilineal society? This is a million rupee question because when there is no equality, there is no freedom.

soon but that never happens.

Then on August 10, last we were told that we would have to renew our service by signing the agreement one more time and we would also have to submit our personal account numbers yet again and only after that they would be able to release our salaries. We were told that was the order from the Director’s Office. We have since completed all these formalities. Ironically when we asked our colleagues from the other districts if they went through the same process we were told that they have been receiving their salaries without being asked to go through the process we had to. This is indeed shocking but we will continue our fight.

Yours etc.,
Dripwell K Marak
RMSA
Teachers’ Assn, South
Garo Hills

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.

BJP going the Congress way in throwing probity to wind

Horse trading, constitutional abuse spoil credibility

By Harihar Swarup

History was made in Ahmedabad on Tuesday (Aug 8). After a grueling battle Ahmed Patel of the Congress won in the keenly contested Rajya Sabha election, thanks to the Election Commission, which acted wisely and impartially. The EC declared the votes of two Congress MLAs as invalid for violating the secrecy of ballot paper by displaying their votes to BJP representatives, paving the way for Patel’s victory. Past mid-night Ahmed Patel tweeted-- “Satyameva Jayate”. There have been precedents, which the Congress leaders quoted and Election Commission accepted: “The most recent precedent was in Haryana on June 11, 2016 when in the election to the Rajya Sabha, a Congress MLA’s vote was rejected on the ground that the ballot paper had been seen by a person other than the authorized person. There was another precedent in 2000 in Rajasthan, where an independent MLA’s ballot paper was rejected on the ground that it was seen by a person other the authorized person”. Though a minor victory, Patel’s

Desam party won wide public sympathy which routed the Congress. In recent Goa and Manipur assembly elections, the Congress emerged as a single largest party and should have been invited first to form the government but the BJP lured the Congress MLAs to make them ministers.

The governors of the two states, violating the established practice (of inviting single largest party), gave the chance to the BJP to form the governments. The two governors are BJP men and they conveniently forgot their constitutional responsibility. The moment a person becomes governor, he becomes a non-party man and is supposed to act impartially but in Goa and Manipur, these norms were thrown to the winds.

In Gujarat, the BJP raised the stakes in an unprecedented way and appeared bent on crossing the bounds of fair play in order to defeat Ahmed Patel. There were floor crossings by Congress MLAs and the party herded the rest of the flock to safety to Congress-ruled Karnataka to protect

In Gujarat, the defection of Congress MLAs to the BJP, and the timing of income tax raids on the Congress crisis manager involved in safeguarding party legislators from alleged BJP lures, have raised troubling questions: just how far is the BJP willing to go to win? Gujarat RS elections have only reinforced the unease sparked by the backroom maneuvers through which the BJP has managed to form governments in states it had lost in elections to other parties, be it Manipur, Goa or Bihar.

success in Gujarat Rajya Sabha election has boosted the morale of Congress. It comes after a series of setbacks. It is deplorable that instead of setting new norms of probity in politics and public life, the BJP is going the Congress way.

The deterioration in the Congress has set in late during Indira’s Gandhi’s tenure and went on from regime to regime. The latest degeneration in the BJP was seen in Gujarat; the way it split the Congress, made its MLAs defect by allurements or any other means to ensure that Ahmed Patel, advisor to the Congress president Sonia Gandhi, was defeated. Ahmed was lucky to have won by a whisker. What the Congress could do in its 50-year rule, in Modi’s dispensation BJP has done in its three years rule. Like Congress, the BJP too has started “sale and purchase” of MLAs and MLCs in states. Though Jawaharlal Nehru’s tenure was clean, the way Kerala’s communist government was dismissed and assembly dissolved was a big blot. The brain behind this unethical step was known to be that of Indira Gandhi. That was way back in 1952.

The way NTR government in Andhra Pradesh, having a two-thirds majority, was toppled using governor Ram Lal, was the most blatant example of misuse of power. This was done at the behest of Arun Nehru, the most powerful person in Rajiv Gandhi’s dispensation. They had to ultimately pay a heavy price-- not only NTR’s government was reinstated but the Telugu

it from the predatory BJP. Towards the end, the drama shifted to Nirvachan Sadan in New Delhi, and the Election Commission intervened. Votes of two Congress MLAs who had allegedly violated the voting procedure and secrecy of ballot papers were invalidated and Patel won.

In Gujarat, the defection of Congress MLAs to the BJP, and the timing of income tax raids on the Congress crisis manager involved in safeguarding party legislators from alleged BJP lures, have raised troubling questions: just how far is the BJP willing to go to win? Gujarat RS elections have only reinforced the unease sparked by the backroom maneuvers through which the BJP has managed to form governments in states it had lost in elections to other parties, be it Manipur, Goa or Bihar. Its large mandate in 2014 gave it a position of dominance, but the BJP seems to show little deference to checks and restraints that also come with power in a constitutional framework.

After Patel won the battle of nerves, Congress leaders are describing it as historic win which will change fortunes of the party. This, however, is premature, given the flight of its legislators and party men in Gujarat, including the formidable Shankersinh Vaghela. Congress needs to reboot immediately if it wants to remain relevant in today’s politics. The leadership space needs to open beyond a select coterie of individuals like Patel or Rahul Gandhi. (IPA Service)

“It is our duty to pay for our liberty with own blood. The freedom that we shall win through our sacrifice and exertion we shall be able to preserve with our own strength”.

--- Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 6 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, AUGUST 15, 2017

Economic output

THE Economic Survey in February had predicted India's real GDP growth to be within 6.75% and 7.5%. The volume 2 version of the survey recently unveiled has ruled out the possibility of attaining the upper end of the growth forecast. The reason is that new factors have emerged causing a deflationary trend. These factors have come up after February 2017 and these include farm loan waivers, implications of the GST, appreciation of the rupee in real terms hitting exports, worsening condition of power and telecom companies as well as agrarian stress. The apprehension in volume 2 means a second year of decline from 8% in 2015-16 and 7.1% in 2016-17. The upshot of the decline may be political. Growth is fine but pointless without jobs and incomes. If growth, investment and job creation do not show signs of improvement, that may affect the next elections which are 20 months away and the BJP's roller coaster ride may be arrested. Volume 2 is also skeptical about the average of 7.5% growth for the last two years. The Survey states that no other country has achieved two years of 7% average GDP growth and that in spite of weak investment, export and credit off-take. Even this growth is hardly sustainable. New factories, companies and jobs have to be created.

The Modi government should see the new assessment in Volume 2 as a danger signal. There have been notable reforms in the last 3 years. But ensuring growth in the foreseeable future is of the utmost importance.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

Navigational aids inNE airports

That navigational and fire-fighting aids at north eastern airports, particularly atDimapur and Guwahati, are inadequate and far from safe is a complaint given vent to in the Press quite often. Whatis surprising is that there is scarcely any response from the authorities concerned tothese complaints either byway of clearing up the position or redressing the deficiencies complained of. Particularly serious is the

one such that even though equipment in the instrument landing system (ILS) fail edon many occasions the officials of air traffic control do not always feel it necessary to inform the airlines about these failures.For instance, as recently as on Feb. 15 last an Indian Airlines' Air-bus flight from Calcutta reached Guwahatibut the pilot did not get the 'guide path' of the ILS, sothat he was holding over Guwahati' for over 15minutes.

could have been allowed as an act of humanity. Alas! This did not happen and as reported by the media, it was because the believers of Ka Niam Tynrai had violated some agreement they had with the shnong. Logically, if there was an agreement then that should not be violated. But to err is human and to forgive divine. Are we all not creations of God who rules over the earth and its creations before we discriminate on the basis of our faiths, beliefs, class, caste, creed and colour? Just as the sloganeering by the people of Myllem highlighted the breach of conduct it also displayed their lack of conscience, their intolerance and respect for the dead which is a Khasi-Pnar virtue. If only the last rites of the deceased had been allowed to be fulfilled without the violent uproar and the matter was dealt with later more stringently in a proper platform! The thought that crossed my mind when I first saw the video on social media was not whether I was a Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi or Niam /Tynrai Niamtre but the horrific truth that we humans have stooped down to this level of inhumanity that we no longer respect the dead. It appear that we now have to fear fellow human beings and that too of the same ethnic group! I wonder what will become of us in the days to come if we have forgotten the basic tenets of our existence here on earth!

Somebody once said, life is a tale told by an idiot. It has no meaning. Well I must add that life on days with incessant rain, then ought to be a tale told by a drunken idiot. There is even less you can do with it. On days when the sun goes into exile, the rain plays havoc with our spirits and spoilsport with our everyday plans, the most sensible suggestion the internet has to offer is, “let’s cuddle on a rainy day, watch old movies and make out.” Am I being scandalous? Of course I am. As you sit at home, reading and rereading today’s paper, and getting bored under the grey and wet sky, it is a writer’s job to cheer you up, with a line which brings at least a smile on your lips, and perhaps a mischievous thought in your head. The more acceptable suggestion in the Indian context of course, is to have pakoras and tea, and gossip.

Of course I don’t want you take the naughty suggestion seriously. I want your attention for a while. Otherwise what is the use of my putting pen to paper, or more accurately thumping the keys on my laptop? Of course a laptop in the olden days, sometimes referred to somebody who sat snugly on top of your lap. Lo, there I go again. Jestin in the rain. Well the fact is that I am also trying my best to wring my sodden spirit dry. It is not an easy task, you know. We haven’t seen the sun in what seems to be a fortnight, and the forecast doesn’t exactly say, when the sky will brighten up again. I have been reading books till my eyes water, and my mind has now become, a fully soaked and a dripping sponge. The rain has got to me so much that even the imagery, as in the preceding sentence, has got water logged.

The only other solution in these times is also to surf the internet. Uncle Google, always has a quote to cheer us up on every occasion. Here is something young lovers would like. “If only there was something I could say to make the sun shine and the rain go away...if there was something I could do...it hurts me to think that you are feeling so blue...so I will be your umbrella, together we will stand, to weather the storm, I will be holding your hand.” In days of our youth, when we were in love, such a quote would have brightened up our love

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

Too late to be sorry for negligence

Editor,
Nature is a wonderful gift and we are mesmerised by the beauty of the mountains and plains of Meghalaya. In the olden days Shillong city was full of trees and plants that sustained our catchment areas but now trees are being cut down daily due to selfish motives and human greed. But an old tree of two or three decades in the corner of Raj Bhavan compound, and few others standing tall on the Shillong-Jowai road as we walk towards St. Edmunds which should legitimately be brought down because they could be a menace to us are allowed to stand until a tragic incident took away three precious lives in just a few seconds. The debris took at least seven hours to clean up and the work around that place continues. The question to ask is, who is responsible for this needless loss of human lives? Today the regret shown by people in authority is just a shedding of crocodile tears, because this incident clearly points to the failures of those who lead our state. They failed to have a proper city plan, and management of human resources in the concerned

By Paramjit Bakshi

letters, as also our chances. But back then Google hadn’t been even conceived, and it was impossible to find, such rare gems to quote. The fashion of love letters being over, such quotes can still liven up, a Whatsapp message. One has to be a little careful though, as to whom one sends that one to. A sceptic net savvy cupid resistant recipient, could dampen your enthusiasm by retorting, in the words of Bob Dylan: “You say you love rain, but you use an umbrella to walk under it. You say you love sun, but you seek shade when it is shining. You say you love wind, but when it comes you close your window. So that’s why I am scared when you say you love me.” Shillong, as you might know is full of people who love Bob Dylan and are also suspicious of love. A more appropriate message might be, “Maybe I can’t stop the downpour. But I will always join you for a walk in the rain.” To quote Bob Dylan once more, “Some people feel the rain, others just get wet.”Most people also just flee the rain. Talking about feeling the rain, a couple of nights ago one witnessed a real treat. On a compound adjacent to ours, and separated only by a chain link fence, one saw two young Naga girls, in their teens actually enjoying the rain. The sat on a couple of swings, and as the rain poured down on them, they loudly sang their hearts out, without a care in the world. Garth Stein, writer and film producer is once quoted to have said, “ I think that the one that’s going to be the hardest to make into a film is the one that’s probably going to made into a film, which is , ‘ The Art of Racing in the Rain.” I mean, it’s narrated by a dog. How do you do that? But hopefully we will get to see.” Well Mr Stein, these girls could have given you a new perspective. And you would have had a couple of natural performers to replace the dog too. This is what every child does naturally, till the adults teach them about catching a cold and locking up their soul. I know of one child

departments to meet the real needs of the common people by way of safe buildings, roads, bridges, etc. The road conditions in our state whether in the town or villages is pathetic. Legislators are elected to see the real needs of the people but they have utterly failed in this. Much of their time is wasted in fighting for the wrong motives, mainly to hold on to their chairs and position so they can serve themselves better.

The 2018 election is at hand and politicians will let loose their propaganda machine to mislead people with many false promises and with wrong motives. My humble appeal is for the common people of our state to start being dynamic and dare to use right channels to address the media and use your right to choose those who have the right sense of leading our state and also have real passion to serve our Jaithynriew and the people of the state. This accident is only a foreshadow of other failures and mistakes that will be coming into the limelight in the days to come. We should remember that each life is precious and we must remind ourselves that prevention is better than cure and that there should not be any neglect of responsibilities in the near future which could cost the loss of innocent lives.

Yours etc.,
Evarist Myrsing
NongrimNongladaw
(Mawbri)

Cut the red tape in relief measures!

Editor,
During last few days owing to heavy monsoon rainfall many areas in the state experienced heavy landslides, floods, house collapse, tree falling on houses, on vehicles and even on human beings which led to loss of human lives and properties. Many roads were blocked for vehicular traffic. These types of occurrences take place every time during heavy monsoon rainfall accompanied by strong winds. It is very sad to mention here that, the government in the districts concerned are ill-equipped and extraordinarily slow to act to rescue those in dire need. Even the relief disbursed to them in advance by the state are not utilized or are mis-utilised left and right, not for the victims but for their self aggrandizement in the name of distributing relief materials. Many victims of natural calamities are left unattended and no relief is given to them even after many years because of the sluggishness and irresponsibility of government employees who are supposed to look after this aspect.

Yours etc
Philip Marwein,
Via email

who is so protected, that she catches a cold, when she merely jumps across a small puddle. Really, I am not joking.

Shillong weather I feel makes us, its residents, over defensive. We spend most of the time wrapped up in extra clothing: jackets and raincoats in the five months of the monsoon, and another three cocooned from the cold in winter. Our minds also exist in isolation. We are forever scared of catching something new; even an attitude that is not traditionally ours. Thank God in a way we don’t really live in the plains. With floods and all, we might even jump up in fear, if someone merely jests, “Noah called. He will pick us up in ten minutes.”

A rainy day is excuse, for a break in the pattern of our daily lives. Remember what fun it used to be, when we would deliberately step into every puddle, on our way back from school. When we would splash water on our friends and enjoy hearing them shriek. A holiday on account of the rain, still did not stop us from getting wet. As one grew up the rainy days came to be associated with connotations, which were more serious. “Save for a rainy day”, we were taught. I much prefer the mirth of Mae West when she advises, “Save a boyfriend for a rainy day, - and another in case it does not rain.” With interest rates continually heading south, like falling rain, saving money is definitely not such a hot idea. And please don’t ignore the insight of Robert Frost who says, “A bank is a place, where they lend you an umbrella in fair weather and take it away when it rains.”

The last time I wrote a frivolous article like this, a friend accused me of lacking in depth. This time I plead guilty. Yet for people more sombre, let me present to you a small nugget of wisdom, which I accidentally came across, sitting cosy and warm, connected to the internet. There are people who actually love rain. They find joy and peace of mind on rainy days. And there is actually a word for them. Pluviophiles, they are called. Into that category I slot all our government officials especially from the forest department and the PWD. Rain provides them with a

Yours etc.,
Evarist Myrsing
NongrimNongladaw
(Mawbri)

Cut the red tape in relief measures!

Editor,
During last few days owing to heavy monsoon rainfall many areas in the state experienced heavy landslides, floods, house collapse, tree falling on houses, on vehicles and even on human beings which led to loss of human lives and properties. Many roads were blocked for vehicular traffic. These types of occurrences take place every time during heavy monsoon rainfall accompanied by strong winds. It is very sad to mention here that, the government in the districts concerned are ill-equipped and extraordinarily slow to act to rescue those in dire need. Even the relief disbursed to them in advance by the state are not utilized or are mis-utilised left and right, not for the victims but for their self aggrandizement in the name of distributing relief materials. Many victims of natural calamities are left unattended and no relief is given to them even after many years because of the sluggishness and irresponsibility of government employees who are supposed to look after this aspect.

Yours etc
Philip Marwein,
Via email

perfect excuse, to do even less work, than they are habituated of doing. Trees can keep falling and young promising lives can be lost, but these pluviophile public servants, sit in peace in their offices, sipping hot tea and playing solitaire. They desperately need to be reminded that “life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass, it is about dancing (and working) in the rain”. The suggestion to cuddle at the beginning of the article is strictly, not meant for them. It applies only to us, the general public, so that we may save our lives, by not venturing out, unnecessarily in the rain.

Truth be told, I too love the rain. Rather than sitting at home and writing this piece, I would rather be getting soaked riding a motorcycle. There is something strangely liberating about that. Sadly though, the word limit of this article isn’t so liberal. One has to conclude soon and in conclusion, though staying with the rain, but completely out of context, let me leave you with a very descriptive fragment of a sentence, from John Greens book, “Looking for Alaska”. It goes on to say “if people were rain, I was drizzle and she was a hurricane.” What a drippingly imaginative way to categorize humans? The rest of the passage, though less scandalous than my beginning, nevertheless cannot be quoted since it contains a four letter word. Those interested in reading it can, like me throughout this article, call upon Uncle Google.

P S: On a more serious note, I wish to offer my sincere condolences to the families of Crystal Gayle Kharnaor, Paul LB Lyngdoh and Hubert Swer, innocent victims of human negligence. Also my sincere prayers for those injured. Often during times like these, one really worries about travelling, not just through the city, but also on the highways in the state. Those responsible for maintaining the safety of the roads, do need be pull up their not so wet socks, for all our sake.

The writer can be contacted at bakhshi03@rediffmail.com

I suggest that the districts have a special task force specially trained to handle this in an expeditious manner, by distributing relief materials promptly, to mitigate the sufferings of the victims. Farmers are the worst hit by such natural calamities because their crops are at the mercy of nature. Those who are assigned to assess the loss of crops are not prompt and are not trained and ill-equipped to do their job. Further, the Relief and Rehabilitation Department is too slow to act due to entrenched red-tape and the old style of functioning which is obsolete in the present era. Hence many farmers and cultivators, especially small and marginal farmers, are not attended to or cared for by the assessors. They are left alone to fend for themselves.

The other aspect that I would like to suggest is that all the matured, old trees along the roadside which are within falling distance on the road ought to be immediately cut (felled) to prevent further disasters and loss of lives and property.

Yours etc
Philip Marwein,
Via email

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

Revamping the National Commission on Backward Classes

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

In the past two years communities across India have been agitating on grounds of increasing reservation. Most of these have spread to communities often classified as privileged. Whether Jats in Haryana ,Kapus in Andhra Pradesh, Patels in Gujarat or Marathas in Maharashtra most of these communities have been traditionally earmarked as the powerful landed elite. Yet almost all of them are on the streets today demanding reservation. Such actions signal a number of different issues. A s t a g n a n t

Constitution economy with less new jobs being created, stagnant agriculture compounded with natural disasters has upset the balance of the rural economy. This has thus evoked unrest among the rural landed communities who now seek government jobs to protect their livelihood. Little do people realize that government jobs account for only 2% of total jobs in the job market. But such protests do point to the fact that the agrarian landed community is in turmoil and in need of support.

Keeping this in mind the

to NCSC often restrict to issues effecting the Scheduled Castes while the Other Backward Classes get much less attention. The Bill seeks to establish the NCBC under the Constitution, and provide it the authority to examine complaints and welfare measures regarding socially and educationally backward classes. The Bill was introduced alongside the National Commission for Backward Classes (Repeal) Bill, 2017 that seeks to repeal the National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993.

T h e Constitution Amendment Bill states that the President may specify the socially and educationally backward classes in the various states and union territories. He may do this in consultation with the Governor of the concerned state. However, a law of Parliament will be required if the list of backward classes is to be amended. Under the Constitution Amendment Bill, the NCBC will comprise of five members appointed by the President. Their tenure and conditions of service will also be decided by the President through

“Presently under the existing system of the Constitution the NCSC has the power to look into complaints and welfare measures with regard to Scheduled Castes, backward classes and Anglo-Indians. This Bill seeks to remove the power of the NSCS to look into complaints and welfare measures with regard to those falling within the scope of people belonging to the Other Backward Classes.”

government has embarked on a number of incentives aimed at improving the conditions of all communities. And one among these steps is the bill introduced in the parliament on the National Commission on Backward Classes. It seeks to grant the National Commission on Backward Classes (NCBC) constitutional status, at par with the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

Presently under the existing system of the Constitution the NCSC has the power to look into complaints and welfare measures with regard to Scheduled Castes, backward classes and Anglo-Indians. This Bill seeks to remove the power of the NSCS to look into complaints and welfare measures with regard to those falling within the scope of people belonging to the Other Backward Classes.

The Constitution while granting power to the National Commission of Scheduled Castes has not done the same for the Backward Classes. The NCBC was a body set up under the National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993. It has the power to examine complaints regarding inclusion or exclusion of groups within the list of backward classes, and advise the central government in this regard. Yet it does have the statutory powers like the NCSC enjoys. And in the years since its formation the trend has been that generally cases pertaining

rules. Under the Constitution Amendment Bill, the duties of the NCBC will include: (i) investigating and monitoring how safeguards provided to the backward classes under the Constitution and other laws are being implemented, (ii) inquiring into specific complaints regarding violation of rights, and (iii) advising and making recommendations on socio-economic development of such classes. The central and state governments will be required to consult with the NCBC on all major policy matters affecting the socially and educationally backward classes.

The NCBC will be required to present annual reports to the President on working of the safeguards for backward classes. These reports will be tabled in Parliament, and in the state legislative assemblies of the concerned states. Under the Constitution Amendment Bill, the NCBC will have the powers of a civil court while investigating or inquiring into any complaints. These powers include: (i) summoning people and examining them on oath, (ii) requiring production of any document or public record, and (iii) receiving evidence. This Commission will indeed give a new fillip to the social justice milieu of the country. If implemented right the establishment of this commission can give a much needed reassurance to the communities who feel left behind. In the larger scheme of things seen right this is one of those affirmative action’s which can take the nation forward. - (Views expressed by the author are personal)

“They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for.”
--- Tom Bodett

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LX No. 7 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, AUGUST 17, 2017

A New CBFC Chief
THE Central Government has finally terminated the services of the Chairperson of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), Pahlaj Nihalini. The demand for his dismissal came from important personalities in the film industry and the enlightened section of the public. Union Minister, Smriti Irani had to give way. Under Nihalini, cinema was subjected to arbitrary cuts and his diktat. It stifled creativity. The new Chairperson, Prasoon Joshi has to do significant course correction to put the film industry on the right track. Joshi is an adman, a poet and a lyricist and is expected to be aware of the demands of cinematic creativity. He is known to have a modern point of view and a thorough knowledge of cinema, but, of course, a new Chairperson cannot do wonders. CBFC needs restructuring. It should not be run by one head in a dictatorial manner. A committee has been set up for more than a year under the baton of famous film director, Shyam Benegal. The committee is expected to suggest necessary reforms. It has already recommended that CBFC should only do film certification and categorise the suitability of films depending on different age groups. This would mean that CBFC will no longer be a Censor Board ruthlessly using the scissors.

The question is when these necessary reforms will be implemented. Benegal has referred to the Censorship guidelines and said that these should not be rigid. The Board should use its own understanding of society to interpret the guidelines. Objections to long kisses and women-orientation should be eliminated. At the same time, films should be realistic and the industry should not peddle dreams which cloud the minds of the audience. Political pressure should be reduced to a minimum. One thing springs to mind. Now that Nihalini is gone, how can the damage done to the documentary on Amartya Sen, 'An Argumentative Indian' be undone? Another breath of fresh air is the appointment of Neil Nongkynrih, the Director, Shillong Chamber Choir who is renowned for having won the second version of India's Got Talent contest and has since put his team on the national and global map. This brings some diversity to the CBFC and will add a new understanding to the meaning of censorship since Nongkynrih also has a critical eye on films, being a creative artist himself. We dare to expect more enlightened decisions from the new CBFC.

TO THE EDITOR

A matter of grave concern

Editor,
It looks like education these days is getting more and more expensive and burdensome on the poor. Today school fees are exorbitant and text books, exercise books etc, are equally expensive. Unfortunately, added to this, an extra burden is being felt by parents when school teachers give assignments to students requiring of them to surf the internet and collect materials from it. I have seen even small children being given assignments of this sort. Many of the children's families are poor and they do not have computers or internet facility at home. So these students are obliged to go to the cyber cafes to collect these materials. Very often pictures are required to be collected, sometimes as many as nine or ten pictures. The cyber cafes charge as much as Rs. 30 per colour picture print-out. Just imagine how much a child or rather parents, have to pay just for five pictures (Rs. 150). Such assignments are given on a regular basis and poor families have to bear the brunt. These are extra expenses for parents and when a family is poor it means a tremendous burden they have to bear. Should the school authorities and teachers not be concerned about the plight of poor children? Can other pedagogical methods which

are less expensive be adopted by the school as a general policy?
I have seen many poor parents who silently complain about this expensive educational approach. In my opinion, the school itself can provide access to the internet materials for the students at a nominal price. A student going to a cyber cafe implies another potential danger, the temptation to waste their precious time on surfing useless or even dangerous sites. I feel that each school has to seriously address this issue so as to ease the burden of many parents and also protect the moral integrity of our children and youth.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,
Via email

Highway to Hell!

Editor,
The song 'Highway to Hell' by ACDC is relevant to Meghalaya considering the kind of roads that people regularly travel from Shillong towards Pynursla onwards to Dawki. I don't know what words to use to describe the road along the beautiful and scenic gorge towards Pynursla, but to a lay person it does even classify as a National Highway as the road width has been restricted due to illegal sand mining and digging of boulders which incidentally happens under the very nose of the district administration.

In the midst of political churning preceding presidential and vice-presidential elections, a thought-provoking comment was heard from some leaders that there is no point in supporting the losing party or the candidate. Such an idea is of course not new, but its manifold significance in the context of current politics is gradually unfolding its full implications.

Similar position has often been taken by voters mostly in State Assembly elections. By-elections generally go in favour of the ruling party due mostly to the obvious benefit of supporting the party in power. This is indeed strange logic in support of winning party and against losers at any time in any election. But, Indian elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies have often produced waves of ebbs and flows that last without change for some years. Thereafter, the waves continue though the positions of parties in the wave may change.

When the change occurs, it generally comes wholesale, that is, as a decisive verdict. Several instances in Parliament and Assembly elections may be cited. The change is partly due to another tendency of voters to apply their choice alternatively or after some gap as if votes are gifts or donations to the needy. "Last time, I voted for X Party and this time, I will vote for Y Party", is often heard from voters assuming to be fair and unbiased in casting their vote!

Anti-incumbency is a common phenomenon going against ruling parties -- a factor that is devoid of political or policy support. In this scenario, there are a few confirmed supporters for some parties like traditional Congress supporters or people who have undergone ideological conversion to Bharatiya philosophy, who form the core supporters to their respective parties, and some adventurists attracted by vehement campaigning of newcomers with some specific agenda like fighting corruption.

Opposition unity is a familiar strategy adopted in Indian politics to oust well-entrenched ruling party/coalition. One of the earliest

Negative Politics
Opposition for sake of it

By Dr S Saraswathi

instances was the anti-Congress alliance formed by the efforts of Rajaji in 1967 in the then Madras State which brought the DMK to power.

It was then a simple arithmetical calculation to pool anti-Congress votes and had no positive ideological base. The alliance included the extreme rightist Swatantra Party as well as the leftist Marxist Communist (in the days prior to the breakup of the USSR) neither of them nursing any ambition to form the government. It is still the best example of "Opposition Unity" as it successfully ended Congress rule in Tamil Nadu from which the grand old party has still not come out though half a century has passed. Congress is forced to remain a junior party to a regional party and at one point to even refrain from Assembly elections for a few seats in Parliament.

In the case of Tamil Nadu, Opposition to the DMK came from within itself and the rise of another regional party. The Congress could not bring about Opposition unity. Since then, the politics of alliances has become the chief feature of Indian elections. Several terms have come into vogue -- Grand Alliance, United Front, National Front, Third Front, United Progressive Alliance, National Democratic Alliance, Mahagathabandhan, Secular Front, and so on.

Opposition Unity brought about by the merger of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Congress (O), Swatantra Party, Janata Morcha, Bharatiya Lok Dal, Janata Dal and Socialist Party (India) against Internal Emergency and the rule of the Indira Congress was a big and quick success, but had short life due to internal conflicts. Janata failure exposes the reality of multi-party politics for a plural society.

Opposition unity can only be an electoral strategy and that too with no consistent partners in any place. More than that, an all-India pattern has not been evolved and cannot

be manufactured with the result that an ally in one State is an opponent in another at the same time. For, Opposition unity is merely a negative concept.

In the first few decades after Independence, a tendency to decry multi-party democracy was common. Two party system like the Whigs and Tories in Britain, or the Democratic and Republican Parties in the US were considered to be the models to emulate. But, it took no time to learn that unity -- ideological or practical -- cannot be artificially enforced or emergence of parties of various sizes prevented. Diversity of needs, priorities, capabilities and interests gave rise to numerous parties. A significant aspect of this is the recognition and importance gained by regional and State parties and emergence of interest-based local parties as voices to be heard and replied by people and government.

In recent past, Opposition Unity formed under the Mahagathabandhan to fight Bihar Assembly election in 2015 is most noteworthy for its success and for stemming the rapid growth of the BJP. It was an alliance of JD(U), RJD, and the Congress along with a number of smaller parties. It raised a great hope among the anti-BJP lobby for repeat performance in other places eventually leading to the capture of the Lok Sabha in 2019. The NCP in Maharashtra started talks with the Congress for alliance for contesting Legislative Council polls.

The Mahagathabandhan, however, has faced severe stress in recent months particularly on two occasions. A group of parties in the alliance comprising SP, BSP, NCP, JD(U), and JD(S) attended the midnight session of Parliament to mark the launch of the GST ignoring the boycott call given by the alliance leader -- Congress. Both JD(U) and BJD which has been attending meetings convened by the Congress extended their support to the BJP candidate against that of the Opposition.

The first reflects an issue based position taken by the members of the Grand Alliance while its leader evidently took a position guided by a blind conviction that it is the job of the Opposition to "oppose". It is a misconception among several parties that when they occupy left side in the Assembly/Parliament, they must speak against the government of the day even if it be a matter once initiated by them.

In the second, Nitish Kumar had to choose between "Ghatbandhan Dharma" by opposing the BJP candidate or take a principled stand against corruption and dissolve the government. His decision to go with the BJP exposes that "opposition unity" has no meaning. The Mahagathabandhan collapsed.

Opposition unity is, indeed, a negative concept and cannot be sustained long by raising the bogey of communalism or majoritarianism, or even authoritarianism. It requires an adhesive that will hold together groups nursing different ambitions. It is still to be produced. Attending meetings and parties convened by opposition leaders does not show unity of purpose. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has proved this many times.

Issue-based support by a party seems to be an Indian invention, but is meaningless. One expects that any party has to take up a responsible role on every issue without blindly supporting or opposing. Their stand should not be pre-ordained but issue-based. But, Opposition in India very often oppose for the sake of opposition, stall proceedings of Parliament and conduct street level politics within Parliament. This very approach destroys unity.

Political parties have to learn a lot about the role of opposition parties before attempting to forge Opposition unity. ---INFA
(The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

nutritional needs during the first 1000 days, and beyond, will positively influence short and long term health outcomes. Thus, a mother being the sole source of nutrition for the developing embryo and fetus during pregnancy as well as being the one who breastfeeds her baby after its birth, is definitely the key to build the future of our country. To make our future citizens physically and mentally strong, she needs vitamins ~ D, B2, B6, B12 and minerals ~ iron, iodine, folic acid, calcium and quality of fat (DHA) in her daily diet.

We are a young country with huge human potential but we are not giving top priority to human development. Thus, we remain a backbencher in Human Development Index at 131st position. India needs to adopt labour intensive technology and a village - first - policy to generate employment. Simultaneously, India should take a First - 1000 - Day - Programme for mothers and children to make healthy babies for a healthy, strong and happy country.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

The Myllem Imbrogio

By Toki Blah

As a citizen and especially as a Khasi I am extremely alarmed by the incident that has been allowed to develop in Myllem. It also appears I am not the only one but a number of people, from all walks of life: well wishers of our society; citizens of this state who have nothing but the genuine interest of the state at heart, share this alarm. As a reminder to all concerned let me reiterate the social values that we Ki Khun U Hynniewtrep cherish and uphold - Ka tip Briew ka Tip Blei; Ka Tip kur ka tip Kha; Ban rai da ka nia ka jutang (to have equal respect for fellow humans and for the Creator; to respect those from our maternal and paternal clan line; to decide matters through debate and discussion using reason and logic)! Unfortunately in the Myllem incident; in the heat of unthinking emotion, these values seem to have been forgotten. All of us have nothing but respect and high esteem for the people of Myllem and their

that by upholding rigidity, the unity of the shnong and with it the unity of the Jaitbynriew, was instantly placed in jeopardy! Khasi Dorbars always went by the adage Ban Kamai ia ka Hok (to always strive for justice). It was the essence of Khasi Dorbar governance. This time justice called that the dead be given a decent cremation. This time one has to admit that equity and justice for the dead man and his family was severely compromised by rigidity of the Shnong. Let us as a Jaitbynriew accept this error, repair the damage that threatens the unity of our social fabric and get on with life.

I refer to the alarm I mentioned earlier. There are several issues that need our immediate attention. If at this juncton we stop thinking as U Paid Khasi bair, we are sunk. Let us admit that a blunder has occurred but we cannot allow that mistake to cause further tension that could lead to a law and order situation. This could happen because of

The Myllem incident threatens to destroy this bonding unity we have taken upon ourselves as a Jaitbynriew. If the Dorbar Shnong stood its ground in denying cremation of the dead because of an absence of a cremation ground, it has erred and erred gravely. If cremation was denied because of an earlier unfulfilled agreement, it simply highlights procrastination on the part of those responsible. It does not hold water. If it was done on the excuse that contravening the earlier decision would have weakened the authority of the Shnong, people forget that by upholding rigidity, the unity of the shnong and with it the unity of the Jaitbynriew, was instantly placed in jeopardy! Khasi Dorbars always went by the adage Ban Kamai ia ka Hok (to always strive for justice). It was the essence of Khasi Dorbar governance.

Hima. At this juncture we request our blood and kin to retrieve; rediscover; and revive once again the above values of our ancestors. The request is as simple as that.

If there is one common thing that identifies us as Khasi Pnars it is our respect for the dead. Death has always been one of the bonding factors that cuts across all issues of faith, creed, class or wealth in our society. Death has always strengthened our egalitarianism as it brings us together to mourn and console each other as a Jaitbynriew. We must never forget this. The Myllem incident threatens to destroy this bonding unity we have taken upon ourselves as a Jaitbynriew.

If the Dorbar Shnong stood its ground in denying cremation of the dead because of an absence of a cremation ground, it has erred and erred gravely. If cremation was denied because of an earlier unfulfilled agreement, it simply highlights procrastination on the part of those responsible. It does not hold water. If it was done on the excuse that contravening the earlier decision would have weakened the authority of the Shnong, people forget

impending political events in 2018 and there are some who are not averse in creating mayhem if it serves their selfish interest. We must be alert against such possibilities. Constitutionally the District Administration is responsible for maintenance of law and order. The DC should therefore immediately step in as an unbiased mediator; a peacemaker; a counsellor in his role to bring an end to the misunderstanding and to once again allow the traditional Dorbar Shnong of Myllem to function as an entity that looks after the interests of all residents within its jurisdiction.

He is fully mandated to do this even if the matter has been referred to the court. Aggrieved parties should take one step backwards to allow the impartial institution of the District Administration to play its peace building role. Mistakes happen in all societies; social tensions arise but it is the hallmark of enlightened societies to find ways and means to diffuse such public anxieties.

And I speak with all the authority at my command when I say that Khasis of the 21st Century are an enlightened community .

If the NGT can put a stop to coal mining, limestone mining, sand mining then why not along this stretch which is now nothing short of a real highway to hell? God forbid in case of heavy rain, a boulder might just come down on a pack of vehicles ferrying passengers. But is the government listening or shall it wake up till more unfortunate deaths occur on this and other similar routes?

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

MCS recruitment 2017

Editor,
I'm one amongst those aspirants who aspire to join the civil services under the state, but it came as shock for many of us when the notification was released and the age limit was fixed at 27. Even with relaxation of 5 years for ST category, it ultimately comes to 32, which I believe will debar many candidates from competing just on the basis of age. Even UPSC does give some flexibility with age (32 general, 35 OBC and up to 37 yrs for ST), considering the challenge and difficulties posed by such exams. Likewise many states civil services do give sufficient age limit for candidates to compete. Another important point which I want to bring here is that, MCS recruitment this year came after a gap of almost a decade, hence many aspirants ultimately

have moved into a higher age bracket during this period.

It's a positive step that the state authorities have aligned the exams of the state civil services along the lines of the UPSC exams, thereby giving scope for the state's youth to prepare simultaneously for both, but I wonder if the syllabus could have been tweaked a bit to make it more state oriented. After all, it's a state civil service! What is required is alignment of the pattern of questioning not the syllabus in entirety. The question may also arise as to whether the state possesses the capacity or resource/ experts to correct the papers on the same standards as UPSC since the entire syllabus is a copy- paste of the UPSC model. Hence a little introspection with some brain storming session with domain experts is required, I believe before finalizing the whole recruitment process.

Through this letter I want to pass this message to our CM Dr. Mukul Sangma to seriously examine this issue and bring corrective steps.

Yours etc.,
Sonie Kharduit,
Via email

Priorities for India

Editor,
Our independence day must make us reflect on

how to build a strong India. There is no doubt that the future of a country lies in its future citizens. So, we need to take care of the well-being of our children. According to UNICEF report, almost half (48 per cent) of India's children, younger than 5 years of age, are stunted. This tells a tale of under-nutrition during the most critical periods of growth and development in early life. Stunting hits a person hard by making an underdeveloped brain with life-threatening harmful consequences including diminished mental ability and learning capacity, poor school performances, reduced earnings and increased risk of nutrition related chronic diseases. Moreover, the report says, 70 per cent of adolescent girls in India are anaemic and half of adolescents are below the normal body mass index (BMI) which has an impact on health of their future pregnancies and children. Stunting is a result of intergenerational poverty, poor maternal and early childhood nutrition. Indeed, this problem will further turn our huge human resources into a liability. To combat it, we need to pay our attentions to the mothers of our country.

Scientists say that the first 1000 days from conception to the second birthday of a child is vital. It is during this period that the infant's body and brain develop at a rapid pace. Increasing scientific evidences show that meeting the specific

“True independence and freedom can only exist in doing what's right.”
--- Brigham Young

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 8 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, AUGUST 18, 2017

Chinese Threat

THE Doklam crisis continues to simmer. Indian and Chinese troops pelted stones at each other at Ladakh. The Chinese have made incursions into demilitarised zones and at Barhati in Uttarakhand. The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) looks poised to occupy a border territory. The Chinese Communist Party Congress will meet later this year and Beijing is preparing for a show of strength against India. Such beating of drums calls for strict Indian vigilance. Of course, armed conflict should be avoided at any cost as India's external affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj keeps on saying. But Beijing may resort to psychological warfare and cyber rattling. The hot words on Doklam and Chinese pin pricks in other areas indicate a pressure strategy adopted by Beijing. New Delhi has to combat this strategy head on. China must not be allowed to establish overlordship in Asia. The objective of forming an India, China and Russia troyka seems illusory.

The global outlook appears to be inclined towards India. The US has decided to elevate strategic consultations with India through a new 2-by-2 ministerial dialogue. It is good news. India is also trying to strengthen ties with ASEAN nations. Many of them are not favourably disposed towards China and these include Tokyo, Djakarta, Hanoi and Taipei. China is also at a disadvantage for a trade surplus with most nations in the region. India is a victim. Chinese goods and components are swamping its markets and anti-dumping is not possible. There have also been security and data leaks. India is reviewing import of Chinese IT gizmos and appliances which may help hacking and securing sensitive, confidential information. At the same time, Beijing will be ill advised to start a trade war with India. Still, regardless of adverse circumstances, India should not relax its diplomatic moves to improve economic collaboration with China.

LOOKING BACK

April 26, 1989

Meghalaya improves20-Pt. implementation

According to a reviewof performance on theimplementation of the 20-Point Programme for the fiscal year 85-86 conductedby the Union Ministry of Programme Implementation Meghalaya ranked 2nd in the North Eastern Region after Manipur, anofficial press Note said.

Compared to the performance in the previousthree years, the perform-ance of the State Govt un-der the 20-Point

Pro-gramme last year has beenvery encouraging. This ismore so considering thefact that the State Govt has had to face the chronicproblem of non availabil-ity of various physical in-puts from outside the Statefor execution of plannsschemes it added.The ranking of the Statehas been assessed on thebasis of performance in re-gard to the 12-points of the20 point Programme withwhich Meghalaya is con-cerned.

Tradition, Modernity, Religion: The Eternal Dilemmas

By Patricia Mukhim

The events unfolding at Myllem where a dead person was not allowed to be cremated because he belonged to the indigenous faith - Seng Khasi - and because people of this faith do not have a cremation ground in that area, brings to the fore many contentious issues which require a societal discourse. Mr Toki Blah in his article in this paper has proposed a peace dialogue before things escalate. The point is that we have a Government and we also have the District Council that is elected to look into matters that impinge on tradition and culture. Should the KHADC not have stepped in to resolve the crises? What about the local MLA? Does he not represent all sections of the populace? And then you have another authority –the Syiem of Hima Myllem whose mandate it is to resolve disputes related to land and culture. All these authorities were created for this very purpose and not to play politics or to get into the business of collecting taxes from markets and forest produce. Now the problem with the Khasi society is that we are pathetically poor at holding anyone accountable. We spend more time in gossip and outraging in private spaces then on honest conversations.

The Seng Khasi evolved out of indigenous culture and was once a very inclusive faith and a way of life and not an institutionalised religion as it is has come to be at this point of time. Perhaps the proponents of the Seng Khasi were threatened by other organised religions and felt that the best way to continue their legacy was to institutionalise and organise themselves into a religious entity with listed and faithful members just as the other religions are doing. To me this belies the very idea of an indigenous faith to which any member of the community has a right to belong to. Adherents of the Seng Khasi are known to be benign and do not preach on pulpits as others are wont to do. But that must not be construed as weakness. On the contrary it is a strength because it means that the Seng does not have to rely on paid membership for sustaining itself, the way other religions do. Indeed it takes a lot of money to sustain organised religion and its presiding elders.

An article in the web news portal – Raiot - very intuitively states that whereas in the rest of the country there is an attempt

to foist Hindutva – a strident form of Hinduism-down people's throats and to create a climate of intolerance towards other religions by banning cow slaughter etc., here in Meghalaya Christians are behaving in exactly the same way as the Hindutavadis are. Intolerance in any form is not sustainable in a democracy, more so in a country like India with its huge diversities. The fact is that every state in India too is just as diverse. In the state of Meghalaya you have adherents of different religious faiths, a plethora of cultures, languages and races. How do you enforce a single culture in this sort

Are we in Meghalaya giving too much importance to an institution that has lost its moorings and is seen to be clearly taking sides in a public dispute?

of disparate political ecosystem?

It is time for the people of Meghalaya to rise above sub-nationalism and ethno-centrism and embrace diversity for that is the only reality. Life itself is a sum total of diverse aspects which include gender, race, religion sexual orientation, culture, socio-economic and educational backgrounds and above all the varied experiences that people bring to the table to enrich and enhance worldviews. Even in Meghalaya, the tribals are not of one race. The Garos are Tibeto Burmans while the Khasis and Pnars are of Austro-Asiatic descent. Yet we have accepted that we are people of one state and the same matrilineal culture but with some minor differences in the way we practise that culture.

This is not to sound snobbish but when we grew up we were more diverse in our outlooks because of the composite culture in our schools. It was only after statehood in 1972 that we learnt to look at a non- Khasi, non-tribal as the insignificant other. This went on until we all joined the bogey of a chauvinistic, non-tribal rant which started in 1979. Today we have come a long way and left that sordid history behind but some who became victims of that ethnic cleansing still nurse their wounds. That period is a blot on Meghalaya's history.

Today life has come a full circle but strangely people of one community are divided by their faiths both of which preach fellowship, forgiveness and humanity? How did this happen? Is this the karma for our sins of the past? It's inconceivable that a people known for their ardent respect for the dead and who inevitably enumerate only the good deeds of the deceased should today deny the burial of a person based on his religious persuasion. There may be many reasons and past quarrels between the Dorbar Shnong of Myllem and the Seng Khasi adherents which have brought things to this flashpoint, one of which is

that the present cremation ground is located near a water source. But these are not immutable differences that cannot be resolved by dialogue. The people of the area (Myllem) are of one stock. It is religion that has divided them. Should that difference be allowed to simmer and reach a flashpoint? Meanwhile, the leaders of the Seng Khasi have called a public meeting on Sunday 20, August, most possibly to sound out in a public forum the perceived persecution they are facing in their own state vis- a- vis the Myllem episode. This is not a healthy precedent and it is a precedent of sorts for Meghalaya. Before this happens it is important for those institutions that are elected to serve every constituent in this state without fear or favour to address this thorny issue and prevent it from spilling over into a communal confrontation.

The 2018 election is approaching and with it the polarisation of political ideologies, behaviours and attitudes. There are subversive forces that would want to join issues with the Seng Khasi and escalate the present standoff in Myllem. Politics is a once- in- five- year jamboree where unscrupulous actors would exploit every societal vulnerability to come to power. And when emotions ride, high people tend to elect their representatives not as informed voters but as emotionally and socially

unintelligent citizens, who will regret their choice immediately after coming out of the polling booth and good sense prevails. Emotional intelligence is in short supply during these turbulent times when politics is mixed with a sense of vengeance to get back at the perceived wrongdoers. The worst part about democracy is when its citizens vote along religious or ethnic lines instead of weighing their choices against the candidate's leadership potentials and his/her track record and credibility.

One can empathise with the Seng Khasi community of Myllem and their sense of hurt and injustice and this is where healing is most needed. Is there no Christian from amongst the community there who can bring healing and forgiveness? How can people go to church while at the same time hold a grouse against their neighbours?

Here one must also critically analyse the role of the Dorbar Shnong. Has this institution lost its ability to be the arbiter and the front-runner for resolving conflicts within the Shnong? Was this not its primary purpose other than discharging civic responsibilities and engaging in the buying and selling of land etc? Are we in Meghalaya giving too much importance to an institution that has lost its moorings and is seen to be clearly taking sides in a public dispute? The problem with these archaic institutions is that they have not imbibed the value systems of yore, riddled as they are by the politics of opportunism.

And what about the religious heads? Don't they have a role to play in such explosive situations? What's the point of religion when all it does is create communal ghettos? Is Christianity any better than the Hindutva brigade that it regularly castigates? It's time for this society to take a discerning view on its future and to develop the kind of institutions that will sustain it in the long run. We have to get beyond hyperboles and chauvinism and get real. Meghalaya is no longer a conglomerate of principalities (ki hima). It is now part of a country and its citizens have, for better or for worse voted to be a democracy.

prevent the flow of water back into the ground.

A department dealing with water harvesting can be set up - perhaps the PHE itself can be given this responsibility with an independent department. The government should make it compulsory for offices and houses of over a certain size, old or new, and all deep tube well owners, to take up water harvesting through recharging pits. In 5 to 10 years the underground reservoirs will be replenished to a great extent and this should help in alleviating the water supply problem then. But we must act now and I would request the Chief Minister, the MLAs, the public and the many NGOs to collectively take up this matter urgently else, in times to come, Shillong will be known as ' Bone Dry Shillong'.

Yours etc.,
D. M . Pariat,
Wales.

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.

Tripura Censored

Centre’s Double Whammy

By Insaif

Tripura's Left Front government has every reason to see red or scream blue murder. On Independence Day, both the Doordarshan and the AIR refused to broadcast Chief Minister Manik Sarkar's speech unless he "reshaped" it. Their argument being the occasion had 'sanctity' and given the broadcast code and its 'responsibility' it couldn't telecast it in the present format! Obviously, it emerges that Sarkar's diatribe against the Centre was not palatable to the powers-that-be. His shelved speech warned of spirit of secularism being under attack, conspiracies to create divisions in society were underway, passions were incited to create India into a particular religious country, sense of security amongst Dalits and Muslims shattered et al. Worse, he wanted to hit out at the RSS by saying its followers were never associated with the freedom movement rather sabotaged it and were servile to the British etc. Wasn't Sarkar merely stating facts? While many would readily nod in agreement and see the action as yet another brazen bullying tactic of the BJP, there is another victim to this blackout—the Prasara Bharati. Its autonomous status has indeed come under cloud. In its yearning to upstage Sarkar's 19-year-old rule in the forthcoming polls, the BJP has dealt a double whammy. Not only has it done grave damage to the institution and federalism, but undeniably dealt a blow to citizen's basic right to freedom of expression and opinion. Will it backfire?

Bengal Big Win

Ruling TMC in West Bengal continues its winning streak. It swept the elections to all seven urban local bodies—five municipalities, one notified authority and one municipal corporation. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will obviously be merry pleased but there could be frown too. While the TMC bagged 140 of the 148 wards, the BJP managed to win six, thus increasing its presence. The other two went to the Forward Bloc and an independent, while both CPM and Congress drew a blank. Obviously, the BJP is making inroads at the cost of others and appears to be steadily improving its vote share. This should give Party President Amit Shah hope of realising his dream - of doing one better in the 2019 General Election in Didi's bastion. After all, the Centre has been doing precious little to douse fire in the Darjeeling hills due to the Gorkhaland agitation. Guess, Shah realises it's not worth risking brighter prospects for its one Lok Sabha seat. It could upset his calculations. More so as there is no denying that Mamata magic holds sway in the State.

Centre Cautions States

The Centre has a word of caution for States. Guard against illegal immigrants like the Rohingyas, warns New Delhi. The advisory to State governments follows from the fact that over 14,000 Rohingyas from Myanmar are staying in the country, given the political turmoil. Other than infringing on the rights of citizens, the Union Home Ministry notes that they pose 'grave security challenges' and the States must detect and deport them by setting up special task force at the district level. Its reasoning being that while migrations go unchecked as there are cultural and ethnic similarities, the migrants become easy prey to terrorist organisations, who recruit them for their nefarious activities against the country. Additionally, the Centre focuses on the fact that in the past terror

outfits such as the LeT and the IM have expressed solidarity with Rohingyas and are said to have even recruited Rohingyas Muslims. Will the States oblige? Remember, there is precious little done about Bangladeshi illegal migrants, despite the BJP coming to power in Assam. Will the adage a stitch in time saves nine, work this time?

UP Tragedy

Uttar Pradesh and its administration sadly do not hang its head in shame. While Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath may breakdown over the death of scores of children in the Gorakhpur, his actions betray his sincerity. Worse, he has the Centre coming to his aid. A three-member Central government committee has in its report claimed that the deaths of 60-odd children at the Baba Raghav Das Medical College Hospital “were not caused by shortage of oxygen supply”. Worse, it has sought to lessen the blow by saying that the ‘number of deaths have reduced compared to last year!’ Shocking and distressing, to say the least. Who is it trying to hoodwink, as the private contractor's threats to stop oxygen supply for non-payment of dues is all in public domain, thanks to the media. And while the State government would like to pass on most of the deaths due to encephalitis, it doesn't for one say it will work on a blueprint to ensure that young lives are saved in future. Instead, it is more interested in getting madrasas to hoist the flag and sing the national anthem. Is this good governance, as promised? Will Gorakhpur be relegated to the background as Yogi seems to have a major problem in hand: if roads can be blocked for namaz, why not for janmashami?” God bless the State.

TN Unity

Tamil Nadu is heading towards unity. Chief Minister Palaniswami has finally decided that the government will constitute a committee, under a retired High Court judge to probe the death of mentor and former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa. At the same time, he has also announced that the erstwhile residence of Amma in Poas Garden Veda Nilayam will be converted into a government memorial, d that Veda Nilayam. Obvioulsy, there would be cheer in both the camps of the AIADMK (Amma and PT Amma) as these moves should ensure a merger. The talks for a coming together have been in the offing with both sides wanting to clip the wings of Dinakaran. It's only a question of time how soon? Fingers are being crossed that there is no clash of egos of whether one conceded to the others demands. For there could be a slip between the cup and the lip!

Kannada Pride Flavoured

Kannada pride has got an additional flavour. In the recent list of emotive issues such as a separate flag, non-imposition of Hindi, bank employees to learn Kannada, etc the ruling Congress has added Indira canteens. “You have had three years of Modi's ‘man ki baat’, now it's time for our ‘Uaangi baath’” (traditional brinjal rice), is perhaps how Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would like to sell the idea of another term in power to the people. With the State going to the polls early next year, the Congress opened the first batch of the 198 low-cost food canteens, which have been modelled on Amma canteens in Tamil Nadu, on Wednesday last. These will cater to the working class, which can now buy breakfast for just Rs 5 and lunch for Rs 10.---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Keep local sensitivities in mind!

Editor,
Anyone trying to call any of the helplines of mobile service providers located here in Shillong, whether the company is Aircel, Airtel, Reliance Jio etc...is usually greeted by a voice on the other side either in Hindi, Bengali or English, and even if it's in English their accent is so poor that its impossible to understand them. The plight is worse for those from rural areas who might call for some issue or clarification. It seems, the management of these cellular companies do not understand that it is not those who stay within the city who fail to communicate in the above languages but even those from the semi-urban or rural places find it difficult. So it would be prudent for such companies to recruit more local girls and boys who can communicate and interact in the local language both in Khasi and Jaintia for the benefit of the users, or else this can be construed as a deficiency of

service on their part which is unacceptable.

Yours etc...
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong

Censor Board!

Editor,
This is with reference to your editorial, "A new CBFC chief" (ST, August 17, 2017). Censorship is all about scissors and cuts. Scissors can be used to cut excess hair or to cut one's throat! While it is dangerous not to censor an overdose of violence and sex, it is equally dangerous to cut the people's voice. The former is why we need a censor board, but it must be mature enough not to go to the extent of killing the people's fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Cool, clear waters

Editor,
Cool clear waters are words that take me back to the sixties when a song was

a hit and was beautifully sung by a popular local group called 'The Amigos' if I'm not mistaken. Cool clear waters were aplenty in the Shillong of those days as the rivers and streams flowing through the town still had water that was probably fit to drink or at least to bathe in. A popular stream was the one flowing from Dhankheti through Barik point and IGP before carrying on alongside the road till it emptied into the Ward's Lake. Mischievous boys would float their paper boats on this stream and would then follow their boats for a mile or two.

The rivers here in Wales remind me of the once clean Wah Umkhrah and Umshyrpi and the smaller streams the Risa, the Thang Sning, the Pom Dngiem which at one time, were as clean as the rivers here now. I remember those days when after game of football at the Polo field, most of the players would unhesitatingly head to the Wah Umkhrah for a good wash in its clean water after which we would rush off for a hot cuppa and a plate of 'channa' at dukan ka mai - wonderful days indeed.

Cool clear water is hard to find now in Shillong except at some of the localities situated at the base of Lum Shillong where clean spring water is still available but here again, these water sources are dwindling by the day due to deforestation and uncertain rainfall. Water is now a money spinner and in the rush to make more and more money, water is being overdrawn from bore wells and natural wells which are not given enough time to replenish themselves. I gather quite a few natural wells have dried up in the last few years.

Recently, before leaving Shillong, I attended a very interesting meeting of members of local dorbars at the PHE office which had been organised by our Nongthymmai MLA, Jemino Mawtoh, on the present water supply situation in Shillong. The PHE department had briefed the members on the many difficulties they were facing in supplying water to the citizens of Shillong. They also briefed us on the future problems, one of which is the very high

“Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.”
---Alexander Pope

Trump Isolated
US President Donald Trump has isolated himself by defending white supremacist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia. His attitude which demonstrates a far-right view was condemned by many on whom he relied for support. The nation's top business executives, military leaders and Republicans expressed their indignation. Microsoft CEO, Satya Nadella said that there was no place in US society for bias and bigotry and condemned Trump for equating white supremacists with counter-protestors. Heads of Apple and Facebook have echoed Nadella's sentiments. Titans of US industry said that they could no longer serve on two of Trump's advisory panels.

The President had to dissolve the two business councils. America's military leadership has also spoken out against Trump's attitude. Five armed services chiefs-of-the army, the Air Force and Navy, the marines and the national guard bureau posted statements on social media attacking neo-Nazis and racism in uncompromising terms. It has sapped Trump's military support to a significant extent. Republican politicians have not lost time in issuing new denunciations of the racial hatred on display in the state of Virginia. It is in the air that some of the President's top officials are also thinking of quitting. It has been pointed out that Trump's Presidency may not recover from the shock and doubts have been expressed about whether he is fit for the job. No US President in the past had such crisis swirling around him so soon after his inauguration. Trump's foreign policy has also suffered a blow. UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, who had been friendly towards Trump has roundly condemned his attitude on the Charlottesville episode. German Chancellor, Angela Merkel has also denounced his statement on the issue. It flies in the face of reason why Trump has decided to seek isolation at home and abroad in his professed pursuit of 'America for Americans' policy.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

PM alleges
Opposition ruled states not cooperating with centre

Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi today accused opposition ruled states in the south for assuming a "non-cooperative" posture towards measures initiated by the centre to develop powers to the people. Addressing the valedictory function of the two day panchyat raj sammelan for southern states at Vidyannagar, near here, he said the centre had embarked on conferences to discuss how the panchayat raj institutions could be made much strongly. He want a revolution that gives maximum democracy (to these institution) a revolution that gives more evolution that could fulfill the dreams of Gandhiji.

"For this reason, we hold sammelans. All state governments are invited. But I regret in the south the governments have taken a non-cooperative stand. This is in sharp contrast to West Bengal where panchayat raj has been functioning better than in other places he said. The Prime Minister said he was happy to learn that the delegate attached more importance to the panchayat raj institutions than the opposition governments. "There is more concern among people for devolution of powers than the governments is southern states.

Mr Gandhi pooh-poohed the claims of Andhra Pradesh government and the dismissed Janata Dal government in Karnataka that their panchayat raj systems were the "ultimate." "Their claims are hollow and carry no weight. There is scope for

improvement." There are not a single chairman for the local bodies belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in Karnataka and only one vice chairman's post was held by a scheduled caste woman. This was inadequate, he said. Mr Gandhi said in Andhra Pradesh, the powers of the local bodies were "usurped" by the Zilla Pranalika Abhiyridhi Mandals whose funds were released by Ministers nominated by the Chief Ministers.

"The elected representatives have hollow shells while they (the heads) steal the kernels from inside." The "Prime Minister said Mr Rama Rao also resorted to "arbitrary dismissals" of elected representatives. He had recently dismissed 12 mandal pradhans but fortunately the judiciary had stayed the move. The devolution of powers was only on paper, he added.

May Day programme in Shillong
May Day will be observed in Meghalaya, along with the rest of world, on May 1 through a series of functions and programmes under the auspices of the Meghalaya May Day Committee. The day-long programme will commence with flag hoisting at 9 a.m. and subsequent flag hoisting by the constituent Unions and Associations, a mid-day demonstrations, processions by the Unions and Associations to culminate in a Rally at the State Central Library at 5 pm to be followed by a cultural programme.

No place to live and no place to die - the Khasi Niam Tynrai in their own motherland

It has long been an observable hidden fact that the Khasi Niam Tynrai have been ostracised by the Christian society at large. However, never had there been witnessed such vehemence expressed in broad daylight as on the occasion of the death of the Seng Khasi leader at Myllem, the height of which would shame even the most committed of the Talibans or the Hindutvas. This incident should bring to fore the question that when the Khasi Niam Tynrai have no right to die in their own motherland, then have they not lost the right to live as well? Every educated citizen should develop goose bumps at this point of witnessing that our Khasi society is fast descending into the depths of the Khasi version of the Dark Ages where the church has every citizen by the strings like puppets.

Without advocating for any religion, on the premise that all religions are equally secondary to a peaceful civilised life and society, I concur with opinions such as that of Abner Pariat (ST 15/3/16) who had expressed empathy that the key word, in relation to the Khasi Niam Tynrai/Niam Tre, is 'discrimination'. Let me try to outline some of the discrimination patterns towards the Khasi Niam Tynrai in the following terms and state that the incident witnessed at Myllem is but the tip of the iceberg.

The first point of discrimination is at a psychological level where the Khasi Niam Tynrai is seen as 'the other' by their very own kith and kin who are Christians and even by parents their very own children. To think that the basis for such discrimination is derived from the teachings of the church is even more spine-chilling. It is taught that non-Christian Khasis are the unsaved and are doomed to hell. This is the foundation for all other discriminations that are against the Khasi Niam Tynrai. This principle is preached in some form or another with great energy and vigour from every pulpit or podium and from every church Sunday after Sunday for more than 150 years in these hills without a second thought and it is considered as an absolute truth. To this day, every Khasi Christian leader worth his/her salt is a propagator of such discriminatory message unbridled and unquestioned, and day-to-day practising Khasi Christians are foot soldiers of this very same discrimination in their compliance with the teaching and/or in their inability to question the paradigm. The Khasi Niam Tynrai are systematically and strategically being seen as objects for proselytising and those who resist proselytising as objects of evil and hatred and against whom blame and resentment are expressed at the very least opportunity. This evil has been in existence in the Khasi society for a very long time since the advent of Christianity on to these hills but which no one has come out to speak up against until at this point when it has come to surface in the form of a public uproar. It is unfortunate but it is a natural outcome.

The second point of discrimination is very respectable but not less discriminatory and that is at the pedagogical level. This appears in the form of books and articles where a misinterpretation or rather a deconstruction of the basic tenets of the Khasi religion is being practised to the point where the Khasi intelligentsia of today are confused as to what to know about the Khasi religion except what Khasi Christian writers have presented to them, and which has left a huge intellectual gap in terms of understanding Khasi philosophy. To cite an example of the protest against books such as Ka Dienjat ki Longshuwa, the discrimination is very clear. The fourth chapter of the book is named "Ka Jingpynlong ia ka pyrthei bad u brierw", or 'creation of the earth and mankind', and is captioned 'Ka Puriskam' or 'a fairytale', whereas the 13th chapter "Ka Miet Christmas" is not captioned as such as it is imagined to be a historical truth. Imagine a Khasi priest writing a book on the Adam and Eve story and captioning it as "A Fairytale" and whether that book would be allowed to be introduced into schools. There are more examples, even in books such as Ka Niam Khasi written by a Christian writer and where misinterpretation is seen even at the end of the very first chapter itself. Moreover, more half-baked Christian religious writings appear as news or articles mainly in the Khasi newspapers almost every day of the week to muddle up the situation (and which in my view has brought

By Mankular Gashnga

down the class of the papers and of honest intellectual dialogue in this part of the country).

The third point of discrimination is a more brutal and a very practical one in that marriage between a Christian Khasi and a Khasi Niam Tynrai is considered essentially a taboo if the latter does not convert. Christian churches prohibit such marriages, though not in writing but in teaching, and would favour marriage among Christians even if either party is non-Khasi. This is a very curious reality. Moreover, it should be mentioned that intermarriage is prohibited in this way even between Protestant and Catholic Khasis and other denominations, but more so against intermarriage with the Khasi Niam Tynrai, again, if proselytising is not opportune. It shows the Khasi Niam Tynrai are discriminated against to the point where they are considered outcasts by their very own fraternity even when it comes to blood ties; they are the invisible, equivalent maybe to the untouchables in other parts of India. Nevertheless, if cohabitation or marriage does happen between a Khasi Christian and a Khasi Niam Tynrai, the church excommunicates and ostracises the Christian bride or groom in various forms should they not proselytise their children and/or their spouse. 'Excommunication' and to ostracise even in any form is 'discrimination' at its worst, but very much a thriving programme within the very beautiful cathedrals and churches of our beloved Khasi land. Such a programme is one of the most evil forms of discrimination against the Khasi Niam Tynrai spouses and is aimed at breaking down their spirits to comply with the demands of the church. Of course such programmes thrive because of constitutional loopholes but are still very much discriminatory in spirit and should be rejected as well as addressed even through marriage laws/acts within the state.

The fourth point of discrimination is in the attitude that Khasi Christians have put themselves on a pedestal as stalwarts of morality, and even absolute morality. However, when now around 70% of the Khasi population is Christian, the drop in moral values is astounding. It is in this Christian era of the Khasis that women and men

display indecent behaviour with pride; that corruption is so rampant while tithes to churches are accepted uncensored no matter the source or the means; that we see countless spectacles of rape and abuse; that we see Shillong so full of dirt and filth; that we see localities and villages have more churches than durbar halls (or even an Assembly building) and yet local governance, local economy and patriotism are at their weakest; and that cases of fraud and scams multiply by the day, all of which were not attributes of the pre-Christian Khasi society. Yet, the discrimination today is still alive and active where the Khasi Niam Tynrai are often referred to as 'b'ym pat don niam' or 'who are yet without a religion', or 'ba dang dum' or 'who are still in darkness'. There need not be more derogatory and discriminatory terms.

The fifth and final point is the discrimination against the Khasi culture. Khasi Christians have been taught to look at Khasi culture in general as 'that of the other'; to divorce themselves from what is of the Khasis in terms of dance, songs and the general Khasi ethos and spirituality. To be Christian means to be more European-like. Converts had been prohibited from participating in traditional dances and songs and traditional ways of prayer, with the threat of excommunication. Khasi Christians have no knowledge or memory of the traditional dance or songs or methods of prayer. The Catholics who apparently try to uphold these traditions do so to suit their own syncretical hidden agenda and not to uphold the Khasi culture per se. The church never even commemorates Khasi patriots such as U Kiang Nangbah or U Tirot Sing. This is annihilation of a collective memory. If this is not mass annihilation of the Khasi culture, I don't know what else it can be called. It is discrimination and marginalization at the highest degree against the Khasi Niam Tynrai. Every tenet of the Khasi culture is seen as something to be shunned and despised. There have been attacks even on the matrilineal lineage system of the Khasis by Khasi Christians who prefer a patrilineal or patriarchal system by basing their argument on Christian teachings, and this they do in the face of the civilized world having recovered from the evils of patriarchy and when there is much thriving towards emancipation of women. No woman is allowed to be a priest in any church in these hills. This shows that Khasi Christian teachings are discriminatory against the Khasi culture and against women in principle. Khasi Christians blindly adhere to these archaic religious teachings without a question even in the post-Christian era of the 21st Century.

The most disturbing point is that almost all Khasi Christians and even the Khasi society at large, including legal and governmental bodies, and even human rights NGOs overlook these discriminations and treat them as completely normal and even would aid in such discriminations knowingly or unknowingly. This is not normal in the least. Everybody is in a state of denial. I do not condemn Khasi Christians by my speaking against this discrimination, but I do condemn their inability to question the religion that tells them to hate other people and to treat their very own kith and kin as outcasts.

Overall, the issue should be addressed publicly as erroneous on various grounds. First, because it leads to an identity crisis. The discrimination is caused by a confused Khasi identity that has been propagated by faithfulness to a religion. This point is very self-explanatory. "Phi dang long Khasi?" or "Are you still a Khasi?" "Em, nga lah long Khristan" or "No, I am now a Christian". If this is not a denial of identity, I don't know what else is. It is just that Christianity does not have a personal law like Islam that Khasi Christians still call themselves Khasis. Otherwise almost all Khasi identity would have been wiped out by now, except the Khasi Niam Tynrai. Yet, the personal law/tradition practised by Khasi Christians today is precisely that of the Khasi Niam Tynrai which they think they had escaped from but which gives them their very present Khasi identity. By that logic, allegiance of identity to Adam and Eve in the church and to U Hynniewtrep in public has caused confusion to the Khasi Christian identity in general. And people wonder why patriotism is on the decline, not having any knowledge of such dichotomy of the Khasi psyche. Discrimination against one's own self is schizophrenic. We Khasis are one. The discrimination exists only in churches and therefore the teachings and programmes of the church are discriminatory and should be rejected. Without the Khasi Niam Tynrai, Khasi Christians will no longer have a definition of identity except as separate Christian denominations where the term 'Khasi' will no longer be applicable and hence the Khasi identity wiped from the face of the earth. This is a very obvious outcome but to which many are still blind.

Second, because it is anti-secular. With the Constitution being our only reason for not killing each other on the basis of religion, it is safe to respect the Constitution more than the dogmas of any religion. The Khasi Religion is not without its faults with all its random superstitions taken into account, but the Khasi Christian Church is more at fault in that its superstitions are being sugar-coated and forced by its adherents to be believed as absolute truth and to be basis of discrimination, notwithstanding the fact that Christianity is just another religion, on the same plane with every other religion in terms of its veracity. Khasis converted to Christianity is a conversion from believing one set of superstitions to believing another set of superstitions, a ridiculous exercise frankly. Our ability to critique this point of error is the only task that will mark us a people who have moved away from being tribal into being civilised; otherwise we are just brutes in modern suits.

I think the raw material for discrimination is in the churches. Therefore, the legal machinery should turn against discrimination programmes in the churches where the seed of the discrimination lies. To level it out from a popular culture standpoint, I can only compare Khasi Niam Tynrai to Boo Radley in To Kill a Mockingbird who was feared for no valid reason. In Harper Lee's own words, "Sometimes the Bible in the hand of one man is worse than a whisky bottle in the hand of (another)... There are just some kind of men who're so busy worrying about the next world they've never learned to live in this one, and you can look down the street and see the results". Of course it is a still a sin to kill a mockingbird.

TO THE EDITOR

No disaster preparedness

Editor,
A tragedy befell Shillong on Aug 12 last and a shame that lives were lost. My heart goes out to the families of the victims. This incident and few before where another tree fell near St Mary's School (thankfully no one was hurt) and a fuel truck on fire at a petrol pump, shows the preparedness or lack thereof of in the government's disaster management manual. The response and recovery methods are hopelessly antiquated. Its amazing to see that a simple act of cordoning off the area and not allowing the morbidly curious public to make it a spectacle and a mela was not followed. I think the work of rescuing people trapped under the tree or debris; of providing emergency medical services which might save lives and generally clearing the area would happen at a much

rapid pace if the area is simply restricted to by-standers. Not to mention ensuring the safety of the aforementioned public. The same was seen recently, when a fuel laden truck caught fire in Nongrim Hills. People (including young kids) ran towards the inferno to take mobile shots. Feeble attempts were made by a few policemen and locals to ask people to move away from the scene but it was too little too late. If the truck had exploded (and there was high chance of that happening), I daresay a lot of lives would have been lost and it would have resulted in a large number of injuries. Not just from the explosion but from the stampede of people fleeing the scene. It was just luck that stopped a greater tragedy from happening. Such scenarios can be easily avoided by establishing an adequate perimeter around the place. The first act of the people in charge of the situation should be to restrict access to the area. Just commonsense!

Yours etc.,
S. K. Gurusung,
Via email

A callous government!

Editor,
Are we an independent nation, let alone a state with empathy or a city of conscience held by moral law? We regale the concept of freedom, while being enslaved trying to chase it. It's a paradox of this democratic nation. I am disillusioned about the morals of our state government towards the recent incident where three lives were lost in an unnatural death. There victims did not deserve to die. There are causes and consequences and the government has to take the responsibility for what happened.

If we talk about road safety and natural calamities, there are two things involved. Road safety does

not only mean preventing one car from hitting another or a car hitting a pedestrian. It also means saving somebody's lives by putting all necessary efforts to prevent any kind of mishap. There actually is a method deployed for road safety, but is it implemented? Talking about natural calamities, no one expects to be caught in a potentially dangerous and extreme situation. If the unthinkable does occur, having a plan and knowing what could have been done can make all the difference.

Accidents do not happen; they are caused. Where is our safety if we are not safe in our own roads? The government which regulates our lives and is responsible for law and order should ensure safety first. After all the Government's prime duty is to protect its citizens. The safety we are referring to here is while walking or commuting on the road. A big tree and an old one at that, is bound to fall due to relentless rainfall. So should the government and its statutory bodies set up for this task during this time of crisis not be held accountable? Aren't they partly responsible for this natural calamity? All living beings be it a man or a tree has its own life span. If the department that takes care of the Governor's garden had reported about the vulnerability of that tree leaning towards the main road then the incident might have been averted. And if they did report why was no action taken? Regulations about old trees growing next to busy streets or public places should be in place. The regulators should not be sitting at their desks but, moving around.

If the dead do not receive justice then justice itself is questionable. Giving just and fair treatment to the victims is the sole responsibility of the government. One soul lost could mean a bread earner

lost. Natural calamities such as this one could have been prevented coming as it does from a government residence with a well-equipped staff to take care of every detail. The bereaved families should not be compensated by a token sum from the Chief Minister's relief fund. I firmly believe that the loss of a bread earner should be equally compensated by a government sanctioned post from the victim's family depending on their legitimacy. Likewise, even those injured should avail free medical treatment with a decent compensation. This is the least they can do to let the deceased persons rest in peace. The state cannot take away lives which it cannot give back.

Yours etc.,
C. Bareh
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.



Unbridled tourism has created problems with growing resentment among locals as well as allegations of damage to the environment, writes *Ranjita Biswas*

Have you been jostled by hordes of visitors while trying to get a better view of the artefact in the beautiful Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg? Have you been to Venice recently and smelled the rotting water? Or think of the hill stations in India now, most of which are wilting under the pressure of thousands of feet with people enjoying the ‘summer holiday’ with nary a thought before throwing an ice-cream cone or a plastic bag on the sidewalk.

According to the latest World Tourism Barometer report of UNWTO (UN World Tourism Organisation), international tourist arrivals grew by 3.9 per cent to reach a total of 1,235 million last year.

Some 46 million more tourists (overnight visitors) travelled internationally in 2016 compared to the previous year. It was also the seventh consecutive year of sustained growth following the 2009 global economic and financial cri-



Grameen Bank of Bangladesh’ created by Nobel prize winner Mohd Yunus is an example of social entrepreneurship

By Ranjan K Baruah
Getting a job in government or private organisation is a dream for many of us. Some of us could get it but some of us also have dreams to achieve milestones in life.

Being an entrepreneur is like an independent career. Entrepreneur is an individual who, rather than working as an employee, runs a small business and assumes all the risk and reward of a given business venture, idea or good or service offered for sale.

The entrepreneur is commonly seen as a business leader and innovator of new ideas and business processes.

In the same way entrepreneurship is the process of starting a business or other organisation. The entrepreneur develops a busi-

ness plan, acquires the human and other required resources, and is fully responsible for its success or failure. Entrepreneurship operates within an entrepreneurship ecosystem. Entrepreneurs have no limit for success and hence they can do lot in life.

One of the most important things to become entrepreneur is to take the risk. Most of the young people from our region are not confident enough to take risks; hence we have less number of entrepreneurs in the region in spite of having many natural resources.

One must have positive attitude to be a successful entrepreneur. It is important to know about the market through feasibility studies and all to start any enterprise.

There are different institutes burgeoning sector. Unbridled tourism has created tension among local residents in some of the most popular destinations in the world in the recent past.

And they have been striking back with anti-tourism protests. In Spain, for example, which saw a some 75.6 million tourists in 2016. In Barcelona, protest group Arran, the youth wing of the radical CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy) have been vehemently opposing cheap-tourist houses alleging they spoil the neighbourhoods and the environment alike.

The Venetians too have been demonstrating against unrestrained tourism in the last few months.

The romantic city on the Italian lagoon sees more than 20 million visitors a year. Add to it the huge cruise ships anchoring to let hundreds of leisure travellers a day to explore the city. The local populace is only 55,000 in number.

No wonder, tired of losing their neighbourhood ambience, some even pushed to the fringe of the city by aggressive real estate developers, more than two thousand locals recently marched through the city putting their feet down and demanding that the mayor and local government take action and they can get their city back.

Popular destinations in India too have seen deterioration to local environment with increasing footfall.

With an expanding middle class and more disposable income in hand, domestic tourism has seen a surge in the last few years. As a result, local residents, be it in Darjeeling, Shimla or Mussoorie, mourn the loss of their habitat and point out that irresponsible tourists spoil the very ambience of the hills stations where they rush in to escape the summer heat.

Rifai in an interview to media on the subject said the people wanting to travel is not at fault, which is natural; rather the need of the day is to manage growth in a sustainable manner which the local authorities need to look into. Among meas-

ures UNWTO recommends to achieve it is taking into account the needs of the local community.

Striking a balance between the number of visitors who bring in revenue to the local market and make it sustainable is a tightrope walk, no doubt. But economists and environmentalists say with policies with a long term view and concerted efforts by local authorities can manage to do so in a better way.

Bhutan, the kingdom at the Himalayan foothills, is often showcased as an example of this point of view. The country’s long-term strategy of controlled tourism with a focus on sustainability and quality

has earned it praise worldwide.

In the process, it has also been able to retain the pristine beauty of the land and its cultural ethos. The “happiest country” in the world, according to a survey measured on its Gross National Happiness, introduced a framework for the development of tourism in 1974.

With a ‘high-value, low-volume’ focus its aim was to control the type and quantity of tourism right from the beginning. Even UNWTO recognised this step as commendable.

Of course, it has also meant that Bhutan remains a rather expensive destination for the average tourist. But then, uncontrolled

tourism would have destroyed the very character of this tiny kingdom. One has to make a choice.

Meanwhile, the mayor’s office in Venice plans to introduce a ban on new tourist accommodation by this summer end. In addition, there would be monitoring agencies to check overcrowding and pinpoint areas that see high concentration of visitors.

Rome recently announced a ban on eating near its numerous beautiful fountains or paddling in the water. Milan too has taken steps to preserve its old quarters from getting spoiled by insensitive tourism. (TWF)



(Top) The mayor of Venice plans to introduce a ban on new tourist accommodation by this summer end; (above) Bhutan believes in controlled tourism and tourists throng the Seine frontline in France

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Be an entrepreneur for change

that offer different training for up-coming entrepreneurs. Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship is one of the institutes that promote en-



trepreneurship in the northeastern region. IIE conducts many training programme for young people to help them to set up enterprises.

Entrepreneurs can contribute to the social change. This is a way which can be taken by our young people for self-employment and self-dependent. There is fun, enjoyment and money too for successful entrepreneurs.

Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society’s problems like poverty, illiteracy, etc. They are determined and continual, tackling major social issues and offering new ideas for wide-scale change. It is the attempt to draw upon business techniques to find solutions to social problems.

This concept may be applied to a variety of organisations with different sizes, aims and beliefs and processes. Conventional entrepre-

neurs typically measure performance in profit and return, but social entrepreneurs also take into account a positive return to society. Social entrepreneurship typically attempts to further broad social, cultural, and environmental goals and is often associated with the voluntary sector for social transformation.

Social enterprises or social end-ventures may bring change in society in different way. A very good example of social entrepreneurship and a social entrepreneur is ‘Grameen Bank of Bangladesh’ created by Mohd Yunus as a micro-finance initiative towards providing economic independence to the lower income group. There are courses available in this area. Tata Institute of Social Science offers Master Programme related to Social Entrepreneurship.

National Entrepreneur Award

The National Entrepreneurship Awards have been instituted by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to encourage a culture of entrepreneurship across the country.

There are different categories which include entrepreneurs from difficult areas, including the northeastern region, women entrepreneur, entrepreneur from ST/SC category, Social Enterprises, Entrepreneur from Persons with Disability category. Aspirants may apply before 15th September.

(Ranjana K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjana@gmail.com or 9864055558 for any career related queries)

Instagram: The emerging photo gallery

By Somrita Ghosh

A “cow mask” photography series uploaded on Instagram by 24-year-old photographer Sutajro Ghosh recently took the Internet by storm.

Shot entirely on a mobile phone, the series features a woman wearing a cow mask posing at different iconic landmarks in India.

Ghosh said he wanted to highlight “women’s safety is a more serious concern than cow vigilantism”, using the mask as a metaphor.

Mounting it in an art gallery would have restricted its reach. “I never wanted to showcase my photography within four walls,” Ghosh, who now has more than 25,000 followers on social media, told IANS.

“There is no doubt that Instagram has helped me to reach out to a much larger audience, making my project successful,” he added.

It is not just Ghosh, but many other artists who are opting for Instagram to convey their stories — whether it’s raising awareness about contemporary social issues or glorifying the beauty of the Indian Railways.

Gone are the days when photographers would wait to get a date at a gallery to showcase their magic; now it’s all on the social media.

The presence of stalwarts like Raghu Rai, Dayanita Singh, Pablo Bartholomew and many others on social media platforms, embracing this sharing, shows how Instagram is gradually becoming a public gallery.

“With renowned photographers joining Instagram, it shows how they have taken the medium seriously. It is not just a pastime anymore,” noted Shanu Babar, administrator of “Window Seat Project”, a crowd-sourced community page.

With over 22,000 followers, the pictures on the community page and their catchy captions would convince you to start travelling by train once again.

For Mumbai-based photojournalist Anushree Fadnavis, who is working with the Indus Images, Instagram is not about uploading just photographs or getting more likes.

It is about capturing the visual world that narrates the stories of commoners.

“You don’t need a DSLR; all you need is a tale to tell. Even mobile clicks are great. And Instagram is just that platform where even an amateur could show off talent,” commented Fadnavis, who has more than 96,000 followers.

Her photographs, mostly shot on her mobile phone, focus on capturing the travels on Mumbai’s local trains, especially in the women’s compartment.

Whether it’s a transgender whom she has befriended or a daily commuter un-



Shot entirely on a mobile phone, the series features a woman wearing a cow mask posing at different iconic landmarks in India. Photo: Google Images

comfortable at getting photographed, Fadnavis finds a story in every single woman who boards the city’s lifeline.

“It’s a way for me to connect to people,” says Fadnavis. “There resides a mini Mumbai within the local trains. So many faces, so many hopes and dreams in those eyes.”

After their success on the social media platform, these photographers are now on a new high as global recognition beckons them. They described how their projects are reaching beyond borders.

Ghosh said after his cow mask series went viral, he has been approached by an art gallery in Italy to showcase the photographs.

“Had I not put them up on Instagram, art galleries from other nations would have never known about them. My work was seen and appreciated by people the world over. Social media brings all under one roof,” Ghosh noted.

Fadnavis too, has been invited to a number of exhibitions post her popularity on Instagram.

“Not just exposure, the platform has opened doors for me and for so many others,” Babar said.

“For a serious photographer, an Instagram account is his professional profile. I make sure that I put up quality content on a regular basis,” Babar noted.

Seeing the craze for photography, Instagram too has taken steps to further inspire budding talent, as well as the professionals in the field.

It is helping people build relationship through shared experiences. One good example of this is the World Wide Insta Meet or #WWIM.

“Inspired by our community, Instagram announces two weekends every year dedicated to Instagrammers meeting each other in person,” said Tara Bedi, Community Partnerships and Programs for Instagram in India.

Although Instagram is turning into a gallery sans boundaries for photographers, the option of too many filters often ruins the charm of original images.

Showkat Shafi, a photo-journalist associated with the Al Jazeera network, believes that over-editing eats away the soul of a photograph.

“Mobile phone cameras have turned everyone into a self-proclaimed photo editor. Photography is an art and should be treated like one.

“Treating it like science with editing apps ruins it. Flaws shouldn’t be edited. Instead they should be celebrated with skilled photography,” Shafi said.

So, on this World Photography Day it is time to test your love for that art. Just shoot and upload on Instagram. (IANS)

For photojournalist Anushree Fadnavis, Instagram is not about uploading just photographs or getting more likes

Honour for Assamese film

Latest Assamese film, Aamis (Voracious), directed by Bhaskar Hazarika, which is currently in development, has been selected for the prestigious Asian Project Market (APM), the biggest investment and co-production market in the continent which will take place for three days on October 15-17 at Busan, South Korea.

Produced by Poonam Deol of Signum Productions and Shyam Bora of Metanormal Motion Pictures, Aamis is a love story set in contemporary Guwahati, and is a film about empathising with people who make terrible decisions in the pursuit of love.

The project is presently in the pre-production stage and casting for the film is in process, a media statement said.

“APM is a major film market and as an official selection, we will be able to attract attention from global collabora-



tors who can help us achieve international standards of film production. I’m really thankful to the APM and the Busan International Film Festival for continuing to support our work after their post-production grant for our first film Kothanodi in 2015,” Hazarika said.

One of the biggest and most important pre-market for films in Asia, APM offers emerging filmmakers the opportunity to meet international leading film professionals and links them with global film investors, producers and distributors. “This selection is a great honour. We hope to find the right international partners and collaborators at Busan to help bring this unique story from Assam to audiences the world over. Hopefully, APM will be the first of many steps in Aamis’ journey to its eventual release sometime later in 2018” said Producer Shyam Bora from Metanormal Motion Pictures.

‘Fashion is personal style statement’

Diksha Modi, a Kolkata based designer, is running her own studio 'Kisses' which was launched around 2009. After getting firmly established in the city, she wants to keep her footsteps outside Kolkata into the bigger world of fashion wear. Souvik Ghosh speaks exclusively to her.

How did you get into this fashion world?

Honestly, it was not in my scheme of things! Perhaps it was pre-ordained. I actually wanted to be a journalist but was not allowed to study journalism. This was 10-15 years ago. So, I went on to do a BBA as I was not interested in doing anything else. It was during those days that my maternal grandmother, a designer herself, asked me to learn a bit about designing. For a year I trained under her, and by the end of it realised that I was not only good at it, but enjoyed it thoroughly.

Do you follow any fashion designer or adore one?

No, I do not particularly follow any one person or trend or style. I am, however, intrigued by the world of high fashion. I do really enjoy observing industry activities and other people’s work, specially the finish, the cuts and silhouettes, which I feel are very interesting. There are some designers who I follow and one of them is Agni. I really love the drapes that he creates for men’s wear. I feel Agni gives a different perspective on men’s wear through his creations, more so for Indian men. I certainly cannot ignore Sabyasachi’s exquisite craftsmanship or help admire the likes of Manish Malhotra. They are the pioneers and I have to follow them. As far as young designers are concerned, I enjoy looking at their work, observing what they are doing and the different work they create. I feel inspired by doing so.

What is fashion according to you?

For me it is a person’s personal style statement. It has alot to do with what one thinkslooks good on himself or herself, and that it should complement one’s skin tone, body structure, and personality. Many follow the trends blindly and dress up in a way which is completely unsuited to their personality. Of course personal taste also matters. There are some who avoid wearing bright colours or loud statementsbecause of their personal preferences.

Have you seen the recent dress worn by Alia Bhatt at a fashion event which was designed by Manish Malhotra? Did you like it?

Yes, I loved it. What I loved most were the colours that he used. There were some basic colours and I just loved the colour palette he used. It was all shine on the top while the bottom layer was simple and sober and that made the entire outfit stand out so well. Of course, it was Alia who was wearing it which obviously helped (smiles).

You have opened your store in Kolkata and also trying to keep your footsteps outside the city. What are the challenges you faced being in this profession?



The first challenge was to make the multi-designer stores accept my collections. The first thing that these stores ask is whether one is an established designer or not, which other stores are stocking my designs and if one has participated in any fashion week. So, in that sense, it was challenging. But despite being a newcomer my collection was accepted by many high end stores, which in turn helped me to venture into the niche market. The challenges are there but I feel one can make it on their own with commitment, creativity and professionalism. Once people see that designers are giving quality designs and collections and are honest, the way paves itself.

What are the collections you are presently having in your store?

Presently, we are showing two collections—the Remnants of Spring, and the other is yet to be titled. Remnants of Spring is a very chic, high-end formal wear collection for young girls. It is fun and flirty and can probably be worn to a nightclub. The other collection is more like a day wear with which one can step out for a lunch with friends or a meeting with a journalist. It is for casual occasions. (IBNS)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, August 20, 2017

Mars sextile Jupiter on your solar return chart denotes a good year. New friends will enter your life on a regular basis this year, adding a new dimension to your social life. Your drive for variety could take you on many adventures, as you embrace life with renewed passion under the influence of your spirit guide, the Peacock. Financial stability will return when you take on a second job or add education to advance your skills. When you make a few minor changes to your diet and physical activity, and you'll experience more vitality and energy. You'll become more socially consciousness this year, inspired to become an advocate for the rights of others. Thanks to the personal spiritual progress you've made, you'll want to update your environment to be more in tune your many faceted personality.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Self-confidence and action are highlighted and you tend to instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. Good work opportunities crop up for those working with overseas connections. You probably should be prudent as there is a tendency to create financial stress due to extravagant spending habits. At times you feel fun loving, energetic, and willing to explore new ideas. At home, you would resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Economy in the home and management of manpower and finances at work keep you in control of situations. You further your business by expanding in related fields of activity with good chances of collaborations. You would have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. You would have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives, friends and loved ones. You take on a dreamy and philosophical outlook. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with hitherto unapproachable people. Your hobbies, leisure time and time spent with children come into focus. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This week brings harmonious relations with friends, colleagues, loved ones, family and children. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. You would be more determined and diligent. On the financial front, progress would be steady and solid. The need to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you during this period. Your domestic life takes on top priority. Making yourself feel comfortable and secure is paramount, and you have every chance to boost your feeling of stability and support of the family. You may be tempted to spend extra money on material goods.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Good financial returns are on the cards as your meticulous planning pays off. A promotion at work or gainful business opportunity starts. You win many a point with your dynamic energy and communication skills. Your personal charm and charisma take you through complicated situations. You would spend a lot of money on clothes, furniture, and entertainment. Domestic relationships and the home environment would be harmonious and peaceful. This is an excellent period in which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Professional situations turn in your favor. You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional choices and difficult situations. You would be able to integrate forces, resources and professional aspects to achieve. With mastery in your field you meet deadlines. Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. You would be compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives and earn respect from them. There will be a fluctuation in moods before a balance is achieved.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent. You would successfully use your charm and your sense of humor to make peace and harmony in personal and professional relations. Romance brings a sense of belonging and feeling of security. You exhibit an ability to adapt to most situations. You would be willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. News and visitors from

far off places are likely to arrive. You are nurturing and caring in personal relationships. You are blessed with good mood and health for most of the week.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Excellent opportunities for people in show business, entertainment and related fields are in the offing. You would work more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You have been more determined and hard working and this brings fulfillment of all desires particularly in your personal and domestic life. Your personal charm and attractiveness would have a positive effect on your relationships. People see you as a loving and lovable person, and as someone who is aware of their needs and feelings, which can benefit you at this time. Others are willing to help and cooperate with your goals and ambitions. It would be better to go for long-term investments and speculations for financial gains.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You would use your talent and knowledge together in personal and professional life. You would get familiar with new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. Strong existing relationships are likely to grow and transform. Your finances could also improve as long as you employ strategy and work in a disciplined manner. You encounter people who are very considerate and understanding. You would also form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. This is a favorable period for people in fine arts, hospitality and other related fields. It's a great time to exert your personal influence, as you are coming across as especially cooperative and graceful.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

It's a very favorable time for developing your relationships with parents and other relatives. Personal relations are precious and need to be treated with tender love and care. New ideas and concepts floated by you at your work place will be appreciated. You may take up new assignments and project that would bring creativity and invention of new ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. There may be gains from shares and assets in hand. You impress people with your talent and charisma and invite fresh opportunities. This is a good time for teachers, salespersons and those in related fields of communication.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You would be able to maintain balance of the head and heart in professional and in personal relations. Family is supportive, children are loving and friends extend hospitality and love. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. You put in a lot of efforts and then find this has established a strong professional base with your hard work and this brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is a good time to organize your workplace, tools and thoughts. This would help you to get a better perspective to achieve desired goals.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Your courage and confidence will keep your hopes alive. You can attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with seniors at work. Increased energy and a renewed feeling of confidence favor you. Take advantage of time and utilize your energy accordingly. Problems in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. You are highly motivated to make money which enhances your energy for new moneymaking projects. Romantic matters, as well as pleasure-seeking activities, come to the fore. You might spend a lot of time in making short frequent trips, visiting friends and relatives. Activities related to communications such as journalism, literature and fine arts are highlighted.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

A wonderful professional opportunity takes you towards success. A personal meeting will lead to romance, love and a long lasting relationship. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes may come. Your family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You exhibit brilliance in handling business ventures and collaborations. This helps you to build your self confidence and strengthen your financial position. You would take up assignments and projects which would end on a winning note for you. Your efforts to reach out to new people will be accepted and welcomed as you get success in foreign matters too. Physical energy and good health enable you to incorporate a busy schedule and work commitments.

“You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore.”
--- William Faulkner

The Shillong Times

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Israel’s support

WITH the growing influence of the military in Pakistan following the dismissal of Nawaz Sharif, the need for India to win friends and influence other countries has been accentuated. A statement by Israeli authorities to an Indian daily to the effect that Israel will support India on the Kashmir issue is welcome. Israel has been relatively silent on Kashmir in the past despite its commitment to counter terrorism. Israel is also a victim of terror, especially by the Hamas in Palestine. Since India's establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1991, Tel Aviv has always endorsed India's position that Kashmir is an integral part of this country. But a kind of entente cordiale emerged between Israel and Pakistan after 2003 with Israel starting to look at Pakistan as an important country of the Islamic world. The Delhi Declaration issued after the visit to India by the then Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon in 2003 did not mention Israel's stand on Kashmir. Similarly, the recent visit to Israel of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the first such visit of an Indian PM to that country did not result in any direct reference to the terrorism issue in Kashmir by Tel Aviv. This was notwithstanding Israel's commitment to forming significant defence ties with India. The joint statement made by Narendra Modi and Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu did not specifically mention cross border terrorism from Pakistan nor did it ask Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of the Mumbai attack to justice.

The latest statement from Israel has finally cleared the air and should reassure New Delhi. It may be pointed out that the Modi-Trump joint communique clearly asked Pakistan to punish the perpetrators of the Mumbai and Pathankot attacks and wanted action to be taken against Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, two terror groups in Pakistan. The US statement may have influenced Israel's explicit support to India.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

Closer to snails than to butterflies

Dear tourist, if you are in quest for leisuredness come, come to Shillong, the land of absolute leisure. Here is a town (or a reclaimed village?) liberated from the hustle and bustle of technocratic civilization, that has nestled itself smugly on somnolent elevations. Here the air is redolent of ritualistic passivity, and the valleys bear an insouciant distance from you. It promises you all the luxury you can afford: tardiness, apathy, inflation and above all, arbitrariness. As the morning creeps in like a yellow fog through the chinks of the windows you can never predict what sort of a day it is going to be., The sky may get burdened with clouds at any moment and the rain may slither down the roofs and bubble in the gutters clotted with filth. Or it may be a bout of wind which fills the air with the vocative smells of the dust and the nascent fust of the tombs. It could even be a bright day with the pine trees on the distant mountains gazing nonchalantly at the sky their forms stippling the landscape like heavy brush strokes on a water colour whose vitality has been blanched from it. This arbitrariness of the nature with its enervating effect has been our legacy for ages, dear Tourist. It is this arbitrariness that has made us a leisurely people. You are welcome to have a taste of it in our buses, on our streets, at our workplaces

and even our hospitals. Our minibuses proffer you the greatest luxury for idling away your leisure. Their seats may be sordid, but they are bug-free (There is no blood left in our flesh for bugs after all our frequent inevitable encounters with the grocers butchers, businessmen and other arbiters). The buses wait for you at every stop and the conductor-another arbiter - welcomes you with the servility of a royal janitor. Packed to capacity or not, the buses won't move until the duration of the ritual halt elapses. What is the advantage of buses waiting for commuters instead of vice versa, you may ask. We know it is putting the cart before the horse. But this is the land of leisuredness. If you are in a hurry (then don't come to Shillong if you can help it) you would better put your best foot forward. Your feet will carry you faster than our buses. The average speed of our bus is six kilometers per hour it takes a whole hour to reach Nongthymmai from Barabazar. However, before you do set yourself on foot fix a pair of blinkers to your eyes. If your gaze strays from where your feet are supposed to follow, you may encounter one (or more) of the following (i) a depression in the footpath, (ii) a fountain from a broken pipe (iii) a heap of putrefied filth transferred by cleaners from the sewers, and (iv) a dead end the footpath.

The Week That Was: A Heart-Rending One!

By H.H. Mohrmen

It was such an inauspicious week which does not bode well with the family that was directly hit by the tragedies. The whole state too mourns the loss of precious lives. In the week that was, one tragedy after the other struck the state like it never did before. It started with the big one where three precious lives were lost in what was called a freak accident. The passing away of the dear souls would have any semblance of reparation to their near and dear ones only if there is a lesson we have learnt from the accident. They know their dear ones will not come back (no matter what) but if the unfortunate accident can at least provide lessons for the future then their deaths will not be in vain.

It was indeed a resounding wake up call for the government (which of course learns lessons the hard way) of the need to take stock of the old and aged trees which pose imminent threats to the people and are still standing in many public places. Of course the action taken by the government is too late for the families that have lost their near and dear ones in the accident and there is no need of blaming and finger pointing, because death comes in mysterious ways. But it is the irony of life that a tree which supports life by providing us clean air to breathe and succour from heat and rain is also the one that has taken not one but three lives in one stroke.

Then there are two young lives that were lost when they were away from home. The young lady who died in harness or with her boots on was a brave young woman who dared to step out of the comfort of her house and the state to work outside. For a tribal girl this itself is an achievement. Then the brave heart who gave up his life for the sake of others is a living example and a testimony to the fact that humanity is still alive. It also proves beyond doubt that in a situation like that, all that distinguishes us one from the other vanishes and only the instinct to save another fellow human prevails. It is comforting to know that he grew up in SOS village and the credit goes to the mothers and the keepers of

the village who have done a commendable job of raising such a fine lad. I used to say that it is not how you die but how you live your life which is important but in this case how he died sets him apart from those around him.

For the families who lost their relatives, there will never be answer to the question why their loved ones died the way they did because there are no answers to that question. But let us find comfort in the fact that they just unfortunately happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Let us also remind ourselves that the dead are not mere statistics; they are somebody's sons, daughters, friends and relatives. I happen to know the relatives of the two young ladies who died

as population grew and the village also expanded what use to be areas away or beyond the village are gradually getting populated with people living around the cremation ground. In Jowai too, the cremation grounds were initially thought to be outside the town till people started to construct houses around it due to urbanisation. Then because the cremation was done traditionally, all the smoke and the stench envelops the houses around and the community complained to the Deputy Commissioner. Of course, there is no foreseeable solution to the problem.

If the saying ‘one man/ women can make a difference’ still rings true’ then the story of how a solution to this complex problem was arrived at is a

The young lady who died in harness or with her boots on was a brave young woman who dared to step out of the comfort of her house and the state to work outside. For a tribal girl this itself is an achievement. Then the brave heart who gave up his life for the sake of others is a living example and a testimony to the fact that humanity is still alive.

recently - Anthony Khongsit the brother of the young flight steward and Raphael Warjit the father of young lady who died in the freak accident.

I wouldn't have brought this issue to the fore again had it not been for the lesson that we can learn from the Myllem funeral imbroglio. I was given to understand that the protest was because the cremation produces a foul stench which causes inconveniences to the community. This is not new because traditional cremation indeed produces foul smell and the community living around the cremation ground often protest.

If we only care to look we would find that traditionally, all the cremation grounds are located in the outskirts or away from the village but

substantiation to the fact. A humble man with very little education is always being seen as a genius in the town. He is the perfect description of a barefoot scientist. He pondered and experimented with his miniature model till he came up with a solution to the problem. Ma Kambel Shullai designed and made the first crematorium which ultimately solved the problem and which also addressed all the needs of cremation in the traditional way. For example in a Pnar Niamtre cremation, timing is kept that the ritual of ‘choh syiar’ coincides with the time the cremation is completed and when ‘ka siang ka pha’ (offerings to the departed souls) can begin. Ma Kambel’s model took all these elements into consideration when he designed the crematorium.

Ma Kambel not only came up with the brilliant

idea but more importantly his crematorium can also be called eco-friendly because it consumes very less firewood. Traditionally one or two trees were cut for use to cremate one dead body, but now only two or three bundle (which is fraction of what was used in the traditional practices) is needed to cremate a person.

Unfortunately the Myllem problem was blown out of proportion; sadly it was also given a communal colour by certain vested interests. Why do we have to protest when we can sit down and talk and come up with a solution like they did in Jowai? After all we speak the same language don't we? My other concern is with the use of students in any protest or even government functions. Did the school management give the DSEO prior information about the students being taken for the protest? How can the education department allow the schools or the shnong to use the students at their beck and call?

Now even government functions will remain empty if the students are not involved. Why do we have to do this? Parents send their kids to school to learn and not to attend functions and protest marches. And also why do students have to suffer to give the politicians and the bureaucrats an opportunity to inflate their egos? What did the students learn from all the functions that they were forced to attend anyway?

It is good that this problem is being given its final burial and the credit goes to the District Administration, East Khasi Hills, but it will be futile if we do not learn anything from the incidents. There are lessons to be learnt even from tragedies if we only open our eyes and look around for solutions instead of looking for excuses to create more problem.

With all the rain and the floods, it was a difficult week indeed but we are glad that it is over and we can resume our work as usual.

When Government & Dorbar Shnong fail us

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

Last Saturday road accident near Raj Bhavan that killed two innocent lives is a negative outcome of e-governance. And the drama at Myllem protesting against the cremation is a rare occasion and perhaps the first time ever in the history of Khasi society. This is because the Dorbar Shnong of Myllem in particular has failed to keep the tradition to uphold the consensus and support usually rendered by the Dorbar to the bereaved family members especially in the process of assisting in disposing off the dead body through burial or cremation as usually done from time to time and from place to place in our society. It is very sad to see how an agitated protest was organised in a funeral or cremation day by few persons who dared to cross the boundaries of decency just because of their personal sentiments. No matter how grievous the situation is, it should have been sorted out quietly within the level of the Dorbar Shnong. And for this purpose I think the Dorbar Shnong has failed because it could not adhere to the principles of being apolitical and non-sectarian institution any longer.

Let us not forget that the dead are still a priority and evoke a respect irrespective of which religious sect they belong to. This is the essence of Khasi society and culture up to the present. The apathy and pathetic behavior of the Dorbar may perhaps have paved the way for such incidents. Dorbar shnong exists for the purpose of instilling confidence and harmony in the community, to become a solution and not a party to a conflict. But this role has eroded over the years especially in rural areas and outskirts of Shillong town because the Rangbah Shnong, Secretary and Rangbah Dong are overtaken by issues that have monetary value rather than the welfare of the community. But my congratulation goes to the District Administration and police for acting at the right time and leaving no stone unturned to bring understanding among the warring parties which in fact could have been settled within the level of the village dorbar because this is their internal matter.

This same paradigm also operated in the government functioning otherwise those two lives would have never been crushed under the tree. This is all because the spirit and mission of e-governance (Electronic-Governance) has not been internalized robustly in order to converge and achieve the purpose of effective-governance. The nonchalant attitude of many of the functionaries to keep pace with the speed of technology has crippled almost every good purpose of governance. Further, this incidence clearly indicates the failure of the entire governmental machinery to protect the lives of its citizens. This episode should be blamed on the functionaries who handle their respective roles. This is not just a co-incidence or mishap of a single time but has happened twice during this season in that area. The first incident was a warning but the authorities concerned took no interest. The causes for this are interconnected but it can be avoided if proper efforts are taken up by authorities concerned (not only to warn pedestrians and commuters). This is a clear case of negligence by the authorities which led to this unpleasant situation.

The big apprehension before everyone now is whether it is safe to travel by road or on foot in any part of the city or town especially during the monsoons with so many trees around us. What credit should the government claim when its very own citizens are living

in uncertainties? And these painful situations and regrets are what we citizens are reaping because those who are elected and entrusted with the mandate to govern ended up only in directing and steering their personal businesses for their futuristic scope.

The head of the state or government may term the incident as unfortunate but he should also remember that mere compensation will never substitute the loss of a precious life from a household. One can imagine what would happen if such an incident had to befall on any of the constitutional heads such as the Governor, the Chief Minister or Judges of the High Court? Let the people answer this question.

It is very stupid to see officials being pressed into action only after a tragedy has occurred. However, let's hope that it is done judiciously. Are there no brains in the government agency to think ahead in terms of preventing mishaps or havoc of any kind? The forest department has its own management skills and scope and I think the impact assessment section should be given more responsibility and liberty to address any issues of possible damage from any quarters such as trees, quarries, mining, etc.

The government has failed to protect lives and property which is constitutionally a primary role and therefore it has no moral right to claim to be a government for the people. The Disaster Management wing of the state too has failed to perform its appropriate duty vis-à-vis that unfortunate situation. As already mentioned this is not the first time that trees have been uprooted, hence there should have been a thorough inspection of trees along the roadside. This wing should have pointed out to the government the impeding dangers from such gigantic trees coming crashing down. They are not employed for the sake of employment and to wait for a disaster to occur so that they can be in operation. It is here that Disaster Management should rediscover itself and redefine its scope for the larger interest. Disaster management is not a debris management but a better and meaningful management for preventing disaster and/or reducing its impact and also to minimize the damage caused. This can only happen if the disaster wing moves ahead by scouting and identifying the vulnerability and grey areas of any kind and to swiftly recommend immediate action. Then it is the duty of the government how to roll out such action.

It's high time that we come up with a permanent solution to these problems of landslides, floods and other calamities. And this is the primary responsibility of the government. These are great lessons that as a state and community we should learn from now onwards so that each and every home can enjoy the outcome of good and effective governance. Dorbar Shnong should exhibit a higher standard of integrity and rise above any political, religious or personal sentiment. They should exhibit sincerity and straight forwardness so that all sections of society can repose their faith on these institutions. It may be an assumption that Khasis belonging to the indigenous faith do not have any more faith in the present Khasi Dorbar because they do not function on the principles of righteousness and truth. But it is also a challenge for the local dorbar if it wants to keep the equality and unity of the community intact.

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.

“Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.”
--- Alexander Pope

The Shillong Times

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Proactive versus Reactive politics
The Indian National Congress in Meghalaya or in the country has not been able to demonstrate its ability to spur its own resurgence. A Party that once ruled India but is now relegated to a pitiable position of not securing enough seats in the Lok Sabha to become the undisputed opposition party in 2014, seems to depend more on the BJP faltering rather than on its own ability to spruce itself up. Every day, Rahul Gandhi the Party Vice President issues statements that are at best amateurish. That he is an MP from Amethi in Uttar Pradesh and is therefore equally responsible for the state of affairs there and not just his own constituency does not seem to occur to this proletarian politician. His visit to Gorakhpur on Saturday to BRD Medical College and Hospital where the latest death toll of children due to Japanese Encephalitis has touched 105, coincided with the visit of Yogi Adityanath the UP chief minister. As can be expected Rahul Gandhi's objective of visiting the place was to score brownie points and put the Adityanath Government on notice. It could have been a more measured visit, aimed at getting a clear picture of this very unsettling situation. This is not the first time that BRD Medical College has seen such deaths. Children deaths have been a regular feature in UP with Gorakhpur being the highpoint, during the monsoons due to several reasons, but mainly because extremely filthy surroundings. Rahul Gandhi has conveniently forgotten that the Samajwadi Party with which he had a pre-election coalition in the Assembly elections held in March this year, was ruling UP between 2012 to 2017 and that blaming Yogi Adityanath who is in the driving seat only in the past five months, for a long standing problem, lacked punch. The BJP termed Rahul Gandhi's visit a "picnic," much to the chagrin of Congress workers.

In Meghalaya too, we see a similar situation. The Meghalaya Congress President and State Chief Minister have been reacting to what the BJP is doing or seeks to do. They have however not spelt out their own action plan for 2018. The state of the roads in Meghalaya today should make them squirm. They should reflect on their own acts of omission and commission instead of pointing fingers at the BJP or any other party, for, Meghalaya is their oyster and has been for a long while and there's no getting away from accountability for the downward plunge of this state. The present round of inaugurations and foundation stones are unlikely to cut much ice. Political parties that only react lack maturity and intellectual capital. Those that are proactive are busy at making their roadmaps without much cacophony.

Potus in trouble: “fine people on both sides”

By TP Sreenivasan

In any situation of conflict, a remark like "there are fine people on both sides" should sound balanced, impartial and just. In any philosophy, assertions like goodness is present in the most evil of men is an acceptable doctrine. But if the clash is between the white supremacists and anti-fascist activists in 2017, such a statement by the President of the United States (POTUS) is blasphemy. If the statement happens to be from Donald Trump, who has espoused white supremacy openly, it is inflammatory. This is why the seemingly innocuous statement by Trump ignited the gravest controversy over racism since his election campaign. Most sections of the population, including Republicans, business leaders and sportsmen denounced him for equating the neo-Nazis with the anti-fascists. On August 12, the white supremacists had clashed with the anti-fascists in a protest in Charlottesville, Virginia and caused the death of a 32 year old woman, Heather Hayes, and injury of 19 others. Trump's immediate reaction and subsequent clarifications shocked the majority of Americans and his approval rate dropped to 38% with 56% disapproval.

Within days, Steve Bannon, the President's chief strategist and the architect of the ultra-nationalism that the President had propagated, joined the other half, a dozen key White House advisers, who had left the administration either in disgust or discredited. Bannon was on the point of leaving earlier, particularly because Trump had not liked the idea of Bannon being identified as the author of many of his plans and ideas, but this time, the pressure was from the liberals to remove Bannon for having formulated the President's statements on the incident. The President's second statement, "We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence, on many sides" had made matters worse. His next statement was an attempt to distance himself from the incident: "It's been going on for a long time in our country," he said. "Not Donald Trump, not Barack Obama. This has been going on for a long, long time." But no other President had endorsed racism and white supremacy as he had done and his justification, however mild, turned out to be the last straw.

Right from the days of the campaign, Trump had inflamed the passions of the conservative right by calling for making America great again, which seemed to be a call to reinstate white supremacy. His election promises and the policies he designed as President made more headlines in a week than his predecessors did during their entire term. The irony is that any optimism about this Presidency is the hope that he will not keep his promises such as ban of entry of Muslims, building of a wall between the US and Mexico and abandoning the United Nations. In actual practice, he has made tactical retreat on many of these issues when they were either challenged by the law or new facts emerged, which made his plans impractical. His fundamental approach of isolationism and non-involvement of the US in world affairs itself turned out to be a non-starter within months of his election.

The DPRK crisis opened Trump's eyes to the need to work with other permanent members of the UN Security Council. He faced the stark choice of either fighting a nuclear war or seeking the support of China to stop the development of missiles by the DPRK to deliver nuclear devices, not only to Guam, but also to

mainland America. Trump abandoned his strategy for a trade war and a confrontation with China on its currency manipulation and invited the Chinese President to his private resort in Florida to work out a joint strategy to deal with the missile programme continued, the crisis was confined to war cries from both sides. When Kim announced postponement of his bombing of Guam, the whole world heaved a sigh of relief and Trump himself welcomed Kim's restraint as "a very wise and well reasoned decision." This shows that Trump's apparent political death wish can be tempered by a sense of reality. Like in the case of Hamlet, there is a method in his madness, it transpired. He even worked with the UN, which he called a waste of time, to secure a unanimous resolution, imposing sanctions against DPRK. The Chinese vote for the sanctions resolution was a great surprise, given its consistent support to North Korea over the years.

The biggest tragic-comedy of the Trump administration so far is, of course, the love affair with Russia, which has come full circle, starting from seeking help from Russia to win the election, to the President signing into law sanctions against Russia for allegedly interfering in the US elections. He sacked his key advisers, threatened to dismiss the Special Counsel, who was appointed to investigate the case and now faces a Grand Jury to investigate his and his son-in-law's involvement with the Russians before and after the elections in the US. The possibility of impeachment already stares the President in the face. Trump's dream of consolidating his position in Europe and containing China with the cooperation of Russia has turned into a nightmare. The failure to replace Obamacare and other misadventures on the

domestic front remain as sideshows to the faltering Presidency.

The present crisis, involving the most explosive issue of racism may well be the most serious challenge faced by Trump. In the seventh month of his administration, questions are being asked how long the Presidency will last. Democrats are contemplating to discredit him and to make him resign by censuring him even without impeachment because of the urgency of the matter. The Republicans are facing the deep dilemma of having to disown their own President as they cannot acquiesce in the President's position on the Charlottesville fiasco. To undermine the Republican Presidency at a time when the Republicans have increased their presence in the state legislators and the number of Governors will be hard, but supporting the President on the white supremacy issue will be suicidal to the Republican Party. Media circles have characterised the incident as "the biggest political train crash" of the current administration and alleged that Trump has exposed his unfitness to continue as President by his unadulterated ultra-nationalism and racism. "The Trump presidency that we fought for, and won, is over, said Steve Bannon. "We still have a huge movement, and we will make something of the Trump presidency, but that presidency is over. It will be something else." No one understands the pulse of the presidency as he does, even though he himself has quit the administration.

(The writer is former Ambassador of India and Governor for India of the IAEA. He is also Chairman, Academic Council and Director, NSS Academy of Civil Services & Director General, Kerala International Centre).

Is this the swan song for Indian democracy?

By Barnes Mawrie

The unforgettable Independence Day speech of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on 14th August 1947: "At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom", still rings in our ears as we celebrate the 70th Independence Day this year. India has always boasted of being the largest democracy, a land of "unity in diversity," a truly "secular" nation where every citizen is respected irrespective of his religion, race, culture and language. For nearly seven decades we Indians have lived an envious existence unlike people in other countries where freedom remains a distant dream. The freedom that Mahatma Gandhi and other freedom fighters have earned for the nation, is seasoned by their sweat, tears and blood. It is a freedom that our forefathers who lived under the foreign yoke welcomed with ecstatic joy. Perhaps the present generation is taking it for granted and fails to appreciate the value of it because they have never suffered the yoke of colonialism.

Whatever we may say, the Congress Party has remained faithful to its sacred duty of preserving the democratic character of our nation. Perhaps the Emergency period between

the BJP, is a major threat to democracy itself. Dictatorial governments have always targeted the media first before they started suppressing democracy. The picture presented by the India Today poll survey in these past few days shows that if a general election would be held today, BJP would back 298 seats and Congress would get only 47 seats. This is a one sided picture presented by the media which tries to put the BJP on a pedestal and so create a make-believe scenario in people's minds that the BJP is the best government and should be voted to power again. The manner in which some of the media channels are going crazy in their sting operations against the UPA and the Congress in particular, is a clear indication that they are not neutral but are highly politicized. Unlike in the days of the UPA government when every media channel would uncompromisingly criticize government policies from time to time, today we hardly hear any media channel say anything negative about the NDA government. We will not be surprised if Modi is projected as the second "Father of the Nation."

Added to these threats, the BJP is raking up religious issues targeting the

Indian democracy may seem permanent but in reality it is gradually under threat of survival. Since the coming to power of the BJP government in 2014, there has been a step by step attempt to denigrate the democratic values and destabilize the democratic system in our country. As of now, the Congress Party is almost in shambles and the UPA appears to be out of form, therefore the BJP is riding high and perhaps 2019 election will undoubtedly go in their favour.

1975-77 during the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi remains a dark spot in the INC's annals. Documents however show that Indira Gandhi wanted emergency only for a short period of time due to internal unrest. However, in election that followed the emergency the Indian people demonstrated their disapproval by voting out the Congress party.

Indian democracy may seem permanent but in reality it is gradually under threat of survival. Since the coming to power of the BJP government in 2014, there has been a step by step attempt to denigrate the democratic values and destabilize the democratic system in our country. As of now, the Congress Party is almost in shambles and the UPA appears to be out of form, therefore the BJP is riding high and perhaps 2019 election will undoubtedly go in their favour. The BJP has a right-wing ideology which is proving extremely dangerous for Indian democracy. Today they are on top of the world with their own men in the topmost positions, namely, the President and the Vice President. It is true that theoretically the President is above party politics, but this is to be seen in reality as things unfold in the days to come considering the fact that he is an RSS man.

Already in the higher bureaucracy the BJP has got its own loyalists who are ready to tow the line and implement their dictates. The way the media has been bought off or tilted towards

minority Christians and Muslims. Through their religious fundamentalism they are threatening the religious freedom guaranteed by our democracy. Today there are already eight states (the latest being Jharkhand) which have passed the anti-conversion bill which legalizes the suppression and persecution of Christians and Muslims. It is alleged that even Muslims (who are over 14.2% of the population) are living in fear in many parts of our country today. It is the fear of imminent danger to of an uncertain future. Hidden plots are being fomented against the minorities. It looks like the BJP is heading towards a constitutional amendment. They seem to be allergic to the term "secular" and want to replace it with "hindutva." As things progress today - the BJP surging ahead in power, the Modi magic hypnotizing the citizens and the Congress left leaderless and in total disarray - the future of Indian democracy is in real peril. Perhaps this may be the swan song for our great Indian democracy.

The BJP left to its whims and fancies will turn our country into a theocratic nation. But I strongly believe that the Indian people are wise, insightful and moderate. They are neither blind to the dark sides of reality nor easily duped by the glamour of political propaganda. Just as they have always disapproved of any undemocratic movement in the past, they will do so in the next general election.

TO THE EDITOR

Identity and religion

Editor,
It was with sadness and deep dismay that many of us read the article "No place to live and no place to die -the Khasi NiamTynrai in their own motherland" by Mankular Gashnga (ST, Aug 19, 2017). First of all, it was a harsh attack on the church in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills in a manner which has rarely, if ever, appeared in print. Second, the latter part of the article was an assault on our collective identity as Khasis, which narrowly defines "Who is a Khasi?" in terms of religious affiliation. The same fundamentalists that the writer derides in the first paragraph are the very same fundamentalists whose worldview he adopts when he writes, "without the Khasi Niam Tynrai, Khasi Christians will no longer have a definition of identity." Of course, it hurts that the church has been portrayed in such a prejudiced manner by someone who had served for a few years as a probationary pastor of the Presbyterian Church before he resigned. I readily admit that the church is not perfect, I fully agree that some of our attitudes arewrong and I wholeheartedly accept that we must correct them. But you just can't paint caricatures of the church in a public forum and then attackthe institution as if its entire agenda is "discrimination"against the followers of the traditional Khasi religion.

However, I shall refrain

from a point by point refutation of the accusations. Because this letter is not about the church but about our collective Khasi identity! This unnecessary mixing of religion and ethnic identity should be resisted by every Khasi-Pnar who loves his/her people and cherishes our unity. Because this is a destructive idea that has the potential to create divisions in our Khasi-Jaintia community, which is generally united till now. We must be vigilant because there are opportunistic, external forces that would polarize us as has happened in other parts of the country and the world.

No sociologist will ever define ethnic identity in terms of religious affiliation. None of the stalwarts of the traditional Khasi religion ever conflated religion with ethnicity. The many SengKur (clan organizations), including my own, never select membership and leadership on the basis of religion. The Hill State Movement was led by Khasis irrespective of religious affiliation. Even the membership and leadership of the various NGOs come from people irrespective of religious affiliation -if you must define "Who is a Khasi?" in activist terms.

The events at Myllichem August 11 were unfortunate and could have been better managed, should have been better managed by the parties concerned. I agree it was wrong to demonstrate against a funeral in progress; because respect for the dead is sacrosanct.But it was also unwarranted, as in the above

article, to drag the church and its supposed "discrimination"into a matter which is wholly under the purview of the Dorbar Shhong of Madan lingSyiem. We must be responsible when writing articles in newspapers. Unlike the social media, newspaper space is sacrosanct. We all want peaceful resolutionof the matter and we all earnestly want the unity of our Khasi-Jaintia jaitbynriew. Judging by newspaper and other reports, we are hopefulthat the matter of a permanent cremation ground will soon be settled.

Yours etc.,
Rev Lyndan Syiem,
Via email

Resumption of coal mining in Meghalaya

Editor,
Apropos the report, "MMDC move to carry out coal mining opposed" (ST May 5, 2017)- the State Government's proposal to carry out coal mining operation through the Meghalaya Mineral Development Corporation (MMDC) has been opposed. The State Government's proposal during the Consultative meeting held on May 3, 2017 at the State Convention Centre as was explained by the Chief Minister and the presentation made by the Managing Director, MMDC has to be understood in the proper perspective. Because of the ban imposed by the NGT on coal mining in the

state in 2014 hundreds of people engaged in coal mining have lost their livelihoods. Coal-based industries have come to a halt and the State Government is suffering a revenue loss of approximately Rs 600 Crore per year from royalty and cess etc.

Without infringing upon indigenous people's rights over land and minerals and assets above and below the land or their land holding and land tenure system the state government has attempted to rescue people of the state from the sudden unemployment resulting in a total loss of earnings. Therefore it is necessary to motivate land-owners in the coal-bearing districts where coal seams of a minimum workable thickness in a consistent and continuous manner to agree to the state government proposal. The smaller areas can be amalgamated by holding/organizing workshops by MMDC to explain the mechanics of it. Since MMDC has no infrastructure in terms of manpower & machinery for taking up mining operations, it may also explain the role of Mine Development cum Operator (MDO) to be selected through tendering process for conducting mining operations and to convince the land-owners to vest their coal bearing land in favour of MMDC through appropriate legal agreements.

No individual land

owner/coal miner in the state, on his own, is in a position to invest capital requirement for scientific mining of coal that would necessitate a minimum degree of mechanization right from making entry/access to the coal seam, establishing ventilation and lighting underground, roof & side support system specially in tertiary deposit of coal, extraction of coal and hauling out it to surface with safety and due protection of environment. In fact a tripartite agreement between MMDC, land-owners and MDOs need to be executed for sharing profit/loss on pro-rata basis depending upon the size of coal bearing land of the individual land owners or of the consortium of land-owners.

In addition to framing policy guidelines for regulating Coal Mining 2012, the state government has already initiated a proposal seeking exemptions under the Sixth Schedule [Para 12 A (b)] of the Constitution of India for early resumption of coal mining in the state with due safeguards and keeping intact the ownership rights of indigenous/tribal people. That the plan of the Government to opt for MDO Model would invite global players to extract coal, at the cost of the local people is a misconception, misnomer and completely unfounded.

In fact the Chief Minister had only appealed to the landowners/coal miners to give their consent to MMDC - a state government corporation to extract coal. There is no question of imposition/coercion. The

interaction was aimed at motivating land owners of a better deal. Amalgamation of land owners and collaboration with MMDC was sought for a viable joint venture to resume coal mining scientifically. The land owners and MMDC would share pro-rata profit/ revenue through mutually acceptable agreement. It would be better to opt for a Public Private Partnership (PPP) model for revival of coal mining in the state. A "pilot project/coal mine" on experimental basis may be operated in a virgin area after confirming the availability of sufficient proved reserves may be taken up by MMDC after fully explaining to land owners/mine owners for amalgamation and adequately motivating them & reassuring them that their rights would not be compromised. On the success of this experimental joint venture more individual land owners/coal miners would be convinced and willingly give their consent to use their lands, with their rights to land remaining intact.

Yours etc.,
Samarees
Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata
High Court

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.

“Ever has it been that loves knows not its own death until the hour of separation.”
--- Khalil Gibran

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 13 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2017

Decline in International cricket
CRICKET in recent days has proved a dull game. West Indies were beaten hollow by England- by an immense lead of 209 runs. Sri Lanka lost to India. All this showed the fall of two giants. Windies were the most formidable team at one time and Sri Lanka also dazzled. The question that is being asked is whether international cricket is losing its appeal. Windies started their downward slope in the 1990s. That was long before the beginning of T-20. Is the decline of West Indies due to the fact that they are a string of islands and without the cohesion that makes for cricketing excellence? The spirit of anti-colonialism exhibited by West Indies in the past has also ebbed away. The advent of T-20 has turned the glorious game into a mercenary affair. Test cricket because of its long duration has lost its glamour and appeal. In Sri Lanka, the outstanding cricketers of the past have not left worthy successors.

International cricket bodies have also turned a blind eye on the mediocrity that has set in. The money monster has dulled individual and team brilliance. Administrators and players have simultaneously become victims of this craze for monetary gains. Bitterness prevails between administrators and players in most cricketing countries. The present lacklustre cricket is no surprise. The Indian cricket board as well as the Aussies have become a quarrelsome lot. South Africa does not much care about international cricket. Pakistan does not play home series. It is a gloomy scenario.

LOOKING BACK
April 26, 1989

Indo- Bangla drug trafficking

The recent Indo-Bangladesh parleys held Dhaka tookup one of the major problems of today the narcotics smuggling across international borders. Talking on the subject earlier this week in Cal-cutta Mr. H.P Bhatnagar, Director General of the Border Security Force won led the Indian delegation said that drug smuggling across the Indo-Bangladesh border has recently gone up substantially because of a change in the pattern of drug trafficking. This has been caused by the fact that while trafficking along the country's western border has somehow been restricted in the wake of recent political developments in Afghanistan that along

the Indo-Bangla border had shot up following rise in drug smuggling along the Burma-Bangladesh border. As suggested by India, it was decided at the two day meeting that both the countries would have a drug liaison officer in Dhaka for exchanging information on drug trafficking. While this is an important step, mere exchange of information however cannot serve the purpose of tackling the menace even as a preliminary step. The crux of the problem is how to restrict the operations along the vulnerable routes and this brings us to the more important question of improving and enforcing strict surveillance which has to be the job of the BSF on this side of the border.

TO THE EDITOR

No personal comments please!

Editor,
With reference to the rebuttal by Rev Lyndan Syiem to my article, I wish to implore on my fellow citizens to please refrain from commenting about, criticizing or attacking me personally but to instead focus and debate on the issues I had raised appropriately for the welfare of the society at large, for the simple reason that I did not write about anyone personally in my article.
Yours etc.,
Mankular Gashnga,
Via email

Traffic Mayhem in Shillong City

Editor,
Come daybreak on a weekday and it's time to power through the chores ready to go out for the day be it school, office, getting groceries, opening of shops/establishments, the like. But stepping out onto the roads is what every commuter dreads these days. The reason? Massive traffic jams which stall everyone's

work leading to flaring tempers and road rage. So we start the day on a negative note. The brunt of it is borne by students who have to endure the long hours of commute in spite of short distances and more so when exams are on and the rain plays spoilsport, thereby adding to the stress level of both parents and children alike. This stress was evident over the last couple of days when traffic snarls led to children reaching late to school, along with the added burden of the tension of exams playing havoc on their young minds.

My appeal to the authorities is to revert to the old system which was prevalent at the Don Bosco Point before February this year. A traffic cop had then said that the change was for a trial period of a month. This system has failed as my fellow commuters would agree and resulted in massive jams. The old Jacob's Ladder road which was built to facilitate commuters has now become an uphill task literally with cars stuck on a gradient during peak hours heaving and grunting all the way up thus becoming hazardous for drivers and pedestrians alike, not to mention the impact on the cars! Children seem to be on edge as they scramble to the sides of the roads with two-wheelers

honking and zipping about like "Bugs out at play", barely swishing past schoolbags and umbrellas when it pours. As a parent, I am concerned that the authorities seem to be turning a blind eye to all these inconveniences faced by the general public, in spite of letters and articles appearing in local dailies time and time again.

I hope through this letter, those in power, especially the SP (Traffic) takes cognizance of our grievances. Or will they do so only when a catastrophe occurs. Our children's lives are precious. Let not the callousness of those in charge lead to grief....God Forbid!!

Yours etc.,
Angela Lyngdoh,
Shillong-14

MPSC depriving candidates of their rights !

Editor,
This is with regard to the Notification NO.MPSC/ADVT-38/1/2017-2018/21 Dated Shillong, the 24-07-2017, which is an advertisement calling for applications for recruitment into the Meghalaya Civil Service, Junior Grade.

Muscle + Money = Mass Appeal

Jo jeeta at all cost woh sikander!

By Poonam I Kaushish

surprised and really don't understand what the brouhaha is about as come elections our netagan are past masters at showing their (girgit) true colours throwing all public decency and decorum to the winds! With the stakes for India's Raj gaddi skyrocketing, polls are all about badla and protecting personal and Party izzat wherein immunity acts as an implicit sanction for more of the same. Alongside, our leaders have perfected the art of making alliances into the most luscious mistress to be measured through the prism of power-glass politics as rajniti is all about ruthlessly grabbing power sans ideology, rearranging its friends and negotiating with enemies.

Worse, once you start peeling off our netagan's mask one comes face to face with the naked truth, wherein every party and its leaders have perfected the art of beguiling its hum zulfs and dushmans with aplomb. More incredible is the whopping monies being spent on this dazzling razzmatazz.

This is not all. The friends and enemies are all rolled into one to fulfill their lust for power with clinical precision devoid of any pretensions of 'meeting of minds', ideology or principles. Exposing that power is the glue that makes incongruent Parties come together.

Take Bihar. Chief Minister and JD(U) head Nitish Kumar last month walked out of the "secular" R J D - C o n g r e s s M a h a g a d b a n d h a n switched across to the "communal" BJP and was promptly dubbed Hindutva. How does someone who was secular yesterday become communal today?

Ditto vis-a-vis MPs or MLAs. The less said the better of mafia dons-turned politicians who are paraded as prized bulls and portrayed as safedi ki chamkan compared to their chor brethren who are unfit to rule, leave alone provide good and honest governance. Consequently, the State has become a battleground

of caste senas, armed brigades and ideologically indoctrinated lumpens. Big deal if political goons have emerged as the biggest threat to society and the nation.

Sadly, no Party and its netas talk about their vision and plans to propel the country forward. Neither are they worried about selecting the right candidates on the basis of their character, integrity, honesty et al. It is all about making the best of a bad bargain. Hence caste, class, creed, criminal and communal paradigms will decide how votes are cast along with loud and abusive procrastination that catch the eyeballs. Winnability not acceptance holds the key. All want the Taj or to be Kingmaker, no matter what the means.

The tragedy of it all is that in this winner take-all-fight, the polity has usurped the legislatures and virtually turned them into a free-for-all. Parliament and Assemblies are now the new akharas where legislators throw paper missiles and files, hurl mikes, shout slogans, clash and exchange blows with rivals even climb on the Speaker's desk and wrench the microphone off its base as Marshals helplessly look on. This is a standing testimony to the contempt our netagan hold for these temples of democracy.

Clearly, the blame for this descent of political discourse into the depth of subjective skullduggery and vulgarity lies squarely with Parties. Quick to crack the whip and complain post haste to the Election Commission they have shied away from demanding the same discipline for such crude and repulsive swipes at rivals.

Alas, gone are the days of politicians enunciating their ideology and policies in measured tone and tenor of how they plan to take the country forward on a growth trajectory. Today, polls have been reduced to a slugfest of personal insinuations and character assassinations against opponents which brings out the worst in everyone. Along-with monetary inducement to defectors, flexing muscle power to steal a stubborn leader, bluntly paisa pekhe

of candidates for recruitment into the Meghalaya Civil Service, Junior Grade, like in Mizoram, this would tantamount to depriving otherwise deserving candidates of a shot at cracking the examination. Naturally, instead of widening the talent pool from which to choose the candidates, their present action only does the opposite. Are the state's best interests also being served in this case?

Yours etc.,
M. Lyngdoh,
Via email

Is burning the dead a healthy practice?

Editor,
This is with reference to the talk of the town on the issue of fight between two groups of Shillong for the place to bury or cremate. In the above Bible verses, Jesus emphatically stated, "Let the dead bury their dead," meaning societies especially in the 21st century which are still busy about death are dead themselves. Just like the present condition of Mainland Bharat where the topic of the day on TVs and movies is 'TOILET' - a place to defecate. Take any statistics. How many days in a year Govt and even private offices and shops of

tamasha dekh.

All this has vitiated the very idea of democracy. Never mind, the aam aadmi's distaste for vulgarity, gender insensitivity, sexist thinking and speeches spewing communal hatred. Additionally, with Parties refusing to act against hate-laden speeches the case for allowing the EC to disqualify candidates with legal safeguards gains currency.

What next? Where do we go from here? No longer can we merely shrug our shoulders and dismiss it as political kalyug. Undeniably, our leaders need to tone down personal attacks, divisive politicking and force and instead take on each other on issues that their constituents and the nation face. Those who reduce the level of discourse to such depths only do so at the cost of exposing their lack of civility to the electorate and the country at large.

Importantly, India is today at the moral crossroads. Specially against the backdrop of our politicians having perfected the art of cultivating low morality and high greed, donning different party robes, according to their whims and fancies --- and the need of the hour and leaving India dangerously communal, but the Parties and their leaders hypocritically secular.

Our polity needs to dump its ongoing political nautanki and remember one age-old truth - if you point one slanderous finger at another, four other slanderous fingers will point back at you! Nor can we allow small men to continue to cast big shadows.

The EC has exposed India's political nadir. Questionably, can a nation be bare and bereft of all sense of shame and morality? And for how long? It time our polity desist from employing their individual meanness in the name of public good. They need to re-think their priorities and desist from destructive mindlessness. And remember the adage: Nothing costs a nation more than cheap politicians! ---- INFA

Shillong close or lose valuable hours because some workers absent themselves due to someone's death. This includes both Christians and non-Christians.

How can Hindus and original Khasis (they love the word original) wish RIP to their dead fellow believers after burning them to ashes in crematoriums? Burning is a violent destructive act - a type of punishment like burning the effigy of politicians (here it is a real body) you don't like. Each cremations burns 500 to 600kg of wood. Perhaps VIPs bodies need more wood and ghee. 60million trees in India are cut annually for it. In Delhi just for burning leaves there is a Rs 5000 rupee fine. But no fine for people cutting trees to burn people! In the whole world today only Hindus and non-Christian Khasis burn their loved ones. Even atheistic China buries it dead ! Can I burn someone and wish him RIP?

Yours etc.,
Rasputin Bismarck
Kolkata.

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

Gorkhaland: Illusion or reality

By Janga Sunuwar

The Centre is caught between a rock and a hard place over the Gorkhaland imbroglio. It has not yet cleared its stand on the separate statehood demand by the hills leaders and allowed the problem to fester for such a long time, much like the State Government has done. The formal meeting of the GMCC's (Gorkhaland Movement Coordination Committee) delegates and stakeholders of the hills with the Home minister Rajnath Singh in Delhi has come as a huge se back. There were high expectations that the dialogue with the Centre would end the long political crisis in Darjeeling but it has reached a dead end without arriving at any consensus. The Centre and BJP's veteran leaders are purportedly juggling with this crucial issue and procrastinating as if they don't have any political obligation towards the hills.

The Bengal's chief minister Mamta Banerjee is now on the horns of a dilemma as how to proceed further to engage the hills

“There is a lull in the foothills after two months of indefinite strikes with the absence of the Centre's intervention. With no developments taking place in the capital however, the persistent demands for statehood in the hills and parts of plains-terais is getting stronger with sustained efforts led by the people. There is fear and anxiety clouding the hills with uncertainties .Two months have gone by but peace eludes the Darjeeling Hills as the State is not ready to take up the Herculean task of allowing people to live a life free from impositions.”

leaders for talks after the she mishandled the hills affairs. The colossal misgovernance and misrule have devastated the beautiful atmosphere of the Queen of Hills like never before. Ostensibly the State has callously failed in the process of delivering the peace, prosperity and development that eludes hills since decades. The bonhomie and chemistry which was forged few years ago between Miss Banerjee and Bimal Gurung has now been marred by the friction in their relationships after the revival of the secessionist movement.

There is a lull in the foothills after two months of indefinite strikes with the absence of the Centre's intervention. With no developments taking place in the capital however, the persistent demands for statehood in the hills and parts of plains-terais is getting stronger with sustained efforts led by the people. There is fear and anxiety clouding the hills with uncertainties .Two months have gone by but peace eludes the Darjeeling Hills as the State is not ready to take up the Herculean task of allowing people to live a life free from impositions. The continuous ban by the State machinery and indefinite strikes by the political parties have increased the burden of the people to the extreme and paralysed normal life with uncertainty all around. Nobody ever thought that things would come to such an appalling pass.

Far from the hullabaloo of "We want Gorkhaland" slogan which never ceases to echo on the ramparts of hills and ditto in other places, there are several tea gardens in the hills and in plains under the hills

jurisdiction which are in utter shambles due to the vicious impact of indefinite strikes. The complete shutdown of tea gardens has caused havoc in the workers lives as they mostly depend on the tea gardens for their livelihood. The tea industry in the country has already suffered a huge loss over the spiralling prices of Indian tea at the international markets owing to more new competitors. The indefinite strikes added more woes to this problem in the State. The sluggish but persistent approach of the hills leaders to carry out the strikes without declaring any deadline has created a paranoia and landed people in more trouble. They should take some prudent and effective steps to deal with hills political crisis at an instant apart from theatrics of the absurd as indefinite strikes will only hampers public life and chances of drawing attention of the Centre are few and far between.

It would be unfair if the irreparable loss of tourism industry is unaccounted for.

So too the fate of several schools which are closed and became sandwiched over the feud between the Hills and the State.

It has become a tendency of the State to ignore the restiveness in Darjeeling since the agitation is not a new problem as it is a sporadic ritual of hills leaders to raise the statehood demand every five or ten years. Probably the BJP at the Centre thinks on the same wavelength otherwise the GMCC and other stake holders of the hills do not have to face defeats and disappointments regardless of shifting the statehood agitation's epicentre to Delhi. There is little visible results on the ground despite their impromptu visits to Delhi and dialogue with the Centre. The Centre's lukewarm approach and apathy to the plight of Gorkhas is an indication that the fight for statehood might go on for a long a long time even after sixty days of indefinite strike becomes unfructuous and also hangs the fate of statehood agitation in the balance between hope and despair.

There is as well a growing resentment among the people against the Centre which has been trivializing the statehood issue under the influence of the State and stopped taking any decision on hills crisis after achieving a political mileage from the initial phase of the hills agitation. The fight for identity crisis and self rule is still a mirage. Century old demand of Gorkhas in the country is still an illusion due to neglect, apathy and weak political leadership and of course highlighted in an inarticulate manner by the hills leaders.

“*Life’s under no obligation to give us what we expect.*”
--- Margaret Mitchell

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 14 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, AUGUST 24, 2017

Trump on Afghanistan

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's new Afghan policy puts the stress on realism rather than on politics. President Barack Obama was committed to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan as much as possible. Trump on the other hand has authorized the dispatch of additional 4000 US soldiers to train and strengthen Afghan forces. Trump is right in thinking that a hasty withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan could create a void which would benefit terrorists, including the Afghan unit of the Islamic State (IS). President Obama's withdrawal from Iraq had a destabilizing effect. He announced deadlines for withdrawal from Afghanistan as well which lent strength to Taliban terrorists. It was impossible to defeat the Taliban which got safe havens in Pakistan. Trump has decided that he will not announce deadlines for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. He has also warned Pakistan against providing safe havens to terror groups. Washington's close ties with Pakistan had botched its Afghan policy in the past .

Trump has rightly asked for a change. He says that it will be in Pakistan's interest to stop providing safe havens to terrorists and helping them. If Pakistan does not comply, the US will use all diplomatic, economic and military instruments to disamm Pakistan. India should be happy that Trump has acknowledged India's role in promoting Afghanistan's stability and reconstruction. The US President will also do well not to antagonize Iran which also seeks Afghan stability.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Railhead project

Opposition trying to scuttle talks with government

Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Mr D D Lapang has deplored the negative stance taken by certain opposition groups against the proposed railhead. Addressing a public meet at Rymbai in Jaintia Hills on Saturday, he said even though HPU leader Mr S D Khongwir agreed to discuss the matter with the State government and come to a positive and amicable solution, members of the HPU were bent on sabotaging the talks. This, he said, was unfortunate as the railhead would bring positive development. The public meeting which was attended by PWD Minister Mr O L Nongtdu and Industries Minister Mr Upstar Kharbuli, was an exercise by the Congress(I) to fan out to the rural areas to build up public opinion in favour of the Byrnihat railhead project.

Mr Lapang said that influx could only be checked if the people work hand in hand with the government agencies. The railhead was not the only harbinger of influx. Many people were actually bringing in labourers from across the border and harbouring them. Mr Lapang said that the State government would do everything to check influx

and to ensure that no outsiders could enter via the railroad. He also spoke of the encroachment by Assam and said that he had taken up the matter with Assam Chief Minister, Mr Mahanta recently. He also said that the "Phira Committee" headed by Home Commissioner J M Phira was conducting an extensive study of the Meghalaya Assam border, and that the State Govt would act on the recommendations of the committee. Mr Lapang concluded his speech with lines from Fr Elias Hopewell. "He who loves the land will never starve."

Mr Nongtdu, defending the Cess Act, said that the tribals had a sense of pride and would never beg. But paradoxically, the tribals in Meghalaya had been reduced to "High class beggars" they had to beg from the Centre a sum of Rs. 405 crore. The Cess Act is a small effort to raise indigenous revenue. "It is a pity that we cannot even raise 3-4 crores of our own money", he said. He once again reiterated that the cess would only affect the transporters of coal and in no way interfere with tribal mining rights. "We should all build Meghalaya with dignity" he said.

traditions. Having previously written a letter on this issue, defending the church (ST, Aug 22, 2017), I feel it my responsibility as a Khasi to say this in a public forum: As citizens of a secular country we fully support the efforts of the Dorbar Shnong, Madan ĩngSyiem and the Seng Khasi Mylliem to amicably decide upon a permanent cremation ground at Mylliem. Apropos the letter "No personal comments please!" (ST, Aug 23, 2017), I respectfully beg to clarify that I was not aware of any personal comments in my previous letter; only information available in the

Has the oppressed became the oppressor?

Resignation of a Chakma Minister in Mizoram

The lone Chakma minister resigned from the council of ministers in Mizoram in protest against discrimination and racism. In the resignation letter, he stated that the four Chakma students who qualified for MBBS seat under the state quota were denied admission in medical colleges in the country. He expressed that "remaining in the council of ministers might create uneasiness to maintain the glory of democracy of our state where all of us irrespective of caste, creed and religion should feel at home". In the history of Mizoram, no Chakma or any non-Mizo minister has ever resigned despite such socio-political egregious relationship between the Mizos and the non-Mizos, and stood against any discriminatory treatment towards them.

The question arises why he resigned? Is it a political drama or expression of a strong protest against discrimination, injustice and racial treatment to the non-Mizo communities in Mizoram? The resignation of the minister from a marginalised community raises many questions than answers. The fundamental question is whether the glory and the symbolic Mizo movement and struggles against discrimination, neglect and injustice against the Indian state in general and Assam state in particular over? Has the oppressed became the oppressor?

In the pages of a glorious Mizo history, the 'Mautam Famine' of 1959 remained a catastrophic page leading to starvation, disease, and deaths in an unimaginable magnitude. The Mizo hills was devastated because of Mautam (bamboos flowering resulting in dramatic increase of rat population) which destroyed food crops, infested human habitations and caused plague. The Indian state and the then Assam government ignored and neglected this acutely painful event. To fight against such neglect and discrimination in 1960, the Mizo cultural society which was formed in 1955, changed into 'Mautam Front with Mr Laldenga as secretary. In September 1960, it was renamed as the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) and gained popularity among the people in Mizoram and outside.

On the other hand, the then Assamese politicians attempted to remove the special provisions for the Khasis and the Mizos from the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In addition, the Assamese jingoism was expressed in the Assamese language movement, whereby the then Chief Minister of Assam declared Assamese language as state official language. In addition, the Mizo people living outside the Mizo District Council including the increasing numbers of student communities were neglected. All these untoward historical events of neglect and discrimination of the Mizo people led to the Mizo uprising to secure their rights for self-determination.

By Shyamal Bikash Chakma

The movement started when the Mizo National Famine Front reformed into a new political organization, namely the Mizo National Front (MNF) on 22ndOctober 1961 under the leadership of Laldenga with the specific goal of achieving a sovereign independent state of Mizoram.

However, the movement for self - rule was ridden with violence. The Indian state did everything to suppress the movement including tragic acts on their own citizens of carrying out airstrikes in Aizawl in 1966. After nearly three decades of struggles, the movement succeeded in achieving statehood on 20thFebruary 1987.

At the same time, the ethnic minorities such as the Chakmas, Mara and Lai held their parallel movement to secure their identity, rights and self-determination as they refused to identify themselves with the dominant Mizo identity. However, their movements got overshadowed by the Mizo movement against the Indian state. Nevertheless, under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution they also were given autonomous district councils on 1st May 1989. However, there was resentment by the Mizo community against granting autonomous council to the Chakmas. Soon after signing the 1986 Peace Accord, the Mizo National Front (MNF) led by Laldenga asked the government of India to abrogate the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) to which the Indian government did not agree. In fact, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi told in a rally in Aizawl, "If the Mizos expect justice from India as a small minority, they must safeguard the interests of their own minorities like the Chakmas" (Benerjee et. al. 2005).

Ranabir Samaddar (2005:228) writes that in between 1986 and 2000, there have been 21 private members' resolutions submitted in the Mizoram legislative assembly by the Mizo legislators for the abolition of the CADC. He further states that the Chakmas are seen as the "enemy tribe" by the hardline Mizos. In the 1990s, the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP, a Mizo student organization) undertook a movement similar to that of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in 1970s to 'detect, delete and deport' foreigners. Unlike, the AASU, the MZP movement did not come into the limelight. The MZP movement against the Chakma and Reang tribes led to physical violence, burning of houses and displacement of people in thousands. In August 1992, about 380 Chakma houses were burnt down by the organized mobs of the Mizos in the villages of Marpara, Hnahva, Sachan and Aivapui. In the 2009 Asian Centre for Human Rights report of 30thJanuary 1995, the MZP

served "Quite Notice" to the Chakmas to leave Mizoram by 15 June 1995".

The report further states that "thousands of Chakma voters who were included in the 1980, 1983, 1991 and 1993 Electoral Rolls were omitted and deleted from the subsequent electoral rolls published in 1995 and 1996. In Aizawl district alone, a total of 2,886 Chakma voters were deleted from Final Assembly Electoral Rolls published on 2ndJanuary 1996. The entire populace in some villages were omitted and deleted from the 1995/ 1996 Electoral Rolls on the basis of complaints by a few individuals. Though the government attempted to enumerate those persons whose names were deleted from the electoral rolls, it also provided vehicles to the activists of the MZP, Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo National Front and Mizoram Peoples Conference to pressurize the enumerators in the process of identifying the alleged foreigners (as reported by the ACHR, 2009). It further states that "these activists decided who should be in the electoral rolls. The Mizoram Police remained mute spectators to the unlawful activities of the MZP, YMA and other non-state actors".

Against this backdrop, the Chakma social leaders like Snehadini Talukdar from Mizoram and Subimal Chakma from Arunachal Pradesh demanded for the creation of Union Territory for the Chakmas. In response, the central government in 1997 made a Rajya Sabha Petition committee, which recommended extension of the CADC. The then Chief Minister Lalthanhawla successfully managed his minister from the Chakma community who, then, in a press statement October 10, 1997 denied that the Chakmas of Mizoram have demanded a Union Territory. He alleged that few people were doing this for their political interests. However, this time the same Chief Minister could not manage to convince his Chakma minister who resigned in protest against discrimination and racism.

Unlike the 1990s, this time though in the same spirit of Mizo nationalism and alleged foreigners' issue, the movement went one step ahead by adopting racial and discriminatory policies and programmes. In 2014, when more than 40 non-Zo (other than Mizo tribes) students were selected for higher studies under the state quota, the government amended the Mizoram (Selection of Candidates for Commencement Higher Technical Courses) Rules in 2015. The amended rules divided the citizens of Mizoram in three categories - (1) Zo-ethnic group (the indigenous Mizos), (2) Non-Zo ethnic group (Non-natives such as the Chakma and Reang) (3) others (people from outside Mizoram but living in Mizoram for government services and so on). In response, the Mizoram Chakma Students' Union (MCSU) approached the

Gauhati High Court in 2015 (PIL No. 39/2015) and challenged the new rules against which the High Court gave a stay order. However, in April 2016, it was amended and notified to reserve 95% seats for Zo ethnic people/Mizos (Category I) while the "non- Zo-ethnic people of the State" were given 4% seats. The Chakma student body once again challenged the notification in 2016 (PIL No. 49/2016) in the High Court. Again the Court stayed this notification in June 2016.

Against this gross act of discrimination, this year the four students belonging to Chakma community were denied the educational opportunities. Indeed, the non-state actors demanded to sack the Chakma minister and not to allow any Chakma candidate in the upcoming state elections.

Indeed, such exclusionary and discriminatory treatment has spread in almost all forms of governance such as development related policies and programmes. Central schemes like the Multi-Sectoral Development Programme (MSDP) and Border Area Development Programme (BADP) have left out the targeted beneficiaries and benefitted the dominant groups. Suhas Chakma of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has rightly pointed at the exclusionary policy of the non-Mizo tribes by the government in the service sector by making Mizo Language compulsory up to VIII standard. He further states that "no Chakma has cleared Mizoram Civil Services Examination since the creation of the State in 1987.

Therefore, the question that arises now is - "Has the oppressed became the oppressor?" The victims of jingoistic Mizo nationalism not only target the Chakmas but the Reangs (Bru) tribe as well. In 1997, the MZP and YMA reduced to ashes 500 houses to belonging to Bru (Reang) tribe. More than 33, 000 Bru or Reang tribes are languishing in the neighbouring states of Tripura and Assam (ACHR, 2009). In their write-up on Northeast India, Biswas and Suklabaidya (2008) rightly analysed that in the dominant notion or claim of 'Indigeneity' or "son of the soil", it fails to accommodate the multi-ethnic, lingual and cultural identities of the marginalized. In Mizoram, the non-Mizo are treated with suspicion and are excluded from the common conceptions of citizenship or belongingness to the land. Hence, are we going to witness a similar uprising from the non-Mizo ethnic groups in Mizoram to secure their rights and justice?

(Shyamal Bikash Chakma is PhD Scholar in Development Studies at School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London)

Of Occasional Bigotry

By Monmi Roaver Pariat

This is with regard to Rasputin's Bismarck's "Is burning the dead a healthy practice?" (ST Aug 23, 2017). Let me not waste any more time (and valuable ink for that matter) in vying the utterly abhorrent, bigoted and incongruous nature with which the writer makes his underlying callous statement. Any given writer presumably knows that to lay the path for the readers to follow, one must be au courant with the correct and valid facts so as to seamlessly bring home whatever point there is to make. If one, so to say, happens to breach this given protocol, then the result would be baseless conceit and not to forget humiliation. This is exactly what the writer did, and did fail oh so

thought out in his piece title. The writer greatly opines that cremation is definitely no way of going out simply because there is no 'last goodbye' in doing so. Thoughts? The writer seems to have this mildly absurd idea that people who are cremated, dead of course, have no means of hearing their loved ones say their last goodbyes (rest in peace, goodbye , au revoir etc), again simply because they are reduced to 'nothing but ashes'. But as for the people who are buried, who also happen to be as 'dead' as the people who are cremated, well maybe they are still equipped with that one sense which enables them to hear all the RIPs showered upon them after their death. Possibility? The

All in all the writer is at the pinnacle of his intertwining details days, jumping from one anonymous subject to the other. If he had given it a few more minutes' worth of thought, then maybe he would have known that eco-friendly crematoriums use comparatively less wood as compared to old cremation processes. If he had given it more thought he would have known that as about now most of the population of the world prefer cremation over burial as consequence to lack of burial space and the cost which is associated with it.

miserably!

The writer got off on a perplexingly bedazzling foot by quoting a verse from the Bible and thereafter stating that 21st century societies are just as dead as they could ever be simply because they are too caught up in their day to day activities, say work? Is that what he is implying? That people are way past dead to be able to live life the way it is supposed to be lived? One might never know. He then seems to go out of his way and take a dig at mainland India and its mindset in terms of television and movies with a somewhat stern abrasion to Akshay Kumar's latest production work, "Toilet: Ek Prem Katha", once again leaving the readers completely perplexed. And just as any connoisseur of seamless segueing, the writer makes a not so subtle transition from the above mentioned heresies to actually talking of people ("Christians and non-Christians") taking a few hours off, if not a whole day, from their 'busy' schedules to mourn the demise of their loved ones, which arises strictly from feelings of sympathy, empathy and sentimentality. But then again one might never know what goes on inside the mind of a person innately deprived of any speck of human emotions.

To add fuel to the fire, to continue with the baseless denigration, the writer finally gets to his point which is so carefully

writer again digresses a bit away from the relevant topic with the juxtaposition of cremations and burning effigies.

All in all the writer is at the pinnacle of his intertwining details days, jumping from one anonymous subject to the other. If he had given it a few more minutes' worth of thought, then maybe he would have known that eco-friendly crematoriums use comparatively less wood as compared to old cremation processes. If he had given it more thought he would have known that as about now most of the population of the world prefer cremation over burial as consequence to lack of burial space and the cost which is associated with it. If he had given it more thought then maybe he would have known that "Hindus and non-Christians" (in India in particular and the world in general) are certainly not the only religious faiths which adhere to the final rites of 'cremation'. What about Buddhists? Jains? Sikhs? A bit more thought and he would have known that even China more or less adheres to cremation. But to err is human, right Mister?

And as much as I want to deliver on the sanctity of cremation with respect to the varied faiths adhering to this practice, I choose not to, simply because I see no worth of doing so in this present predicament.

Absurd arguments

Editor,
Apropos the letter "Is burning the dead a healthy practice?" by Rasputin Bismarck (ST, Aug 23, 2017) I respectfully beg to disagree. Every group has the right to dispose of the dead according to their age old customs and religious traditions. This is a sensitive issue and we must write with responsibility. Just as we expect people of other faiths to respect our institutions and traditions, so must we respect their institutions, customs and

public domain. However if this was construed otherwise, I do apologise. Yes, I fully agree that we must debate issues for the common good of our Khasi Jaiñtia community, to which we all owe our common loyalty and love.

Yours etc.
Rev. Lyndan Syiem,
Shillong

Ignorance personified!

Editor,
The appalling ignorance of Rasputin Bismarck has left me worried. His views reflect his total mindlessness

and paranoia while he wrote the letter. More bothersome is the wanton indiscretion shown by the newspaper which published it, despite the letter's murderous propensity to incite inter religious/inter community sentiments. We can ill afford to go around expressing our jaundiced views on the crematorial practices of others. Mr Bismark should have better business than this. I am sure if he applies his mind with sanity, there will be no dearth of relevant issues to write on. And for his information, cremation of

the dead cannot be compared to burning of effigies. Cremation of the dead has existed thousands of years before both Rasputin and Bismarck trod on the soils of Russia and Germany respectively, and will continue to exist, notwithstanding the fact that Rasputin Bismarck still wants to kick up religious hatred with his ill- conceived logic. Let the ways of wishing RIP to the dead not become a topic of debate for those who are still alive.

Yours etc.,
Devadeep Dasgupta,
Guwahati

(Editor replies: This paper gives space to all shades of opinions and believes in rational debates. We do not judge writers based on their religious, community and political affiliations. All are entitled to express their considered views in a democratic country).

Why Gorkhaland?

Editor,
Gorkhaland is the yearning of every Gorkha living in India. Creation of Gorkhaland will permanently soothe their

anxiety and insecurity which is lingering inside them ever since the demand for a separate state came up in the public domain. It will enhance their sense of belongingness towards this country, which they so dearly love. They will undoubtedly feel equal to their countrymen and not feel like a subject of Nepal. Guaranteed, that Gorkhaland will be an exemplary state for others to follow, like the people living in Gujarat are doing for their state. Gorkhaland is a long outstanding aspiration of Gorkha soldiers in our armed forces. Being in uniform, they cannot make a political

demand. It is the duty of the heads of the State to uplift the morale of serving personnel. It will surely infuse more valour to their fighting spirit. They no longer need to be in perpetual pain of suspicion lest they might be called a mercenary force fighting for India.

This is a humble request to all, particularly to the people from West Bengal, to support the cause of Gorkhaland considering it as a demand of one brother from another brother, his share of the ancestral land.

Yours etc.,
Krishna Chetri,
Shillong-2

“Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength.”
---Arnold Schwarzenegger

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 15SHILLONG, FRIDAY, AUGUST 25, 2017

Deuba’s visit

NEPAL’S Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba will visit New Delhi for five days. The Congress said in Parliament that relations between India and Nepal had deteriorated in the recent past. But External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj parried the thrust saying that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited Nepal twice in one year while no Indian Prime Minister had done so in the last seventeen years. There is, however, no doubt that relations between the two countries have been through ups and downs. India may continue to be seen as an interfering Big Brother. But this is because Nepal politics has been so unstable with one government following another. The Great Blockade by the Madhesis in 2015 embittered relations between the two neighbours. Nepal claimed that India backed the obstructionist Madhesis. Meanwhile China has poured a huge amount of money into Nepal to finance a number of infrastructure projects and concluded some trade and transit deals. But Nepal's attitude to the India-China standoff on Doklan remains neutral.

Madhesis have links with Indians in Bihar and U.P. but India has withdrawn support to them to counter penetration of Chinese influence in Nepal. Nepal is making the most of the competition between the two giants. Dueba will no doubt air his grievances against India during his visit starting from the Mahakali Multipurpose Project to the adverse impact of Modi's demonetisation. There may also be a complaint that the BJP is secretly trying to rob Nepal of its secularism. It is however hoped that Dueba's visit will be as fruitful as his visit two months ago.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Air Traffic officials to blame

The feeder Airline Vayudoot has air traffic controllers of the National Airport Authority responsible for the crash of its Fokker Friendship plane last October in Assam in which all the 34 people including crew members were killed.In an affidavit filed before the Justice Umesh Bannerjee Commission which is inquiring into the crash, Vayudoot contended that the radio telephone was being controlled by an unskilled person instead of a licensed communication officer at the time of landing of the aircraft. It alleged that the person handling the radio communication at the time of landing was just a billing clerk instead of

anauthorized person who was not present for 20, minutes while the aircraft was on its final approach to the runway and subsequently crashed.

Welfare fund forState Government Employee mooted

A fund for the benefit of State Government employees will be introduced soon,Meghalaya Chief MinisterMr P A Sangma said in his budget speech in the Legislative Assembly in Shillong on Monday. The fund, to be known as theEmployee's Welfare Fund,would be set up through nominal subscriptions made by Government employees.

TO THE EDITOR

Irregular appointment of lecturers

Editor, Through your esteemed daily, I would like to bring to the notice of the readers the unscrupulous ways adopted by some of the so-called “lecturers” of higher education in our city to obtain jobs in some of our reputed colleges. In a one such renowned college a lecturer in the Computer Science Dept has “obtained” an M.Phil in Computer through correspondence course from Periyar University and was subsequently confirmed in a Government sanctioned post and is enjoying the benefits of a government salary. What is astonishing is that neither the College nor the Education Department bothered to verify the validity of the degree before sanctioning their approval, whereas clause 5 of the UGCs (Minimum Standards and Procedures for award of MPhil/Ph.D Degrees) Regulation 2009, clearly

states that no University will conduct MPhil / Ph.D. programmes through distance education mode. Hence, that person's degree is not valid. Another lecturer of Computer Science Dept in the same college has an MSc in Computer Sc through distance education through a study centre in Shillong and is enjoying a substantial salary. However, the UGC guidelines allow operation of a University only within the territorial jurisdiction, and in no case beyond the territory of the State where the varsity is located. So in this case also the College administration has faltered by confirming the services without verifying the credentials. So why is the College showing such leniency towards these employees? Are the qualifications of other youths less legitimate that they are not being given this opportunity to serve our students? Definitely there is something more than meets the eye. I appeal to the Education Department, the affiliating university, NEHU and to our students’

unions to substantiate the facts mentioned herewith and to right the wrong that has been going on for so many years.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Absurdity has its limits!

Editor, A person going by the name of Rasputin Bismarck whose letters have earlier appeared in your daily on issues relating to Christianity has now gone overboard by suggesting that cremation is unscientific and polluting. Just because Christians bury their dead does not mean that all should follow that route. In a country like India religion is best left to the private domain. To my mind an electric crematorium is the cleanest way to dispose of a dead body. In a country with such a large population how can there be burial space enough for every person? This is a point to ponder. Also there are ways of expressing an opinion without being abusive. Rasputin Bismarck who,

going by his address, is a resident of Kolkata seems to have lost his bearings completely. An intrinsic part of the Khasi culture is to respect the dead and to say that our society is overly sentimental about the dead is a disrespect to our culture.

It is true that there is a lot of absenteeism on account of funeral services et al and that it is only those employed with government who can afford to avail such leave. It is also true that those employed in private agencies cannot afford to take a week-long leave even when a bereavement happens in their own family. But we have to evolve with time. Society cannot be pushed into sudden change. We are all slowly adapting because there is no choice. Even within the government, today many employees are employed on contract basis with stringent rules and regulations. The days of easy casual leave might soon be over if governments begin to tighten the belt. So one way or the other we have

to move with the times.

My advice to the likes of Bismarck is to stop quoting the Bible. It does not behove a great and secular country like India to be dictated by any religious faith.

Yours etc.,
MN Nongrum,
Viaemail

NEIGRIHMS' reversion of practice

Editor, On my last visit to NEIGRIHMS in May, this year, I was extremely agitated by the fact that the Institution had done away with the issuance of blue-coloured outpatient cards to the senior citizens as was practised in the past. Being aggrieved at what I felt was disrespect meted out to senior citizens, I had shot off a letter to your esteemed daily to highlight the glaring social neglect and as a consequence my letter to the Editor did appear in your daily (ST May 25..2017) under the title 'NEIGRIHMS neglecting senior citizens'.

the blood is sucked out of the human until he/she dies and the blood is fed to the Thlen. If the Thlen really existed then where is it now? We don't know and we will not discuss these issues because we are a society that goes into a shell whenever we have a controversy at hand.

And this precisely is the problem. We need more societal conversations because we no longer speak to each other as we used to do around the hearth (sawdong ka lyngwiar dpei). Family conversation are staccato and revolve only around our selfish needs. Children are more educated than their parents hence they don't accept age-old truths from their wise elders. Most elders are not clued in to the mental and psychological challenges that their children go through, what with social media bombardment and the pressure of studies. There is a disjuncture and it is not being bridged because no one knows how to do it. What we need is a peer support group for parents experiencing these pangs and for children who feel their parents don't understand them. The twain needs to meet otherwise we will have dysfunctional families and more substance abuse and alcoholism.

Recently, I visited Bethany Society where I met a young mother with an autistic 14 year old son. She had to leave her job in a metro and return home because there is no support system outside. Sadly even here, she confided that there is no one to talk to and learn how to cope with an autistic kid. She looked exhausted. I asked Carmo Noronha, Director, Bethany Society, if we could have a peer support group for such parents and he willingly offered space. So parents with autistic kids please do make use of this space.

Granted that we have entered an era with challenges that exceed our capacities to handle, but sharing problems and societal conversations are still the best way to heal. This is a social capital we cannot lose!

Thereafter, I didn't keep a tab on developments around this issue. However, in this month of August, i.e., post three months of my last visit to this health establishment, I found to my very pleasant surprise that the earlier blue-coloured outpatient card has been re-introduced. In the development of this positive outcome, I fondly hope that my said letter printed in your paper three months ago may have triggered a wake- up call to this premier health unit. My heartfelt compliment therefore, goes to your daily in particular and the NEIGRIHMS authorities in general for ameliorating the plight of senior citizens at large.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh,
Viaemail

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.

Japanese firms in China in dire straits; opportunity for India

India, Japan upgrade bilateral ties to global partnership

By Subrata Majumder

Some 110 Japanese firms went bankrupt in China last year, according to a Japanese research report. In 2015, Toshiba and Panasonic had announced that they would stop producing television sets in China. These are some of the manifestations of Japanese frustrations in China and underscore a trend of the Japanese exiting from that country. China has been losing its status as the hub for Japanese investment due to a drop in low cost competitiveness on account of wage hikes and heightened political tensions. A majority of these 110 firms were Japanese apparel manufacturing companies in China.

In contrast, Japanese investment in India and Vietnam was on the rise between 2014 and 2016. But the overall Japanese investment witnessed a much faster growth and higher value in India than in Vietnam. While it increased by 53 percent in India, the growth was only 12 percent in Vietnam. In 2016, Japanese investment in India was double that of Vietnam (US\$ 3.7 billion in India compared to 1.9 billion in Vietnam).

Besides foreign direct investment, the Japanese also deployed huge amounts in private equity and venture capital in India. During the first half of 2017, Japanese firms invested at least US\$ 1.43 billion in

“In fact, India-Japan relations took a new dimension after China launched its ambitious OBOR plan, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasizing a shift from bilateral strategic economic relations to a global partnership between the two nations aimed at a global role in economy and geo-politics. He asserted that the Indo-Japan global partnership should be the engine for 21st century growth. Modi wooed Japanese investment in automobiles to infrastructure to defence and development of smart cities.”

Any loss to China is a gain to India. This is the catchphrase trending in foreign investment circles. Against this backdrop, India has the potential to emerge as an alternative destination for low cost manufacturing. The report said that to offset high cost manufacturing in China, the Japanese apparel companies have shifted to Vietnam and Myanmar, two countries that are most cost effective for Japanese investors. But India has an edge over these two countries in many respects.

According to a Deloitte survey in 2016, India will be the 'New China' in low cost manufacturing in the next five years. India is expected to rise to the 5th position in the global manufacturing competitiveness index in 2020 from 11th position in 2016, the survey said. Besides low cost manufacturing, the other factors favouring India include a vast reservoir of English speaking scientists, researchers and engineers. With China losing the powerhouse status in terms of low cost manufacturing competitiveness, five Asia Pacific nations are expected to emerge as the new choice, according to the survey. These include Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and India. But the survey puts India as the frontrunner, with the others chasing.

Given the global upgrade in India's manufacturing strength, the Japanese could consider India as a viable option as Japan's investment in Asia Pacific is on a downturn while it is on the upswing in India. Between 2014 and 2016, Japanese overseas investment (according to Japanese sources) in China dropped by 21 per cent while it plunged 36 percent in Hong Kong and 27 percent in Thailand - known as the Detroit for Japanese automobile manufacturers.

Indian private equity and venture capital. This was three times more than US\$ 459 million of similar investments in 2016, according to Japan Times. In fact, India-Japan relations took a new dimension after China launched its ambitious OBOR plan, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasizing a shift from bilateral strategic economic relations to a global partnership between the two nations aimed at a global role in economy and geo-politics. He asserted that the Indo-Japan global partnership should be the engine for 21st century growth. Modi wooed Japanese investment in automobiles to infrastructure to defence and development of smart cities. India has accordingly liberalised its FDI policy in railway infrastructure and defence, permitting 100 percent FDI in railway infrastructure and high speed train projects and raising the FDI cap in defence from 26 percent to 49 percent. Japanese Prime Minster Shinzo Abe has set an ambitious target for doubling Japanese investment within five years, committing US\$ 35 billion for different infrastructure projects to bolster the Make in India programme. The Japanese involvement includes India's first high speed rail from Ahmedabad to Mumbai and institutional framework for transfer of technology. Japan is the third biggest investor in India and its ODA programme was a key player in the country's infrastructure development, including power, transport and environment related projects. Delhi Metro - a breakthrough in India's mass transit - was largely financed by Japanese ODA. (IPA Service)

“You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one.”

--- John Lennon

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 16 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, AUGUST 26, 2017

SC strikes

AFTER the triple talaq judgement, the Supreme Court has struck again pronouncing the right to privacy as a fundamental right protected by Article 21. The Constitution does not specifically mention the right to privacy. But it can be derived from Article 21 and the Preamble to the Constitution which upholds the dignity of the individual. The Supreme Court has thus dealt a blow on state surveillance over individuals. In the past, the SC judgments took an ambivalent stand on the right to privacy. But this time the nine judges who took the decision adopted a firm attitude. The attack on the Aadhar database which identifies uniquely a billion plus residents was a main feature of the judgment. The Aadhar database is an intrusion into a vast amount of personal data. The cow vigilantes have also been targeted. The judgment further protects homosexuals and witches though protection of them cannot be popular among most people.

Justice Chandrachud has described privacy as the ‘Constitutional core of human dignity’ and said that it is in consonance with the diversity and plurality of our culture. Of course privacy expectations vary from case to case. But on the whole it is a core freedom. Since such expectations vary from case to case, they can be judged likewise from case to case. The Supreme Court judgment of December 2013 re-criminalised homosexuality. This was according to many a regressive step as the previous Pope in the Vatican had also leaned towards its recognition. The government has to convince the Supreme Court that the biometric data collected and their use in the Aadhar cards are necessary for implementing various welfare measures. The exercise also weeds out fraudulent PAN cards. The latest Supreme Court judgment strikes a balance between individual interests and national security as well as the requirements of criminal investigation. It is necessary for governments, corporations and individuals to act in coordination.

LOOKING BACK
May 1, 1989

Cong(I) blames Bhandari for IT imposition

The Congress party held a mass rally and procession here today blaming the ruling opposition Sikkim Sangram Parishad party for the imposition of direct central taxes on the state. Hundreds of processionists carried placards accusing SSP leaders of being involved in the gift racket to launder black money, which officials have said was the cause of the taxes being introduced.

Prominent in the processionists was VP Diwan an AICC(I) observer from New Delhi, who is here to make an on-the-spot study and reorganize the party here. Today's demonstration was the first protest againsts the SSP held by the Congress party since it lost the election to the regional party in 1985. The President of the Sikkim unit of the Congress(I), Mr Madan Chhetri said the procession was mean to launch an agitation to have arrested some 150 people allegedly involved in the gift racket. Mr Chhetri's list includes Sikkim Finance Minister, Mr Chamla Tsering Hutia and prominent people from the business community. Mr Chhetri said the plan today to gherao the residence of the Chief Minister Mr Nar Bahadur Bhandari has been postponed till Mr Bhandari's return from New Delhi. Mr Bhandari is in Delhi with a team of his cabinet ministers to plea for withdrawal of the taxes.

NTR repudiates PM's charges

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N T Rama Rao today took strong exception to certain "incorrect and unfounded" statements of Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi on the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions in the state while addressing the Panchayati Raj sammelan of southern states in Bangalore yesterday. Addressing a news conference here, Mr Rama Rao said it was "unfortunate" that the Prime Minister should have referred to a constitutionally elected staff government's activities in terms such as "non-cooperative" "hollow," "arbitrary," "unsurped" and "freely" over-riding." It was clear that the Prime Minister had allowed himself to be "misled" by "frustrated" politicians from the state, he added.

The Chief Minister said he did not attend the Bangalore conference as a mark of protest against the "murder of democracy" in Karnataka and for no other reason. Referring to Mr Gandhi's charge that funds given under national programmes, like NREP and RLEGP, has been diverted or misused or given fancy names and passed off as local schemes, Mr Rama Rao said no specific instance of misuse or diversion of funds had been brought to the state Government notice official by the Union Government.

Only Union Ministers visiting the state were making such "vague and unsubstantiated charges." Mr Rama Rao said the boycott by Andhra Pradesh of the Bangalore sammelan was done on a matter of principle in order to condemn the "murder of democracy" in Karnataka and was not connected with Andhra Pradesh's performance or attitude towards panchayat raj institutions.

There is a famous Khasi middle class story about selfishness and it goes something like this. There were a number of crabs in a bucket and they were all destined to become dinner at some point in time. The crabs knew about this and they realised that they needed to escape this horrible fate. The story goes on to tell us about how one of the crabs had somehow managed to get a firm grip on the rim of the bucket and was proceeding to pull himself out to the relative safety of the outside world. However, just as he was about to complete his great escape, the other crabs resorted to pulling him back down to the bottom of the bucket. He was, thus, doomed like the rest. The moral that many Khasi people draw from this is that Khasis are like the crabs in that they are inherently selfish and would rather pull other Khasis down rather than raise them up to greater heights or glory (or as the story goes, to freedom). It is one of those stories that Khasi middle class society has learned off by rote and which comes out often during drinking sessions. I have heard it so many times that I instinctively cringe at it when I happen to hear the familiar lines: "Ki brierw jong ngi te ki long kum ki tham..."(our people are like crabs...).

So firstly, this story is about as Khasi as sliced bread or Kentucky Fried Chicken. Many people the world over use the same allegory to voice the same complains within their own particular contexts. The conclusion is usually the same so there is nothing Khasi about this in a strict purist sense. I have heard Bodo people say it, Mizos tell each the same thing, Bengalis as well as the Assamese. Selfishness it can be argued is a universal human feature. Now the other thing is – and this might shock some of you - crabs are not human beings! We may enjoy our Jataka and Panchatantra tales but they are hardly manuals on human behaviour. What do you think is going to happen? Will the crabs sit in secret meetings on one side of the bucket and conspire to overthrow their human wardens? Will the crab who manages to climb over throw down a roll of string for his fellow in-mates to use?

The story of the crabs in the bucket is actually a throng for their pettiness. However, the other side of the story is this: our hero is, probably, a real selfish bastard. It is actually unfair that the story unfolds as it does. Does it tell us how many crab heads our hero stepped on to get to the top? It is a story – like many others – about the sacrosanct virtue of individual achievement. It is a nice story and many of us identify with that crab: triumphant, glorious (and undoubtedly) egotistical. We immediately associate crowds with hysteria, violence and viciousness. When we turn to politics, we see this very clearly. Our politicians stand over us: unassailable, irreproachable, haughty. Many of them actually come from humble settings and humble locales but you wouldn't know it based on the way they act. They are

Crabs in a Bucket

By Avner Pariat

philosophical experiment. It is easy for the listener to condemn the apparently selfish act of the crabs in the bucket but is it so straightforward? Who is actually being selfish? The singular individual crab or the clawed throng that pulls him back? The way you look at the story depends on the type of person you are. If you are a person who prides individual achievement over the collective interests then you'd side with the lone crab hero. Most people would boo and jeer at the

The story goes on to tell us about how one of the crabs had somehow managed to get a firm grip on the rim of the bucket and was proceeding to pull himself out to the relative safety of the outside world. However, just as he was about to complete his great escape, the other crabs resorted to pulling him back down to the bottom of the bucket. He was, thus, doomed like the rest. The moral that many Khasi people draw from this is that Khasis are like the crabs in that they are inherently selfish and would rather pull other Khasis down rather than raise them up to greater heights or glory (or as the story goes, to freedom). It is one of those stories that Khasi middle class society has learned off by rote and which comes out often during drinking sessions.

after many sessions of careful planning and coordination, they come up with the idea of using a distraction to fool the humans while one of their best trained crabs climbs over the wall with the help of some others. The said crab would then drop down an escape line and thus everyone could be saved. This is a nicer scenario because it argues for a better, much happier conclusion. Rather than the original story which pits individual survival against collective doom, in this version of the story everyone is saved! This version lays emphasis on the importance of teams and team-work. That the crab-hero could not be triumphant without the aid of others is understood and accepted by everyone including the fellow crabs.

An interesting tangent that arises from my version

of the tale is this: when the crab-hero gets to the top, it has two choices – to either drop the escape line and help rescue the others or to save only its own skin and run away? Based on these two choices, certain economists, politicians and technocrats say that people – being intrinsically selfish and self-involved - would choose the latter option as it is the one that requires the least amount of work and time. This was essentially the situation and conclusion proposed by the mathematician John Nash in a game he helped devise called “So Long, Sucker” (the name of the original game is less savoury and not fit for this space!). Through it he inferred that humans would always try to fulfil their own selfish desires; so our crab-hero must always – according to his rational logic – desert his comrades and leave them to their fate. However, the actual results of Nash's game showed that people, in fact, did not behave like that. Most people empirically tried to help each other and negotiate with each other in order to achieve a collective goal or desire in the game. Can we not apply this to politics and economics as well? Why must we be drawn into false binaries which do not reflect reality and the experience of living together as a society?

Finally, the last interesting thought that I want to extract from this scenario is perhaps the most realistic. Let me repeat the query again: when the crab-hero gets to the top, it has two choices – to rescue the others or to save its own skin. In a political sense, for its own future power, the crab-hero should save the others. Their gratitude and appreciation would guarantee the hero-crab the fruits of a secure and prosperous life. There is scope for a lot of abuse of power based on this outcome. Individuals could abuse the privilege of their office to gain and accrue wealth as we see it today in Meghalaya. The key to thwarting this must surely lie in the public realising its own power. The public will have to realise that the individual desire for power is real but so too is its own power to shape and control it.

Lies, damned lies and statistics

By Ananya Guha

The inner paradoxes that are in the body politic of our nation, is all too evident. On the one hand we are again and again reiterating the secular ideals of a nation, and it's rightful diversity. On the other hand we are trapped in this diversity, by proclaiming again and again that history of the country was distorted and the enormous wrongs must be righted. True of course, that the history of the country represented in past was North centred, paying little attention to the Southern, or for that matter, the North Eastern regions of the country. The northern domination came to be represented as a clash between Muslim and Hindu rulers, be they Marathas or Rajputs.

So the paradox continues and we live in a conflict. We mouth the platitude of secularism, but practice the ideology of sectarianism. There are many who are lamenting this, and vocally protesting against it. The time has come to take stock and find out whether things are going from bad to worse, or have matters improved in terms of economy, corruption, and overall functioning of government departments. In between is the great debate raging on nationalism, it's meaning and the relationship it bears, or does not with the professed

The positioning is something like this: my way of an essential patriotism is this, yours is different, your nationalism is different from mine, your reading and interpretation of history is wrong, subversive, mine is right etc. So we shout at each other, especially on television platforms. In the midst of it lying totally unnoticed is the poor Indian, who is perhaps not interested in such debates, but is struggling hard, braving adverse and deleterious weather conditions, whether it be the heat, or the floods, to simply eke out the meals of a day.

secularism. Certain radical changes in terms of cleansing the currency and imposition of the goods and services tax have resulted in both criticism, and appreciation. Three years some say, is enough for a government to make changes. Are these changes visible, or can they take place in such a short space?

Education and health many contend, are the two crucial points for the well being and development of a nation. What has been happening to them, in the past? some query. After all we are seventy years old. The questions that come to mind, to the apolitical are: what is the condition of poverty; has it decreased? What development has taken place, in rural areas, in terms of housing or communication? Has the rural urban divide lessened? If we are talking about internet connectivity, what is the state of road connectivity, in intractable areas of North East India. True, how are we going to overcome problems in accessibility of education, wipe out teacher absenteeism and look at education for drop outs and street children? Health care suffers a similar fate of apathy and neglect. Anyone having even an iota of love for the country, must look at these matters dispassionately. But what is unfortunately happening is that both rightists or leftists are not rising above petty party politics. And, some of the intellectuals, writers and artists! No one is willing to position themselves in an objective and unbiased manner. It is either this side

Elections- A No win-situation

Editor,

In a few months from now, candidates with their group of entourage will be knocking at our doors, wearing a big smile on their faces, inquire about our children and grandchildren. They will go to whatever extent to make us believe, that no one else can represent us better than them and that they are truly and genuinely concerned about us and our future. Maybe that sounds a bit extreme, but the fact remains that our candidates will do whatever is possible to make us believe that our votes matter to them. If voting really matters, then we have no one else left to blame but ourselves, for the lack of development, corruption, high handedness and whatever else that has made our state what it is today – the poor state of our roads being a strong example. It is a visible truth that once the elections are over, none of us really has any access to the people whom we have voted for. Our individual votes will never matter unless the election result in our

Yours etc.,
Pyndapbha Warjri
Shillong – 2

Show respect for all religions!

Editor,
This is in reply to Mr.

Rasputin Bismarck's letter "Is burning the dead a healthy practice" (ST Aug 23, 2017). I feel it is of paramount importance for Mr. Bismarck to learn that Hindus perform cremation of the dead because they firmly believe in the soul being indestructible and that death symbolizes only the end of the existence of a person's physical being. Hindus firmly believe that the soul then reincarnates in some other life form and passes through the same cycle of taking birth, growing and eventually meeting death. Cremation of a person's dead body is therefore, supposed to rid the departed soul of any attachments to the body it previously resided in and also to dissolve the 5 elements inside the body (Earth, Sky, Air, Water and Fire) back into the cosmos.

I believe the content of Mr. Bismarck's letter are highly irresponsible, immature and calls for immediate apology as he is mocking the traditional values of a religion which has close to a billion followers worldwide. While the writer vehemently terms the tradition of cremation as not eco-

friendly, he forgets to realize that the same tradition is also saving millions of acres of land specially in an over populated country like India. For his further satisfaction, he may also do a simple reality check by searching on Google: "land shortage for burial in (any country of his choice)" to see innumerable news reports from renowned media houses like BBC, New York Times, Reuters, Guardian, India Today, etc which express the alarming state of affairs as the world is running out of burial space.

Therefore instead of ignorantly ridiculing a particular tradition, it is our utmost duty to have mutual respect for all religion and their long established traditions which are actually indispensable to us.

Yours etc.,
Raghav Bajaj.
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.

Rebuilding Doll House

In the age of Barbie & X-Box, few enthusiasts keep tradition of making rag & cowrie dolls alive

Wooden dolls, rag-couples, toys made of cowrie are things of passé. Now is the age of Barbie, X-Box and other new-age electronic games. But despite such Western ‘game-changers’ in an Indian child’s doll house, a group of creative people is trying their best to tell the story of their land through age-old rag dolls or shell figures or simply by adorning plastic dolls with traditional dresses.

Zuboni Humtsoe, an entrepreneur from Nagaland, says the idea of making rag dolls came from her fashion factory. Humtsoe runs an online shopping portal where traditional Naga ornaments and western outfits are sold. “Whatever materials, be it cloth, beads or threads, are left, we use them in making rag dolls. In fact, we also sell these dolls on our portal,” says Humtsoe over phone.

The dolls sold by PreciousMeLove, the online shopping portal, are dressed in the traditional attires of different Naga tribes. Humtsoe says Meghalaya is one of her big business areas and besides accessories and dresses, the number of dolls sold in the state is also high.

Another enthusiast, Ikali Sukhalu, from Nagaland says she loves making cowrie dolls that tell the stories of her land. She also sells the dolls on special occasions as souvenirs.

“The idea of making the dolls came from the local tradition of presenting gifts to guests. I grew up outside Nagaland and came back to the state much later. I observed that people would gift stole or shawl to visitors. What is unique about it,” says Ikali.

During her visit to China, Ikali saw that people make small dolls dressed in traditional dresses and she too thought about doing something similar.

“As a souvenir, what is better than a pair of traditional dolls?”

Ikali uses conch shells for making dolls and wraps them in the tribe’s traditional shawl. “There are 14 tribes in Nagaland and each has a unique shawl. But these shawls are really expensive. So I am focusing on only four tribes,” says Ikali, who is a fashion designer based in Dimapur.

The young doll-maker says making the dolls is a strenuous job as it takes patience to put the things together in the miniature versions. “When I see a particular accessory associated with a particular tribe, I get them and try to copy them in the miniature version, which is really tough.”

There are women workers assigned to each tribe because “you cannot mix the ornament with the attire or the identity of the tribe will be lost”. The dolls come in pairs



(Clockwise from top left) Ikali Sukhalu; dolls in Khasi attire made by Silbi Passah; an Ao couple; rag dolls from the factory of PreciousMeLove; and a Chakhesang couple; (top right in the box) Zuboni Humtsoe with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and (inset) a Naga doll

the attire and ornament has different names in Khasi. Pointing at a Khasi couple, Passah says the male attire has different parts like — Ka Jainphong shad, Jainboh, Theria, Jainteh Syngkai, Shanryndang and Kynjri Syngkai, among others.

For the female attire, the different parts are — Ka sopti mukmor, Ka Jainpien, Ka Sempoh, Ka Dhara, Ki Kpieng Ksiar, among others. “A silver crown adorns the head of a female. It rests on the knot of hair purposely fastened to the level head of the dancer for placing the crown. From the hair knot a projection of the female hair is also provided on the right side to accompany the lone silver chain,” says Passah.

When asked about how well-received the rag or cowrie dolls or dolls in traditional attire are among today’s children, Ikali says, “The obvious choice among children these days is Barbie but I make it just for the love of it. Some people do cherish these simple dolls.”

~ By Richa Kharshandi & Nabamita Mitra



‘Precious’ project

After graduating from Delhi University I did not want to return home to Nagaland because of the lack of opportunities. However, I had to when my father suffered a massive stroke and our family was going through a hard time. Being a creative person, I did not want a government desk job but watching my ailing father suffer broke my heart. Sitting on the cold benches of the hospital I vowed to work really hard.

Saving Rs 3,500 from my college scholarship fund, I dismantled our beds and converted our bedroom into a walk-in store and started ‘Precious-MeLove’ (PML) through Facebook by selling clothes hand-picked from Sarojini and flea markets.

Since we did not have resources, we worked from the backyard of our house on a shoe-string budget, tapping our creative veins, making use of all our available resources to the hilt and using artistic photography to share our story.

Many people laughed and discouraged me saying women can’t do business. But we kept working really hard. Over time we grew and became an all-girls’ team from the photographers to the seamstresses, stylists to designers, models to writers, doll makers to managers.

Living in a society that is crazy about the comforts of white-collar jobs, there have been many times that we had to literally rebel against our own families. In 2015, Lothungbeni Lotha (PML COO) told her father that she didn’t want a government job and left home to join PML saying, “If PML can do it, even I can do it”.

Similarly, against her family’s wishes, Babita Meitei (PML head-crafts designer) continues to work and make beautiful handmade dolls. Other team members also share similar stories. Being a passionate and determined entrepreneur, I ran after Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 as he was leaving and convinced him to visit our PML stall at the Hornbill festival. Modi left his VVIP entourage, walked back with me and greatly appreciated our hard work.

From a simple page on Facebook in 2011 we managed to launch our own fashion Ecommerce website in 2016, becoming one of the first fashion e-commerce website from the North East run by an all-girl team. Today, we have our own manufacturing unit with 20 full time employees and 30+ indirect employees. We sell our own label of premium Nagaland fashion designs, vintage clothing, fashion accessories from different designers to handmade dolls of northeast India.

Keeping social responsibility at the heart of our business we also keep conducting and participating in entrepreneurship skill trainings and workshops. We are also working towards an inclusive workplace to empower and employ more differently-abled and people from different strata of the society.

Proving all our critics and naysayer’s wrong, on March 8, International Women’s Day, the President awarded us the prestigious ‘Nari Shakti Puraskar’ National Award for outstanding innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship and women empowerment.

Entrepreneurship taught us so much, it has empowered us and the best part of it is that we get to empower and better lives of even more.



This is our dream that through our creativity and hard work we will make the world a better place one stitch at a time.

For more than five years now we have been delivering Preciousmelove products to almost every part of the country. From Delhi to Mumbai, Goa, Bangalore, Chennai, Pune, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Hyderabad, Odisha, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland etc. We also have good clients from abroad buying and supporting us.

HURDLES ON THE WAY

I started doing business seven years ago when I was 21. Many people said I was wasting my education and called me crazy. I was often discouraged and criticised.

Our other team members also share similar stories. The pathetic infrastructure in the state also adds to our woes and challenges. Erratic electricity, horrible roads and connectivity, terrible but expensive internet services and air connectivity, difficult-to-get train tickets, the expensive courier and transportation charges, expensive raw materials, lack or non-availability of quality raw materials, lack of skilled people, the geographical challenges, nepotism, exclusive policies and schemes that don’t bring much benefit for small entrepreneurs like ourselves etc. It all proves to be a challenge till today.

Entrepreneurship looks very glamorous from the outside but only an entrepreneur really understands an entrepreneur: it is a challenging and lonely road. But it’s also an incredible journey.

This year in February when we were informed that we were going to be awarded by the President for outstanding innovation, creativity, women empowerment and entrepreneurship we all cried. It was proof that we were not so crazy after all.

(As told to The Shillong Times)

Eliot’s Teenage Waste Land

By Ratan Bhattacharjee

Fifty years ago the poet T.S Eliot passed away. One hundred years ago, he made his literary debut with the much debated poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

Eliot began writing *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* in February 1910 and was first published in the June issue of Poetry. It was later printed as part of a twelve-poem pamphlet titled *Prufrock and Other Observations* in 1917.

Nearly 100 years ago when *The Love Song of Alfred J Prufrock* was published, Eliot was himself barely out of his teens uncannily in touch with the exquisite torments of hypersensitive youth.

On the surface the poem relays the thoughts of a sexually frustrated middle-aged man. But on a deeper level focuses on a teenage wasteland in which Eliot lived. The spirit of Eliot’s poem is irreverent. It is a picture of dystopia.



Photo: Google Images

Disorientation of language only highlights churned up dreams, thwarted desires, ageing and decay which heralds

paradigmatic cultural shift from the late 19th Romantic verse and Georgian lyrics.

Prufrock’s monologue reveals meaningless of existence in the modern world and inability of modern man to live without being disillusioned. Random thoughts at interval epitomise impotence of a modern individual. Overall impression that prevails is that it is a drama of anguish.

Evening in this poem is spread out against the sky like a patient etherised upon a table. The poet speaks of ‘sawdust restaurants’ and cheap hotels, yellow fog and the afternoon.

Other images show the poet’s concern for ageing and senility. Eliot’s poetic predecessors in America and England emphasised on personal emotion and private thoughts, but in this poem the romantic mode is abandoned.

The poem was so profound that it drew attention of Ezra Pound, overseas Editor of Poetry Magazine who recommended to Harriet Monroe, the magazine’s founder to publish the poem.

The poem tolled the death knell for

Georgian poetry. Physical and intellectual inertia of modern life is depicted in an innovative way through the character of a middle-aged man.

The disillusionment of post-war generation is so graphic in this poem. It is obscure not because nothing is understood, but rather for the opposite reason that there are so many meanings amalgamated and multiple dimensions added , that it is not to be understood at all.

Today if you ask readers to name 20th century’s greatest short poem, the answer would be *Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock* which is more than erotic dithering in spite of the lines: “I have heard mermaids singing each to each/ I do not think they will sing to me”.

Eliot was labelled anti-Semitic and elitist and as a man suffering from psychological disorders in conjugal life as he and Vivian had tough times of misunderstanding.

No one will remember or will show curiosity about his Harvard days where

he left behind his bittersweet love Emily Hale, ‘coldly marmoreal’ as Robert Crawford in his book *Young Eliot* describes her.

Eliot grew up in a family of preachers and educators and was reserved. He was the physically delicate boy who never played sports and was more passive for his double hernia. His adolescence was shattered because of shyness and acute anxiety about his body image, and was never happy with his social relations.

Away from home he loafed as a boy of mediocre grade, frequented music halls and joined dining clubs and secret societies.

Finally when he found his true voice in poetry, all facts of his own life were crushed into impersonal musings and a great poem was written.

(The author is Associate Professor and Head of PG English, Dum Dum Motijheel College, Kolkata. He may be reached at profratanbhattacharjee.com)

Be a green crusader

By Ranjan K Baruah

We have been talking about climate change and protection of the planet. In recent years, the rise in temperature has been a global concern.

At this juncture, the big question ahead of us is to what action should be taken to mitigate the crisis. Globally, from 1880 to 2012, average global temperature increased by 0.85°C. To put this into perspective, for each 1 degree of temperature increase, grain yields decline by about 5 per cent.

The entire world is talking about combating climate change and taking steps for adaptation and mitigation.

We have challenges and at the same time several career options. There are options including business, energy, engineering, apart from research and activism. Some of the options are mentioned below:

Climate Change Analyst: A climate change analyst evaluates climate data, research and patterns to determine how specific climate changes will affect people, economies, ecosystems and the environment as a whole. These analysts must also have a strong background in computer and environmental sciences. These analysts may specialise in scientific research, public policy, education, etc.

Environmental Scientists: The demand for environmental scientists working in academic and research institutes, laboratories, offices and field is high. As we continue to tackle complex issues like climate change, toxic chemical cleanup and water conservation, the workforce will need an ever-growing staff of environmental scientists to lead the way.

Environmental Engineers: Environmental engineering is the branch of engineering concerned with the application of scientific and engineering principles for protection of human population from the effects of adverse environmental factors; protection of both local and global environment, from potentially deleterious effects of natural and human activities; and improvement of environmental quality. They use the principles of engineering, soil science, biology and chemistry to develop solutions to environmental problems. They are involved in efforts to improve recycling, waste disposal, public health, and water and air pollution control.

Green/Sustainable Building Professionals: Sustainable architecture seeks to minimise the negative environmental im-



pact of buildings by efficiency and moderation in the use of materials, energy and development space and the ecosystem at large. Sustainable architecture uses a conscious approach to energy and ecological conservation in the design of the built environment. The idea of sustainability, or ecological design, is to ensure that our actions and decisions today



do not inhibit the opportunities of future generations.

Green/Sustainable Business: Sustainable business, or green business, is an enterprise that has minimal negative impact on the global or local environment, community, society or economy — a business that strives to meet the triple bottom line. Often, sustainable businesses have progressive environmental and human rights policies.

Green business has been seen as a possible mediator of economic-environmental relations, and if proliferated, would serve to diversify our economy, even if it has a negligible effect at lowering at-

mospheric CO2 levels.

The definition of “green jobs” is ambiguous but it is generally agreed that these jobs, the result of green business, should be linked to clean energy and contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases.

CC Education: One of the best jobs may be joining educational institutions or research institute for climate change education. There are many NGOs and civil society organisation who conducts various awareness programmes and other programme to sensitise individuals and students on the issue of climate change. There are many national and international organisations where one may join with required qualification.

Activism: There are many organisations that work on activism and this is important to pressurise government to take climate friendly decisions. There are many international convention and treaties related to climate change and through proper activism only they can be made climate friendly and pro-people.

There are many other opportunities in this field. The most important is awareness among all. One who can gain knowledge in ways related to combating, adapting or mitigating climate change can opt for any of these new-age careers. Arunachal Pradesh and North East being bio-diversity hotspot bring more opportunity for individuals to work for the conservation of bio-diversity. Conservation of bio-diversity is nothing but steps towards combating climate change.

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

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, August 27, 2017

Venus is forming an angle of 80 degrees with Jupiter on your solar return chart which denotes a mixed year. Invest in higher education this year, to help you open the doors to a brand new career. Practice a healthier lifestyle by incorporating more exercise and reviewing your eating habits diet. You are likely to come across a lingering health concern. Spiritual practices will increase your ability to adapt to the karmic changes you'll experience this year, designed to redirect your path on a personal as well as professional level. A new opportunity will challenge you to move more independently, which will awaken the passionate entrepreneur within you. When relationships hit a low point, you can revive them by focusing on changes you need to make, rather than insisting your partner change.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This is a mixed period for you. You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives. You would be more accommodating in relationships and not take things personally. Work wise there will be some obstacles that you would face. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. It is time to express your feelings and ideas and share what you have learned through a variety of experience in this life. There could be an interaction, which on the face of it looks difficult to resolve but you reach out and get to the root of the problem.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

There is a deeper understanding in professional associations and personal relationships. Your associates and co-workers prove to be loyal and disciplined. You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity. You are likely to meet well known people in authority and share ideas and spend a fair bit of time in their association. A stimulating project should be taken as a challenge that would further and promote your business prospects. You are in touch with innocence that comes from life lived fully, which also has a quality of wisdom and the acceptance of the ever-changing wonders of life. Health will take a turn for the better.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You would be able to integrate forces, resources and professional aspects to achieve success in important ventures. You are individualistic in professional aspects. You boldly express your views and comments without being afraid. It would be good to say what you feel that you would be appreciated for being honest. There could be alteration in ideas or plans, increase and decrease in finances and fluctuation in business. On the personal front you go all out to make the special people in your life feel wanted and special. This is a time for you to renew your energy.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This is altogether a happy and relaxed time for you. There is perfection and beauty in emotional relationships as you come from a deep and spiritual space within to relate in a new way with your loved ones. Communications and business associates from overseas bear good news and offer lucrative opportunities. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration would be strengthened through understanding and commitment. You may handle more than one project at the same time with expertise and success. End of this period brings fresh energy, love and romance in important relationships.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This phase brings pleasant results in your professional life with rewards and recognition. You would also work hard and would get ready to express yourself and take charge and responsibilities. Personal projects are on an upswing. Income from foreign sources could also figure during this time. You would be able to complete work assignments and personal business with good energy and support. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciprocity. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. Health problems are resolved and your energy is restored.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There could be an exciting job offer, reward, recognition, or promotion. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily work tends to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than

usual. This is a very significant period of the year, when you are inspired creatively and emotionally. You can draw correct conclusions from prior knowledge of people you meet. A new cycle begins with the old order finishing as inner and outer changes are on the cards. You feel on top of things as you are blessed with good health and energy.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This period is marked with fun, entertaining and happiness. Your hobbies, leisure time, moments spent with family and children, are highlighted. There is youthful energy and verve in your life. You are generous, kind and preserving in family and personal relationships. You are diligent and pedantic at work as you exhibit your knowledge in your field of activity. You can well utilize the energies to attend to your health and well-being. Though you are assiduous and hard-working you do not relish being tied down to your laptop or cell phone and would like to spend quality time on the personal front.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

There is good-luck in love and romance and personal relationships. You are on the threshold of a creative and inventive assignment that brings you name, and exposure, as your desire for some form of recognition will be fulfilled. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering as you have to positively use your talents and efficiency. Good health and energy enables you to participate in sports related pastimes. A pleasant surprise awaits you. Yoga and meditation put you in touch with inner bliss.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You would handle your profession sincerely and creatively and devote your time to children and family members. A personal involvement has the qualities of love, balance and freedom that you desire. On the other hand you are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. Learning important lessons from life could be the beginning of spiritual growth and understanding. Spiritual pursuits and meditation can be rewarding. You grow and transform as you pass through a touching emotional experience. Health needs to be maintained with a planned diet and fitness schedules.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

As you improve personal and professional relations with patience, love and care you avoid long drawn discussions, criticism and arguments. You are blessed with divine wisdom and inspired to take up a professional challenge. You are original and ambitious instilling a personal style in whatever you do. You give and receive affection and love from friends and relatives. You connect with old friends and business associates. Being open and receptive, you attract prestigious opportunities and interesting people. You are happy as there is balance and harmony at home and synergy in the work area. Don't allow personal feelings to influence professional decisions.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Pay close attention to performance and continuity and your efforts would be visible to senior colleagues and people in authority. You resolve an important issue that has been the cause of anxious moments for some time as you start a new business project while adding zest to an old one. Express your views and conditions clearly when it comes to business and financial dealings. Sharing your philosophical interests with a romantic partner may be especially appealing to you. A new person or influence leads to renewed interest in creative fields. Fresh attitudes and a new perspective are needed.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You would effectively handle difficult projects at work. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to yearn for a connection to more spiritual or idealistic pursuits. A sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself is something that is entering your life now. You look to community service and lend a helping hand as you want to make a difference. Be ready to make quick decisions at work and act spontaneously in personal situations. You would achieve success at work and complete projects through interplay of ideas and correlation of subjects since communication is your forte. You could be restless and pay impromptu visits to friends and relatives.

A slice of Holland



Five years ago, we (my wife and I) got the opportunity to travel to Europe for 15 days. We were part of a group tour organised by a famous tour operator in India. It was an experience worth penning down. And so I did, I kept a record of our day-to-day visits to new places, of surprises and disappointments as well as trivia. Here is an excerpt from a traveller's notebook, a storehouse of memories.

August 9, 2012: Hotel NH Koningshof-Eindhoven (the Netherlands): This is the sixth day of our tour of Europe. We are in the low-lying countryside. The Netherlands literally means ‘low country’ and one fourth of its area lies barely one meter above the sea level.

The Netherlands, known for tulips and windmills, is also home to the world famous brand Philips .This morning we woke up around 6.30 am to an aura of a misty morning with a mellow sun gleaming through the canopy of conifers down to the green grass laden with dew drops. It was a serene beauty. After the breakfast we were all very keen to venture into the Dutch countryside. Our first destination was The Hague.

After almost two-and-a-half hour drive from Eindhoven, we crossed the bridge on River Meuse and entered Rotterdam, the second largest city in the Netherlands and one of the largest ports in the world. Rotterdam had the distinction of the busiest port of the world from1962-2004, and only to be surpassed by Shanghai. We were enjoying Hindi movie songs with video clips on the LCD screen.

It was 10.30 in the morning. Within half an hour we shall reach Den Hague, The Hague, a tranquil city. The Hague is the official residence of the Queen of Netherlands, Queen Beatrix, and also the seat of the Dutch Government and the parliament.

To capture best video shots I occupied a seat just behind the coach captain. Before entering the city limit we stopped for a while at a traffic signal.

The surrounding had a beautiful landscape with parks and greenery all around. Our coach then took a right turn and we were off to Madurodam, which means miniature Holland.

At Madurodam, we felt like giants, like Gulliver in the land of Liliputs, amidst miniature windmills, canals, palaces, airport, power stations, sea ports, embankments, and others .We had a real taste of Holland at Madurodam.

After spending about an hour at

Madurodam, we headed towards a typical cheese factory at the Jacobs Hoeve on the outskirts of Amsterdam.

We had glimpses of rural Holland on way to the factory. It was a real treat to watch the serene beauty. At the factory, there were real demonstrations of how the Dutch prepare their cheese. We tasted different varieties but they all tasted salty. Some friends purchased little quantities for their families.

Adjacent to the cheese factory, in the same courtyard, we enjoyed our Indian lunch arranged by Gourmmindia, a chain of outlets of Indian cuisine in Europe. The menu included some surprises for us- there were puri, raita, and pure mango juice too.

After lunch, we got into the coach for a visit to a windmill. After travelling some distance along very narrow roads, surrounded by lush green fields, cattle farms, canals with crystal clear water and the most beautiful cottages I have seen during my tour of Europe. Small

TRAVELLER'S DIARY

boys and girls bypassed us paddling bicycles. I was delighted to have sighted a windmill in the midst of lush green fields and swamps. I never thought a windmill could be so large. All of a sudden a faint memory of the poem “Miller of Dee” by Charles Mackay, which I read decades ago, flashed into my mind.

We alighted from the coach for a brief photo-stop against the backdrop of the windmill. We clicked some memorable pictures. I was rather keen to find out how the windmill worked. But we were denied entry into to the premises.

After spending some time and enjoying the beauty of the typical Dutch countryside, we were off to Rattermans, a traditional Dutch shoe factory where we were given a live demonstration of how wooden shoes were made. We were told that wooden shoes are extensively used in agricultural fields. Traditionally wooden shoes are made from poplar wood. After curving, clogs are cured for about three weeks for painting.

After a short drive from the shoe factory, we reached Amsterdam. The entire journey to the city was a wonderful experience.

On the way, we came across beautiful waterfronts and canals with lovely little boats, small and beautiful houses virtually on the waterfronts.

Known for its night life, canals and museums, Amsterdam is one of the best tourist destinations in Europe. I was thrilled...

Amsterdam offers different types of a cruise from simple day one-hour to night tours. Amsterdam Jewel Cruises offer luxury saloon boats, with reserved private tables, where one can relax in the backdrop of well-illuminated canals and enjoy a la carte three-course dinner.

Canals of Amsterdam are not only major attractions for tourists but also a wonderful way to discover Amsterdam in its full glory.

A number of smaller canals spread out in different directions, creating 90 odd islands. Canals gradually start widening towards the sea. For years the city did not allow automobiles within the city limits! Amsterdam is still a paradise for those who ride bicycles.

When the tour manager went to the counter to collect tickets for the boat ride, we were having a virtual tour of the canal side. To our right, across the road, we could see the huge logo of Heineken, the world famous Dutch beer.

The one-hour cruise was a life-time experience.

We cruised along slowly along the canal. There were commentaries in English and Dutch describing important landmarks and I was rather very sad when we came near the iconic landmark of Amsterdam, the house of Anne Frank. Any tour of Amsterdam would not be complete without a visit to Anne Frank's house. But that was not included in our itinerary. I was saddened by the thought of the little Dutch girl, who went into hiding to save her life during the Nazi occupation of Holland.

The Netherlands is also proud of her two master painters — Vincent van Gogh and Rembrandt. In Amsterdam, there are two museums in their names. We were not so lucky to see their famous art works because like Anne Frank's house, museums too, were not included in our itinerary.

Vincent van Gogh, known for his use of bold colours had about 900 paintings to his credit. Some of the world famous paintings of van Gogh are Starry Night, Sunflowers, Irises, Poppies and Wheat-field with corns. After an hour long grand tour of the canals we were back near the Heinekens, had a brief stroll and got into the coach for a long journey back to Eindhoven.

(Contributed by Parag Ranjan Dutta)

Get set for adventure sports



Meghalaya is the place to be when it comes to adventure sports. Pioneer Adventure Tours (PAT), which was established on August 15, 2011, organises such sport events in several places of the state.

The first adventure site is situated in Dawki along the Bangladesh border and provides activities like scuba diving, trekking, river rafting, cliff jumping, ziplining, caving, rock climbing, rappelling, canyoning and camping.

Sports enthusiasts and adventure lovers can stay for a few days at PAT's camps and experience the thrill.

Another adventure site is in Dympep/Mawkdok, Cherrapunjee where we operate a zi-

pline, the second in the North East. The line is 2,400-foot long and 700-foot in height. PAT says in a statement that it intends to expand the zipline to 6 km across the valley towards Cherrapunjee.

PAT not only provides adventure opportunity but also helps generate employment in villages. “Through our activities we have been able to generate employment in remote and backward areas and have contributed positively to their economic empowerment. Expansion of our activities will have a direct bearing on rural economics and provide a multitude of opportunities to the locals,” PAT said in the statement.

“*I like the night. Without the dark, we'd never see the stars.*”
--- Stephenie Meyer

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LX No. 18 SHILLONG, MONDAY, AUGUST 28, 2017

National shame
WHAT happened on Friday August 25 is the last nail in the coffin of the Haryana Police. While it is an open secret that the police in India continues to be the ruler’s police – a legacy inherited from the British and the 1861 Indian Police Act - never before has this been demonstrated so unashamedly as it was on that fateful day. That s self-proclaimed god-man – Gurmeet Singh Ram Rahim Insaan, accused of raping two sadhvis who were inmates of the Dera Sacha Sauda, 15 years ago was going to hear the court verdict of the case filed against him with a cavalcade of 700 vehicles, beggars all logic. The man has a huge following and is also patronised by all political parties but his lifestyle betrays his carnal nature going by the kind of stunt movies he acts in and produces. The man has amassed wealth and his devotees claim that the Dera Sacha Sauda does a lot of charitable works but that does not excuse Ram Rahim’s vulgar display of influence and affluence. The Haryana Police are only acting to a script. It is possible that some in the force might also be followers of this god-man. But the complete failure of law and order leading to near rioting and the death of 30 people and the attack on media persons and government installations are unpardonable. The state government of Haryana has to be held accountable and the chief minister should take responsibility for the complete failure of the state machinery on Friday. Nothing less than that is expected from the central government.

India claims to be a superpower and a progressive nation which has produced scientists of great calibre such as CV Raman, Homi J Bhabha, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam amongst many other luminaries, but large sections of Indians are steeped in superstition and fall prey to such god-men who play on their insecurities. In recent times science is sought to be given short shrift by all kinds of absurd counter claims from people who are trying to push us back in time. This needs to be resisted. India is a secular country and those mandated to rule it had better distance themselves from religion and unscrupulous god-men.

LOOKING BACK
May 1, 1989

J&K Ministry expanded to 30

Eight Congress(I) and three National Conference Minister were inducted into the Jammu and Kashmir council of Ministers today raising its strength to 30. Nine Cabinet Ministers and ten Ministers of State are from the National conference while five Cabinet Ministers and six Ministers of State belong to the Congress (I). Meanwhile the entire

Pradesh Congress(I) committee of Jammu and Kashmir has been dissolved and former Union Minister Mr Mohammad Shafi Qureshi appointed as the new Congress(I) president. Declaring this, AICC(I) general secretary Mr K N Singh told reporters today the resignation of Pradesh Congress (I) president Mr G R Kar had been accepted.

government reports. The lack of political will and courage to do away with such favours only shows the lack of vision of those in authority and their complete detachment from the ground realities. If we are to go by statistics produced by the state and those conducted by an independent organization, I think our politicians would be ashamed to know that we are lacking in all aspects. But what will it be like even after the 2018 elections is something we have to keep our fingers crossed.

Yours etc...
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong:

Religion: the recipe for disaster?

Editor,
The article by Mankular Gashnga “No Place To Live And No Place To Die ...” (ST, Aug 19, 2017) is a rare and bold piece. I’ve not read such a write-up in the past. He has bared his soul to all and one. True, people should not disrespect any religion. But people could detest the dogmatic belief

The Khasi and - Christian Debate

This article is not about the infamous funeral incident and its aftermath but it is about the relationship between the children of Hynniewtrep who affiliated themselves to different religions. From the religious point of view, the entire Khasi-Pnar society belongs to one homogenous community, but by a happenstance of history (which is beyond their control), they later happened to follow different religions. One section remains in the old religion while the others decided to follow other religious paths. Of course there is nothing wrong in following a religion of one’s choice but in this case, a section of the society feels that in the process it is being discriminated upon and a progressive society like ours should take notice of this, discuss, debate and if possible come up with a solution to resolve the problem.

Also, it would not do us any good if we continue to be in denial and act as if nothing has happened and everything is honky dory in the society. We can only move forward and work at reconciliation if we try to see and understand this important issue in its proper perspective. This article is therefore an attempt to scratch the surface and help us see the problem that is prevailing in the different strata of society and perhaps come up with suggestions to solve the problem.

The previous arguments for the Church which appeared in this paper have their own flaws because they look at the problem from the Christian point of view only. I have in my earlier write-up espoused the idea of putting oneself in the shoes of the followers of the Niamtre or Niam Tynrai religion and try to understand the problem from their standpoint. And it is only if we move from our comfortable stance and try to see the problem from the other’s perspective that we will be able to understand the gravity of the problem.

The crevice was formed since the first person was converted to Christianity and an example is a case of the first convert in Jowai. According to the book Gwalia in Khasia (The Welsh in) when the lady converted to Christianity she had to move (lock stock and barrel) to the Mission compound, Jowai and as the name of the locality suggests, it is a place where the missionaries

based themselves. It was not clear whether the lady was banished by her family because she converted to the new religion or whether the missionaries felt it convenient to further indoctrinate the convert by bringing her closer to the fold even in the physical sense. But this certainly has created a rift in the family if not in the community.

And when Christianity grew, the new converts were taught that only they are saved and their friends, families and neighbours who have not accepted Jesus as their saviour are destined to burn in hell. This also made the Christians adopt a holier-than-thou attitude towards their friends and neighbours because they are made to believe that they are saved while the others are damned. It was then that the rift got bigger because you have in the community those who are saved and those who are not. One can very well imagine how a section of the society which was considered to be damned and to burn in hell (for no fault of theirs) will feel when they are only following the religion that their ancestors had taught them.

As Christianity gained new converts, villages like Mission Compound which had only people from one particular denomination living in the area also increased in numbers and this continues to this day. This idea of a secluded locality, where only those who belong to one religion can live was copied and replicated elsewhere. The dorbar shnong in the particular village also consisted of people from one denomination only and to maintain the homogeneity of these villages, they came up with rules and regulations that only those members of the particular denomination can settle in the village. Or if anybody married a person from another village who is not a follower of that particular denomination, the individual will have to convert to the denomination of the majority if he or she wants to settle in that village.

Perhaps it will be a good idea if these villages are taken as case studies to further understand the

intolerance that is prevailing in this section of the society. One is not sure if this trend where a community in the villages insists on all the members in the society to conform and follow the same religion is unique to West Jaintia Hills only, but such villages still exists in the area. Villages like Moodymmai and Demthring are examples where the church and village administration mix to this day, and almost cent percent of the people who live in these villages belong to one and the same church. And this is not sheer coincidence and does not happen by chance.

The segregation is not only between the followers of the Niamtre/Niam Tynrai and Christians; this tendency is now growing even among Christian denominations too. There are villages which are divided into two sectors called ‘A’ and ‘B’, but scratch a little bit deeper and one will find that the alphabets represent the area where the members of different denomination lives. For example are ‘A’ is where the Catholics live and ‘B’ is a predominantly Presbyterian settlement and we even have villages where the localities are named after the religion like ‘Lum Raman’, ‘Lum Pres’, ‘Lum Chor (Church of North East India)’, ‘Lum Trom (Church of God)’ etc.

The recent letter to editor which suggested that burial is better than cremation also lacks understanding of the importance of cremation to the followers of Niamtre or Niam Tynrai. For many of us it does not make any difference if we bury or cremate the dead; after all it is just how we dispose of the dead body. But cremation of the dead in the Niamtre tradition starts with ‘knia, khad’ (funeral rituals) at the residence of the deceased then continue with ‘e din’, ‘choh syiar’ followed by ‘ka siang ka pha’ at the cremation ground and ends with depositing the charred bones of the deceased person in the clan’s ossuary. Unlike many of us they do not have the luxury to choose how to dispose of the body of their near and dear ones. There is only one option and that is cremation.

To understand the relation between the two one can also look at the language or the way people talk with or about those who

still follow the Niamtre or Niam Tynrai. Whenever-Pnars who are strangers meet for the first time; the first question they ask is other each other’s health and that of their family members. The next question is about the clan to which they belong, the area of domicile and then the religion one follows. A typical Christian will ask another question ‘phi la long niam?’ which literally means are you following any religion? But the actual meaning of the question is, Are you Christian? The inference is, if you are not member of any church you are not following any religion at all. Or to be more precise, in their scheme of things Niamtre or Niam Tynrai is not considered a religion at all. To justify the argument, one would also hear Christians referring to non-Christians as ‘kito bym pat long Niam phi’ meaning they are not following any religion.

In conversations among Christians they would generally call the non-Christian-Pnars as ‘Jentil’ (Gentiles), ki ‘bymngeit’ (heathens) because they are not members of any one of the three Abrahamic religions. Even the members of the church which rejected the trinity such as the Unitarian Church, were called ‘ki len Blei’ (heretics) by the Christians. But the members of this church now wear that as a badge of honour because the original Greek meaning of the word heretics is those who are able to choose.

Whatever may be the case, the Niamtre/ Niam tynrai are at the receiving end of the stick. The fact that their numbers have declined is evident for all to see because they are now becoming a minority without minority benefits. Christians may congratulate themselves and claim that the church has done a commendable job by providing education and healthcare to the masses, but the followers of Niamtre/Niam tynrai also argue that it is also true that Christians have accelerated the conversion process and increased the pace of decline in the numbers of followers of the indigenous religion in the area.

Religion is a poor unifier. People need to rise above it.

unimaginably vast scope of the “divine creation” there is no natural phenomenon that forces us to live in confrontation, vindictiveness, and fanaticism unless we choose to. God is great but our religious concepts are too small to encompass that greatness.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong-2

Support of godman's ungodly act?

Editor,
The violence that had erupted after a godman rapist was convicted by a CBI court amply proved that Indians are in favour of the rapists. Women are just objects of enjoyment by the male to quench their thirst and lust for sex and nothing else.

Yours etc
A. Pyrtuh
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.

**A source of injustice removed for ever
Brave women who challenged shameful practice, taste success**

By Harihar Swarup

The Supreme Court made history when in a landmark 3-2 verdict, it 'set aside' the centuries-old practice of instant triple talaq in which Muslim men divorce their wives by uttering 'talaq, talaq, talaq' in quick succession. The apex court thus ended a source of injustice that put certain sections of Sunni Muslim women at great disadvantage. By a 3:2 majority SC ruled that this form of talaq is “manifestly arbitrary”, allowing marital ties to be “capriciously whimsically” broken by a Muslim man, and violated Article 14 of the Constitution guaranteeing equal protection of law to men and women. With no chance for reconciliation, many Muslim women have found themselves destitute, with no recourse available in civil law.

It is now for the BJP-led NDA government to act fast and in six months time, during which the SC verdict is operative, bring up a detailed legislation to end for ever the obnoxious practice of triple talaq. It is a matter of regret that when every Muslim country has legally prohibited triple talaq, in India Muslim Personal Board and its supporters defended this shameful practice. Muslim countries which abolished triple talaq include Bangladesh and fanatically Islamic nation Pakistan. Among other Muslim countries are Indonesia, Afghanistan and Turkey.

The Personal Law Board is a body of clerics, and history shows that they take longer than normal to move ahead with times. In his famous speech Mustafa Kamal Pasha, the leader of Turkey, blamed the Muslim clergy for social and educational backwardness of the community.

It is to be noted that Arif Mohammad Khan famously quit in protest as minister of state in Rajiv Gandhi government after the enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act in 1986, which overturned the Supreme Court’s historic Shah Bano judgment, the last such landmark case on Muslim women preceding the Supreme Court’s latest 3:2 judgment which has ruled instant talaq unconstitutional.

Arif Khan says the abolition of triple talaq by SC is a big victory. "I welcome this verdict. I honestly feel that we are not in a position today to make a realistic assessment of the positive fallout this judgment would have on future of Muslims. The real problem is that a Muslim girl grows with this consciousness that after marriage her husband can turn her out of the house by simply saying triple talaq. This was really oppressive for Muslim women. This apparent law on triple talaq had distorted the minds of the Muslim world. Now, they will see a new Muslim community growing up in India which will not have the fear of triple talaq among them."

The few Muslim women who fought against triple talaq are: Shayara Bano, 38, is a resident of Kashipur, Uttarakhnad. She was divorced through a speed post on October 10, 2015, after 15 years of marriage to a property dealer Rizwan Ahmed. Bano, a mother of two children, who were taken away from her after divorce, said she was tortured and abused by her in-laws for dowry and made to undergo six abortions. A post graduate in sociology, now pursuing MBA, Bano said she would take up a job and continue her fight for the rights and dignity of Muslim women.

Shayara filed a petition in the Supreme Court against triple talaq. The BJP-led NDA filed an affidavit in the apex court against triple talaq based on the petition. She hopes her daughter doesn't go through the sad experience that she did.

Ishrat Jahan, Howrah, West Bengal. Triple talaq pronounced over phone in 2014, Married at 15. She had four children before her husband S K Murtaza summarily divorced her over phone. Clad from head to toe in burqa, Ishrat is a pious Muslim women and would have stayed a home maker had she not been thrust into the legal fight by her husband’s actions.

A week after talaq in April 2014, her husband remarried. Two of her children, the eldest – a daughter—and the youngest—a son, made their way in her home. She is now fighting for custody of other two daughters. She says the present SC verdict should lead to introspection and lead to reforms on how women are viewed and treated. Only then it will lead in meaningful change. What she will do for sure is give women the courage to fight for justice.

Gulshan Parveen, 31, Rampur. She received the divorce notice on a Rs. 10 stamp paper when she was visiting her parents in 2015 after two years of marriage.

Parveen refused to accept the notice, after which her husband moved a family court. She says she and her two-year-old son were suddenly homeless after her husband’s whim to divorce her. Parveen’s husband lived in Noida, where he worked, while she stayed with her in-laws in Rampur. She says she was tortured for dowry. Her husband was arrested last year on charges of dowry harassment and criminal intimidation. Parveen is a post-graduate in English literature and now lives in Delhi. She filed a petition in SC against triple talaq that was clubbed with Shyara Bano’s plea.

Atiya Sabri, 38, lives in Saharanpur, U.P. She was divorced on a piece of paper. A post graduate in sociology, she was married in 2012 to Wazid Ali. She objected when her husband gave her talaq on a piece of paper and moved the court. Her in-laws got a decree from Deoband justifying talaq. Later she filed a dowry harassment case against her in-laws. Her husband and father-in-law were arrested. Sabri has two daughters, aged 3 and 4. Her plea was that the talaq given to her cannot be justified. “I need justice as I have to raise my daughters”, she pleaded. She approached the Supreme Court in January challenging her divorce.

Triple talaq notice came to 27-year-old Aafreen Rehman by speed post. Her Indore- based lawyer husband, Syed Ashar Ali Waris, wrote talaq three times and posted it to her via speed post less than two years after their wedding in 2014. On Sept 27, 2015, Afreen was shown the door after being thrashed by her husband over petty issues. She filed a petition in Supreme Court in May 2016. Upbeat over the Supreme Court’s verdict Rehman says it may not give a new lease of life to her relationship but it will prevent hundreds of women from the same ordeal.

There are innumerable cases like the ones mentioned. Modi government will do a great service to the Muslims community if it promptly brings up a detailed legislation to end for ever the obnoxious practice of triple talaq. (IPA Service)

“You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one.”

--- John Lennon

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 19 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2017

PM speaks

WHAT Bernard Shaw said about Sydney Webb- that he was a good man fallen among Fabians- may be said about Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well. He seems to be a good man fallen among Hindutva standard bearers. Speaking two days after the widespread violence in Haryana and other states following the conviction of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim for rape, Modi has said that violence in the name of faith would not be tolerated and law breakers would be punished. It makes no difference what political ideology one subscribes to or whether it is allegiance to a person or customs and traditions. The Prime Minister has made it clear that state satraps should be brought into a uniform code of conduct. Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar has already been under fire for not taking prompt action. The Haryana and Punjab High Court has already indicted Khattar's government severely. It was considered political surrender just to allure the vote bank. The BJP leadership was at pains to defend Khattar and praise prompt action taken by him against violence. That was preposterous. Passing the buck to the army and the paramilitaries does not do. The police under political pressure sit idle.

Modi has made it clear that no one has the right to take the law into one's own hands in the name of one's beliefs. He added that everyone had to bow before the law. The law will fix the accountability of Ram Rahim. On Monday the Haryana High Court has sentenced him to twenty years' imprisonment for rape. It is a sad commentary on India's secularism that the army intelligence had red flagged the possibility of Ram Rahim's followers being provided weapons at the time the court delivered its sentence, but that these warnings were willfully ignored.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Arunachal Governor to open AR conference

The Arunachal Pradesh Governor, Mr R D Pradhan, will inaugurate the Annual Commandants' Conference of Assam Rifles at the Assam Rifles Headquarters in Shillong on Monday. The three-day conference, which will be presided over by the Assam Rifles Director General, Lt GenM.K. Lahiri, and attended by the IGs, DIGs and Cos of the Assam Rifles from all the North Eastern states and Sikkim will discuss the operational, training, administrative and welfare matters of the force apart from reviewing major policy decisions taken in the last conference and the progress made in implementing them.

Religion without humanity!

Editor, I couldn't agree more with the views of Salil Gewali in his letter, "Religion the recipe for disaster" (ST Aug 20, 2017), as we are witnessing increasing intolerance and hatred around the world and in our own country on account of religion. Even today Palestine and Israel which are considered holy lands still remain in turmoil, poisoned by religion to prove the superiority of one over the other while innocent lives are lost. In our day to day lives, religion always serves as a driving factor and guides our judgment. Often marriages fail due to differences in religion, no matter how compatible, righteous and morally sound the persons are. Favoritism in matters of employment, school enrolment on the basis of religious background etc. and more importantly religion becoming a political weapon are definite recipes to break the social and cultural cohesion that our ancestors had bestowed on us. In my personal belief, religion does play a vital role in our belief system but it can't overtake humanism. A person who preaches and practices humanism has

A Spectacle called LGBT

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

In this age and time, why should anything at all be a spectacle? Why should we gaze upon and even worse why should we frown upon anything? Fact of the matter is that words like 'spectacle', 'gaze', 'frown' and the like are very heavy, connoting a serious degree of societal disgust and intolerance. Contemporarily, we are seeing a visibility of a grouping whereby they are increasingly identified as a community by the name Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT). If there is any community that is widely abused and demeaned these days, it is this community. However, the question is why? Socially, are these people not equals, are they not entitled to a choice and to a life. Why can we not just look at LGBTs like we look at others? Why are they taken as a 'spectacle'? Accordingly, I place the following pointers.

Firstly, we are all born with a sex (boy/girl). No one is ever born with a gender. Gender is a social construct. The society defines what gender is by way of psychological make-up, behaviour and roles. Hence, let us put things in perspective. When a baby is born into this world, it is defined as a boy or girl on the basis of sex (except in the extreme and rare case of hermaphrodites [these are babies with both boy and girl sexual organs]). As such, there is no gender associated with a baby. Gender becomes visible and imposed only when the baby starts growing into a child and further into an adult. As the baby grows, the psychological make-up and behaviour becomes socially imposed. Further, gender roles come into effect. Consequently, as the baby boy/baby girl grows the so-called well defined and revered societal norms on gender comes into the picture. Some of the norms at the most local level is - only females cook, a male and female return from work at the same time in the evening but the female has to make tea, it is demeaning for a male to touch a broom at home, only males can propose to a female and so forth. Point is, these are gender roles christened by society; but they can be challenged. Similarly, if a

gathering of teachers we are expected to be rational and socially correct; even though in our heart of hearts we may not agree on gender equality and justice. A case in point is that we as teachers all agreed that we must accept all genders equally. However, when the question was raised 'will you accept if gender norms and roles are challenged by your own children?' The classroom went into a pin drop dead silence. Food for thought!!! Thus, the real issues on LGBT are not in the four corners of the classroom or educational organizations. It is actually on the streets and in our homes. As such, let me talk a bit about NEHU and my own community. Firstly, if there are LGBTs present in our university and classrooms, how should we respond to the situation and what approach do we adopt? Do we accept them and treat them equally as a normal gendered person or do we frown and gaze and treat them as a spectacle? Secondly, let us look at our

jubilation is that 'privacy is a fundamental right and is protected under Article 21 (which guarantees right to life and liberty) and it is intrinsic to the Indian Constitution'. Hence, if privacy is a right under life and liberty; who are we to question on gender preference. No one questions the gender preference of the majority, so why should the majority question the minority? Be that as it may, as a result of this legal recourse, the whole debate on LGBTs will change in this country irrespective of societal norms and household roles. This is a good thing as it will at least ensure a sense of sensitivity to not look at them as a spectacle. As such, we can be as conventional as we may be as a community/society; but we have to realize that the LGBT question is not some irrelevant story or utopia. It is a clear and present situation freely prevalent in our midst. Ignoring it will not help. In the context of Shillong at least, I am not sure about the presence of

The Church cannot ignore this situation, even though plans for dealing with such contingencies do not currently exist. Let us not go to the Biblical argument here. As Biblically, such a wedlock institution can never be accepted.

transgender person(s), but we do have lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Clearly, we must not treat them as a spectacle. As said, they have a right to life.

Fourthly, what will the Church do when (not if) two he's or two she's walk towards the church leadership and declare that they would like to sanctify their bond into a wedlock. This is a pertinent and valid question. The Church cannot ignore this situation, even though plans for dealing with such contingencies do not currently exist. Let us not go to the Biblical argument here. As Biblically, such a wedlock institution can never be accepted. As such, I do not contest that. However, is not the Church supposed to care and nurture society? For sure it is! Moreover, these days we have a concept called 'holistic mission'. I have a question. Where does the connotation of holistic mission stand if we continue to look at LGBTs as a spectacle? Hopefully, someone form the Church perspective responds as I do believe that they do have a response and should have one. In any case, one of the answers will be upbringing and counselling. However, what if the upbringing in itself was instrumental or not instrumental towards gender preference of a person? And what if the person is not responding to counselling? Do we ostracise them? The most important fact that we have to factor here is that LGBT preference is decided sometimes by force and sometimes by choice. Either way, it is critical.

Lastly, we can ignore them or be indifferent towards them or demean them. But the fact of the matter is that the LGBT community is one of the most vibrant communities worldwide. Moreover, currently they are not divided on the context of race, caste, creed, religion, faith, colour and country. Come to think of it in the context of our normalised communities, is it not ironic?

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

Right to privacy!

Editor, Apropos your editorial, "SC strikes" (ST, August 26, 2017), the Supreme Court of India has again come up with another landmark judgment after their historic verdict on triple talaq, this time declaring privacy a fundamental right. Indeed, it is our system and administration that need to be absolutely transparent to check corruption. But to make people's refrigerators and mobile phones transparent is not only unnecessary but also dangerous especially in a country that wants to remain democratic. In this context, we can recall what the head of the Chamar tribe told the king in Tagore's poem ~ "Juta abiskar" (Discovery of shoes) ~ "If you cover your feet then you don't have to cover the earth." This simple truth carries a great message. Without becoming a Peeping Tom in the name of cleaning the dirt in our society, any administration needs to be well covered all along so that it itself can remain free from all sorts of corruption thus enabling it to effectively govern without any prejudice and bias. Yours etc., Marbianglang Rymbai Shillong-2

The Code of Wages Bill

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

In a rapidly changing global world new challenges are being confronted on a daily basis. The new world faces challenges in the form of increased automation, shifting international trade and a large growing population in the employable wages. All these have resulted in the need for newer reforms and newer challenges in the scope of employment and also how wages are defined.

In the backdrop of this the Code on Wages, 2017 was introduced in Lok Sabha in August 2017.It seeks to consolidate laws relating to wages by replacing: (i) the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, (ii) the Minimum Wages Act, 1949, (iii) the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, and (iv) the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.

The Code will apply to establishments where any industry, trade, business, manufacturing or occupation is carried out. This will also include government establishments. The central government will make wage-related decisions for its authorities, and establishments related to railways, mines, and oil fields, among others. State governments will make decisions for any other establishments. Wages include salary, allowance, or any other component expressed in monetary terms. This will not include bonus payable to employees or any travelling

twice the normal wage of the employee.

The bill has sought to codify how wages can be paid to employees. This is important so that the whole system of meaningful wages and how to obtain the system is strengthened. The bill states that the wages can be paid in coins, currency notes, by cheque, or through digital or electronic mode. Regarding the time period the bill states that the wage period will be fixed by the employer as either: daily, weekly, fortnightly, or monthly.

On the question of deduction the Code specifies that, an employee's wages may be deducted on certain grounds including: fines, absence from duty, accommodation given by the employer, or recovery of advances given to the employee, among others. These deductions should not exceed 50% of the employee's total wage.

On the question of bonus the code seeks to clarify the following points. On the questions of determination of bonus: The employer will pay each employee an annual bonus of at least: 8.33% of his wages, or Rs 100, whichever is higher. In addition, the employer will distribute a part of the gross profits amongst the employees (allocable surplus). This will be distributed in proportion to the wages earned by an employee during the year.

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The bill states that the wages can be paid in coins, currency notes, by cheque, or through digital or electronic mode.

allowance, among others.

One of the most contentious issues in recent times is the issue of Minimum Wages. In the past few years with the idea of the Universal Basic Income getting much traction and finding a mention in the Economic Survey as well, the question of National Minimum Wage indeed needed to be revisited. This bill has done the same. On the questions of National Minimum wage it states that the central government may notify a national minimum wage for the country. It may fix different national minimum wages for different states or geographical areas.

The minimum wages decided by the central or state governments will not be lower than the national minimum wage. The central or state governments will not reduce the minimum wages fixed by them, if these wages are higher than the national minimum wage. The Code requires employers to pay at least the minimum wages to employees. These wages will be notified by the central or state governments. This will be based on time, or number of pieces produced, among others. The Code specifies that the central or state governments will review or revise the minimum wage every five years.

The Bill also tackles the question of working hours. On the question of working hours the bill says that the central or state governments will fix the number of hours that will constitute a working day. Further, they will provide for a day of rest for employees every week. An employee will receive overtime for working beyond these working hours on any day. This amount will be at least

An employee can receive a maximum bonus of 20% of his wages. This will include any amount distributed as allocable surplus. If this surplus exceeds the maximum bonus payable to all employees in a year, a certain amount will be carried forward to the following years (up to four years). The amount carried forward will not exceed 20% of the total wages payable to all employees during the year.

The other key features of the Code include the following: The central and state governments will constitute their respective advisory boards. These boards will have representation from: employees, employers, and independent persons. Further, one-third of the total members will be women. The boards will advise the respective governments on aspects including: fixation of minimum wages, and increasing employment opportunities for women.

The Code specifies penalties for offences committed by an employer, such as paying less than the due wages, or for contravening any provision of the Code. Penalties vary depending on the nature of offence, with the maximum penalty being imprisonment for three months along with a fine of up to one lakh rupees.

This Code is undoubtedly a welcome step towards improving the conditions of the labour class in the country. Many firms are often accused of exploiting their workforce and this bill makes a correct step towards reducing that imbalance.

(Views expressed are personal)

“We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us. ”

--- Joseph Campbell

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 20SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30, 2017

Doklam crisis ends

INDIA and China have agreed to expeditiously disengage from the stand-off in Doklam. There has been a crisis over the Bhutanese territory for 72 days. China has agreed to a simultaneous pull-out of troops. Top level Chinese and Indian official have been in a huddle for almost 10 weeks and finally foreign ministry officials of the countries arrived at a peaceable solution. The Indian Troops have already withdrawn to their post at Doklam. Chinese troops and their road-building engineers also beat a retreat to the stand-off which began in June when Indian troops stopped the PLA from building a road on Doklam plateau. Chinese plans caused security concerns for India. The Resolution of the crisis comes on the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to China for the BRICS summit. It also comes shortly before the 19th party Congress in China.

The Doklam issue was orphanage to the 2013 incident at Depsang and the 2014 one at Chumar in one respect. In all three clashes China tried to change the ground reality to pose a new boundary issue. India for its part for the first time sent its troops to a third country. It was however to protect Bhutan’s territorial rights. India ramped up its military presence but external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj used every diplomatic initiative to stave off an armed conflict with China while seeking the support of all neighbours on her side. The stress was put on economic collaboration between the two giant neighbours. China continued to carry on aggressive diplomacy against India but in the end Delhi has prevailed. Doklam shows the best way to defend the Indian claims on the LOAC.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Joint sector ventures

A joint-sector vanaspati plant project with a capacity to manufacture 135 tonnes per day is to be set up in Manipur shortly.

Manipur government has agreed to be a partner in this Rs. 12 crore project, but the more agree-able fact is that a success ful private enterprise group the OWM group of companies concentrating so far in north India has offered to extend its activities to the north-east which so far has not been able to attract much attention of industrialists despite its available and prospectivere sources. Manipur is fortunate, therefore, that it is going to

be among the first of the such joint sector enterprises if the trend catches up in the near future.

Assam government's offer of the proposed new Assam Refinery under the Assam Accord to be set up as joint venture with the State government participating in it is hanging fire for quite some time now. Officials of the petroleum and natural gas Ministry of the Govern-ment of India and representa-tives of the Assam govern-ment are reported to have discussed this issue thread-bare recently but with no agreement reached.

Tri Colour atop the Himalayas: A North East Perspective

The ebb and the flow of events in the north east since post independence makes fascinating reading. While the shadow of insurgency cast an eerie backdrop to almost everything here, the bright lights of development seem to be slowly pushing that shadow away. Without a doubt, emotional integration would take time and the fact that the national anthem of the country stops at Banga and does not even mention the land of Brahmaputra and beyond is taken as an indicator of that emotional divide!

But this supposed divide did not stand in the way of Anshu Jamsenpa from Arunachal Pradesh, and a mother of two, proudly waving the Tri-colour from the Everest twice in a span of five days and thereby becoming the first woman to do so! Incidentally, she broke the previous record of Nepal's Chhurim Sherpa, who had climbed Mt Everest twice in a week in 2012. Neither did it stand in the way of Captain Neikezhakuo Kenguruse, a soldier in the Indian army who hailed from Nagaland. His moment of valour came when he was made a part of ‘Operation Vijay’. On the fateful night of 28 June 1999, Kenguruse, the Ghatak platoon commander was leading his team to capture what is known as the ‘Black Rock’ on the icy heights of the Drass Sector. He volunteered to undertake an almost impossible commando mission which involved attacking an enemy machine gun position on a cliff face. As he tried to scale the cliff, Kenguruse realised that on the sheer rock face his boots gave him no grip. So, at a height of 16,000 feet and a temperature of minus 10 degrees, he climbed it bare foot. Weighed down by a heavy rocket launcher on his back, his bare toes sought out every crevice and foot hold and he succeeded in scaling the rock. He used his positional advantage to good effect and destroyed the enemy position and helped capture the strategic top. It is another matter that he sacrificed his life. A Naga martyr for the Indian nation!

Was Kenguruse a Naga? Yes, a proud one. Was he an Indian? Yes, probably much more than many others. There is no dichotomy and there can be no confusion on this. India is a nation of many races, languages and faiths. The Indian concept

By Sanjeeb Kakoty

of nationhood cannot be equated with other nations that either boast of one nation one language, one race and one religion or seeks to achieve it. We draw our strength from diversity not from an artificial mono culture of the mind. In this score, the north east can certainly lead the nation. Seventy years ago when India began her tryst with destiny, sceptics wondered if the nation would endure. The many voices of regional identity that emerged in areas such as the north east were supposed to be serious threats to the integrity of the fledgling nation. Specials acts such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and the Disturbed Areas Act complemented the might of the armed forces to contain these divisive and disturbing voices. Precious lives were lost, a generation was scarred. But what emerged was an understanding that the Indian Constitution certainly provides the inalienable right to smaller sub nationalities to exist with dignity and as an integral part of the larger national identity. The sixth schedule of the constitution, the clear assertion of its secular credentials and the inherent respect for racial and linguistic diversity are the very cornerstone of the Indian nation.

Not that the transition to a nation state was an easy journey. The hiccups of separate electorate and the two nation theory had begun even when the independence movement was on. On the eve of independence, the north east, most of which was under the state of Assam, found themselves almost gifted away to Pakistan, due to a faulty grouping scheme. Amazing as it may seem, the then central leaders with Nehru at the helm of affairs showed little sympathy for Assam’s concerns and apparently wanted to accomplish the independence of the country post haste! Thus, Assam’s grouping with Pakistan seemed a fait accompli and it seemed like the end of the road for the region! It took a man of Gopinath Bordoloi’s character to fight it with all his might. Though it

displeased and peeved many a central leaders no end, he had secured Gandhiji’s complete support and Assam remained with India!

After that inauspicious start as a constituent state of the Indian Union, Assam and the rest of the states often suffered from distinct signs of neglect coupled with emotional and cultural divide . The promulgation of acts such as the AFSPA, Disturbed areas act, the Restricted Area Permit (RAP), and the Illegal Migrant Determination Tribunal(IMDT) Act that had put in place two sets of citizenship laws for the country (before being struck off by the Supreme Court after two decades of its operation) had certainly contributed to exacerbating the emotional divide between the region and the rest of the country. Thankfully, this approach to governance has been undergoing remarkable change in recent times. The RAP is withdrawn, IMDT is history and the continuation of the AFSPA is all set to be decided by the state governments of Assam and Manipur. Small but important first steps in reclaiming the emotional trust of the region, but there is long way to go yet!

Attempts to address the sense of alienation by pumping in huge amounts of money worsened the situation by institutionalising corruption at all levels. Basic infrastructure remained absent, good governance took a back seat and the illegal influx of huge numbers of people from neighbouring countries caused a demographic imbalance leading to xenophobia and violence. There were no easy answers to sort out the problems. Building roads and improving communication was hardly a solution to the woes of the region. Not many people noticed a quiet revolution initiated during the Vajpayee era; that of building roads and highways that sought to link the remotest villages of the region. Suddenly, the equation started changing. Better communication meant better access to information and to markets. Technology enabled the RTI to become a fundamental right in the truest sense. Soon, there was a glimmer of Hope that all was not lost. Corruption, no matter how entrenched

could be uprooted and the innate genius of the people would be allowed to flower. Manipur which was always a powerhouse of Indian sports, soon had company. Tripura produced India’s first woman gymnast to qualify for the Olympic finals in Gymnastics in the form of Deepa Karmakar. No Indian football team could function without a name or two from the region, be it Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya or Assam. Shillong Lajong became a household name in the north east and carved a niche for the region in the Indian football I-league scenario. Individual stars in the form of Mary Kom, Shiva Thapa, Dinko Singh and the list goes on and on!

Away from the football field, in the political arena, Mizoram set the standards of having the cleanest elections in the country, through the laudable initiative of a youth group backed by the church. Assam has put the chief of the state public service commission behind bars for corruption. The list is certainly set to grow longer as new leaders committed to probity and development emerge and the public becomes better informed and politically aware. It is this awareness that made the common man of the region support not only demonetisation but also every move that the government makes to curb corruption and ensure transparency.

Probably, the most symbolic moment of the coming of age of the north east happened when the young Christian lady Temsula Imsong from Nagaland made it her mission to clean the Ghats of the Ganga by designing a campaign called Mission Prabhughat. She got a pat in the back from none other than Prime Minister Modi. In turn when the Prime Minister visited Meghalaya and went to the village of Mawphlang, he tried his hands at the traditional drum. When he got the beat right, the drummer actually gave him a pat on the back! Even the Prime Minister can do with a pat on the back and he had to come all the way to Mawphlang to get it!

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A critique of religion

By Barnes Mawri

In my previous article I had discussed at length on the necessity of religion for man and the danger of emphasizing on religious cultural variations. In this present article, I would like to discuss further on another important aspect concerning religion and religious affiliations.

Religion is both a physical and a spiritual reality. It is physical in as much as it implies living persons who adhere to it, physical spaces for worship (churches, temples or mosques), tangible laws and regulations to be obeyed and concrete liturgy and rituals which are being performed etc. It is a spiritual reality in as much as it related

sentiments supersede human reason, then religious fundamentalism takes over. It happened to Christianity during the era of the crusades and colonization and it is happening today in Islam and Hinduism. The Islamic or the Hindu radicals are those who take religion at the level of emotions and so they are often led by instincts of violence and terror. When religion is taken at the affective level, there cannot be any dialogue with other religions for dialogue implies reason and intellect. A religious fanatic is one who is sentimentally fired by a sense of loyalty to his/her religion and therefore

The Catholic Church has learnt a hard lesson from the past and today it does not encourage sentimentalism in religion. This is the reason why the Church after Vatican II, has always encouraged ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and dialogue with cultures. This means that the Church considers the cognitive dimension very essential in the practice of one’s religious creed.

to the God and other spiritual beings and their relationship with human beings, it is concerned with salvation of the soul and spiritual well-being of the believer. Both aspects are essential to constitute a religion. When religion becomes a mere physical reality, it is not different from any secular organization and when it tends to be totally spiritual, religion becomes a mere ideology, an abstract concept. The physical dimension of religion makes it relevant for man while the spiritual dimension makes it salvific.

Religion is also both a cognitive and affective. It is cognitive in the sense that a person learns and acquires knowledge about it before he pledges allegiance to it. In this sense, there is intellectual formation and information about religion which enables a person to know and understand the basic doctrines and beliefs of a particular religion before that person could assent to it. So the study of scriptures, traditions, laws and regulations and other related sources are important before an individual can fully grasp the essence of a religion and be attracted to it. It was St. Anselm who said “fides quaerens intellectum” (faith seeking understanding) in connection with the concept of religion. Without adequate cognitive understanding, religion runs the risk of being a blind pursuit. There is no such a thing as “blind faith” because blind faith is no faith at all. Faith that is based on a clear understanding is what every religion should seek to promote. It is for this reason that religious education and instruction are part and parcel of any religion – the Christians have their catechism class, the Muslims have their madrasas and the Hindus have their ashrams etc where such religious education is imparted to their followers. Religion also has an affective dimension which is connected to sentiments of the heart. It is said that in education “the intellect must form the heart.” So too in religion, the cognitive learning is meant to induce fundamental sentiments in the heart of a believer, sentiments of joy, compassion and love.

In recent years, we have seen a dangerous development in many religions wherein the adherents tend to emphasize on the affective aspect of religion. This means that they are led more by sentiments rather than by reason. When religious

he/she perceives as an enemy anyone who does not share his/her religious convictions. What is happening in India today is a concrete demonstration of this whereby Hindu radicals become passionate about their religion and so they display disrespect and intolerance towards other religions. These days the news is focussed on the violent protests of the Dera Sacha Sauda followers against the conviction of their leader Guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. The fact that his followers are going berserk even after knowing full well that he is guilty of a crime, is a clear example of how sentimentalism can dictate religion. Unfortunately, many religious leaders are exploiting this dimension of religion. The ISIS and the Talibans are doing this, so too the RSS and other Hindu radicals in India. Often it is the hoi polloi (crowd) who becomes an easy victim of such manipulations. This is the reason why we see RSS karsevaks (crowd) are the ones who are easily influenced by a sentimental approach to religion and they become the militia of religion.

The Catholic Church has learnt a hard lesson from the past and today it does not encourage sentimentalism in religion. This is the reason why the Church after Vatican II, has always encouraged ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and dialogue with cultures. This means that the Church considers the cognitive dimension very essential in the practice of one’s religious creed. In fact, there is a lot of scholarship and academic pursuit within the Church in order to promote this dimension. This is also the reason why the Church is often sceptical about certain charismatic movements which give undue emphasis to sentimentalism.

History has taught us that when religion is translated into sentimentalism, there can be only one outcome, namely, radicalism which leads to intolerance and violence. I hope that adherents of whatever religion in India, will understand the importance of maintaining a balance between the cognitive and the affective dimensions in their religious faith. It is only by avoiding an extreme position that all religions can become true to what they should be, “God-given institutions for the well-being and salvation of mankind.”

TO THE EDITOR

Need to maintain communal harmony!

Editor,

Apropos the article "Need for Societal Conversation," by Patricia Mukhim (ST Aug 25,2017) and, "Khasi and Christian debate" by HH Mohrmen that appeared in ST last few days these articles are very important food for thoughts by rational and civilized society. Today, the urgent need is that e (ST Aug 28, 2017) each and everyone in society living in any locality in villages or in urban areas ought to apply common sense (which is not common) ,rationality, restraint and conscience in all things that we do, especially when we are confronted with occurrences in the locality or in the neighbourhood. Sudden outbursts or fanning communal passions will not take us anywhere.

A journalist friend and I had visited Madan Myllem locality under Myllem village after the cremation of the Seng Khasi elder of that locality. I do not see any

problem at all in allowing cremation of the dead body at the Seng Khasi plot of land which is well within the locality. The place is quite big and there is already a utility building of the Seng. I do not see any danger of pollution to the village or the nearby stream because of the cremation. Nor should it pose any danger to the nearby houses or the private school. In fact, the garbage, toxic wastes and sand mining are more dangerous which are continuously polluting the drains and the rivers of the village. Though the village durbar had disallowed the Seng Khasi from cremating any more dead bodies in the plot of land, yet none of the male members of the locality came out to prevent the cremation, except some women and some school children who openly protested the cremation with slogans and placards. The cremation went off peacefully without any hindrance or untoward incidents. Now, the village durbar had good reasons to ask the Seng not to cremate dead bodies in the plot of land of the Seng Khasi in the heart of the village because an alternate large plot of land at Nongkhlaw hill was already allotted to the Seng

for cremation. Of course the alternate plot is a bit distant from Madan Syiem. The Seng was hell bent in cremating the dead in the old plot as the deceased was a famous leader of the Seng in the village. That created more hurdles. The controversy arose because there was no diplomacy from both sides and no rational dialogue took place. And also there were no able intermediaries. Hence, the unnecessary controversy! It is not a fact that Christians of that locality ganged up to disallow the cremation because the deceased is from the Seng Khasi. Perhaps it was based on mere assumption and suspicion. That was misconstrued and misinterpreted and miscarried by some fringe elements to create communal differences and passions within the village and to carry a wrong message outside its confines. In fact there were no incidents or precedence earlier of hatred or conflicts between Christians and the Seng Khasi within Madan Syiem Myllem or under Myllem village. They lived peacefully, with mutual respect and co-operation in the affairs of the village. If

some fringe elements and some political vested interests had a hand in it because the elections are round the corner, then it is a different matter. People from outside Myllem should not meddle into this minor incident which can be resolved within the village, as the exercise has already begun and is being resolved with the intervention of the District authorities. No one should be allowed to take this further or else the law will jump on such people.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Regiousity is the problem

Editor,

Your editorial, "National shame" (ST, August 28, 2017), raises a number of pertinent questions. Anarchy is bound to happen when political power bows to religion. And this has practically been staged in Haryana. The Punjab and Haryana High Court has rightly said to Monohar Lal Khattar, the Chief Minister of Haryana, "The Chief Minister is also

the Home Minister. Why have you allowed people to assemble for seven days? If they were antisocial elements, why were they allowed entry for seven days?" It is a pity that when the judiciary is trying really hard to drive religious prejudices like triple talaq out of the socio - political backyard, our political representatives are fighting shy of such responsibilities even though they themselves had promised to take up that job after getting elected.

We need to realize that there are two aspects to religion - spirituality and religionism. Sri Aurobindo had rejected religionism or sectarianism in religion lock, stock and barrel. He said, "On the other hand, religion when it identifies itself only with a creed, a cult, a Church, a system of ceremonial forms, may well become a retarding force and there may therefore arise a necessity for the human spirit to reject its control over the varied activities of life." According to Mark 12 : 17, Jesus Christ said, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Here Caesar means government. This is a clear message for a secular

government which is not connected with religionism. Had we followed this teaching, we could have avoided oceans of bloodshed and banished many Rasputins from enjoying political power.

History has indeed witnessed many Rasputins, big and small, coming out of an unholy alliance between religionism and politics. So, we need to be very cautious about religious dogmas hijacking our political rights as well as our evolutionary progress. The names of those who shared the public space with Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh even after his being charged with as grave a criminal offence as that of a rape, must be made public. The electorate should be in the know about such political Who's Who to beware of them.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

“*There is some good in this world, and it's worth fighting for.*”
--- J.R.R. Tolkien

The Shillong Times

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PAK-US freeze

PRESIDENT Donald Trump’s diatribe against Pakistan sponsoring cross border terrorism and his Afghan policy favouring India have caused a freeze in US-Pakistan relations. It is Islamabad which appears to be on the offensive. Pakistan has angrily rejected the proposed visit of two senior US officials to Islamabad to sort out differences resulting from Trump’s recognition of India’s stakes in Afghanistan and denunciation of Pakistan as a virtual terror state. Pakistan has also cancelled a scheduled trip to Washington of its new foreign minister Khwaja Mohammad Asif at the invitation of US secretary of state. It appears that Islamabad is for the moment ignoring the needs of its fragile economy. US authority have imposed a \$630 million penalty on Pakistan’s leading bank, Habib Bank Limited, for non compliance with US anti- money laundering loss; forcing it to shut down its US operations. Islamabad is planning to close American supply routes to land-locked Afghanistan for the first time. As a retaliatory measure, the Trump administration hardliners wish to further tighten the screws in order to force Pakistan to clamp down on the terror groups harboured by that country. Aid will freeze not only from Washington but also from multi- lateral agencies and Western allies. US visas, visits and access to Pakistani leaders and officials who rationalize terrorism will be stopped by the US.

Asif and other Pakistani leaders are busy strengthening ties with other countries. Visits are being planned to China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan is already on a shaky wicket after the removal of PM Nawaz Sharif . Overtures to other allies will hardly make up for the downslide in ties with the US. This is a make and break point for Pakistan diplomacy. In a sense Donald Trump has managed to do what other US Presidents have only threatened to do with Pakistan for promoting cross-border terrorism and above all for sheltering Osama Bin Laden, America’s sworn enemy who was finally eliminated by US seals.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Garo Hills Deficit School Teacher's Meet

The three day 2nd annual conference of the Garo Hills Deficit School Teachers and Employees Association (GDSTEA) will commence from May 4 at the United Rongjeng High School in the East Garo Hills District. The conference, which is expected to be attended by more than 100 teachers of deficit M.E. and high schools of East and West Garo Hills as well as representatives of the Khasi-Jaintia Deficit School Teachers' Association, will discuss the formulation of plans and programmes and the future course of action with regard to the demands of the Association.

The Meghalaya Minister

of State for Education, Mr C B Marak and Mr K C Boro, MLA are expected to be the Chief Guest and the Guest of the Honour respectively at the open session of the Conference on May 6.

Butterfly boom

Clouds of brown butterflies have shrouded the roads and sidewalks and made driving difficult in an Iranian border town, the official Islami CA Republic News Agency repors. Scientists could not offer an explanation over why the butterflies were drawn to Dargaz, 670km north-east of here. But some experts speculated the invasion followed a drop in rainfall.

Vindicating Princess Diana: Western Modernity and the Carnal Gaze

PART I

It is hard to believe that twenty years have already gone by since Diana, Princess of Wales, a young mother of two, died untimely at age 36, in a tragic car crash on Aug 31, 1997– five days before Mother Teresa. To appreciate Princess Diana is not quite respectable in academic circles, which dismiss her as part of a sentimental popular culture too shallow to merit research. But I have always liked her. I found her humanity touching. I admired her strength. I also felt deep disgust for the way the British royal family treated her – especially her former husband, Charles, Prince of Wales. That he did not have filial feelings for Diana, despite being 13 years older– was troubling. That his feelings were perhaps more carnal and instrumental – using her body to get the heir and spare for the British throne, calling an insecure, young Diana “chubby,” with what seemed like calculated sadism – was chilling. Even more troubling was his moral confusion about the ethics of marriage – that it is wrong to sever friendship from the carnal act, that such severance is the inception of lust – above all that it is wrong to continue a prior, carnally-oriented furtive friendship, while married to somebody else.

The difference in their respective responses to the question, were in love, asked at a post-engagement 1981interview of Charles and Diana, was telling. His philosophical response, “whatever ‘in love’ means” – proves perhaps that although 33, Charles was not mature enough to understand that being “in love” – if it is to have any truth-value at all – presupposes faithfulness and friendship. Her response – “of course [we are in love]” – stands perhaps as an omen of her understandable need for affection and family (typical of children from broken families),her essential hominess, and romantic unrealism – traits that trailed her brief life as part of the psychological baggage she carried from the trauma of her parents' divorce. This difference in their responses proves as well perhaps that a large age gulf never bodes well in marriage. Perhaps more troubling was the conduct of Charles' present wife, Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, who is ayear older than Charles. That she had neither filial feelings for young Diana – despite being 14 years older – nor feminist feelings of sisterhood – enough to control herself and stay away from Charles – was disconcerting. Of the two women, Diana certainly came across as more maternal.

The British royal family has always left me perplexed. I understand that unredeemed human nature will come with inherent proclivities towards hierarchies – that human nature, in essence, is sectarian. I understand as well that all spiritually

meaningless hierarchies express the will-to-power – not the will-to-goodness. While family lineage is utterly meaningful in a moral-spiritual sense, it becomes empty snobbish sectarianism when based on wealth, power, aristocracy, etc. The Law of Karma mandates family lineages based on moral-spiritual grounds. There is, in this special sense, no accident of birth. We are born exactly to those parents, who fulfill the karmic purposes of our birth. But lineage based on historical privilege – having nothing to do with its own innate moral-spiritual worth – has everything to do with worldly power.

The British love for history and their preservation of their royal family always struck me as odd, existentially delusional, and narcissistic. I admire the vigor, discipline, and spirit of duty of the British royal family. But given their unquestioning immersion in the tinsel glory of aristocratic lineage, and the consequent gulf they have always maintained between themselves and the commoner – I am convinced they have replaced conscience byprotocol. The Queen may appear like a secular essence of the soul of Britain – adeity citizens turn to in times of historical crises. But like all delusions, this one too is troubling. How can one expect stellar virtues – like compassion, empathy, and inspiration – from the historically privileged, who haveno knowledge of the travails of theordinary life? Indeed, one may expect all these consoling virtues from a genuine theocratic leader and param sevak like HH, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, who does serve as the heart and essence of the Tibetan people. To compare his Holiness to Queen Elizabeth II, is unfair to the latter. That she nevertheless serves as some sort of secular essence of the British people goes to show the mindset of her subjects – that they crave for what she represents – wealth, historical privilege, unearned worldly power. We are, after all, defined by what we admire and rely upon.

But all this is part of the pageantry endemic to the celebrity culture of the west – a culture that prohibits the spiritually extraordinary individual, even as it grovelsidolatrously before the most worldly of all individuals – the lost souls who serve as celebrities – pop singers, movie stars, millionaires, and other exemplars of western Maya. We may add to all this the colonial shadow cast by the British royal family. The west has always regarded them as

somehow superior to royal families from the former colonies. Let us not forget the prime aesthetic fallout of colonialism and post-colonialism still prevalent today – namely, the tenacious conviction that white is right, all else being ugly– a racist sense of physical beauty. Although now questioned and somewhat resisted in the west, this subjective sense of western colonial aesthetics often lingers more virulently in the former colonies in Asia and Latin America, where persons of African descent can face ugly discrimination – not from the white man, but the brown man.

This racialized Carnal Gaze – a primefallout of colonialism – is insidious, because it comes with a false universality. True universals tend to draw from objectivity. False universals are not only subjective, but draw their fake omnipresence through populism. The notion that white is beautiful – and in Princess Diana's case, that flawless skin, proportionate features, and height are beautiful – all this is highly subjective (and therefore individuated) – yet universal – because the multitude share such populist perspectives, despite their rank subjectivity. How does this happen without consultation or agreements? How do millions reach the same aesthetic conclusions, independent of each other? Through the mob-like collective eye that craves sensuous beauty. Therefore, the irony of the matter is this. Although such notions of beauty lie entirely in the eye of the beholder – implying thereby sheer individuation, heightened subjectivity, and delusion – nevertheless, such false universals are gleaned from the mob-like multitude who share the same power-driven creeds of carnal beauty. Thus, tall, blonde, slim, and blue-eyed constitute aspects of the man-made physical beauty carved by the carnal gaze of the white male, which constitutes a specific shade of masculinist subjectivity. That white is beautiful, all else being ugly, therefore becomes a collective decree of colonial mob-aesthetics – a highly subjective judgment nevertheless shared by the mob-multitude.

Such colonial aesthetics has perhaps a more terrifying fallout on the psyche of the objectified white woman, who can no longer distinguish between love and lust – than it has on the brown or black woman, or the non-white man. For it degrades and harms with immediacy, the white woman more than anyone else. The carnal eye, so pervasive in the west today, no longer distinguishes between puritanism and true chastity. Eating disorders that afflict western women, the terror of

gaining weight and of aging, and the conviction that their partners will no longer love them, once they age – these constitute the ghastly fallout of a b o d y - o b s e s s e d materialism. This homogenized aesthetic standard for the white woman has become a diffused somatic template, destroying wholly, the unique individuality of the body, which is a temple for the soul –through the homogenizing carnal gaze of the white male – a gaze that seeks to mass-produce all female bodies in the same template. For western man mass-produces and titillates desire itself and the objects of desire. After all, nothing can be sadder than to conflate sexual attention with love, friendship and affection. Etched deep in the psyche of vulnerable white women – this carnal conflation demands that matter (body) rule over mind, rather than mind over matter (body).

Despite the terrifying denigration of motherhood by western sexists and feminists alike, there is in the western psyche a hidden longing for the traditional wife and mother. The sum result of the carnal conflation of love to the carnal act is extreme insecurity in heterosexual white women, who feel unloved when carnal attention is lacking. A more insidious result perhaps is thisself-contradictory dream of the white male – a dream that carves out the female psyche more surely than any pornographic dictates. For the white masculine eye desires, on the one hand, women who are virginal, virtuous, and maternal –yet, on the other hand, clothed somatically in pre-sculpted desirable forms. Even as he pats himself on the back for not veiling his women – like the crude Islamist – the white male longs to see his woman shrouded in an aphrodisiacal veil. In Diana's case, this veil was her natural charming shyness. The west usually pities the brown and black woman through insidious forms of colonial feminism. But the misogynistic western carnal eye has so ravaged the white woman that it has sculpted not only her body, but also her soul in accordance with masculine fancy. In this context, it is almost a relief to be a brown or black woman ostracized from this sadistic carnal ambit. To be convinced that the acme and purpose of a woman's human existence lies in falling in love with a man – and this alone – has to be the most foolish take on human existence ever. The purpose of our human birth can never be mere romance gleaned at the bridal altar, but rather, the sublime gift of Nirvanic self-realization received at the Altar of the Divine.

(The author teaches at Purdue University, US)

How Can Privacy Be An Elitist Notion?

By Ananya Guha

The recent noise that right to privacy is elitist underscores the fact that those who say it do not understand what is meant by privacy. Privacy means the right not to do anything you want, but the right to be respected for your choices, beliefs, in company, in the dress that you wear, in your intimate matters of love and affection, in your work etc. That will apply to anyone. But in bringing in elitism - a false world of haves and have not - is falsely implicated in this context. Right to privacy is an inherent right, it does not move from individual to individual in matters of class, colour, creed or religion. So the question of elitism does not arise. Hence since according to it is a prerogative of the elite, it should be done away with. What fallacy!. How do we define the elite? By bringing in notions of elite and non-elite we are hood winking people and straying from main issues, which lead to the debate on privacy. Slowly but surely there is a calculated move to infringe on people's rights and privacy, to make their individual choices, to choose their partners, and to be left a little alone to themselves, which is the logic of privacy. So, even if it is elitist, are you going to trample upon rights of so called elites?

The signs are disconcerting. We see public intervention in private spaces, authoritarianism, state intervention, and stalking private individuals who may not speak or act according to authoritarian behest. In its extreme this is sowing seeds of totalitarianism where the state or individuals in political power may issue dikats, and ruthlessly flagellate individual view points.

Now let us see how this has been happening over the past few years. The cow issue. A mythic issue was suddenly brought to the forefront and then suddenly there were self proclaimed cow vigils. This infringed on human rights and atavistic forces unleashed terror on poor people. This was inextricably connected with ' cow eating'. Again terror was unleashed against cow consumption. Then followed the corollary - attacking particular religious or minority groups.

After that came the much vaunted Aadhar card and everything linked to it, which made the common man insecure .Aadhar with PAN card, then with passport, indeed as if an archaeology of excavation was taking place. Under these circumstances people moved the Apex Court of the country on the issue of privacy. But this issue is related to many more aspects of human behaviour or sustenance, as mentioned above.

Coming back to the notion that privacy is an

elitist construct, nothing could be further from the truth. The notion of elitism is in itself a myth, perpetuated solely by exclusive and ivory tower living. In a country like India such notions work only exclusively. If one wants to know the country and it's people then it is only commingling which can help survive. By such advocacy we are blind to realities - realities that say there is no elite class, all irrespective of poor and rich have a responsibility towards the poorer masses, whose agriculture, whose labour, whose domestic work, whose masonry, welding, plumbing, artisans we are heavily dependent on. Elitism is floundering, it is flouted by the small majority. They have little time for it, nor care for it. By raising this issue, we are side tracking the main one of privacy, an inherent right of the individual. Moreover this is a vague argument more to hoodwink, than to look at private individual rights.

Then again is the matter of historiography and nationalism. By reworking a new brand of history, certain historical facts like Muslim invasion and culture are glossed upon. The South Indian dynasties, and architecture are also ignored. History is only harking back to ancient times, where supposedly the Indian sage was the philosopher king. So, goes too with Nationalism, a one sided thing where many leaders who played greatest roles in the freedom struggle are sidelined. Lynching has become a metaphor in that history and Nationalism.

So this means there will be no privacy of thought, individual opinion, artistic rights, rights of transgenders, the freedom to express in an unfettered manner. No dissidence, no nothing. And the question of privacy for the non elitist, does not exist I suppose, otherwise why would the issue be labelled only with the supposed elites? Thus, the question was made to be a non issue, by supposedly responsible citizens of the country.

The Supreme Court by it's recent stricture has put an end to this nonsense. It is a clever ploy by all governments past and present to cleverly divide the masses and classes, going only to them with the begging bowl of votes. It is high time the people of India see through such nefarious designs of disuniting people in terms of money power, caste, class , language, and of course religion. The policy makers are amnesiac. They forget wilfully that is the inchoate masses that make up the country, it's history, it's privacy as a nation of plural values, many sided dialogues, for which we love it.

TO THE EDITOR

Who is a ‘Dkhar?’

Editor,
I read with great interest the two write-ups in your newspaper dated Aug 28, 2017. The first was titled, "HSPDP not against genuine non-tribals: Ardent,"and the second is the article by H H Mohrmen titled, "The Khasi and Christian Debate." One points to the sudden realisation 'with a political end' that acceptance of others into our fold is not such a bad idea after all. The second highlight the realities that have plagued the Khasi society for over five generations.

To begin with I would like to recall certain events in the not so distant past. A certain section of the Khasis (which include the Pnars, Bhois and Wars) have, for four decades, agitated against the perceived threat of an

inflow of people who are branded as non-tribals or ‘Dkhars,’ into these hills. We have seen violent agitations, protests and social sanctions against the non-tribal communities by the numerous social, students' and the so called Non-Govt Organisations (NGOs).

But have we ever engaged in deeper soul-searching and analysed the inner fears that we suffer from - the fear of being swamped by the larger numbers i.e. the people who have come from outside? Why don't we introspect and further question ourselves of the fact that a sizeable number of Khasis have been swamped by a religion that the Dkhars - the white Dkhars - had brought into our hills and had discreetly perpetuated their religious belief so as to cause a feeling of alienation within one section of the community? Let us also for a

moment dwell into the realm of history. Christianity is a religious belief that was imposed on us by the white rulers who came to the Indian sub-continent two centuries ago with the agenda of the three ‘M’s’ - To engage in empire building by means of trade and commerce (Merchants), to subjugate the non-adherents, including independent princely states by armed action (Military force) and thirdly to win over the tribal and weaker sections of our people by conversion into their religious belief (Missionary Works).

Is it not, therefore, true that Christianity is a religion that came with the non-tribals/Dkhars and consequently what are we fighting for and who are we standing up against?

Yours etc,
B K Dey Sawian,
Via email

Appointment on compassionate grounds

Editor,
Reading Desmond Lyngdoh's letter, ‘Compassionate ground appointment’ and that of D. Wahlang, ‘Misplaced idea of compassion’ which appeared in these columns of your esteemed daily on Aug 10 & 11, 2017 respectively, it gives me a blend of excitement and regret at that in equal measure. Explicitly, I was more than elated that in one of my past letters printed in your daily (ST May 24, 2017) under the caption of: ‘Issue before the Meghalaya 5th pay Commission’, I had suggested before the latter to revive the issue of c o m p a s s i o n a t e appointment in strictly bonafide cases given the

fact that this scheme is still applicable in a good number of States in India and, importantly, even in the Central govt. establishments compassionate assignments are still in place. And arguably these public enterprises are painfully aware of the need for this social contention. Consequently, I surmised that the said Commission might have perhaps, just perhaps, made allowance to my humble indication by reopening the issue of compassionate appointment which had since been abrogated from November 24, 2010. Incidentally, as a state govt. officer when I was associated with the compassionate employment cases I did find that there were innumerable genuine instances where compassionate placements were, and still are a crying need taking the heart-breaking family background

as the final reckoning truth.

However, it makes me edgy to peruse the letters of the duo in question who have taken strong exception against the Pay Commission on c o m p a s s i o n a t e appointments. Markedly, state govt. employees are alleged to be a much pampered lot and most of their deaths are occasioned by ‘excessive drinking’. Such submissions are a brazen slur on the entire govt. staff fraternity, given that most of them are also no less sincere and devoted to their assigned duties. In a word, all govt. employees cannot be sweepingly painted with the same brush. The citation that such appointments are not based on merit, where over-aged applicants are favoured, who would overtake the role of a supervisor of their

meritorious and experienced peers smacks of naivety as the State’s Personnel department is rigidly bound to adhere objectively to the extant laid down rules and procedures like the family economic status, family background etc., to be certified by the respective Rangbah Shnong and Magistrates preceding official approval for compassionate inclusion of the prospective applicants and, furthermore, age criterion has also to be accounted for. Put simply, these disciplinary procedural rules have to be observed in letter and spirit or the said applications are summarily rejected. Hence, appointment on compassionate grounds are not for the asking. It may be reminded that, thereafter, the endorsed compassionate appointees are invariably appointed only as Grade III or Grade IV staffs, the former are the ones, who have passed the Matriculate standards

and the latter are those who have not crossed this educational benchmark. So how could these low grade fresh appointees hijack the domains of the experienced or senior colleagues?

Admittedly, there are currently a vast army of unemployed youth in our state but it is also not untrue that Meghalaya being a welfare Government cannot outrightly forsake its employees who had dedicated their lives to the service of their state, leaving aside those ubiquitous alcoholics seen in almost in all strata of society, as of now. In fine, let the Govt, the final arbiter, give its final nod over this issue as advanced by the Pay Commission and until then let us keep our fingers crossed without making heavy weather of things to come.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh,
Via email