

*"Live as if you were to die tomorrow.  
Learn as if you were to live forever."*

—Mahatma Gandhi

## The Shillong Times

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### Need for passionate environmentalists

IN a world where people pay lip service to the environment and discuss global warming at the high tables, 20-year old Rohan Agrawal from Nagpur Maharashtra walks across the country and has now reached Shillong with a message of creating awareness about the hazardous effects of plastics on the environment. Rohan has walked 10,000 kms so far in 720 plus days and has travelled through 26 states of India. His Instagram page RohitYatra speaks volumes about his passion to heal the environment. Rohan exhorts every Indian that it is their bounden duty to conserve the environment on a daily basis. His plea is that healing the environment from anthropogenic activities is no longer an option but a compulsion.

It is not known if Rohan has seen and heard of the environmental damage that Meghalaya is daily experiencing from coal mining with no environmental norms in place to sand mining which has virtually destroyed the flow of the waters and has long terms repercussions on the hydrology of the rivers, to limestone mining without any regulations simply because this is a Sixth Schedule state. Although all kinds of environmental laws are in place their enforcement is non-existent or shabby. The recent flash floods that resulted in several deaths is the result of human onslaught on the environment and this on the plea of livelihoods. The word 'environment' is often or nearly always conjoined with the word "sustainable." But when trees are mercilessly brought down to be burnt into charcoal day after day then something is seriously wrong in implementation of environment conservation laws. This is in fact the biggest challenge; the other one being that Meghalaya does not have a vibrant civil society that takes up environmental issues with the seriousness it deserves. Besides the problem with Meghalaya is that roughly about 96 % of forests are under the custodianship of the autonomous district councils (ADCs) and therefore out of the jurisdiction of the State Environment and Forest Department. The ADCs use the revenue from forest products including timber to manage their affairs since they are always short on revenue.

Meghalaya could do with a passionate environmentalist like Rohan Agrawal because although single-use plastics are banned in the State, beyond Shillong and in the rural areas where weekly markets are held single-use plastics are still rampantly used – again because the administration is so distant from the people and awareness is largely lacking among the rural folks. In Meghalaya's rural areas there is no garbage management system and most of the plastics find their way into water bodies and forests. These are areas not discussed even though they will seriously impinge on Meghalaya's fragile environment.

# Action of Hima Mylliem towards Laitumkrah Dorbar arbitrary

By Wankitbok Pohshna

The people of Laitumkrah were stunned by the news of the acting Syiem of Hima Mylliem revoking the sanad of the three Rangbah Shnongs (headmen) of Laitumkrah followed with the appointment of an acting Rangbah Shnong from amongst the suspended three on the very same. What led to this development is something that the people should be aware because a point has been reached which requires the further strengthening of the village administration system. Though Laitumkrah falls under administered area of municipality, locals have the privilege to constitute a dorbar shnong for local governance since the administered areas enjoy dual character in self-administration.

Since time immemorial the elders of the locality recall that Laitumkrah had three Rangbah Shnongs to manage the affairs of the people. Sometime in 1956 the Laitumkrah sports social and cultural club was formed to further improve sports and cultural activities in the locality. Back then, the sports club had a person in-charge in every block of Laitumkrah, usually termed as 'dongs or kyntoit'. It was only after 1956 that Laitumkrah streamlined its affairs by electing its first chairman (L) Kisto Mohon Roy Marbaniang from amongst the three Rangbah Shnongs and (L) Alfred Red Wahlang as secretary of dorbar pyllun. In Sept 1970, it was felt that Rangbah Dongs (deputy headmen) were needed in every block to assist the Rangbah Shnongs as the population grew. Those were years when affairs of the dorbar were well-managed, not to forget contributions of all the former Rangbah Shnongs and dorbar officials to name a few (L) Mon Lyngdoh, (L) H Kharkongor, (L) P G Marbaniang, (L) J Khonglah, (L) S N R Shylla, (L) R Kharshing, (L) B Kharkongor, (L) R Kharpor, (L) T P Nongrum, (L) B Myrthong etc. Whatever differences arose were sorted out internally and seldom required the intervention of outside authorities.

Sometime in 2006-2007 and 2011-12 the Syiem of Mylliem denied sanad to the Rangbah Shnongs of Laitumkrah citing that there may be a clash of interests if all three are given sanad for the same purpose. The then Rangbah Shnongs were well matured to convince the Syiem to respect the system of village administration that was prevalent in Laitumkrah and all three Rangbah Shnongs were given sanad and it continues to this day.

On Dec 2014 when the

single bench of Meghalaya High Court struck down the powers of headmen that prompted all dorbars of 'ka bri u hynnietrep' to act together to overcome legal challenges, Laitumkrah dorbar was also actively involved under the able leadership of the Rangbah Shnongs who took part vehemently in all the protests that year. On June 2015, the KHADC brought the Mylliem Syiemship Rules and subsequently headmen were re-conferred with sanad at a grand function held at Khasi National Dorbar Hall on Sept 2015 and by January 2016 the Supreme Court also temporarily stayed the division's bench order and allowed headmen to re-function as per rules of the District Council under the Mylliem Syiemship Rules of 2015. Not much is spelt out in the principal act of 2007 nor are there broad details laid in the rules of Mylliem Syiemship when it comes to the functions and responsibility of the Rangbah Shnong.

With such developments, the Laitumkrah dorbar was convened on Oct 2017 and new Rangbah Shnongs were elected by the people who attended the dorbar. Three were elected, namely SB Nongdhar, GB Sawkmie and AA Jyrwa for a tenure of 3 years which was to end on Sept 2020. As per convention S B Nongdhar was chosen as Chairman of the Laitumkrah Dorbar Shnong Pyllun based on the highest number of votes attained. But the Chairman had to resign from the Committee on July 2021 on health grounds and GB Sawkmie took over as the Chairman by consensus of the Executive Committee of the Laitumkrah Dorbar. Fissures arose as A A Jyrwa was not in agreement with the decision taken by the EC. In Sept 2021 he along with a group of people convened a meeting to form the Seng Samla, by-passing the Chairman, the other Rangbah Shnongs and the EC of the dorbar which was active. This and other actions on the part of one Rangbah Shnong led to certain differences and on Feb 2022 this year the same group of people must have formally complained to the Syiem of Hima Mylliem following which the Rangbah Shnongs were summoned.

The Chairman, GB Sawkmie had requested for a copy of the complaint to understand the basis of such complaint which the Office of the Hima never served. However, it is understood that the failure to convene dorbar at the end of the tenure is the reason

for the complaint.

As per clause 3 of section 5(B) of the Mylliem Syiemship rules 2015, 'A Rangbah Shnong shall hold office strictly within the period and as per terms and conditions of the sanad issued by the Syiem and the Dorbar (which usually is for a period of 1 year only). The clause further states however that if not less than 50 percent of the total inhabitants/ members requisition for a meeting of the Dorbar Shnong, the Syiem and the Dorbar may authorise any myntri (sub-ordinate) to look after such village'

A bare look at the above clause points to two question that are pertinent here. Who are the 50 percent inhabitants who signed the complaint and which prompted the Syiem to revoke the sanad of the Rangbah Shnongs of Laitumkrah? Is the list of complainants based on the electoral roll of the District Council or is it the list of all inhabitants of Laitumkrah which naturally does not exist. Why an acting Rangbah Shnong is appointed from amongst the suspended, when it is imminent from the series of events that unfolded that something is brewing and all is not well. It is worth recollecting that after the office of the Syiem issued an order that the dorbar had to be convened in April this year, the EC of the Shnong was convened to discuss the said order and came up with the modalities of conducting the elections. It was during that meeting that a group of youths which included one of the complainants forcefully entered the hall and started abusing the Rangbah Shnongs of corrupt practices, using foul language.

The meeting was called off and an FIR was also filed against the disruptors and the whole matter was reported to the Office of the Syiem by the Secretary of the Dorbar Pyllun, to which the acting Syiem issued another order cancelling his previous order of summoning the Dorbar.

The matter resurfaced in June this year when the acting Syiem re-summoned the three Rangbah Shnongs to discuss pending issues of the dorbar without mentioning the remedies taken by the acting Syiem in resolving the issue. The Chairman GB Sawkmie reiterated to the acting Syiem vide a letter on the

pending issue of non-action on his part on reported matters relating to threats given by a certain group and that it is not conducive to summon the three Rangbah Shnongs to the office of the Syiem in the presence of disruptors or complainants which may lead to further unrest. But the Office of the Syiem issued another summons in August, asking the three Rangbah Shnongs to be present before him with copies served to the disruptors with not a single mention on the actions taken by the acting Syiem to resolve the matter under dispute.

The recent order of suspension reads that the reasons given by the other two Rangbah Shnongs were baseless and not substantive and therefore the Syiem was forced to revoke the Sanad vide his order dated August 25, 2022. As per rule the Syiem is supposed to appoint a 'myntri' as caretaker to convene the Dorbar with the assistance from the Secretary of the dorbar pyllun. But violating all norms the acting Syiem has appointed the same person whose sanad has been revoked as the caretaker. Where is justice in this? How can differences be settled without an opportunity of being heard in person?

Instead the acting Syiem issued order upon order without correcting on reported matters. And appointing an acting Rangbah Shnong at this point of time from amongst the suspended lot will only add fuel to the fire. Will the Syiem guarantee that the dorbar to be held shall be free and fair? Who with a sane mind and fine sense of judgment will get involved in such matters?

In the absence of specific written laws on the conduct of elections to the office of the Rangbah Shnong and rules on their functions and responsibilities especially in administered areas of municipality, such attempts under duress will create factions within a particular dorbar that is not at all healthy for the traditional system we know of. Revoking of the sanad by overlooking rules on the part of the office of Hima Mylliem itself is questionable. While it is time for the District Council to intervene in such circumstances and as custodian of the system it is the moral duty of the Council to set the entire system in order. And if need be which in this instance it appears so, amendments must be brought to the existing Mylliem Syiemship Rules 2015 in matters relating to functions, tenure and conduct of elections to the office of the Rangbah Shnong which should be uniform throughout Khasi Hills.

# Looking beyond tokenism in a President

By Martin Macwan

It is over a month since Droupadi Murmu became the 15th President of India. She is the second woman and the first person from a tribal community to occupy the highest office in the land. This is an achievement, no doubt. There is hope that her ascent to the highest office will ensure that tribal voices are heard in New Delhi, that the tribal agenda is placed at the forefront of policy making and that she can leave a mark so that we can end what tribal communities perceive as "centuries of neglect".

Tribal leaders are pinning their hopes on her work in the past. They cite the stand she took as Governor of Jharkhand, when it seemed tribal rights would be compromised. This included returning a bill seeking amendments in land laws during the previous BJP government's term or changes in the Tribal Advisory Council that the present JMM-headed government wanted to make. However, it may have been forgotten that it was difficult for her to continue standing up against the State government. In 2016-2017, the Raghuram Das ministry sought amendments to the Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act, 1908, and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act, 1949. The amendments aimed at making available tribal land for commercial use by giving the right to the tribal owners to lease their land. Although she returned the bill with

these groups. It cannot be said so.

Looking back, unlike K. R. Narayanan, the first Dalit President who had an independent mind and committed passion for social justice, Ramnath Kovind appeared eager to please the government, including signing the papers at midnight to ensure that the BJP candidate could take oath as a Chief Minister in Maharashtra before the world awoke.

Droupadi Murmu has time to prove whether or not she stands for tribal rights as the first tribal President. It may not be comforting that her first address to the nation as a President on the eve of the 76th Indian Independence did not mention tribals or their rights. The issues of deprivation of forest land, the non-implementation of PESA, malnutrition and hunger deaths of tribals did not find a mention in her speech which spoke of the story of the phenomenal rise of India as a great nation. But then, this is only the beginning of her term and she has five years ahead.

We have several examples of leaders who have risen from tribal leadership to create transformation. Few would know that Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was from the Xhosa-speaking Thembu tribe from Mveza village in South Africa. He rose to be one of the biggest leaders of our time. Closer home, it was the heroic death



mounting opposition, the State government did finally succeed in making the proposed changes allowing it to acquire tribal land "in public interest for purposes like infrastructure development".

It is true that a President in the Indian constitutional system has limited powers; she or he must act on the advice of the council of ministers, which is where the real executive power rests under the Parliamentary form of government. It may not be easy to make space for an agenda of tribal empowerment led by the President. But she will carry tremendous influence and can nudge and create a sense of sensitivity, and in that sense her role can be more than symbolic. This will be a good achievement and an admirable goal after her predecessor Ramnath Kovind, a Dalit President, who could not do much in terms of bringing to the forefront and increasing awareness let alone moving to improve the lot of Dalits.

Cynics will say that following a Dalit as President, it was important to have a tribal leader as President keeping in mind the 2024 general elections. After all, the SC and ST reserved Lok Sabha constituencies add up to 130 seats. Thanks to the Ambedkarite vision of political representation of marginalised and discriminated Indian classes through affirmative action, which he agreed to in the absence of separate electorates, SC and ST votes have become a decisive factor for any political party to be in power. This is of course regardless of whether or not, the SC and ST parliamentarians represent the interests of their communities. The present Government has been very careful in ensuring caste and tribe-based representation. After having a minister, Renuka Singh Saruta, from the powerful Gond community, Droupadi Murmu has been selected thanks to her identity as a Santhal, the third most significant tribal group in India with a population of over 6.6 million.

But ultimately, are symbols and figureheads helping the marginalised classes of India? Is having a tribal or a Dalit as President bettering, even slightly, the lot of

of Birsa Munda that compelled the British to enact the Chhota Nagpur Tenancy act which protected tribal land from being transferred through unscrupulous means to non-tribal use.

We may also not set our expectations too high. Here is someone who has overcome much difficulty and has traversed a painful, hard path to become Governor of a State and now President of India. We can also hope that she will stand by the poor, the marginalised and the downtrodden in her own way, using the enormous influence that she will have as President and even beyond the one term she is elected for.

Should the Indian President represent the interests of her or his own class and caste? I disagree. She is President for all of India – all sections, all groups, all communities, all interests. Yet, there would be little disagreement on the issue that the President should stand by and support the most marginalised citizens of India. Unfortunately, we are as a nation governed by contradictions. We are disturbed and agitated with the system of caste-based reservations, disregarding the fact that it was a complete dismissal of the marginalised communities from the system and political representation that necessitated the introduction of reservations. The oppression continues to this day.

Tribals and other marginalised backward groups too face contradictions. They have assured political representation through reservation but yet feel powerless in the absence of good leadership that can sincerely represent their interests. Today's situation may spell hope with a President who has the rather special qualification of a lived experience so that she knows what it means to continue to be oppressed in a land we call free.

(The writer is the founder of Navsarjan, a grass-roots Dalit organisation fighting for human rights and has also served as a convener of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

### Letters to the Editor

#### On Smart Meters

Editor,  
I happened to watch the programme "Let's Talk" a hard talk programme organised by The Shillong Times on use of Smart Meters in Meghalaya in place of the traditional ones. The subject anchored by the Editor of the Newspaper, Patricia Mukhim, was very much appropriate, current, hot and highly controversial. The outcome of the discussion was, at least for me, more confusion than clarity on the subject matter and I presume, the public viewers were disappointed because they got no enlightenment whatsoever on the utility and advantages of installing Smart Meters in their homes / business / industrial premises etc. The reason was because the resource persons representing MeECL, one Mr. Syiem and one Mr. Kurbah, were unable to enlighten about the rationality and advantages of implementing the Smart Meter project and as to why costly SMs are used instead of the cheaper existing meters easily available and what are the cost benefits.

In fact they dithered on many issues connected with the project in spite of the fact

that the files on the subject are dealt by them. Moreover, the resource person from NEHU, one Prof Utpal De who was expected to throw more light on the subject could not bail out the two beleaguered high ranking MeECL representatives. In fact, they were cornered with facts and figures brought forth to discussion table discussion by the fluent HVC, RTI activist, Roy Kupar Syiem and by the uncomfortable probing questions of the anchor.

Perhaps, another more useful and insightful hard talk on the subject is called for, for the benefit of power consumers who are not at all convinced with the installation of Smart Meters. In fact, through the programme, consumer viewers got clear hints and indications that the Smart Meter project is ridden with scams and became even more convinced that the top bosses of the Power Department are dictated by the Company that supplied the Smart Meters by extorting the poor hapless power consumers of Meghalaya not only in terms of installing a four-times costlier meter with zero guarantee and which will drain heavily the pockets of consumers in terms of costlier tariffs because of many inbuilt factors which the consumers are not

aware of.

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

#### Delinquency

Editor,  
A very lively and dispassionate discussion in The Shillong Times programme LetsTalk, held about three months ago, anchored by Patricia Mukhim on the Assembly Dome collapse where Architect, Aiban S Mawkhroh, Politician, Dr. Fabian Lyngdoh, Columnist Rev. Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh and Dr Benjamin Lyngdoh, Professor NEHU participated. In simple but forceful language they could enlighten the audience about the process of decision making, planning, execution, supervision, monitoring, financing and sense of accountability of all involved and the attitude and mentality of the general public that is influencing the burgeoning corruption and exploiting the state's resources, hindering the progress while depriving the hapless citizens and keeping the state under-developed, in spite of 50 years of self rule.

I expected the panellists to lay more stress on the involvement of 'Pressure Groups' here who can mo-

bilise public opinion on this vital issue of burgeoning corruption that is carrying on with impunity and I hope they do so in the future.

Yours etc.,  
B.C. Biswas,  
Guwahati

#### Delay in issuance of Trading Licence by ADCs

Editor,  
The common practice to get a municipal license for trading purposes is to give an application and submit documents like ID, a no-objection certificate from the headman and from the landlord/landlady to prove that one is a genuine citizen of India. Within 15 days one gets a municipal license after payment of necessary fees. And those annual fees too are paid without any tension. But in the case of the District Councils even after submitting all the necessary documents, the matter of granting trading license is delayed. It seems as if the ADCs and the staff working there are unwilling to grant the license even if this is clearly laid down in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. My question is why this discrimination when all the information required has been provided? Why

make people run from pillar to post and cause so much unnecessary trouble for them? Non-tribals are paying their taxes regularly and tax payers deserve respect and also they should receive assistance that is due to citizens.

What are the reasons for the ADCs to delay in giving a license after all documents are submitted? The ADCs should answer publicly on this issue. We have taken this lying down for too long. The Government needs to intervene in such matters as there is too much harassment meted out to those applying for a Trading License.

Yours etc.,  
Justin Roy  
Shillong 2

#### No unfair treatment

Editor,  
With reference to the letter, "Unfair treatment of ICSE topper" (ST Aug 31, 2022) in your esteemed daily I am deeply concerned that this particular parent never ever considered the 11 years that his son spent in St Edmund's School after being admitted into this esteemed institution and succeeding to pass every year. Till that time Mr Zamal had no complaints about anything at all. Now, since his son/ward has

secured the top position in the ICSE examination, he wants this esteemed institution to recognise his feat, especially in the media.

Being a past pupil of this esteemed institution, I would like to inform Zamal and the readers of this newspaper that St Edmund's School never publishes the names of the "toppers" in the media ever since I can remember, so it's nothing new. Some of us got great marks in our ICSE exams but we were never mentioned in the media. We were taught the dictum, 'Facta Non Verba,' which translates to 'Deeds not Words,' and we internalised this.

I would like to congratulate the ward/son of Mr Zamal for his accomplishments and for being a good pupil, but he should have at least read the school diary and learnt about the history of this esteemed institution. Mr Zamal, your family is your responsibility, I will never argue with you on that but please understand that 'The Christian Brothers' also have their own policies.

Yours etc.,  
Kamwada Lalo,  
Via email

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"We all have hourglass figures; your sand just settles in different places."

— Octavia Spencer

## The Shillong Times

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### Confused Congress

IN two months from now the Grand Old Party is going to have an elected President. The urgency for a new president is all the more important as interim chief Sonia Gandhi is ailing. Rahul Gandhi is not willing to shoulder the responsibility and suggests a president from outside the Nehru family. This implies that it should be someone other than Priyanka Vadra. Yet, hopes are still pinned on Rahul Gandhi by sections of Congressmen. What comes in between would be his Bharat Jodo Yatra, its stated purpose being to promote unity in the nation's diversity, directly targeting the "divisive" forces on the Saffron side. The Yatra from Kanyakumari starts on September 7 and travels through 12 states before it ends five months later. This obviously means he would not be around to oversee the organisational elections. While running the party might not enthuse him, the more lucrative PM's post in the event of the party returning to power should attract him. In fact, through frequent tweets, he continues to pit himself against PM Modi.

While the G23 is planning strategy and even held a meeting with Ghulam Nabi Azad, the big struggle among them would be as to who can be projected from their side as the next party chief. One who has shown considerable interest, so far, is former Union minister Shashi Tharoor. His high stature, though, had been punctured in part by allegations surrounding the death of his wife Sunanda Pushkar. Tharoor's intellectual aura in a sea of ignoramus that straddle Indian politics is to his advantage. However, a big problem is that his appeal will at best be limited to the educated, elitist India, which is very powerful but numerically very weak. The Hindi belt will mostly not warm up to him. It is this belt that majorly decides who should rule India, as in the case of the BJP now and of the Congress in the past.

Another name proposed by Sonia Gandhi is that of Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot but he wants to continue as state CM for some more time. His BC tag will not take him too far because he has no 'aura' built around him in the general perception. Worse, the old hat is aged 74. A pity is there's hardly any leader in the Congress outside of the 'family' who commands a significant following or appeal at the national level. Many have a record of being hugely corrupt and unprincipled. Despite several allegations against the Nehru dynasty, their strength is the aura the family still has.

# The Newspaper as a Public Square

By Patricia Mukhim

Many think of the newspaper as just several pages of information on politics, governance, society the economy and some sports and entertainment. In progressive societies people engage actively with day to day issues of governance because that's what really matters at the end of the day. Meghalaya, however, has a different ecosystem. Among the educated class, the large majority don't want to ruffle feathers just in case they need political or bureaucratic favours. Hence, they create a cosy, comfort zone and operate within that. They only indulge in gossip sessions about who is corrupt and how deep the rot is in the government. After that they forget and live another day to reveal these state secrets at another gossip session.

However, Meghalaya, has been exemplary in many ways. When The Shillong Times exposed the corruption that riddled the State Lottery run by Mani Kumar Subba, the businessman who later turned MP from Assam in connivance with Meghalaya's politicians, we had some of the best and most honest officers in the Law Department like the Late Mr L Jyrwa who did not hesitate to share the violations committed by Subba's firm. MK Subba, filed defamation cases against The Shillong Times at several courts in Assam to harass and silence the paper but the newspaper managed to gather so much information on the criminal antecedents of the man that he could not pursue those defamation cases.

Similarly in the year 2000, the Government led by Late EK Mawlong had signed a deal with Asian Housing Construction Limited (AHCL) which would have given the Company complete ownership of the Meghalaya House at Russell Street, a premier location and allowed it to capitalise the space by turning it into a commercial complex with Meghalaya retaining only a small portion at the back. There were a few ministers then who were honest to the core. They called a few of us to discuss the matter and to tell us that we needed to blow the whistle on this. Some of us activists then joined hands with other pressure groups like the KSU, FKJGP, SSSS to form the group - Peoples' Rally Against Corruption (PRAC) which was chaired by Mr HP O'Flynn Dohling. We had several public meetings in different villages to draw attention to this "would be scam." Some of us approached the High Court of Gauhati with a PIL. When we returned from Gauhati after filing the PIL we learnt that the deal was rescinded. But things had become so murky and there was internal dis-

sension in the Government. Several ministers felt that the then CM had failed to prevent what was to have been a 'sell-out' of Meghalaya's prime property. The Government of EK Mawlong collapsed and FA Khonglam became the Chief Minister. The architect of this entire drama was the Late PA Sangma.

This Kolkata Meghalaya House episode was enacted by a certain bureaucrat in connivance with AHCL. Obviously, there was much to gain for him through this deal. Thankfully, the then politicians (at least a couple of them had strong scruples and leaked the MoA between AHCL and Meghalaya Government - an agreement that gave the Company undue benefits.

Today we no longer have such ministers. Not a single one of them is ready to blow the whistle on the Government. They don't have the spine for that because they

under whose tenure the above malfeasance was committed by the AIG(A), for exposing the rot in the Police Department which had clearly come out in the Enquiry Report. The Report had actually recommended, "a high-level Fact-finding enquiry should be formed to go into the details of the entire scam, since this enquiry report may not reflect the entire magnitude of the scam."

Defamation notices are usually sent by people who have something to hide and therefore want to gag the media and to cancel the democratic ethos of freedom of speech and expression. A person's reputation is not what he thinks it is. A person's reputation is built over a period of time and is certified by co-workers, seniors and juniors in the establishment in which that person is working. The question then is whether the enquiry into the wrongdoings in the

and comprising Justices SK Kaul and KM Joseph, was unanimous in its verdict that purportedly leaked confidential documents can be relied upon while adjudicating on the Rafale review petitions.

Earlier I had stated that the newspaper is the Public Square in a democracy where all wrongdoings by the custodians of public money have to be exposed. It's a different matter that very few if any pick up their pens to write their views and send those to the newspaper as letters. The 'letters to the editor' column is a Public Square where people speak up on the state of governance, the corruption and mis-governance that is being witnessed day in and day out. The MDA Government has become a government of 'a scheme a day' even while officials are tasked with distributing money right, left and centre based on those schemes which, by the way, do not measure outcomes. There are so many areas that Government has failed to address and newspaper offices should actually have hundreds of letters every day which express the grievances of citizens. But that hardly happens. I met a retired lady government employee. She says, "I agree there is so much wrongdoing by this government but as pensioners we still depend on the 'salt' of the government so we cannot speak. Did democracy foresee such a situation where those who work for the government would have to compromise on their voices and be forever muted, even after they are retired?"

It was Plato who said, "The price good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men." Plato was a far-sighted philosopher and centuries after he made the above statement we are seeing it play before our eyes. Not many will disagree with Plato's (Republic, Book VI) which argues that democracy is inferior to various forms of monarchy, aristocracy and even oligarchy on the grounds that democracy tends to undermine the expertise necessary to properly govern societies.

At this juncture when this newspaper has been served with the defamation notice there are many who say, "We stand with The Shillong Times." But the media needs more than that passive support to be able to expose corruption and abuse of public office.

In any case, Truth is an absolute defence to defamation. If a statement is true, it can't be defamatory. For example, if someone accuses a public official of corruption and an enquiry committee finds that to be true, that itself is proof and cannot be defamatory. In the end Truth has to prevail!

*"Defamation notices are usually sent by people who have something to hide and therefore want to gag the media and to cancel the democratic ethos of freedom of speech and expression. A person's reputation is not what he thinks it is. A person's reputation is built over a period of time and is certified by co-workers, seniors and juniors in the establishment in which that person is working."*

are themselves hugely compromised. Hence the investigation by no less than some senior and responsible police officials into the gross misuse of "public money" by the AIG (Administration) since 2019 in purchasing 29 vehicles of different makes without proper documents and keeping them in his personal custody, is not even worth considering a 'scam' by this present government. That's how low Meghalaya has sunk in the past four years. The Enquiry Committee looking into the cases of abuse of power by the AIG (A) used the word 'flabbergasted' to define the shock at seeing not one or two but a host of irregularities that have gone unchecked for over three years. How could an AIG (A) working under the direct control of the DGP in the PHQ have done this without being detected. In that case how can Police detect crime outside their department? Isn't this demoralising for those in the police that joined with a sense of commitment and did not pay their way into the service?

Recently this newspaper was served with a defamation notice by the former DGP

Police Headquarters were done with the intention to rupture the reputation of the person heading the police establishment or to unearth the numerous criminal acts of a person working directly under the DGP, who claims that his reputation has been sullied. Even if one single fact out of the many detected by the Enquiry Committee is found to be true the liability falls on the head of the Police Department.

Talking about leaked documents, this is as old as Watergate where US President Richard Nixon had to resign from office when documents that compromised his position as the President of the USA were leaked to the media. In April 2019, the Supreme Court decided that leaked confidential documents which suggested the interference of the Modi Government in negotiations over the Rafale jet deals can be relied upon while adjudicating on petitions that have sought a review of the court's verdict of December 2018 which had rejected prayers for investigation into the fighter jet deal. The apex court bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi

## Great teachers matter

By C.S. Krishnamurthy

We often hear that we can learn from anyone. From effective people we learn what to do, and from ineffective people, what not to do. Teachers herein have a great role to play. We don't forget our best teachers - those who infused in us a lasting impression, those who opened doors and altered the course of our careers.

Teachers come in varied qualities - Super, excellent, good. Of course, there are mediocre teachers and, sadly, terrible ones too. Which calibre you decide to become depends on your personal strengths, relationships, professional goals and individual priorities. Before you begin the noble profession, consider how much time and effort you can expend on your work.

Super teaching requires large quantum of physical, emotional and mental energy. For instance, the extraordinary teachers usually arrive at school early and stay late. They attend seminars, volunteer for student activities, make themselves available to students who need extra help. But don't beat yourself up if you can't be superlative. Being an excellent or good teacher

ter, good teachers embrace grandeur.

Whether mathematicians or Biology teachers or PE instructors, the best teachers know their subjects, but they also know how to involve, and challenge students and foment inspired responses. Two things for sure: Teaching matters and students can learn.

Beyond lesson plans and lecture notes, the teachers discern the subject and value human learning. The expert teacher constantly reviews her lessons, and learns without limits.

There are teachers, though far and few, who told the pupils from the outset that his/her goal was not to prepare them for, say, the biology exam, but to impart them how to think like scientists. Looking back, I'd have to commend my English professor for carving the path that led me to my writing passion.

**Passion weighs**  
Everyone remembers "that" great teacher who made a difference. The one who went the extra mile to truly impact student lives, whose lessons carried as much significance outside the classroom as inside!

*"When great teachers say something, they mean it. They firmly believe that it's humans, not programs that ascertain the quality of an institution. When a student misbehaves, great teachers target to keep that behaviour from repeating. When they have high expectations for pupils, they have even higher benchmark for themselves. They habitually treat everyone with respect. They have a plan and purpose for everything, often ready with plan 'B'. Their key teaching skills include attention, clarity, questioning, monitoring, feedback, summarising..."*

is itself a true achievement. Not everybody can be a super teacher.

Excellent teachers enjoy their work, but they limit the amount of time and energy they commit to teaching. Good teachers do their jobs well but know their own limits. They make a clear distinction between professional and personal time. Though they deliver their best, they don't feel obligated to save every student. By earmarking a definite work-life balance, they conserve their energy.

Teaching has existed since the first humans, showed other humans how to hunt, build a fire and cook food. Good teaching always prioritised the learner's needs and interest first. What was beneficial to the student simultaneously defined what was right for teachers to do.

**What makes them "great"?**

Who are the teachers, pupils remember long after graduation? What great teachers do differently? Do principals provide leadership and support? Are today's parents placing too many demands upon teachers? Great teachers cross many hurdles.

Teachers can ace exams in their undergraduate and graduate classes. But the difference between more effective teachers and their less-effective colleagues is not what they know. It's what they do. What do they see when they view their classrooms and the students in them? Where do they focus their attention? What guides their decisions?

If there were just one answer, surely, we'd all have it by now. Education is complex, and so is classroom teaching. But we can try to understand what the best teachers do.

Merits of great teachers must be viewed not just based on their credentials, but on their students' success. A student's academic progress should be compared to his/her previous performance. By focusing on both what they do well and what they could do bet-

Teaching is a job unlike any other. Teachers have the chance to change the world of each of their students - today and for future.

Some are absolutely phenomenal. I have read that a teacher taught fifth grade for 40 years - the teacher you wish your own children and grand children could have. When asked her how she managed to stay inspired, she replied: "This is my 41st year teaching fifth grade, but for these students, it's the first time". Didn't that teacher bring her skills - especially people skills - to bear on new experiences every day? We can learn from her!

Passion is the distinguishing factor between an ordinary and extraordinary teacher. For those who do it well, teaching is not just a profession, but a passion which reflects in the lives of students.

When great teachers say something, they mean it. They firmly believe that it's humans, not programs that ascertain the quality of an institution. When a student misbehaves, great teachers target to keep that behaviour from repeating. When they have high expectations for pupils, they have even higher benchmark for themselves. They habitually treat everyone with respect.

They have a plan and purpose for everything, often ready with plan 'B'. Their key teaching skills include attention, clarity, questioning, monitoring, feedback, summarising...

Are passion, motivation, education and training enough? While these can be virtues to create a good foundation, super teaching requires much more than knowledge and desire to teach, such as, a grasp of leadership, conflict resolution skills, human psychology, computer literacy and the ability to think on your feet. Effective teaching is more a matter of psychology than pedagogy.

The future belongs to leaders now being taught by teachers to be lifelong learners.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Clandestine Project

Editor,

As far as we know the forested slope along the Wahukhrah river on the side of the Polo-Demseiniang road, is part of government land. The portion of land just opposite the Puja Idol immersion point, is a long stretch of land which the government could actually use to widen the road so as to ease traffic congestion along this part. What leaves every citizen in perplexity is the mysterious project that seems to be going on there. The high rise blue dyna roof barricade hides something suspicious behind. The public would like to know if this is government land and what project is actually going on here. It is mysterious as well that a wine store has already come up in this government land. Is this wine store a government project or has it been sold to a private party?

When traffic congestion is the nightmare of the city, road widening (wherever possible) should become the government's priority.

This portion of the mentioned government land should have been used for this purpose and not for other dubious constructions. Unfortunately, Meghalaya is a state where citizens prefer to remain silent or even stay complacent in the midst of glaring irregularities in the government functioning. I am sure if it were in other states RTIs would have been filed and investigations would have taken place already. In this connection our NGOs and pressure groups like the KSU, HNYC or the FKJGP should take up this matter and if irregularities do exist seek for legal actions. It is abdication of one's civic duties to keep quiet and just sit and watch when corruption is glaring at our faces.

Yours etc.,  
Barnes Mawrie sdb,  
Via email

#### An unwarranted response

Editor,

With reference to the letter, "NO UNFAIR TREAT-

MENT" (ST Sep 1, 2022), we are deeply concerned and aggrieved by the fact that in response to our previous letter, one Mr Laloo, in his letter says that we seek recognition for our son in the "media". However, it seems Mr Laloo has either completely failed to understand the crux of the matter or has misread our previous letter. As a matter of fact we do not seek any publicity from the media for our son, we had just asked for information which the authorities of St. Edmund's school refused to provide. For his kind information, I too hold this same institution as my alma mater and was taught by the Irish Brothers themselves. So "reading the school diary" will not compare to the values instilled in me by this same institution.

Furthermore, our son's hard work and result precisely embodies the motto of the school "Facta Non Verba" (Deeds not Words). He does not need such publicity to prove his worth. His results speak for themselves. WE JUST REQUIRE ST. EDMUND'S SCHOOL

TO ACCEPT THE FACTS AND PROVIDE THE CLARIFICATIONS WE HAVE BEEN SEEKING. Damage to the school's reputation is in no way our intent or purpose as it is deeply connected with our emotions as well. Anyone who thinks otherwise is either misinformed or is looking through the eyes of prejudice against a sixteen year old.

Yours etc.,  
Saeed Zamal,  
Via email

#### Love thy neighbor in this difficult time

Editor,

Despite so many technological advances, we can hardly understand nature's fierce calamities that strike us almost too often. Look at how abnormally continuous rain in Pakistan has played havoc with the lives of millions of its citizens. There are sufficient "causes" for such eccentricities of nature these

days. Of course, climate change due to our wrong pursuits is also to blame. It has been reported that more than 33 million people have been affected by the monstrous monsoon. The flash floods have mercilessly washed away bridges, roads, houses, livestock and people across the country. More than 1100 people have been killed so far. Just imagine their plight and how each individual is struggling to survive in these difficult hours. Practically speaking, with almost nothing to eat and nothing to drink, innumerable stranded citizens are also gasping for breath, as reported. Their lives are floating on the bubble of uncertainty. I believe each one of us should learn a lesson or two from here. We should take a cue from it and conduct ourselves in this mundane world more thoughtfully. The profound TRUTH is that human life on this planet is unquestionably "impermanent and unpredictable".

Needless to say, what has happened in our neighbouring country might also happen to us. Any time our wealth and luxurious gadgets

and accessories can be devastated. A similar situation was experienced by millions of people in Assam a month ago. Well, our Prime Minister has conveyed his good thoughts and prayers in these difficult times for Pakistan. Of course, our prayers may be different in words, but the CREATOR is the same. The style of worshipping Him may be different, but the devotion is the same. So, let's keep the Pakistani people in our thoughts and prayers now. Let's keep aside the narrow dogmas of our religions and think for humanity. While religions may divide us, humanity will unite us, making us spiritually more evolved. The compassion shown to our fellow brothers never fails us.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gewali,  
(Member, International Human Rights Commission)  
Shillong  
Via email

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"It is not in the stars to hold our destiny  
but in ourselves."

— William Shakespeare

The Shillong Times

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**Enquiry reports not state secrets**

**THE** Right to Information Act, 2005 is supposed to bring transparency and accountability in a system that had reeked with opacity and people were left in the dark on how public funds were used. Before the RTI Act was passed, those running governments got away with large scale corruption, nepotism and all manner of wrongdoing. Officials refused to divulge information to the media and more so to members of the public and hid behind the Official Secrets Act. The attitude of civil servants before the RTI was "Its none of anyone's business how departments spent their budgets as there was no mechanism to check on whether public money was spent on the public good or if the money was diverted to private pockets.

After the RTI Act, several scams have surfaced when members of the public took it upon themselves to ask questions from respective departments when they sensed that there was wrongdoing in those departments. Very often of course the answers given, especially by Departments such as State Public Works Department (PWD) and Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) are intentionally made technical so that the public that gets the information cannot decipher the answers and will have to seek the help of technicians. Despite the RTI Act there is a general air of resistance to provide the public with information and we can only assume that this is because there is wrongdoing that needs to be hidden from the public eye. Transparency is one of the basic principles of good governance and citizens should be enabled to inspect public works and to question those in charge of construction of public utilities. In the Jal Jeevan Mission it has been found that implementation leaves a lot to be desired and people are yet to receive piped water into their homes as promised by the Prime Minister. So too several other road projects and public utilities are either incomplete or badly executed even while contractors have been paid and completion certificates issued by engineers. In a situation where most politicians are also contractors executing government projects there is a direct conflict of interest but this does not seem to matter in Meghalaya.

The RTI Act also speaks of voluntary disclosure by the government whenever public funds are involved but this is a far cry in Meghalaya. It is also a matter of grave public concern that retired police officials and bureaucrats are appointed as State Information Commissioners and LokAyukta despite it being made clear that the Lokayukta is usually a former High Court judge or Chief Justice of the High Court. The Lokayukta is an anti-corruption authority appointed to safeguard the interests of the public, and not of the government. Most importantly, it investigates allegations of corruption and mal-administration against public servants and is tasked with speedy redressal of public grievances. This has made both the offices of State Information Commissioner and Lokayukta infructuous.

The recent decision of the University Grants Commission (UGC) for engaging experts and professionals from various fields as professors of practice is indeed a welcome step. The objective, as per the draft, is "to develop courses and curriculum to meet the industry and societal needs and enable HEIs (higher education institutions) to work with industry experts on joint research projects and consultancy services which will be mutually beneficial".

The initiative is aimed at bringing in distinguished experts from various fields such as engineering, science, technology, entrepreneurship, commerce, social sciences, media, civil services,

4.0 implementation, changes are imperative in the sphere of upgrading quality.

This could begin at the curriculum level. The curriculum requires the right mix of technical knowledge, social sciences, ethics, leadership skills, design elements and it also needs to be tightly integrated with out-of-class learning. But this curriculum has to reach all universities throughout the country with an eye on those located in the backward districts of the country.

The National Education Policy has come out with some innovative ideas such as permitting undergraduate stu-

more expensive and obviously beyond the means of socially and economically deprived sections. This also implies that quality education that the rich and middle class can afford will not be available to the lower echelons of society.

As is happening presently, the privileged section has been acquiring education that will enable them to fill executive and official positions, while others excluded from such education will be given skills and will join the vast segment of the workforce among whom limited number of available is rationed out. The globalisation of capital

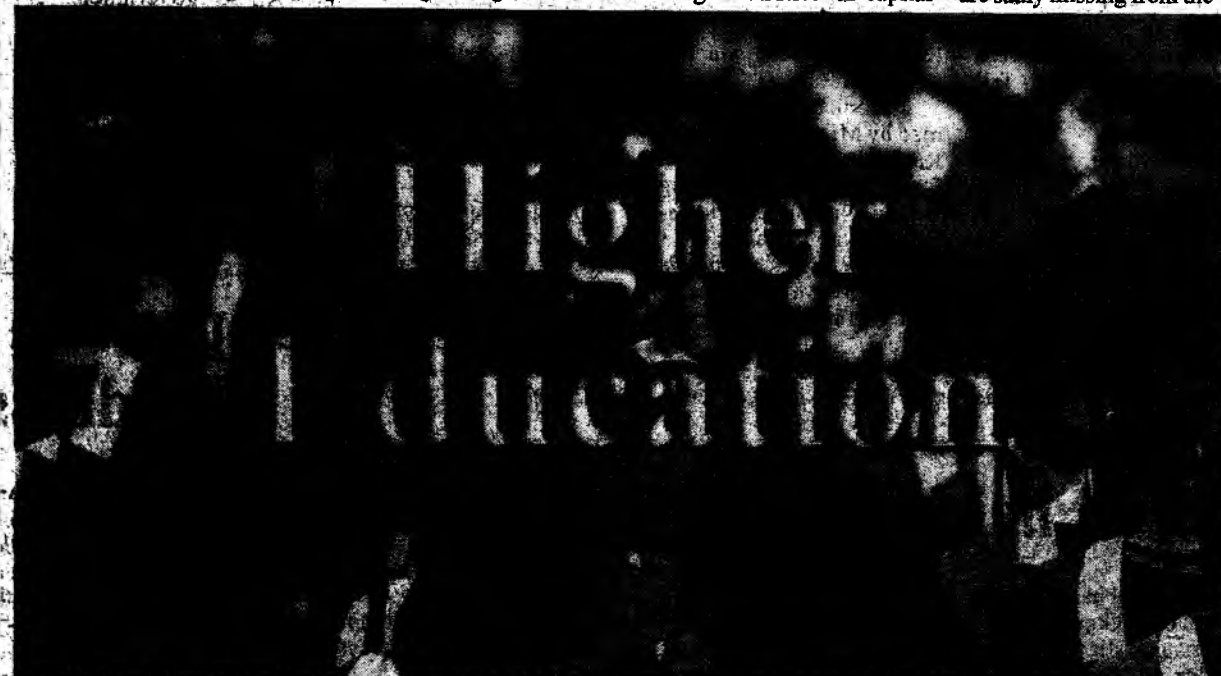
and each institution has to be allowed to develop in its own way. This means they should be allowed to devise variations from the standard curriculum, keeping in view local needs and requirements.

The growth of the university depends to a large extent on the quality of education imparted for which the faculty has to be of a high order and sincere with their students. Involvement of teachers with students is very much necessary to ensure that each one of them — not just those who are meritorious — get the right education and have no difficulty in understanding. In this connection, dedication and sincerity are key words which are sadly missing from the vo-

Professors Of Practice

Upgrading higher education?

By Dr Oishee Mukherjee



public administration, trained faculty, and involve them in developing and designing courses, delivering lectures, mentoring students in innovation and entrepreneurship, focusing on industry-academia collaboration, carrying out joint research projects and holding seminars in collaboration with regular faculty members.

The biggest challenge before higher education today is to impart skills that are relevant to needs of industry, farm sector and the like. The obvious idea is to make students not just aware of the social and economic realities but make them ready to take up assignments. But there is also the need to impart quality education, which unfortunately is confined to few higher education institutions.

Delving into statistics, there has been growth from about 20 universities in 1950, to about 1040 universities at present. Only around 135 of these institutions are regarded as Institutions of National Importance (INI). Close to 79 million students are currently enrolled in the academic institutions with India's gross enrolment ratio (GER) standing at a little over 27 per cent. For Education

decide to take courses across all disciplines, launch of four year undergraduate degree course, incorporating vocational education in college curriculum and autonomy to leading colleges. Meanwhile, very few colleges have so far been granted autonomy and the process definitely needs to be expedited. Added to this, there is a specific and important suggestion of creation of a National Research Foundation

However, the basic problem is the setting up of more colleges in rural and backward areas of the country but experts are not talking about this. There are suggestions of amalgamating tiny colleges into one big institution without considering how students would reach that institution every day. Though the focus is on modernising education, which undoubtedly is very important at this juncture, there is equally a need to make available education for all sections of society.

A section of experts believe that the latest NEP visualises education that is in perfect sync with the politics of the corporate Hindutva alliance that currently rules India. The policy believes in privatisation of education, which will clearly make it

characteristic of neoliberal capitalism also created a global market that requires, in turn, a homogeneous education, across countries. This detached education, say in India, completely from its Indian setting. Thus, a student of economics in the country cannot simply understand the Indian economy without reckoning with the legacy of colonialism.

The present endeavour to make education more professionalised by laying stress on the vocational angle and imparting skill education is possibly something which should have been taken up years ago. The emphasis on curriculum development has to be given special attention by making education not pedagogic but tuned to the necessities of industry and society. This indeed is a big challenge and the sooner this transformation comes the better it is.

However, the autonomy of these higher education institutions have to be guaranteed which is a vital need at this juncture. Politicians, both at the Centre and in the States, want to have a say in universities and colleges as they want to use students for their political activities. This cannot be allowed to continue

cabulary of most teachers.

The trend towards privatisation of education, which will clearly make it more expensive and obviously beyond the means of socially and economically deprived sections, needs to be seriously considered and proper steps brought in place regarding fee structure. A committee may be set up to ensure that meritorious students from the poorer sections get benefits to study in private universities.

Finally, while institutions should be encouraged and allowed to grow with proper impetus and support coming from the government, in the long run, universities in backward areas should not fall behind as this would imply that quality education would be available only to the rich and middle class, as is happening now. It would be distressing if only the privileged section acquire education that will enable them to fill executive and official positions while others excluded from such education will join the vast segment of the workforce among whom a limited number of available jobs is rationed out. In fact, the leadership must educate itself as empowering the young generation is the need of the hour. —INFA

Modi govt applying rules for bureaucracy to suit its convenience

By Sushil Kutty

Bilkis Bano's 11 rapists were given the benefit of remission, their horrible crimes set aside like so many cookies in the jar. Now, they are back to roaming the streets. And we also have a second case of remission, this one for an IAS officer who had once been detained under the Public Safety Act after being prevented from fleeing the country on a private mission to allegedly defame India from the launching pad of a perceived enemy country.

Both these remission cases fly in the face of the much vaunted rule of law. They also confirm that the law applies differently for different people in India, and that the law can be applied differently by prime ministers and home ministers if they wanted to, or were inclined to.

The two remission cases have put a question mark on the premise that India is governed by rule of law. The 11 gang-rapists of Bilkis Bano were bumped off the convicts' list for all the reasons, "good behaviour". Eleven rogues together and at the same time, give or take a few hours, were declared the best products of the correctional system.

In the remission case

reasons best known, Shah Faesal was detained under PSA; for reasons best known, no FIR or case was filed against him. It helped that not just Shah Faesal, a bunch of other "troublesome" Kashmiris were also detained and placed under house arrest.

Was Shah Faesal ever presented in court? Nothing of the sort was reported. Then, all of a sudden, Shah Faesal started retweeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tweets. Then, to no one's surprise, Shah Faesal was back in the IAS, and word broke that his resignation had never been accepted!

Apparently, Shah Faesal is an exceptional officer, worth his weight in gold. Home Minister Amit Shah, whose abrogation of Article 370 was at the root of Shah Faesal's rebellion, was also at the root of his reinstatement, all his crimes forgotten, the rules of service and reappointment be damned.

A similarly placed, and similarly accused IAS, from any other state would not have got the remission that Shah Faesal got. Shah Faesal walked away without breaking the correctional system. In the remission case

The two remission cases have put a question mark on the premise that India is governed by rule of law. The 11 gang-rapists of Bilkis Bano were bumped off the convicts' list for all the reasons, "good behaviour". Eleven rogues together and at the same time, give or take a few hours, were declared the best products of the correctional system.

of Kashmiri IAS officer, Shah Faesal, there was no correctional facility involved. The man had left the IAS voluntarily. Faesal had made headlines when he topped the Indian Civil Services examination, the first Kashmiri to do so. For Modi, Shah Faesal was a trophy, a symbol of "Modi, wasn't, after all, anti-Muslim".

Ever since then, the Modi government had been broadcasting the rising number of Muslim IAS/IPS serving India in the Modi regime. But Shah Faesal pricked that balloon. He rebelled against the abrogation of Article 370. He resigned from the IAS, parting with damning words for the Modi regime.

Shah Faesal also formed a political outfit with people

at Patel's "steel frame of India" has developed cracks, and has rusted under the combined weight of Home Minister Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Without doubt and quite clearly to every citizen of India, Shah Faesal, rightly or wrongly, had resigned from the civil services. And the government of India, for subsequent actions, had acted rightly with the laws of the land. Filing PSA on anybody is not done for play. The Government of India is not a game of Lego for Modi and Shah to play "PM-PM-HM-HM" with.

More importantly, why in the first place was Shah Faesal detained under PSA and for what crimes? Shah's reinstatement in the IAS was a calculated move. For reasons best known, Shah Faesal was detained under PSA; for reasons best known, no FIR or case was filed against him.

of the same bent of mind. He let it be known that "India was behind all the troubles of the Kashmiri Muslim". JNU's firebrand Shehla Rashid stood in solidarity with Faesal. Shah Faesal was detained at the Delhi airport, apparently trying to flee India to Turkey.

Faesal was taken to Srinagar and detained under the Public Safety Act. One would have thought that was it, curtains for Shah Faesal. It wasn't. Earlier this year, he was back in the IAS. And on August 31, he was appointed a deputy secretary in the Union Ministry of Culture. Is Shah Faesal no longer a danger to public safety?

More importantly, why in the first place was Shah Faesal detained under PSA and for what crimes? Shah's reinstatement in the IAS was a calculated move. For

return and join, like it used to be in the courts of ancient kings, and in the durbars of medieval sultans. The Indian bureaucracy is no wayward king's harem. There are rules and regulations written on stone, and the roles of everybody are well-defined.

But, from whatever that could be made of, Shah Faesal played by the rules, he resigned. Nothing about the remission given to Faesal is transparent. The Modi government helped Shah Faesal break every rule in the book to make a comeback. Nobody is above the law and the rule of law is not just about controlling crowds belching out of a place of worship once a week. If Prime Ministers and Home Ministers cannot uphold rule of law, they should head for the door. (IPA Service)

G.O.A.T

Editor,

G.O.A.T or Greatest of All Time is the tag that millions of football fans across the globe associate with the likes of Ronaldo and Messi for their stupendous performance over all others in the game of football. Looking at the state of affairs in Meghalaya and if the ruling dispensation doesn't take corrective actions to right the wrongs, the acronym G.O.A.T will one day be called the Greatest of All Thieves. The plethora of alleged scams occurring in this small state is beyond comprehension. To name a few of these starting with the illegal smuggling of coal, the power sector scams, rice scam, illegal-mushrooming of coke plants, the assembly dome collapse and the latest one is the alleged police department scandal, one is truly scandalized. Besides these there are also so many unfulfilled promises in the road sector missing the deadlines, the agitators taking to the street on many occa-

sions with regards to salary and many more other issues which if mentioned may take up the whole space of letters to the editor.

The issues in the state are serious symptoms of incompetence fuelled by greed. All these wayward things cannot happen if there was a strong and disciplined executive. The value system of governance in the state is completely compromised and this system of governance must have originated from the top chair and trickled down the line. This is apparent from the lip service given by the incumbent CM in blatantly defending all his cabinet's fault in spite of prima facie evidence of corruption happening across all departments.

For instance, in his latest defence that illegal mining of coal in remote places are impossible to monitor is a weak defence, since the real problem is that illegal mining takes place only because there is illegal transportation. For any public related work, the first step crucial for success of the same is 'good

Intention for public good' but in the case of Meghalaya that is not the case but the antonym of the phrase. Now, it is for the public to learn this valuable lesson and to come out in full force to voting booths in the forthcoming election rather than make it a day of family picnics, fishing and other activities during that very important day and vote cautiously. If not and if we still choose the wrong representatives, we will spend the next 5 years of Deja-vu at our workplaces and social spaces criticising the government like what has happened in the last 5 years. At the same time we will be responsible for the birth of our local G.O.A.T or "Greatest of All Thieves" for generations to come.

Yours etc.,  
Deity Majaw,  
Via email

Laitumkhrab Dorbar controversy

Editor,  
It was very disturbing to

read the article, "Action of Hima Mylliem towards Laitumkhrab Dorbar arbitrary" by Wankitbok Pohshna (ST Sep 1, 2022). On careful reading of the article, it appears arbitrary and not in the interest of justice that one Rangbah Shnong out of three whose sanad (term of office) has ended should be appointed Acting Rangbah Shnong to conduct the next election to the Laitumkhrab Dorbar Shnong. Laitumkhrab as a Shnong has been the example for many in the way the local governance system has functioned. Everything is going on well so it's difficult to understand why a group of young people would disrupt a Dorbar meeting and use foul language at that. This seems to be the norm today — if you cannot win an argument in the civil manner then use foul language. This is also a sign of how the Khasi etiquette is abandoned by the present generation. Perhaps the young don't even know what the Khasi etiquette (Ki Jingsneng Tymmen) is all about. I hope those are still taught in school.

By the look of things it appears that the very foundation of the Khasi traditional institution is now on a slippery slope. The Acting Syiem of Mylliem seems to be influenced by one of the Rangbah Shnong and is allowing him to dictate terms. In this case when the Acting Syiem of Mylliem and the Dorbar Shnong are in conflict and the Syiem seems to have lost the confidence of the people then the District Council which is the appointing authority of all the Syiems should step in and set things right. This is not a matter that should be left unattended. What happens if the two Rangbah Shnong approach the civil courts against the third Rangbah Shnong and the Acting Syiem of Mylliem? This will have far reaching consequences and will chip away at the Khasi indigenous cultural institution — the Dorbar Shnong.

This also brings into question the deficiencies of the Autonomous District Councils which have not yet framed laws on how

the Dorbar Shnongs are to function. Without any laws and principles how can the Dorbar Shnong continue to be guided by a Sanad from the Syiems whose functions have not been defined in the Sixth Schedule. These are gaps that should have been addressed but we are also infamous about addressing anything until things spin out of control. The result is now before us and it exposes the Khasi traditional governing system which has not evolved with the changing times, including that of not allowing women to hold office in the Dorbar Shnong. Time has come to set things in order. But who will do this? There are too many parallel authorities that all want power but don't understand that real power belongs to the people.

Yours etc.,  
AN Thangkiew,  
Via email

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# A sneak peek at *Lord of the Rings: Rings of Power*

For a newcomer to the wonderful world of Middle-earth, the universe created by the British author and academic JRR Tolkien can seem as large and unwieldy as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (currently in Phase Four with more still to come). And, there is a new addition as Amazon's *Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (rolls off the tongue, doesn't it?) hits screens.

The series comes eight years after the concluding film of *The Hobbit* and 19 years after the last *Lord of the Rings* film. So if you want to watch the series and keep up with inevitable social media debates, here is a guide to this sprawling world to initiate newcomers to Tolkien's Middle-earth.

## A quick catch-up

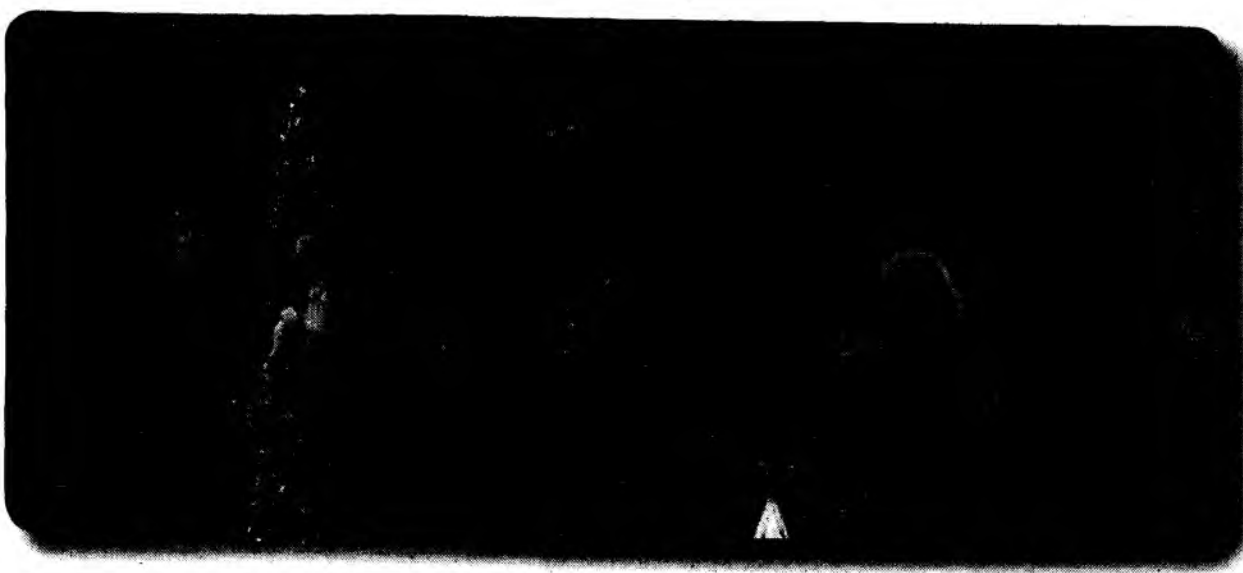
*The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (published between July 1954 and October 1955) were Tolkien's most successful and famous novels.

*The Hobbit* follows the adventures of the eponymous creature (short of stature, hairy feet), Bilbo Baggins, on a quest with a party of dwarves to reclaim lost treasure. Along the way, he finds a ring that gives him the power of invisibility.

*The Lord of the Rings* picks up the story many years later as Bilbo's ring is revealed to be the One Ring, forged by the evil dark lord Sauron as a source of power. Bilbo's nephew Frodo embarks on a dangerous journey to destroy the ring and save Middle-earth. He is aided by his gardener Sam Gamgee as well as representatives of the other chief races of Middle-earth: two further hobbits, the dwarf Gimli, elf Legolas and two human men, Boromir and Aragorn.

Tolkien served during the first world war and his experiences on the battle-field shape the numerous conflicts depicted in the stories as well as the various forms of heroism that are displayed. In Tolkien's world, moral courage is just as important, if not more so, than physical prowess for the enduring heroes of Middle-earth.

The close bonds between serving soldiers also inform the interpersonal relationships that are central to *The Lord of the Rings* – it is evident in the devotion between the hobbits Frodo and Sam and the enemies-to-friends narrative of Gimli and



Legolas.

## What is Middle-earth?

Middle-earth is the fictional setting for Tolkien's invented mythology, which made its debut in *The Hobbit*. However, the term Middle-earth was not used in that book – that came later with *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien was a professor of English literature and an expert in language, especially in written and oral histories. His mythology for Middle-earth is filled with poems, songs and oral history traditions that help to build the world of different cultures and races (hobbits, elves, dwarves, men) that inhabit his universe. Norse mythology, Anglo-Saxon epic poems, fairy tales and the Finnish mythic poem the *Kalevala* are all influences on the stories, characters and languages found in Tolkien's work.

Although *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are the best known

stories, they're not the complete history of Middle-earth. *The Silmarillion* (1977), which was published after Tolkien's death and edited by his son Christopher and the fantasy writer Guy Gavriel Kay, outlines the thousands of years of history of Middle-earth.

The book charts the creation of Arda, where the continent of Middle-earth is located, and covers the First and Second Ages of the world (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* take place in the Third Age). Arda starts as a flat disc and evolves into something more recognisably planet-like over the course of cataclysmic events during repeated battles between forces of good and evil. Further events and characters that shape Arda and Middle-earth feature in *Unfinished Tales* (1980).

However, as Amazon has only acquired the rights for *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, none of the stories from either *Unfinished Tales* or *The Silmarillion* will feature

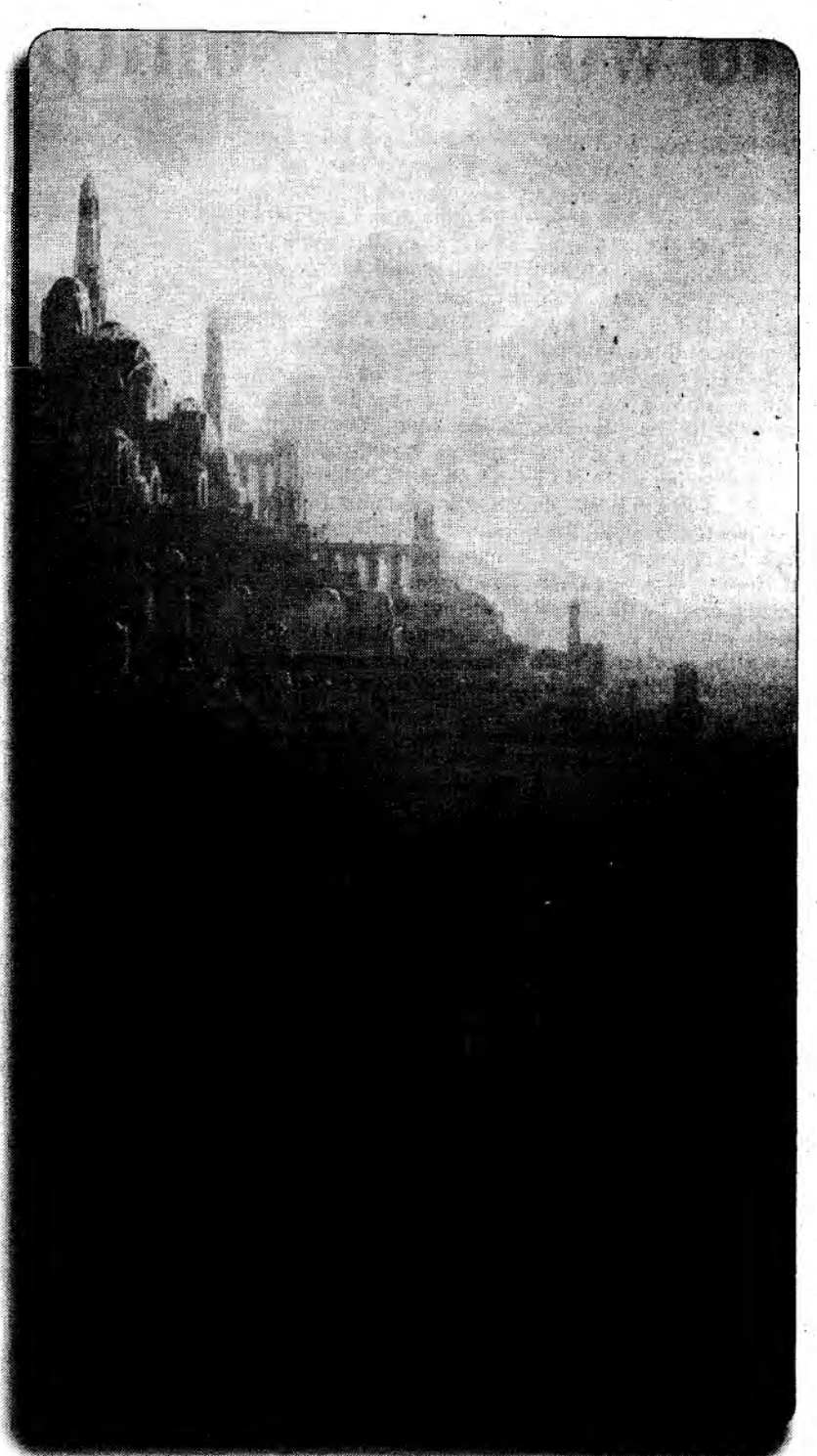
in the new series. The extensive appendices to *The Lord of the Rings* are the source of the material for the new show.

## Familiar names

Set in the Second Age of Middle-earth, *The Rings of Power* takes place thousands of years before either *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings* so there will be few recognisable characters. Sauron, who appeared in *The Lord of the Rings* as a flaming red eye, is still the big bad.

The creator of the corrupting rings of power and of the infamous One Ring that controls the others, Sauron may not be front-and-centre as an antagonist but his actions and desire for control of Middle-earth will drive much of the action.

The other two familiar names are the elves Galadriel and Elrond, here much younger than they appeared in the films. Galadriel is established as a warrior – which is true to her his-



tory as Tolkien wrote it – and there is a lot of scope in the series to see how she develops into the wise ruler of the elven realm Lothlorien.

Elrond Half-elven, the ruler of the enclave of Rivendell, is shown as more optimistic than in *The Lord of the Rings* and with closer links to the human kingdom of Númenor, whose rulers are descended from his twin brother, Elros.

As the brothers were half-elven, they could choose which of their kindred they would identify as. Elros lived as a mortal and eventually

aged and died. Elrond chose to live as an immortal elf and the emotional toll of those decisions will be explored in his story arc.

Fans might be concerned that Tolkien might have disliked some of the liberties taken with his works. While his estate is known to be protective (and litigious) over the original works, Tolkien stated that he wanted other hands to add to his universe. In light of that, he would probably have been delighted to see his creation still so beloved and still expanding. (*The Conversation*)

## Why is Netflix's Marilyn Monroe biopic, *Blonde*, rated NC-17?



By Kevin Sandler

The NC-17 rating has historically been a film certification that's bad for business due to its adults-only label and pornographic stigma. Yet Netflix's Marilyn Monroe biopic, *Blonde*, will carry the rating – a first for the company. On September 28, 2022, it will debut on its streaming platform, following a Venice Film Festival premiere. Based on Joyce Carol Oates' 2000 book and starring Ana de Armas, the film reportedly includes a graphic rape scene and a vaginal point-of-view shot in its treatment of the Hollywood icon's life and career. I study the rating system and am the author of *The Naked Truth: Why Hollywood Doesn't Make X-Rated Movies*. Movies carrying the NC-17 rating were often dif-

ficult to screen and promote, as they were locked out of some movie theatre chains and traditional advertising. The critically acclaimed, sexually graphic *Blue is the Warmest Color* in 2013 was the last serious film released with the rating. Despite making over \$2.2 million on 142 screens, its relative success as an NC-17 film didn't fuel the production of any more movies like it.

So why would Netflix resurrect a rarely used, contentious, and restrictive NC-17 for *Blonde*? Netflix's 2020 film *Cuties*, which caused a PR crisis over the perceived hyper-sexualisation of young girls, now has a "TV-MA" rating on the streaming service. Why wouldn't the company simply use the same rating for *Blonde*?

## From 'X' to 'NC-17'

The NC-17 is one of five ratings – the others are G, PG, PG-13 and R – that the Classification and Rating

Administration, a division of the Motion Picture Association, assigns to films submitted for certification.

NC-17 means "No one 17 and under admitted." This classification prevents children from purchasing a ticket or entering a theatre, even if accompanied by an adult. It replaced the X rating in 1990, which had been the adults-only marker since Motion Picture Association of America President Jack Valenti created the rating system in 1968.

However, Valenti's failure to copyright the X made it possible for any film to carry the adults-only rating without its distributor having to officially pay the Classification and Rating Administration for certification. This allowed filmmakers to slap it on pornographic films like *Deep Throat* to attract viewers and to gain access to the legitimate marketplace.

While the X rating could be also assigned for representations of nudity, violence, language, drug use or overall "tone," this association with hardcore sexual content stigmatized the category's use by serious filmmakers for years.

Valenti hoped renaming the X rating as NC-17 would spur the adults-only rating's use by the film industry. For the most part, it didn't, with a few notable exceptions like *Showgirls* (1995), *Bad Education* (2004) and *Shame* (2011).

Instead, practically all distributors whose films were initially awarded an NC-17 by the Classification and Rating Administration chose one of three options: to re-edit their films down to an R rating, to release an R-rated and unrated version for home video or DVD, or simply to surrender the rating altogether and release the film theatrically without one.

It was commonly believed that an unrated film would encounter fewer barriers to exhibition in the US marketplace than an NC-17 one.

## An eye toward awards season

Netflix, though, is not a movie theatre. It is a streaming service that requires no admittance in the traditional sense, has no employees patrolling its screenings for underage viewers, and shifts the responsibility of denying access to its content to subscribers themselves. Netflix offers parental controls so users can restrict access to certain content for each profile in their accounts.

Significantly, many Netflix films with mature content carry a "TV-MA" rating. The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board developed the designation, meaning "For mature audiences. May not be suitable for ages 17 and under." It's recognizable to viewers of television series like AMC's *Better Call Saul*, FX's *American Horror Story* or even Netflix's *Ozark*.

So why wouldn't Netflix apply a maturity rating from television to *Blonde*?

The answer is simple: Netflix likely sees the film as an Oscar contender.

Per the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' rules, to qualify for the Academy Awards, *Blonde* must have a theatrical run, even if that run is extremely short. In 2019, Netflix joined the Motion Picture Association – the first and only streaming service to do so. So if it decides to release its films theatrically, Netflix must do so with a rating, just like the legacy member companies: Disney, Paramount, Sony, Universal and Warner Bros.

With its TV-MA-rated *Ibiza: Love Drunk, Cuties* and *365 Days*, Netflix never carried a Motion Picture Association rating because these films bypassed theatrical exhibition altogether in the United States.

## Making the media rounds

Netflix undoubtedly is also using the NC-17 for

*Blonde* as a marketing ploy – what film scholar Justin Wyatt has called "marketing controversy," a technique used in the past to sell films that received an X or NC-17.

Netflix has remained mum on the subject. Instead, *Blonde* director Andrew Dominik and star de Armas have dropped hints to the media about the film's provocative and sensationalist aspects, while, at the same time, expressing incredulity at the film's NC-17 rating.

"I was surprised," Dominik told *Vulture*. "I thought we'd coloured inside the lines."

De Armas said largely the same in an interview for French fashion magazine *L'Officiel*. "I didn't understand why [the rating] happened."

Nearly in the same proverbial breath, both director and star have also teased the salaciousness of the subject matter.

"It's an NC-17 movie about Marilyn Monroe, it's kind of what you want, right?" Dominik told *Screen Daily*. "I want to go and see the NC-17 version of the Marilyn Monroe story."

De Armas, meanwhile, supports Dominik's unfiltered look at Monroe's life, declaring it "the most daring, unapologetic, and feminist take on her story that I had ever seen."

## 'A little steam to keep the stream'

I wonder, though: Is *Blonde*'s NC-17 really much of a selling point, given what viewers are regularly exposed to in their living rooms?

In a streaming landscape littered with sexually explicit TV-MA television series like HBO's *Euphoria* and *House of the Dragon*, Hulu's *Minx* and *Pam & Tommy* and even Netflix's own *Sex/Life* and *How to Build a Sex Room*, it shouldn't be.

Dominik indirectly, but perhaps correctly, undercut his own film's luridness, telling *Screen Daily*, "If I look at an episode of *Euphoria*, it's far more graphic than anything going on in *Blonde*."

De Armas echoed the same talking points later in her *L'Officiel* interview: "I can tell you a number of shows or movies that are way more explicit with a lot more sexual content than *Blonde*."

This new wave of sexually frank and progressive series, according to *Variety* television writer Joe Otterson, may be one strategy that streaming companies are using to keep subscribers enthralled in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

"It might take a little steam to keep the stream," Otterson writes.

*Blonde* – NC-17, TV-MA or unrated – is just another provocative addition to this pot.

(Kevin Sandler is an author and an Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies, at Arizona State University)

# Incredible natural rock formations in Al-'Ula

The city of Al-'Ula, which is located in the northwest of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is a location of remarkable natural beauty and rich history. For thousands of years, it has been home to a vast variety of flora, wildlife, and human populations. Al-'Ula's geology, environment, and climate have allowed human communities to grow here. It is centred around its renowned oasis and is surrounded by sandstone mountains.

Because three different geological ages are concentrated in one area, Al-'Ula has a special and spectacular landscape.

The Precambrian Arabian shield rocks, which are identified by various strata of sedimentary rock, were the first geologic age that resulted in the formation of the rocks. These rock strata, which have been deposited over millions of years, provide a permanent record of Earth's past, including the fossilised remains of plants and animals that were buried when the sediments were created.

Second, the area's underlying sandstone was created during the Cambrian period over 485 million years ago, and tectonic activity has helped further shape its dramatic geology, creating volcanic landscapes, basalt plateaus and sandstone massifs. These geological features enable the area to act as a water catchment basin with an area of nearly 700 square kilometres, allowing the valley to flow southwards towards its settlements. Trilobite trace fossils discovered in its sandstone date to at least 252 million years ago and provide evidence of some of the earliest life in the area. The soft and porous rock, perfect for carving, also acts as an aquifer that can store the vital fresh water resources required to sustain life in an arid environment.

Following that was the black basalt layer formed by volcanic eruptions creates the dramatic plateaus called the Harrat.

The desert of Al-'Ula is famous for its several geological rock formations, formed over millions of

years by the hands of the best sculptors, the wind and the water, to form natural shapes untouched by human hands, and to become exceptional natural shapes that are unseen except in this vast natural desert. With the contrasts of these colours and the lush green oasis running through the middle, it makes it like no other place on earth.

Here are the nine most incredible natural rock formations:

## Elephant Rock

The Elephant Rock is one of the world's most popular rocks and the highlight of the region. Looking at it from afar, this rock seems like an elephant with a ground-bound trunk. The Elephant Rock is also known as Jabal-AlFil in the Arabic language. Standing at a height of 52 meters, the giant rock climbs three stories into the Arabian sky.

This mammoth stands out among the other hand-carved, ornate structures of nearby Hegra's Nabataean tombs as it was shaped by natural forces. The trunk and body of this red sandstone beast were shaped through water and wind erosion that was caused over millions of years.

The huge elephant stands in a landscape of golden sands, surrounded by other rocky formations which are equally impressive in size. Regardless, the Elephant Rock still overshadows all that falls in its sight and acts as a reminder of the sands of time. The beauty of this mighty elephant increases at nightfall where it becomes more lifelike in the warm lights that have been installed at the site. Visiting the rock at night is advantageous to avoid the hot weather

during the summer day.

## The Mushroom Rock

You can find several Mushroom-shaped rocks in the desert. The most famous is located in Sharaan Nature Reserve.

Mushroom rocks are a wonderful natural phenomenon usually formed as a result of the erosion of sedimen-

gone viral on social media through a photo taken by the photographer Khaled AlEnazi, as he spotted a rock in the form of a fish in the desert sands and transformed through millions of years ago into one of the most important ancient archaeological inscriptions and strange rock formations that marks the lands of the region.

worth the 90-minute drive from the centre of the city.

Its bridge-shaped structure, which resembles a rainbow flanked by two clouds, is a rare sight indeed. Enthralled by this sprawling display of sandstone, don't miss spotting semi-precious desert diamonds on-site. You can eye these multi-coloured pieces of quartz embedded in the rock itself and scattered on the surrounding ground.

The Arch Rock hosted Symphony Under the Stars back in March 2022 as part of Al-'Ula Skies Festival events, which was dedicated to the spectacular starry night of the desert of Al-'Ula. Under the backlit Arch Rock, Italian pianist Dardust led a magnificent Symphony Under the Stars in a show like no other. This modern take on classical music had the audience on their feet for a spectacular performance.

## The Dancing Rocks

The Dancing Rocks are so-called because these formations are sculpted by nature to appear as if they are swaying in unison. Located in the Raggasat Valley, the rocks seem to dance together, slightly removed from the surrounding rock formations. This place is famous for hiking activities and dune buggies experience. Reach Dancing Rocks in 45 minutes from the city centre, while hiring a four-wheel-drive vehicle with an experienced driver is recommended.

## Gharameel Desert

About an hour outside of the city centre, discover dark, thin pillars of stone stretching up to the sky. This is Gharameel. You'll need to go

off-road to reach the site, so we recommend hiring a four-wheel-drive vehicle with an experienced driver. Your reward is a view unlike any other, made even more dramatic at night when its dark skies showcase a brilliant display of stars above the rocks. Stargazing packages welcome you to gaze at Gharameel's stone pillars and follow their spires upward toward the twinkling stars.

## Volcanoes

At the remote desert areas, find stark, black volcanic rock and inactive volcanoes which stand atop sandstone and are surrounded by seas of golden sand to make for truly dramatic, other-worldly sights. Some of those areas are visitor friendly with guides to experience the hiking around the top of a volcano.

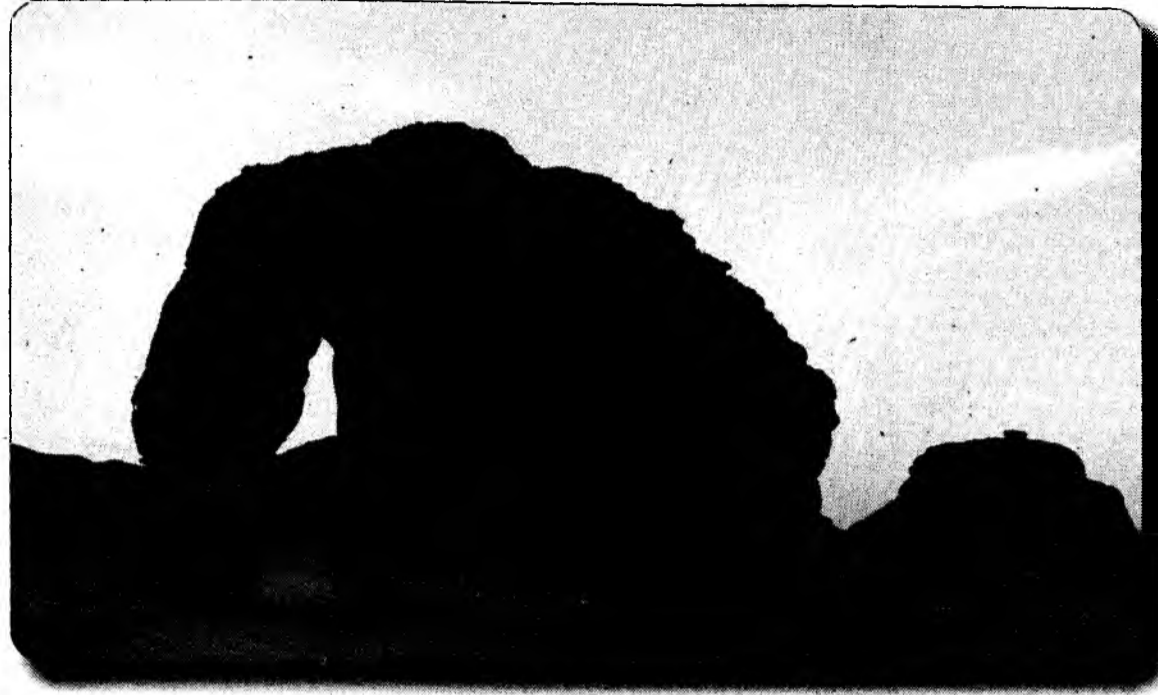
Khaybar, the neighbouring Oasis in the south of Al-'Ula is well known for its two famous: The White Volcano and the Black Volcano.

## Lava Domes and Flows

The earliest human activity is evidenced in Al-'Ula in Harrat Uwayrid and elsewhere in northwestern Saudi Arabia in Harrat Khaybar. These important volcanic areas comprise two of the largest in Saudi Arabia. Harrat Khaybar includes a spectacular 100-kilometre long vent system containing lava domes, tuff rings, basaltic cones and the Jabal Qidr stratovolcano.

The dramatic lava flows of volcanic events can be seen across the region. Harrat Khaybar has at least seven post-Neolithic (less than 4,500 years old) and eight historical (less than 1,500 years old) lava flows. The last eruption in the Harrat Uwayrid is believed to have occurred around 640 CE.

According to Bedouin legends, the explosion erupted fire and stones, killing herdsman and their animals. The best way to see these formation is by taking a helicopter tour to see the incredible formation from a panoramic sky view. (LANSlife)



tary layers over millions of years. The remaining part of these layers is exposed again to wind, resulting in the lower parts of the layer breaking down more quickly.

The Sharaan Nature Reserve itself consists of 1,500 square kilometres (579 square miles) of soaring red-rock canyons, sprawling desert and valleys carpeted in delicate wildflowers offer a treasure trove of natural wonders. The mission of Sharaan Nature Reserve is to restore, protect and conserve the sensitive ecosystem native to it. Efforts are currently underway to restore the area, allowing for its natural inhabitants to reclaim the land.

## The Fish Rock

This Desert Fish was recently

## The Face Rock

Amongst the monumental tombs of Hegra, next to Jabal AlAhmar (which means The Red Mountain due to the colour of its rocks), you will notice a formation that resembles the profile of a human head gazing out over the desert landscape. As with all of its rock formations, sunrise and sunset are prime times to visit, when the light plays on the sandstone, seeming to illuminate the rocks from within - a magical sight for observers and photographers alike.

## The Arch Rock

One of the most recognisable rock formations, The Arch (also known as Rainbow Rock) is well

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Aja Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 4, 2022

**Moon** settle Saturn in your solar return chart and it will give wonderful results. There will be livelihood opportunities to rise in your life. You will get job/business offers. You will also plan your career well. There are career opportunities eagerly waiting for you. Financially you will be stronger and on a solid footing. You will earn well. Your investments will yield excellent results. You will also get your struck money from somewhere. You will also plan to get married. Those who are in love relations for a long time will plan to get married. Peace and harmony will prevail at home. You will stay away from controversy. You will also get the chance to go for social gatherings, wedding or any other auspicious occasions. The time is good for achievements and you will get lots of acclaim. Students will perform well. **Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

There will be lot of activities this week on work front. You will achieve your goals. It will give you lot of mental peace and your tension will get reduced. You will be pre-occupied with your family. You will fulfill your duties and commitments towards them. Your continued support and guidance are required for their growth. You will also use your intelligence and capabilities for your development. The placement of Mars and Saturn will increase your courage and strength. You will get financial success. A matter which you wanted to remain under wraps could come out in the open. But it will not affect you much. Love mates will keep enjoying their days and time. They will understand each other's requirements quiet well. There will be gentleness in your marital relations. **Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

You will have a lot to cheer this week. You will enjoy marital bliss and enjoy bonding with your mate. You will be greatly influenced by some philosophy that can change your life for good. You need to be careful in financial dealings otherwise you may be victim of some fraud. Don't trust anyone blindly. You will have immense pressure at your workplace. You will also start doing such things that will increase the money flow. Wedding talks can go ahead for the unmarried. Love birds will enjoy a wonderful time. You will remain busy with your work. Someone in your family may add to your worries. You may need to sort out the matters. You will fulfill all the responsibilities to your elders. You will be busy in your job as well as family. **Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

There are possibility of some positive and pleasant events taking place. You may think a lot in the financial matters. The arguments between husband and wife will get resolved. You will take part actively in business activities. You will prefer to spend some time with your family. It will give lot of mental peace and calm. You will receive the blessings of your elders. You will fulfill your business and professional commitments. You will look after the demands of your children too. You will be energetic and enthusiastically carry out your job well. A meeting with an important person will open the doors of destiny for you. You will receive a good news related to progress in your job. **Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

It is a very favorable week. Your little bit of efforts put will help in speeding up of your struck tasks and which will get completed now. You will regain your confidence which will be reflected in your behavior, attitude and demeanour. Instead of waiting for opportunities to come to you, you will like to create opportunities on your own. You can get a job as a result of your efforts. A new business offer can also come to you all of a sudden. You need to cash on to it. You will enjoy wonderful love life. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. With your guidance the arguments with in the family will get resolved. Instead of listening to your heart voice, you will take decision using your mind and commonsense. You will be known for your wisdom and intelligence. **Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

The time will be pleasant. You will have money gains. You will get a chance to go to a business meeting or conference. You will have good interactions with people who matter. As a result of which new possibilities and opportunity will emerge out of it. You will have good understanding with your partner/spouse. There will be many happy occasions. You will also plan to go to a party or the movies. There will be more work on professional front. The results will be in your favor. You will take interest in yoga and spiritual activities. You will get success in your job/ profession. Money and wealth will keep coming. Hobbies will keep you busy. Regular income will be there. You will have no worries. **Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

You will be busy learning something new. You will be peaceful and positive too. You will also be able to dominate your competitors. In your business and earn good profit. Your hard work will get completed. You will come out of a legal problem. You will get victory in official matters. There will be new outlines of work in your business. You will also attend a marriage function and meet old friends. Your work load will increase

but you need to manage it. You can also visit your parent's home. Husband and wife will share perfect understanding. Family and children will not be neglected. You will have lot of courage and determination to complete your work. You may get out of a problem at your workplace that was bothering you for long. **Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)**

The beginning of the week will be pleasant for you. You will get a good news related to promotion in your job. Personal matters will be solved and it will come as a big relief for you. You need timely action in your work. You will share intimate bonding with your partner. Your love life will be lively and joyful. You will take your business to new heights. You will face no major hurdles. You will get good news from somewhere. You will respect your seniors and elders. They will also bless and support you. The days will be of respect and prestige. You will witness growth in your business. You will not take any risk in financial matters. Daily work speed will be normal. This is the time for self analysis and self realization. You will feel peaceful at heart. **Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

You will be working along with people. You will have gains in business and profession. You will also invest in share markets and get high returns. If you are trying for government/administrative job you will get success. Your dominance and power will grow. Your kind nature and soft talks will increase your standing and worth among people. The results of your work will be in your favor because of your wise and patient behavior. You will get success in love affairs. There is strong possibility of getting married. Do not take any risk in financial matters. Daily work speed will be normal. This is the time for self analysis and self realization. You will feel peaceful at heart. **Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)**

There will be success on financial front. You can go to a business meeting or conference. Your mood will be ok. You will do some research and innovation in your work. You will also spend some time with your family. You will take part in entertainment activities. You will try your best to take your business forward. The problems related to your work will get over. Your power will be increased as you fight problems. In job, you will touch new heights. Your seniors will be happy with your performance. You will like to go out of station with your family. At home you will have a good time with your family. Some guests are expected. **Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

The good relations you share with officers/seniors will be visible before everyone. You will complete your work in time. Financial condition will be normal. You will get full benefit of your hard work. Enemies won't be able to harm you. Students will have their results as they wished. The time will be spent in entertainment activities. The time will be beneficial. You will have profits in every work. You will be cheerful at home. Outside also your time will be spent in recreation. There will be thoughts of stability. Continuous hard work will give you success. The matters related to land, housing and other property will be solved quickly. You will do some work under pressure but finish it nicely. **Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

It will be a productive week. The work related to employment will gather speed. Your financial condition will keep getting better. You will work with lot of enthusiasm and energy. You will also get the results in the form of energy and respect. You will get promoted in your job. You could also get honored by some organization. You will be very happy on account of all this. You will also give time to your family and friends. You will look after your children's needs well. You will share amazing bonding with your mate. You will also clear some administrative / departmental exams. Your competitors will be jealous of your growth. Your friends and well wishers will keep motivating you. You can go on a business trip. You will carry out your work tasks and responsibilities. The proposal of buying or selling land will fill you with excitement. In the process, you will get good results. **Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

You will work very hard and result too will be great. You will not let your concentration waiver and not allow attention to get diverted from your objective. Lot of people and guests will come to visit you at home. The atmosphere at your home will be cheerful. Trivial matters won't bother you much. You will have gains in your business. There will be improved situations in work. You will be dedicated to your work, so that it will be finished in the right way. You will clear some competitive exams/ interview. Your hard work will pay off. Gradually, all the situations will be in your favor. You will mould yourself according to the changing atmosphere into some extent.

## Varsity hosts film fest on partition horrors

As part of a series of events being organised under Partition Horrors Remembrance Day, a two-day film festival has been organised by the Ministry of Culture and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts at the Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad.

Films based on the theme of 'Partition of India' are being screened in this Film Festival.

Chandraprakash Dwivedi renowned filmmaker, producer and screenwriter best known for his television epic "Chanakya" said that movies made on the subject of 'partition' evokes response but it should be a constant effort in that direction.

One of the films screened at the event was *Pinjar*, which was directed by him. He said through *Pinjar* he wanted to bring to the fore the issues which were faced by women during the partition. He further added, "History is the third eye of human civilization and we should be able to see through it to avoid any tragedy as 'partition' in the future."

Anurag Punetha, Media Controller of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts said "dozens of short

and documentary films based on Partition themes will be screened at the festival. Out of these, three best films were given three, two and one lakh rupees awards respectively. Also, consolation prizes given to some of the films. Apart from the documentary and short films included in the event, viewers also enjoyed Bollywood block buster movies *Pinjar* and *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*."

Under the series of programs on India's partition, the Union Ministry of Culture and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts have so far organized screenings in Delhi, Kolkata, and Hyderabad. They will also organize screening of films focused on Partition in Amritsar (September 4-5).

The partition of the country is one of the biggest human tragedies in the world.

Millions of people died in it, crores were rendered homeless. Last year, the Prime Minister had called for observing "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day" so that the pain of lakhs of families who suffered the brunt of partition should not be lost from our memories. (LANS)



## JK Rowling explains why she skipped Harry Potter reunion

JK Rowling has responded to why she was absent from the *Harry Potter* reunion, and the answer is pretty simple - she didn't feel like it.

During her appearance on Virgin Radio Saturday (Pacific Standard Time), the author explained why she wasn't featured in the *Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts*, which debuted on January 1 on HBO Max, reports *People* magazine.

"I was asked to be on that, and I decided I didn't want to do it," she told the host, Graham Norton, quoted by *People*, via a clip uploaded to YouTube. "I thought it was about the films more than the books, quite rightly. That was what the anniversary was about."

"No one said don't (do it)...I was asked to do it and I decided not to," she added.

According to *People*, elsewhere



pressing her concern about Salman Rushdie's stabbing incident.

"I try to behave online as I would like others to behave... I've never threatened anyone," she told Graham during the interview. "I certainly wouldn't want anyone to go to their houses or anything like that."

"Social media can be a lot of fun, and I do like the pub argument aspect of it. That can be a fun thing to do..." she continued. "I sort of have a love-hate relationship with it now. I can happily go for a few days without getting into a (virtual) pub brawl."

People states that Rowling came under fire in June 2020 when she appeared to support anti-transgender sentiments in a series of tweets.

Though she denied that her views on feminism are transphobic, she doubled down on her controversial standpoints in a lengthy essay shared on her website days later. (LANS)

*"Walking is the best possible exercise. Habituate yourself to walk very far."*

—Thomas Jefferson

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No.26 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2022

### Legacy of Gorbachev

MIKHAIL Gorbachev, finally laid to rest, was a great phenomenon. He had class and he changed the course of the world and its history through two epic steps, namely Perestroika and Glasnost — meaning, restructuring and openness. He sought to reform the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) with an open mindset but disintegration was the end result. Once a closed society, the former USSR opened up after seven decades and the steam was released full throttle. Notably, when Gorbachev took charge of the Soviet Union, it was already at a breaking point, its economy in shatters — the first demonstration that Communism as a political system undercut growth. Russia spent much of its economic resources on a military build-up against the United States in the Cold War era. The re-unification of the two Germanys — weak East under Communism and mighty West under Capitalism—in 1990 signalled the dawn of a new era of global cooperation and also a weakening of the Communist empire. A year later, Gorbachev midwifed the final and irrevocable disintegration of the Soviet Union, with the centre-piece Russia left alone.

Gorbachev as one who had worked for agrarian causes in the Communist Party had a deep understanding of the worsening rot within. As the youngest leader ever to lead the Communist party and then head the government, his sharp mind was set on effecting an epic overhaul and granting freedom of expression to a society to which it was anathema for long years. He had in him the grit and determination to change things. Change at that point in the USSR was inevitable. Ronald Reagan's Star War programme prompted the USSR to invest heavily in a matching air defence shield programme, which hit the already ailing economy hard. There were those who believed Reagan cunningly drove the USSR into this game of competition and finished it off.

Unlike China, the Russia of Gorbachev stood by socialism at its core. Vladimir Putin later dumped the ideology. In the final phase of the USSR, the economic crisis was so bad that shop shelves were empty and even bread production had sharply come down. The old guard in the party turned its ire on Gorbachev and staged a coup, after which the Moscow party chief Boris Yeltsin got people on to the streets and grabbed power. Russians were fed up of Gorbachev even as he grew tall on the world stage. They gave him no more than 6 percent vote when he stood for Presidency in 1996. Yet, in his departure, Gorbachev leaves behind a rich legacy. The world breathed easy after the Cold War ended.

# Reflection on Teacher's Day

By Dr John Parankimalil, SDB

I grew up with an old saying, 'Good buildings don't make good schools, good teachers do.' But today, on the contrary, opulent buildings, sprawling campuses, air-conditioned classrooms, swimming pools, horse-riding, smartly dressed students and teachers, and sky-high fees have become the status symbol of schools.

September 5th is celebrated as Teacher's Day every year but it does not hold the value it once did. Education has become a business.

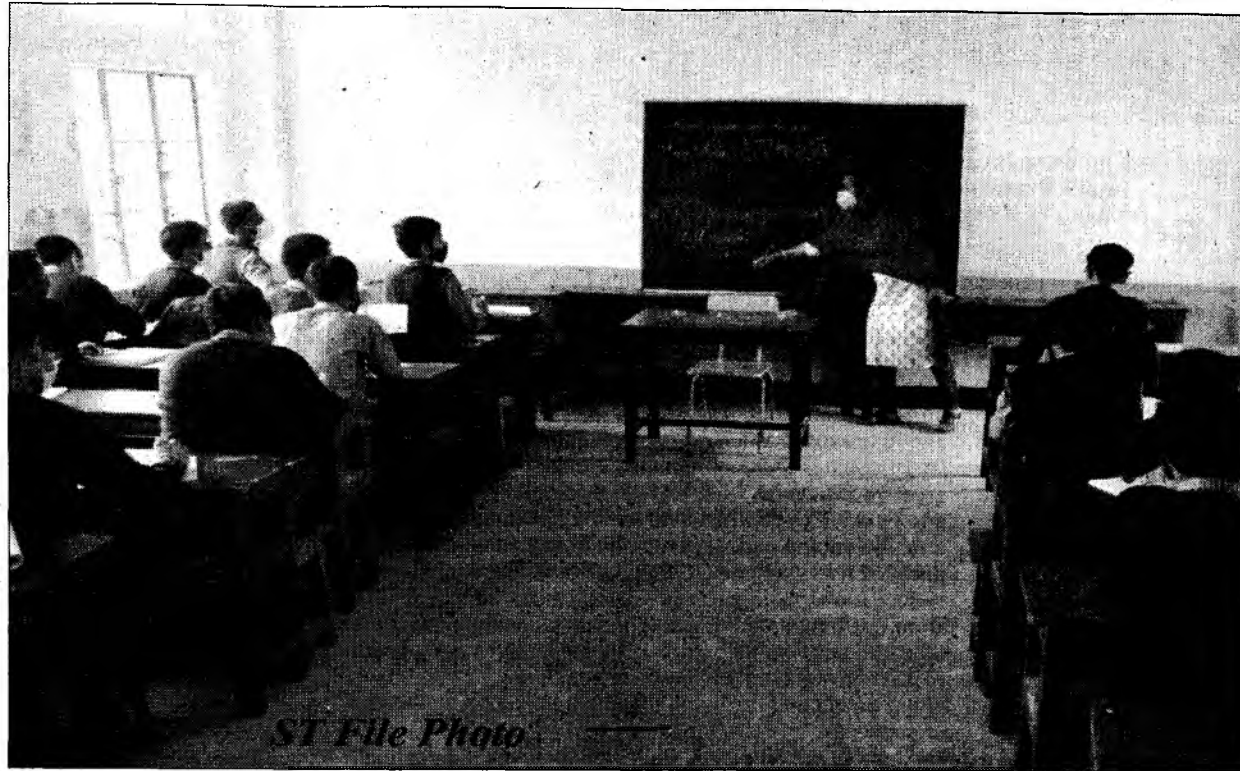
interaction with the teacher is limited to the screen and the course. All they talk about is smart learning and tricks for cracking an exam. The skills that the teachers impart are also limited., like, how to solve a math problem, how to complete a paper on time, which topic to focus on, which topics to avoid, how to revise at the last moment, and how to score the best marks etc.

ally trained, morally upright, service-minded and socially committed.

At a time when frightening reports about youngsters turning into criminals have become the order of the day, one is forced to ask what is wrong with their upbringing. When chilling news is emanating day after day of children turning to drugs, sex, kidnapping and murder, one has to take a relook at

on academic excellence in a competitive world. But on an equal measure, it is their duty to help their students become good human beings who are assets to the society at large. This has become crucial in today's India where communal disharmony, religious animosity, ethnic divide and regional imbalances are rapidly raising their heads. Teachers can also help students not to fall into the trap of drugs and related issues, through their role as mentors and guides.

Education used to be a



ST File Photo

Education is a commodity on sale. Teaching has become a transaction. Teaching has become profit-oriented. The teachers are becoming increasingly disconnected from their students. The disconnect is growing with the advent of online learning. Today, there are so many companies selling education.

BYJU'S is one such company founded by a teacher in 2011. It has over 115 million registered students. What are they basically teaching the students? Nothing but exam related learning. Children as young as 6 are taught tricks to boost their test scores and its subsidiary WhiteHat Jr is teaching coding to 6 year olds.

Teachers are selling shortcuts to succeed and parents are registering their kids in advance for an online course. A child is being reduced to a "Login ID". He/she is learning behind a screen. His/her

There is no scope for any emotional bond, let alone intellectual or spiritual bond. There is no scope for an impact. In fact, teachers are leveraging this obsession with grades, and contributing to the toxic competition. They are failing to give enough attention in the class room, and selling the unhealthy practice of private tuitions. Most of the same teachers are also offering coaching at home.

In the midst of such a mad race for elitism and academic brilliance, the soul of education gets drained out. The making of a complete human being endowed with human values, along with academic excellence, and much needed skills have become the biggest casualty of modern education. The syllabus-focused education has almost fallen by the wayside which was earlier one of the noble purposes of school education: making of a person intellectu-

ally trained, morally upright, service-minded and socially committed. But, in today's world, it has become a mere profession, verging on business. It has gained all the trappings of any other business venture. This changed situation has made campuses and classrooms places for grooming students to become professionals devoid of human values. This lack of value system is the reason for students looking at their peers, and others, without love and respect. This deterioration has to be reversed. The classrooms should become zones of solidarity where students respect and appreciate one another irrespective of caste, religion, region or colour. Teachers should become catalysts of this most needed change.

Teachers do face a herculean task in this regard. They work under pressure to enhance the academic results of students. Their efficiency and proficiency, is weighed on the basis of academic performance of their students. It is true that they do play a vital role in helping students become successful in career and business. I am not saying that teachers should not focus

mission; those engaged in it, especially the teachers, lived it with a missionary spirit. But, in today's world, it has become a mere profession, verging on business. It has gained all the trappings of any other business venture. This changed situation has made campuses and classrooms places for grooming students to become professionals devoid of human values. This lack of value system is the reason for students looking at their peers, and others, without love and respect. This deterioration has to be reversed. The classrooms should become zones of solidarity where students respect and appreciate one another irrespective of caste, religion, region or colour. Teachers should become catalysts of this most needed change.

**The writer is Director, Don Bosco Institute of Management Email: jparankimalil@gmail.com**

## Teacher: A Caring & Responsible Public Intellectual

By Paul Pudussery csc; Ph.D

September 5, is set aside to acknowledge, appreciate and admire our teachers who have had a positive influence on our lives and on the society. Any adult person has encountered numerous teachers who have shaped their lives and their thought pattern. A teacher is a person, a role model, a coach, a guide, a philosopher, a task master, a second parent and the list can go on. Our great Indian tradition placed the teacher on a high pedestal showering upon them a status of respect and honour. Let us on this day reminisce the memory of every teacher who contributed in making us who and what we are today.

The profession or the way of life of a teacher is undergoing a crisis. Crisis is accelerated by the advancement in communication technology, inflation and due to the changing perception of who a teacher is. In earlier times and until the pandemic, a teacher was considered as a person who contained knowledge and transmitted that learning and experience to the students. This process of transmission, earned in the minds of students especially in the younger ones a sense of indebtedness and admiration. The transmission of knowledge was done with care, understanding, commitment and love. It embodied multiple virtues and nurtured

talk pedagogy. The refusal to adopt technology made them unpopular and even irrelevant. The teachers lost a voice to be engaged in nation building and character formation. Society is losing the tacit knowledge of an experienced nation builder.

The explosion of information could be accessed by anyone, provided they have the technology to acquire it. Once this unfiltered information is received, many consume it without applying a cognitive mind. Such platforms have become a breeding ground in promoting agenda of the content writers. The idea of knowledge and the teacher, acquired a new meaning. A post-Covid narrative emerged which may be termed as the "Post-Truth Era". Many remained at the level of information gatherers rather than knowledge constructors.

Social media was used by many to spread information to emerging consumers, mainly the young. To hook the young, things are presented by those expensive adverts profiling the idealistic dreamers to journey of fulfillment. The advertisers present an alluring image, attractive young go-getters, with glowing complexions and sharp business dress, providing inspiration amidst strategically placed Bunsen burners and an uplifting

**The teacher in a village set-up, not only taught but created discourses that affects the village. He/she initiates conversations about health, hygiene, sanitation, religion, development and many other topics. People pitched into these conversations that become opinions and eventually policies that all adhered to.**

those virtues in the taught. This transmission took into consideration the receptivity and the capacity of the students and made it palatable for most of them. The teacher presented himself or herself as an embodiment of knowledge, reservoir of information and lived that knowledge in a simple way. The demeanour, the way she or he conducted themselves in public, attracted students to them.

Teachers present themselves as moral compasses and had the knowledge of traditional values and ethos of a community. The very presence of a teacher served as a light house through their eloquent silence. A teacher is not only an embodiment and transmitter of knowledge but a guard of social conscience. The society looked up to the teacher to declare what is wrong and what is right, what is allowed and what is not allowed in the given context of a society. The students imbibed those values and the teacher nurtured it with utmost care and detachment.

The teacher in a village set-up, not only taught but created discourses that affects the village. He/she initiates conversations about health, hygiene, sanitation, religion, development and many other topics. People pitched into these conversations that become opinions and eventually policies that all adhered to. The teacher choreographed the life of a society — the young and old alike. The teacher earned respect and became the philosopher and guide engineering a new generation with hope.

The new inventions in communication technology de-institutionalised knowledge and that process got accelerated during the pandemic, leading to an emerging narrative of a teacher. The teacher lost the image as the container or as the embodiment of knowledge. Teachers had to struggle to cope with the demands of the students enabling them to learn to harness the power of technology. Some teachers found it difficult to embrace technology and they continued to use chalk and

sound track. Many of our current generation enslaved themselves and made life decisions based on this misplaced information. They are failing to convert information into knowledge by applying a method of computational thinking.

NEP 2020 envisages a teacher who is qualified, talented and trained; a teacher who has excellent subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and technological knowledge. A teacher who is able to engage students to imagine, facilitate interaction with the subject, through an immersive process. Hence to attract talented persons to the teaching profession a new recruitment policy is created, a new curriculum framework is also in the processes of being finalised. Standards of assessment, promotion and pay are being defined. Will this new vision reinstall the position of our teachers in the society? Will these changes increase the commitment and tenacity of our teachers in preparing our next generation to the uncertain future?

The role of a teacher has changed from transmitter of knowledge to a promoter of learning. The teacher, today, has to teach students to become life long and self-driven learners. There has to be a paradigm shift in the narrative of a teacher. Will this paradigm shift disturb the honour, respect and the role, the teacher played as a committed, responsible and caring public intellectual? Will the 21st century present a teacher who is merely a professional with minimal commitment. Will this new narrative of a teacher jeopardise the construction of a just and compassionate world?

September 5, cannot just pass off with a few greetings, garlands and pious words of gratitude. It calls on policy makers, public intellectuals and decision makers to re-define the "Teacher" for our time to carve a better future for the next generation.

(Dr. Paul Pudussery csc is a freelance social science researcher and may be contacted on pudussery@gmail.com)

### Letters to the Editor

#### What was that again?

Editor,  
I know it is common knowledge but let me repeat it anyway for this has now become quite popular on social media, and that is "Reading or listening to our Hon'ble Home Minister's statements are always, "Oh so Entertaining." Take for instance the statement he made on efforts to curb illegal coal mining (ST September 2,2022) where he purportedly claimed that 1. Monitoring illegal coal mining in remote areas is a challenge for the police 2. Policing in far flung areas is very difficult as it takes six to seven hours to reach such places. Apparently these statements were made to bolster Union Minister of Coal and Mines statement when he claimed in the Rajya Sabha that, "no coal production has been reported in Meghalaya for the last four years." In its larger context however is the ban by both the Supreme Court and National Green Tribunal on the continued rat hole mining of coal in the State and the State Government's observance of the same. There is strong suspicion that these orders have been honoured more in the breach than in the observance and that too by "Honorable powerful gentlemen" more keen in breaking the law than in making one.

Now let's take the above two statements made by the Home Minister. Of course, all of us agree that it is

extremely difficult if not impossible for policemen to trample and push their way through thick jungles in search of well-hidden coal mines. Our police are more in patrol cars and manning stationary check gates. So the question is why send them on a wild goose chase into the thick jungles when the job can easily be done on the roads and highway itself? Illegal coal mining will automatically come to a halt if that same coal can't reach its market. Now coal, as far as we know doesn't have legs or wings to fly itself to such markets. It needs vehicles, specifically trucks to be economically viable, to carry the illegally mined coal to the market, and most astonishingly these trucks need roads to ply on. Now if police are already deployed on our roads, the illegally mined and transported coal can quite easily be stopped in its tracks on these roads. Result — illegal mining will automatically come to a halt! That's the logical sequence! But what makes these statements of the Home Minister, as mentioned earlier, so very entertaining is that obviously officials in the Home Department can't be all that dumb as not to have thought of such police enforcements on the road.

So 'dal mein kuch kala hai,' or as cops would say, "Man, this is an inside job" meaning there is someone from high up who is facilitating this illegal transportation of Meghalayan coal. Home Minister Sir, you might actu-

ally be sitting next to a cabinet colleague who is out to break the law! Surprised?

The Shillong Times on the same day carried another statement again by our Hon'ble Home Minister and this time it was in relation with "It's a Scam, No it's not a scam" war of words that has broken out over a report of the fact finding police team constituted by the current DGP. The report damned an AIG (Administration) for massive irregularities. The reaction of the Home Minister to the demand for immediate action against the accused AIG is intriguing if not completely bewildering. "There should not be any knee jerk reaction," advises the HM. Fine! But what about the Chief Minister who had equivocally responded in a typical knee jerk, off the cuff manner that there was, "No Scam." How does he know? By Instinct? Then simply look at the panic, alarm and apparent loss of nerve the news report on the matter has caused in some quarters. There's definitely more to it than meets the eye and the apparent involvement of higher officers has also surfaced and red herrings are being strewn all over the place.

We the public need to know. So why this attempt to drag the case; delay the investigations and the need to sweep it under the carpet? It's the senior police officers themselves who first reported the scam. They must have found something beyond tolerance; something incriminatingly disgusting to

have provoked them to such an uproar of a report against one of their own. Trying to delay or throw the public off the scent, in this case, can be quite costly to the UDP, which is fast being seen as a close abettor to the crimes and scams by the MDA Government.

Seek clarifications; serve show cause notices; study the report if you must but also take immediate action to ensure that evidence is not tampered by compromised parties. Remove the accused from the scene. Frankly speaking the reading public is suspicious of a high level cover up attempt and so far their suspicions seem to be well founded.

Yours etc.,  
Toki Blah,  
Via email

#### Unemployment in Meghalaya after 50 years of statehood

Editor,  
Much has been written in these columns about the sorry state of affairs in Meghalaya today vis a vis the performance of the various government departments. It would be fair to state that the present scenario is due to the failure of successive governments to deliver and come up with a road map for sustainable development. The present government assumed charge in 2018 amid high expectations. Unfortunately, it had to deal with a range of

issues, agitations, allegations of corrupt practices and illegalities, controversies and the unprecedented corona pandemic which have derailed the governance.

Among the problems affecting our state is lack of infrastructure especially in surface and air connectivity, health care, education, power and water supply in addition to others like influx, border disputes, traffic congestion in Shillong, farmers' and teachers' plight, garbage disposal and unemployment. This letter aims to only highlight on unemployment which is a very serious issue in our state. RTI queries have revealed that there are many vacancies under various government departments. It is also a well-known fact that a large number of contractual staff are being engaged by government departments and undertakings. But there seems to be little effort to fill up the aforesaid posts.

The central government has recently announced a massive recruitment drive to be completed within the next few months. We also read about similar exercise by the Assam government. The situation in Meghalaya however, is not encouraging. In general, there is undue delay by the MPSC and the DSCs to carry out the recruitment process which causes anxiety and frustration among the youth. It is undeniable that lack of employment opportunities gives rise to unrest and insurgency. On Meghalaya's 50th years it would be befitting for the government

to expedite the recruitment process by holding special recruitment drives to fill up the different grades of posts lying vacant. This will be a boon to our job aspirants and bring smiles to thousands of families. However, it is important to ensure transparency and fairness while conducting the examinations so that deserving candidates are selected.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope that this letter receives the attention it deserves. Furthermore, the Golden Jubilee year should be an occasion to reflect on the achievements and failures of successive governments in Meghalaya. Observing and celebrating this through various events should not distract the government and the people from the various pending issues and unfinished tasks. It would be prudent for the government to review outdated and flawed policies and come up with strategic action plans for various departments to transform the state. All said and done, efforts should be made to root out corruption, exploitation, nepotism and ensure transparency, good work culture and accountability. Otherwise, we are staring at a bleak future with no respite for the common man.

Yours etc.,  
J. Lyngdoh,  
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.

"If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door."

— Milton Berle

The Shillong Times

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**Meghalaya BJP blows hot and cold**  
It is evident that the BJP in Meghalaya is a divided house with one group acknowledging the reality that the Party will have to bear the anti-incumbency that could afflict the scam-ridden MDA Government – a phenomenon called 'being guilty by association.' While former Minister AL Hek is all for severing ties with the MDA Government so that the Party can acquit itself of further scams that could blow up at any time, the present Minister Sanbor Shullai is reluctant to give up his power and perks. Hence the dilly-dally. Meanwhile the NPP leadership is cocking a snook at the BJP and its other coalition partners by stating upfront that it will form the next government single-handedly in 2023. The NPP seems sure of capturing over 30 seats in the next election since the Congress Party which was its main adversary is now in tatters and has very slim chances of even getting a double digit figure. The NPP also believes that the Trinamool Congress has not yet caught the imagination of the people of Meghalaya. The United Democratic Party (UDP) too similarly boasts of going it alone and returning to form the government solo. The electoral equations worked out by both the NPP and UDP are baffling to say the least.

In fact, any other Government would have feared an anti-incumbency riposte from the voting public but the NPP as the main architect of the MDA Government seems confident of carrying the trophy in 2023. This despite the scams that erupt nearly every month – the latest being the Police scam. But perhaps the NPP will wash its hands off this scam since the Home portfolio is held by the UDP. Similarly, when it comes to the scars suffered by the SSA and Primary school teachers for whom the street became a home for nearly a week, the Education Minister at whose feet all the blame lies is from the UDP. It was a master stroke that the Deputy Chief Minister, a senior NPP man finally got the teachers to the negotiating table and promised to redress their grievances. Thus, the NPP scored brownie points at the cost of the UDP. A coalition government where the partners undercut one another is witnessed for the first time in Meghalaya.

Interestingly, of the two BJP MLAs, one is openly denouncing the scams in the Government while the other is silent. The BJP does not yet have a toehold in Meghalaya. The current dichotomies that afflict the Party might worsen its prospects in 2023. Besides, the BJP-in-charge, Meghalaya seems undecided about what to say and contradicts himself time and again. The BJP ship sails on stormy seas. Whether it goes the Titanic way or has a rough landing will depend on the central leadership.

Letters to the Editor

**Our silence is harmful to society**

Editor,  
When people in high places express disgust towards righteousness, social degeneration sets in. The Friday special article -- "The Newspaper as a Public Square" (ST Sept 2, 2022) by the senior journalist Patricia Mukhim is a pointer to the fact. While it received high appreciation from many right-thinking citizens, it reminds me of a famous quote by Albert Einstein -- "If I were to remain silent, I'd be guilty of complicity." Such thoughtful words only come from a person with a high level of integrity.

Usually, people choose to keep silent and for that society has to pay a heavy price. The recent "alleged corruption" in high places of the police department has made the public very apprehensive. It was seemingly happening for years together. Are the police not expected to be more honest? Have they not vowed to deal with the "dishonest" with all sincerity? The episode has sent out the wrong message to the lower hierarchy of the enforcement department, apart from the public.

What if the media were not pro-active and upright in the past, as aptly pointed out in the article by Ms Mukhim? The jaws of corruption would have certainly further gnawed at the very fabric of the governance resulting in the public being at the receiving end. So many

underhand dealings were checked due to the vigilant media. So, the fear of upstanding media inarguably ensures a healthy democracy. Of course, the media should unflinchingly play a very constructive role in political governance and so on. Yes, even our kids might go astray and indulge in wrong things if we (parents) remain silent and do not keep a "watchful eye" on them!

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
Shillong-2

**Sorry state of College of Nursing NEIGRIHMS**

Editor,  
The College of Nursing-NEIGRIHMS was established in 2006 with the aim of providing competent nurses who can be an absolute boon to any healthcare regime they are a part of. Initially during the budding years of the college it was the selfless and untiring efforts of Ms Catherine E Myrthong and the invaluable contribution of her team which have brought to the College to what it is today. We have had 12 batches of Graduate nurses (BSc.) till date and all of them are well placed in almost every State and premier Institutes of the country and abroad. The nurses from the College of Nursing-NEIGRIHMS have received accolades and certification from every place they have been to, all of which is augmented by the

**We, the middle-class intellectuals**

By H. Srikanth

The word intellectual, in its positive connotation, evokes spontaneous respect and admiration. Usually, a person who is well read, knowledgeable, articulate, and one capable of distinguishing between good and bad, and inspiring the people to take the right path, is assumed to be an intellectual. In a broad sense, this category encompasses not only academicians but also scientists, bureaucrats, lawyers, political leaders, technicians, managers, media persons, writers and artists who play the role of interpreting, connecting and mobilizing the people in different spheres of life. History abounds with several examples of intellectuals playing a positive role in human civilization. The west produced intellectuals like Socrates and Aristotle to J.S. Mill and Marx, who through their writings and actions, contributed to the development of new ideas and institutions. There is no dearth of intellectuals in India who have contributed to the development and dissemination of knowledge.

In ancient and medieval India, the domination of religion and caste did not allow the growth of intellectuals beyond certain castes and communities. In contrast, the British rule, by extending educational opportunities for all communities of people enabled the birth of intellectuals from varied social backgrounds. Social reform movements and the nationalist movement shaped the political and ideological direction of Indian intellectuals in the colonial era. The right-wing intellectuals adhering to Hindu nationalism were also active during the period, but they lost credibility after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. On the eve of independence, India had a rich galaxy of intellectuals in political, economic, social and scientific fields. There were different spectrums of intellectuals—Gandhian, Nehruvian, socialist, Marxist, Ambedkarite, etc. All of them, in their own ways, contributed to Indian society and polity through their intellectual contributions and social activities.

Most leading intellectuals of the first three decades were from the middle class

background. The middle class had access to modern education and to new professions. The middle class then was not very rich. The gap between them and the poor and marginalized sections was not very wide. Different reform and radical movements of 1960s and 70s had their influence on the middle class as well. Several intellectuals emanating from the middle classes identified themselves with one or the other social movements, and expressed solidarity with the peasants, workers, tribals, women, dalits, and other marginalized communities. In different capacities - as teachers, writers, poets, theatre artists, journalists, scientists, lawyers, environmentalists, human rights activists - the intellectuals played a significant role in the civil society. Some radical intellectuals suffered as they confronted the privileged political and economic elites. During the Emergency, several intellectuals were arrested, beaten up, and even killed for espousing the cause. The masses revered and admired them for their contributions. The hegemony of progressive intellectuals compelled even the fence sitters to project themselves as progressive minded people. These pragmatic intellectuals then found it advantageous to wear khadi, wave the red flags, and speak and write supporting socialist and secular visions. Quite a few of them could make their way to different universities and academies using their personal and political contacts.

The 1990s witnessed dramatic changes both in international and national spheres. Events like the fall of the Soviet Union, reassertion of the market forces, birth of communal and identity politics, etc., had a deep effect on the ideology and political practice of the middle-class intellectuals. With the decline of socialist ideology, the intellectuals adhering to Marxian, Nehruvian and Gandhian varieties of socialism found themselves in a fix. True adherents were genuinely confused, while those who were only pretending to be progressive gave up all their pretensions. Some took to identity politics; others

found a refuge in supposedly progressive post-modern and post-colonial theories and jargons, with no risking of career or life. Liberalization, globalization and technological innovations such as the IT revolution and growth of digital technologies opened new avenues for growth for a section of middle-class intellectuals. The state also started patronizing and accommodating the intellectuals by enhancing their pay through the pay commissions, or accommodating them on different committees and commissions as members and chairpersons. Collaborations, consultations and tie-ups with foreign and Indian monopoly corporations led to massive increase in the income and wealth of a section of the middle intellectuals working in IT, media, NGO, advertisement and other creative sectors. As their economic status improved, the distance between the intellectuals and the masses has widened. The neo-rich upper middle-class intellectuals started identifying themselves more and more with the interests of the political and economic elite.

Indications of such changes were visible even during the UPA regime itself. With the ascendancy of the Hindutva politics, India is witnessing a sea change in the role of and the approach towards the intellectuals. Having been marginalized in the public sphere for decades, the new regime wedded to the idea of Hindutva found an opportunity to vilify liberal, secular and Left leaning intellectuals, by branding all of them as anti-nationals and anti-Hindu. Simultaneously, they began efforts to entice and saffronize the intellectuals. Those who adhered to the ideology of the regime got plump positions in the education sector, media and administration. With no possibility of political change in the near future, pragmatic middle-class intellectuals became turn coats in no time. As they realized which side of the bread is buttered, they quickly changed their colors, flags, public posture, language, and rhetoric. To seek the attention of the masters, they disowned socialist and secular ideologies, and

started denouncing Gandhi, Nehru, and Marx in public forums and social media. They began talking about the supposed glory of ancient Hindu India and started locating patriotism and humanism in the leaders, whom they branded once as communalists. Many came out openly to declare loyalty to the organizations and ideologies close to the regime. To display their loyalty, some literally started crawling when they were asked to bend. Many who could not stoop so low decided to maintain strategic silence.

Not that all middle-class intellectuals support the regime. But most fear to express their difference, as they apprehend Big Brother is watching their every move. The intellectuals have their own excuses to justify their actions and inactions. They cite how criticizing the government lands the people in jail, force them to encounter the wrath of the investigating agencies, and makes them face the mob that would troll them in media and social media. If anyone tickles them, they ask: don't we have a career to build and a family to look after? Why should we alone talk when all other people are silent, and jeopardize our career prospects? If we lose jobs or don't get promotions, how difficult would it become to pay the EMIs for the home loan, send our kids abroad for higher studies, or marry off our daughter to some wealthy family? Such utilitarian concerns and calculations are enough to tame them and make them fall in line with others. Fear of reprisal, career temptations and growing indifference enfeebled the middle-class intellectuals so much that they have lost the will to question the power and resist injustice. True, like the odd stars that shines bright in the darkest nights, even today, here and there, one might find some middle-class intellectuals who have not lost their conscience and will to fight for a public cause. However, the people cannot pin hopes on those few. This is the time to look for different class of intellectuals. Not from the middle-class, but from among the peasants, working class, and uncompromising tribals, dalits and radical youth.

It is to be noted that I am addressing this letter to the third CJI. I had earlier brought to the notice of the previous two CJIs that Acts passed by Parliament are not being implemented meticulously and I hereby quote that the first Disability Act was passed by Parliament in 1996; the second Act was passed in 2016 when there was pandemonium in the Parliament. This Bill was passed without any resistance from any party and Prime Minister, Modi even mentioned the passing of this Bill during the visit of US President to India. That shows the strength of this Bill turned Act. But both these Acts have not been implemented in true spirit which in turn goes against the spirit of the Constitution and against the various court decisions and against natural justice and against human rights.

I had written to the CJI to treat my representation as a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) if it is permissible as per norms. Whether the large number of disabled can expect justice during the period of the present CJI is uncertain but something to look forward to. Let us hope for the best, otherwise those with disabilities will continue to remind the Supreme Court that they are being highly discriminated.

Yours etc.,  
Yash Pal Ralhan  
Jalandhar - 3

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

**Mawpdang a model village of Res-Publica**

By Barnes Mawrie

The Khasi since time immemorial have had a wonderful and praiseworthy traditional practice of property management. This socio-cultural practice is particularly related to land ownership. For the Khasi community land was never a private property but always considered a community property. Thus there was the widely accepted tradition of khyndew hima (chieftainship held land) khyndew raid (regional land), khyndew shmong (village land) and khyndew kur (clan's land). Private land of so and so was never heard of. However with the enactment of the Land Revenue Regulation in 1886 passed by the British Government, private proprietorship became common. Since then the buying and selling of land between private parties became widely accepted. In a state like Meghalaya where land ceiling law is not enacted, the negative impact of private land ownership is seen in the fact that rich and well-to-do families are owning hundreds and thousands of

land. The true manifestation of the concept of respublica is evident in two common practices, namely:

1) Every newly formed family in the community is allotted a plot of land to build their own home. Besides this, the Raid also allows them to do free cultivation in some fallow land as indicated by the authority. The traditional rule with respect to the allotted land, is that the family cannot dispose of the land to any outsider. In this manner, the community land will always remain in the possession of the members of the Raid.

2) The Raid authority, consisting of the Sordar and his durbar, has so far been acting impartially and justly with regard to any movable and immovable property of the Raid. This sense of collective justice is seen even today when the Raid authority gives equal share to every family of any income that the Raid makes. For example, recently when the government had taken some land from the Raid for the construction of the Shillong



acres of land (which many times lie unutilized), while thousands of poor families are without an inch of land. Thus we see so many Khasi families in urban areas who continue to live in rented houses and remain so for generations. This would not have happened if we were to retain our traditional land holding system which is so humane.

However, in the midst of this gloomy scenario, we still have many Raids and villages that still continue the practice of owning community land which they equally distribute to members of the community as per the given rules and regulations. One such place

by-pass, the money paid to the Raid was equally divided among the families. Lately, when MUDA had bought a large portion of land from the Raid, each family received a sizable amount of money. This has enabled many poorer families to build better houses, start businesses or support their children for higher studies. By the end of this year, visitors who come to Mawpdang would be surprised to see beautiful mansions which people have constructed. I sincerely compliment the Sordar, Mr. Amos Duia and his durbar members, for respecting and preserving this traditional practice of land management. I am sure there

*The ancestors of the Raid which trace their origin to the Syiem of Mawpdang, one of the daughters of Ka Pahsyntiew, were given as birthright the ownership of this vast track of land by the Hima Khyrim. The Raid has always maintained and respected the traditional concept of collective ownership. This is a perfect example of a true "republic" from the root respublica which means basically "common property."*

which is so exemplary for the rest of the Khasi society, is the Raid Mawpdang (East Khasi Hills) which is about 19 km from the city of Shillong. Thanks to the wisdom of the ancestors of this Raid, the community here owns a vast track of land running into thousands of acres. The ancestors of the Raid which trace their origin to the Syiem of Mawpdang, one of the daughters of Ka Pahsyntiew, were given as birthright the ownership of this vast track of land by the Hima Khyrim. The Raid has always maintained and respected the traditional concept of collective ownership. This is a perfect example of a true "republic" from the root respublica which means basically "common property." This practice has maintained to a great degree the egalitarianism of the community. There is no family belonging to the Raid which does not have a plot of

are other villages where the headmen and their councils make a lot of money by way of land deal commissions, payments for certificates etc, but the community does not get any benefit from these incomes. Somehow the money disappears or is not accounted for.

For these reasons, Mawpdang Raid, its sordar and his durbar deserve our appreciation, not only for the equal sharing of incomes with the community members, but also for upholding the Khasi traditional land holding system and land distribution. How we wish that this beautiful, humane and just system established by our wise ancestors becomes a reality again over Khasi-Jaintia Hills. How blessed are the people of Raid Mawpdang for having such honest, transparent and people-oriented leaders at the helm of village affairs.

*"A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon."*  
— Napoleon Bonaparte

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 28 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2022

### Hasina in India

THE positive sentiments that mark the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India and her confabulations in New Delhi are there for all to see and cherish. The four-day visit takes place in the run-up to parliament elections in Bangladesh next year and this is time for India to demonstrate its continued support to her and Bangladesh in more pronounced ways. Bangladesh became a reality with eminent backing from India during the time of Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who headed the Independence struggle through the Mukti Bahini movement against Pakistani domination, in the early 1970s. The bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh remain strong even as China plays around and continues to court Bangladesh through promises of economic and other support.

During the present visit, India and Bangladesh have decided to extend bilateral cooperation in fields of IT, Space, Railways, Nuclear and Media and signed a river water sharing pact on Kushiara river that originates in Nagaland. The more important sharing of waters of the River Teesta that originates from the Himalayas in Sikkim and passes through north Bengal eluded an agreement yet again despite a willingness on the part of Delhi to help Bangladesh. As long as West Bengal continues its resistance to such a sharing, the issue could remain unresolved. Yet, the positive note with which Sheikh Hasina deals with India was evident in her assertion in New Delhi, "With friendship, we can solve all our problems."

The two nations would soon begin talks on a comprehensive economic partnership. Hasina is concentrating heavily on developing the national economy as was also evident in her repeated assertions, "Our enemy is poverty". Having neutralized the opposition for long, she has an unassailable position as leader of the nation. The political stability thereof and her command over the affairs of the nation have ensured fast-paced progress for Bangladesh, registering better growth figures compared to India in recent times. This has also helped her effectively tackle the Islamic fundamentalism that gained considerable strength in Bangladesh due also to backing from the ISI of Pakistan. Hasina and India are mindful of such threats even as Pakistan seeks to target both via these fundamentalists. The going for Hasina is 'so far so good' and what adds to her strength even today is the able support India extends to Bangladesh. The future is certainly not predictable especially in a scenario in which Islamists are spreading their nets far and wide. The strong command of Hasina over the affairs in Bangladesh is guarantee, so far, that such games will not succeed there.

# A phenomenon called 'quiet quitting'

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

A youth sat at an eatery at Golflinks in Shillong. It was early evening. While sipping on his coffee his eyes were set on the lush green hills of the golf course. But, something was not right. His gaze was somewhere else. He looked anxious, perplexed and lost. On seeking permission from him on whether we could converse, a short but meaningful discussion took place. The youth works in a typical government office and is dissatisfied with the work climate and its manner of functioning. He explains that he has been sitting at the golf course for quite some time now and narrates on being dissatisfied, irritated, sad and angry at the state of things. On most days, he ventures out early from the workplace after doing just what he is supposed to do on a daily basis. There is no motivation to do more or better and the commitment level is zero. This encounter has been put on this column with his permission.

The phenomenon is known as 'quiet quitting' and is becoming a serious problem these days. Through social media, many have become aware of its meaning and nuances in recent months. The term 'quiet quitting' was coined in 2009 but the condition is not new. Today, it has become a buzzword thanks to a number of TikTok clips that have been doing the rounds. It basically refers to a work/motivation culture whereby the worker does just the bare minimum that is required and expected of him/her. There is no motivation, dedication, drive and commitment to do more and contribute extra in work and other duties. There is an air of discontent at work. For example, a data analyst in a firm has access to a plethora of data and numerous programmes through which the data could be richly analysed. But, since the worker is not happy with the supervisory style of his superior/employer he/she does just a basic analysis without going the extra mile towards serious analytics which would have really helped in decision-making processes and policy formulation and implementation. Under quiet quitting, a worker tends to enter work late and looks forward to close of office. Whenever possible a worker will always look to leave office early.

Although quiet quitting is mostly related to work and employer-employee relations, the ramifications are far

wider. If we are really observant, we will find quiet quitting everywhere. It is there in our households, educational institutions, public and private offices, locality affairs, politics, the drive to bring change in society, etc. We are becoming more inclined to do just the required minimum in

In truth, the phenomenon is more than meets the eye. By not being motivated and having high commitment levels right from school to work to society and politics, etc, the result of such a lackadaisical attitude impinges upon development as a whole. It is an accepted fact that the more

*"Through social media, many have become aware of its meaning and nuances in recent months. The term 'quiet quitting' was coined in 2009 but the condition is not new. Today, it has become a buzzword thanks to a number of TikTok clips that have been doing the rounds. It basically refers to a work/motivation culture whereby the worker does just the bare minimum that is required and expected of him/her."*

everyday affairs and life. The most worrying case is that of students. This is because if they are gripped by quiet quitting, then all future is lost. Over time there is a tendency for student-teacher lethargy and conformity to accepting things the way they are. The belief that there can be no change has started seeping into the thought processes.

In social life, it is every man for himself. The good human nature to help and be of use for a social good has diminished. In politics, the

hard working are the workers, the more and better are the development outcomes. Quiet quitting is detrimental to the process of development. It is anti-development and goes against the very ethos of a responsible human being. By being less motivated right from school means that it would hamper the quality of future workers. As they grow, they would work less and try lesser and not push themselves to try new and better things. In future, as they work at different levels they will

*"Although quiet quitting is mostly related to work and employer-employee relations, the ramifications are far wider. If we are really observant, we will find quiet quitting everywhere. It is there in our households, educational institutions, public and private offices, locality affairs, politics, the drive to bring change in society, etc. We are becoming more inclined to do just the required minimum in everyday affairs and life."*

voters have 'quiet quitted' at large. They see no hope in elections and government. The rot is such that even politicians themselves do engage in quiet quitting. They only do what is needed and that too mostly for their own constituency. Things are done out of compulsion and not out of the feeling of duty. There is no concern for carrying the people towards a better well-being.

become complacent and not try to improve in their careers and life. By being depressed and with the temptation of alcohol and drugs aplenty, it is a serious problem facing us today. It is a vicious cycle. But there is a catch, if the workers are quiet quitting then there must be something wrong in the functioning of the employers too. It cannot be a one-way traffic. There is a high probability that

the employer themselves are not professional, lack understanding, lack empathy, are exploitative, do not promote work-life balance, etc.

As a way out, there are a number of things that can be looked into. First, a workplace could develop a practice of continuous evaluation of employer-employee relations. There is a common saying that workers are complex beings, but then so are employers. In fact, employers are the direct reason for quiet quitting. Hence, an open channel of two-way communication, empathy and care can go a long way in mitigating the problem. If workers are expected to go the extra mile, then so are employers. Second, homes and educational institutions are expected to do bulk of the work. Quiet quitting can be seen in a simple case as a child who does not do his/her class work and homework properly. For example, they do painting but there is a lot of room for improvement but the child is not willing to do more. This can be taken as the very first indicator of quiet quitting. Such a situation is to be nipped in the bud. Third, there are rehabilitation centres for addicts. Well, do not let it get to such a stage. Addiction results from lack of motivation in life. As such, rehabilitation/counselling centre for the struggling youth can go a long way in dealing with the problem early; before they get to drugs and alcohol. Such centres can be set up at the Dorbar/locality levels.

In the final analysis quiet quitting is a ticking time-bomb. It is like a cancer that is eating into our homes, schools and society as a whole. Those heading institutions and workplaces should intervene and try and reverse the phenomenon. The hallmarks of a human being are mostly developed when at school. This is one of the reasons as to why so much stress is laid on school education. Today, the role of a teacher is not confined to just teaching hard social studies, science and mathematics, etc. It is about understanding nuances like quiet quitting. The marks of a student may be very high; yet there still may be obvious signs of quiet quitting. Observe closely, we as teachers will all be surprised and alarmed at the gravity of the problem!

(The writer teaches at NEHU; Email - benjamin21im@yahoo.co.in)

## Congress and the NDA Applecart

By Chiranjib Haldar

In the prelude to the 1989 General elections, Congress sponsored billboards started pedestrians with a query: how many prime ministers will a country have? The nation went bonkers with the Bofors controversy and the artillery guns became a cogwheel for the electorate. Former Prime Minister V.P. Singh's Janata Dal spearheading the anti-Congress front and an ebullient BJP cobbling in tandem to defeat the Rajiv Gandhi regime. More than three decades later, the wheel has come full circle. Only the crusaders have changed. Nitish Kumar's JD(U) severing ties with the NDA, with the Bihar Chief Minister donning the turncoat's mantle again and cosying up to Lalu Yadav's RJD, all giving a flip to the index of opposition unity. If it is a shot in the arm for an anti-BJP front in the offing, this severance of ties may have been a blessing in disguise. It has indirectly strengthened the Congress and the seeming coalition of regional satraps.

Since the notion of a non-Congress, non-BJP Third Front has been a mirage for long, as past experiments with the United Front have proven, it can only be the Congress at the centre-stage of any opposition unity. Ghulam Nabi Azad's resignation missive to the Congress party has thrown up a fundamental query. Can the party survive or flourish sans the Gandhis? Long before these resignations were in the pipeline, the G-23 dissenters had stressed that Rahul Gandhi was fortifying himself from his senior party colleagues. The spate of resignations of senior party leaders notwithstanding, Congress' campaign for a national renewal remains on track. The moot question:

rain to elect a new President and preparing to capture lost ground in Jammu and Kashmir. When most critics and diehard Congress loyalists pointed to a somnambulating outfit, the party was shedding off flab. It was showing signs of rejuvenation. The upcoming Bharat Jodo Yatra ensured a political party returning to its grassroots and amplifying its relevance in today's polity.

Political scientist Zoya Hasan in her recent book has opined how the Congress' topsy turvy electoral fortunes have more to do with wounds that run deeper. She asserts, "Whether secularism can remain India's defining ideology will depend in part on the BJP's future electoral success but, above all, on the strategies the Congress adopts to counter divisive politics engendered by this regime." An aberrational brand of nationalism which was never the cornerstone of India's freedom movement seems to have gained traction. The most formidable challenge to the Congress is sustaining the pluralist idea of India it has always espoused and promoted. And this is where like-minded opposition parties can bolster the Congress led UPA to offer an alternative unifying vision to divisive politics.

The existential angst of the once powerful Congress party and its malaise has more to do with the erosion of centrist philosophy. An alternate political narrative where the party shuns soft majoritarianism and revitalises its solidarity with the masses by focusing on issues relevant to public welfare and rebuilding its network at the grassroots is imperative at this juncture. The Congress ship, as recent meltdowns show, is full of proverbial deserters who aft

*"Nitish Kumar's exit has pumped adrenalin into a moribund opposition. AAP's escalating tussle with the BJP is not only a poser for the NDA alliance's invincibility but presents Arvind Kejriwal as a challenger."*

can the Bharat Jodo Yatra, a supposed Congress antithesis to the present regime still upset the BJP applecart?

In recent surveys, the Narendra Modi-led BJP may be ahead of the opposition coalition despite the Congress sticking to its flagbearer responsibility. And Tejaswi Yadav's 'cry wolf' tirade at the BJP after getting a chance to claim responsibility in Bihar or Nitish Kumar harbouring prime ministerial ambitions and taking one final shot as an aspirant does have many takers. Only it gives a shove to the BJP to encash on the simmering discontent among opposition stalwarts and play its disciplinarian card. It also gives the party the opportunity to consolidate its alliance with steady partners through thick and thin.

What is most palpable with a shrinking of the NDA is that BJP's numbers have dwindled in the Rajya Sabha. As numbers stack up, the upper house is on a knife's edge and Nitish Kumar's exit from the NDA does have a bearing on the party's equations. Though BJP still remains the single largest party in the Rajya Sabha, its dependence on NDA allies like AIADMK, Biju Janata Dal and YSR Congress will increase for the passage of so many pending crucial bills. Even with three more nominee MPs and the Tripura seat likely in its tally, the NDA's strength will still be short of the half-way mark, a sure dampener of sorts.

Many political observers and sundry were startled, some within the Congress party appeared astounded by a stalwart and veteran party leader like Ghulam Nabi Azad hanging his boots. The timing was characteristically astute; the grand old party was at last charting out a ter-

want to be the captain and have put the onus of ineptitude on the party's central leadership. Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, umpteen spokespersons leaving for good as they feel, all have made the Congress a rudderless ship in shambles. Even at the cost of electoral debacles, the party is unlikely to let go of the unwilling Gandhis and the outcome of the presidential elections being anybody's guess.

Nitish Kumar's exit has pumped adrenalin into a moribund opposition. AAP's escalating tussle with the BJP is not only a poser for the NDA alliance's invincibility but presents Arvind Kejriwal as a challenger. A decimated Congress on the verge of resuscitation with a leadership crisis and a mass unification campaign has more up its sleeves. The ideological shifts in the last decade echo not merely a political transformation ongoing in India but the ideological consolidation of the right in India, an experience which can only be fought tooth and nail by the grand dame of Indian polity, the Congress.

One needs to witness the role plays on display. There must be an antidote to the societal gobbling of the centrist space on lines of caste and religion and incessant polarisation. Despite all the hoopla by a section of commentators, even a fractured opposition with the Congress at the helm can challenge the NDA threadbare on the road to the 2024 hustings. Multiple aspirants for the coveted top slot often at loggerheads, can never be a deterrent.

(The writer is a commentator on politics and society.)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Laitumkhrah hijacked

Editor,  
The age-old social fabric of Laitumkhrah, the prime and prestigious locality of Shillong is disturbed due to power struggle among its Rangbah Shnongs.

One of its Dorbar Shnong Andrew A Jyrwa to fulfil his aspiration and ambition to grab power is mis-utilising a handful of local youths in the name of Seng Samla and subsequently maligning the image and prestige of Seng Samla as a whole. It is the need of the moment for the Seng Samla, Central body, to look into the matter and stop itself from becoming a pawn in the hands of power-hungry individuals. Jyrwa is arm-twisting everyone with the help of these bunch of youths in Laitumkhrah creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust. Sadly, the Acting Syiem is working according to Jyrwa's pre-planned strategy falling prey to his muscle power.

The decision makers and elders in Laitumkhrah should understand that a free and fair election with 100 percent voters' participation could not be held during the pandemic. Seniors and elders will definitely stay away from voting due to the fear of Covid infection. In fact, many organisations across the world postponed elections and important general meetings due to Covid. However, few in Laitumkhrah including Jyrwa and his gang wanted a quick election without the participation of elders and wise residents of Laitumkhrah, so that they can influence the election results to their benefit.

In fact, everyone in Laitumkhrah wants election, but in a free, fair and peaceful manner upholding the culture of our rich tribal society. Hence, in view of the forthcoming Dorbar election, the local MLA, District Council, acting Syiem and other authorities should take necessary steps to prevent future conflicts among the

forced the acting Syiem to suspend the existing three Rangbah Shnongs and again ironically reinstating one of its suspended Rangbah Shnong, Andrew Jyrwa as caretaker Rangbah Shnong to conduct elections within the next one month. This has confirmed the doubts that the Acting Syiem is working according to Jyrwa's pre-planned strategy falling prey to his muscle power.

electing Rangbah Shnongs, because, as far as we understand, the same set of people will contest the forthcoming election and will become Rangbah Shnongs. Hence, it is imperative to resolve the existing conflicts among the suspended Rangbah Shnongs and plan for a strong future Dorbar which will work for the development of Laitumkhrah devoid of fear, extortion, intimidation and arm twisting.

Yours etc.,  
James Lyngdoh,  
Shillong -3

#### A catch in the advertisement

Editor,  
I read with consternation the advertisement appearing in The Shillong Times dated September 2, 2022 by the District Project Coordinator, RMSA calling for Assistant lecturers in different subjects at Tirok Sing Memorial Government Higher Secondary School, Laitumkhrah. The advertisement is silent on the salary except to state that it will be determined according to receipt of funds from the Ministry of Education (MoE). The posts are initially for one year and may be extended, subject again to receiving of funds from the MoE. The bait is such that when you're caught you cannot protest or complain for not receiving your salary

because you have accepted its condition i.e subject to receipt of funds from the distant MoE.

The experience of SSA funding from MoE has seen teachers in the streets. Why adopt a policy which is vulnerable to teachers' agitation? Government policy should be pragmatic and practical. One should think of other funding alternatives. Unemployment among our educated young people has grown to such an extent that it is like a volcano ready to explode at any time.

Yours etc.,  
Torist Mark,  
Via email

#### Rainwater harvesting

Editor,  
Meghalaya is situated in the highest rain-falling zone on the earth. This state has an average of seven to eight months long period of rainfall in a year. Sadly, we have not yet, so far seriously thought of conserving this natural source of abundant water, for our later use during the dry periods. During three-four months of dry spells, people are usually seen reeling under acute shortage of water for their household use. Year after year, newspapers report the woes of people living in the Greater Shillong area. Surprisingly, there is no plan

yet for any alternate supply or augmenting of the existing source of supply of potable water.

A few days ago, one Ms Reakor Shisha Kharkrang (ST Aug 18, 22) had written about the necessity of rainwater harvesting, in detail, in this column. Since then, there has been no follow-up or response from any quarters. This has prompted me to remind people as well as the Government of Meghalaya to take some action on this important issue. Why should we always wake up and be active only there is a crisis? The signals of the impending problem are already there. We have read in this very newspaper that trees and other wild vegetation are fast vanishing from the catchment areas, which are the natural reservoir of water. This is evident from the fact that our perennial rivers of the bygone days are now turning into dirty drains. Should we let this happen and continue, thinking everybody's business is nobody's business? The situation that may arise because of our inaction is for everyone to visualize. The much hyped about Jal Jeevan Mission or Har Ghar Jal will then be a pipe dream. From where will the water tankers, that we see plying every day, for the needy, get their tank replenished?

It is high time now, that we plan to avert this alarming situation. Augmenta-

tion of the existing water resources is an inescapable necessity. And to supplement our existing source of water supply, rainwater harvesting is a must.

As the state agency is the sole supplier of potable water in Shillong City, much of the initiative for rainwater harvesting should come from the Government or its urban bodies. Like the Roof Top Solar Plant subsidy provided by the Central Government (ST Sep 4, 2022) the State Government may also consider providing a similar subsidy to those who intend to construct Rainwater Harvesting Plant (RHP) in their existing buildings. A step further would be that all building plans in future, should be approved by the concerned authority, only when there is a provision for RHP, in the building blueprint. All large building projects of the government should also have RHP in their site plans. To ensure the availability of skilled workers for the construction of RHP the state government may consider imparting training to the local youths, well in advance.

Yours etc.,  
Krishna Chettri,  
Via email

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

"The beginning is the most important part of the work."

— Plato

## The Shillong Times

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### Time to legalise coal mining

MEGHALAYA'S Home Minister in an interview with this newspaper stated upfront that coal mining is a traditional activity which provides livelihoods to many in the State. He also wriggled out of the question of how coal can be transported without being detected by police all along the highway. Instead, the Home Minister threw the question back at the public and their role in reporting any such illegal transportation for which the Government had even put out an award. The police, according to the Home Minister, are not in a position to check the thousands of trucks carrying essential commodities and passing through Meghalaya on their way to the states of Mizoram and Tripura. The Home Minister is of course defending the indefensible since the crores of rupees accruing from the illegal coal mining and transportation does come into the coffers of those who facilitate its movement.

From 2014 Meghalaya has been losing revenue to the tune of over Rs 600 crores after rat-hole coal mining was banned by the National Green Tribunal after it was reported that several people died inside the mines with the deaths going unreported. Besides the acid mine drainage had turned several rivers adjoining the mining areas and even those at a distance toxic and unfit for human use or consumption. In fact, these rivers are so toxic that they no longer support riverine life. The NGT is right in responding to the reports of irresponsible and unsustainable mining without any environmental costs being paid by mine owners for offsetting the climate change phenomenon that happens as a result of mining activities. The incessant landslides across Meghalaya in the past few months are warning signs that unscientific mining could result in flooding and caving of mines which could bury people alive.

Meghalaya has been reporting that there is no mining since 2014 to the Union Ministry of Mines. The Minister for Mines has stated this in the Rajya Sabha on two successive occasions and therefore misleading the country. The Supreme Court maintains that mining can only start once there is a mining policy in place which will take into account the environmental concerns in a holistic manner. The MDA Government has been trying to wriggle out of this compliance requirement because the mine owners are also funding the elections and they don't want a policy that cuts into their profits. In this situation an illegality has been allowed to thrive for several years. It is time that political parties that promise to bring change in 2023 make legal mining of coal an active agenda. Let coal be mined legally and let the revenue accrue to the state exchequer and not to private coffers.

Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh arrived in India last Monday on a four-day visit. This is her fourth visit as the Prime Minister and seventh as an individual and the Opposition leader. This visit signals to renew and reaffirm ties between India and Bangladesh, especially as Hasina, though a friend of India historically, is criticised for her recent pro-China tilt.

The current backdrop to India-Bangladesh bilateral negotiations is the growth of the economies of both countries. India has just overtaken the United Kingdom as the fifth largest economy of the world after USA, China, Japan and Germany. Likewise, Bangladesh also has graduated to the rank of a middle-income country in 2021. But the latter has run into rough weather owing to the international situation mainly sparked by the war in Ukraine. Energy and food prices were soaring causing widespread protests; the depletion of foreign currency reserve has made crucial imports prohibiting; the import orders from the West on garment has hit the industry, which is the largest in the country; the skyrocketing demand for wheat has made Bangladesh the fifth largest wheat importer in the world.

On the other hand, although India's economy is growing, New Delhi is facing political and security issues in the neighbourhood which are largely instigated by China; be it Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, Bangladesh and of course, Pakistan, which has become almost a vassal state for China. The recent floods although have made Pakistan rethink its neighbourhood policies. In this atmosphere of hostility and poaching of neighbours by Beijing, New Delhi would like to have friendly neighbours. Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina has been a steady and consistent friend.

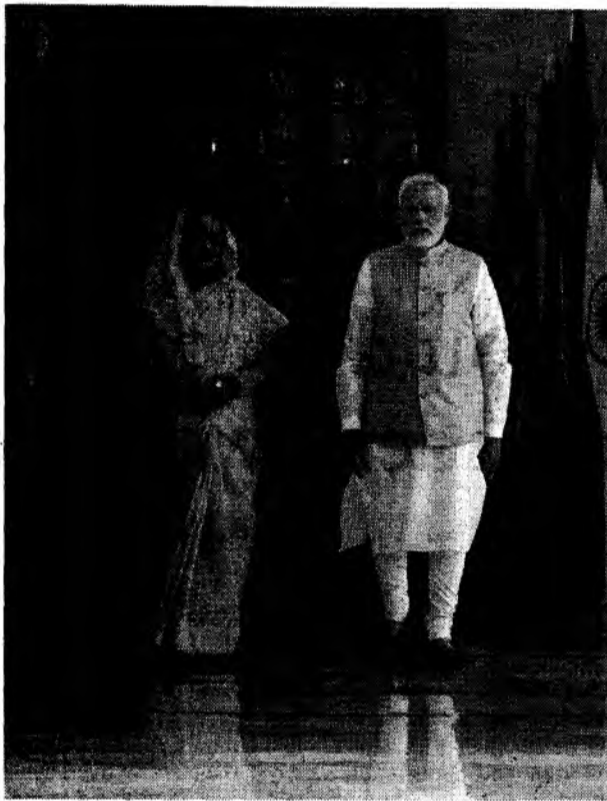
During the Sheikh Hasina's last visit in 2019, both the countries had signed seven pacts. In this visit also seven memorandums have been inked between India and Bangladesh in the areas of railways, science and space technology and broadcasting. These memorandums were signed after extensive discussion on bilateral issues related to water, trade, economic ties and regional and global issues. The MOUs were significantly signed in the presence of both the Prime Ministers. These are as follows:

An MOU between Jal Shakti Ministry of India and Ministry of Water Resources

Bangladesh on withdrawal of water from common border river Kushiya; two, between Ministries of Railways of India and Bangladesh on training of Bangladeshi Railway personnel in India; third, the two Railway Ministries on collaborations on IT systems such as FOIS and other IT applications for Bangladesh Railway; fourth, between National Judicial Academy of India and Bangladesh's Supreme Court on training and capacity building programmes for Bangladesh Judicial officers in India; fifth, between India's Council for Scientific and Industrial

both sides hinted at initiating discussions on a bilateral Economic Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which is expected to raise Bangladesh exports to India two-fold and enhance the country's GDP by at least two per cent.

There was, however, a concern from Bangladesh to rectify the wide asymmetry in the bilateral trade. Bangladesh exports 1.9 billion USD worth of goods to India and imports 16.15 billion USD from India. Sheikh Hasina and her team of Ministers accompanying her would like to at least partly balance the



Research (CSIR) and Bangladesh Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) on scientific and technological cooperation; sixth, on cooperation in areas of science and technology between New Space India Limited (NSIL) and Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited (BSCL) and seventh, between Prasar Bharati, India and Bangladesh Television on cooperation in broadcasting.

In addition to the above, New Delhi provided some information about the projects to be signed and/or inaugurated by both countries. These included the unveiling of the Maitree thermal power plant in Rampal in the district of Bagerhat; the inauguration of the Khan Jahan Ali Bridge over Rupsha River in Khulna, Bangladesh also known as Rupsha bridge, and Khulna Darshana railway line link by making it double line.

Across Asia, India is the biggest market for exports from Bangladesh. In order to deepen bilateral trade,

trade disparity. This would help her answer the domestic critics, who argue that their country importing 600 million USD of rice, mostly parboiled was a sign of India's overarching shadow on the country's economy.

The statement by Narendra Modi should lift the spirits of Bangladeshis. He said, "the trade between India and Bangladesh is increasing rapidly. We have decided to extend cooperation in the IT, Space and Nuclear sectors. Talks are also underway on power transmission lines". On another area, which occasionally becomes controversial is the water sharing, mainly in Teesta River. The Prime Minister said that 54 rivers flow through India and Bangladesh border influencing the livelihoods of a large number of people in both countries. An important agreement was signed on Tuesday on water-sharing in Kushiya River.

On the political front, the indication coming from the

joint statement was that the common ground for understanding and cooperation was growing between two countries. Both leaders were full of appreciation of each other as they resolved to fight common threats of cross-border terrorism, radicalisation and covid like pandemics. Hasina reaffirmed that India is the most important and closest neighbour of Bangladesh. She extolled the bilateralism between the two countries as the 'role model for neighbourhood diplomacy'. Quite an assertion that! She attributed this to the visionary leadership of Modi that continues to add momentum to the bilateral relations.

Modi reciprocated the goodwill for India and appreciation of his leadership. He said that Bangladesh had witnessed rapid development under the guidance of Hasina. "It is our biggest trade partner in the region and we share strong cultural ties", he added. Remember that Hasina has been at the helm for 13 years. Although she has faced stiff opposition from her rival party BNP who even called her 'a proxy of India', it is under Hasina, the same radicalised elements suffered the biggest electoral setback - outright public rejection.

Sheikh Hasina looks to India as a friend and mentor owing to the strong historical inks from the days of liberation of her country. She herself had sought political asylum in India for six years up to 1981. Her family has had a 70-year-old link with the 12th-century shrine in Ajmer. The Chistis of the Shrine have been the hereditary priests of Hasina family. Her father Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the founder of Bangladesh, had visited the shrine in 1957.

Diplomats from Bangladesh asserted that the PM gives primacy to India among all its allies even though it may not be so easy to state in the geo-political stage. But it is evident in all her speeches and interviews she gave in the run up to the visit. Sheikh Hasina's inclination toward India is obvious, but the challenge is to build solid relations between peoples of both countries.

India should not repeat the mistake committed in Nepal by supporting the part of the population, the Madhesis. Each country requires a specially calibrated strategy. In Pakistan it is the government which is antagonistic unlike in Bangladesh where it is the people. New Delhi should see such nuances in the neighbourhood diplomacy. —INFA (The writer is Prof. International Relations, JIMMC)

## Bharat Jodo Yatra - opportunity for Congress to reassert its secular moorings

### Participation of civil society activists sure to impart a new dimension

By Arun Srivastava

Rahul Gandhi in September 7 launched his most cherished "Bharat Jodo Yatra" after offering obeisance to his father Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumbudur, where he was assassinated in 1991. Choosing Sriperumbudur for launching Yatra is quite significant. It might prove to be the turning point in Indian politics and project Rahul Gandhi as the challenger to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his divisive agenda. The Yatra aims at completely reshaping and redesigning the political contour of the country.

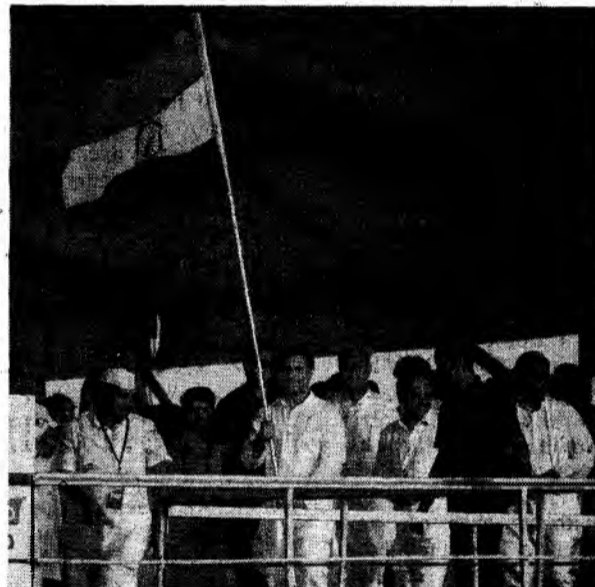
His move no doubt would rejuvenate the party and help it gain some political relevance and respectability amongst the people of the country. It would work to expose the divisive policies and false hood practiced by the RSS and Narendra Modi to the rural people of the country. Offering prayer to Rajiv Gandhi memorial in Sriperumbudur, just before launch of Yatra also sends a very strong message that Congress under Rahul is different. Taking a leaf out of his father's politics, Rahul will try to give a majortwist to the Congress policies and programmes. The Yatra will focus on the economic disparities, social polarisation, political centralisation and

in that case his New India will be a land of communal violence, hatred and a lackey of capitalists who are out to loot Old India.

Some people are trying to find a similarity between L K Advani's Rath Yatra in the early 1990s and Rahul's Bharat Yatra. But unfortunately they prefer to ignore that it was Advani's Yatra that had sown the seeds of communalism, communal violence and politics of hatred. But this Yatra is a mission to integrate India and restore the ethos of India which is being destroyed by the Narendra Modi regime.

The Group 23, the pressure group of the dissident leaders inside the Congress was born in late 2020, but it is really surprising that they became quite proactive coinciding with the announcement of Bharat Jodo Yatra, first major mass-outreach programme.

The Yatra is a mass movement to create awareness among people. It is expected that after this Yatra the Congressmen will turn aggressive towards the rightist forces and particularly the BJP. The stress of Rahul has been on Yatra serving as a political bridge that connects opposition parties with grassroots movements. He pointed to the possibil-



bizarre attempt to communalise the politics of India.

Over these years Rahul has come to realise that the only mechanism to rejuvenate the Congress was to involve the common people who are not associated with Congress. It is interesting to notice that the 150 civil society bodies who will be part of the yatra have been basically severe Congress critics. It is the urgency of the situation and compulsion to check the rightist forces from ravaging the political and democratic institutions of the country that have led them respond to his call in spite of their disagreements with the Congress Party in many aspects. This underlines the importance of the programme.

Bharat Jodo Yatra is the largest mass mobilization programme the Congress has undertaken in Independent India. It will cover 12 states and two union territories in five months. Significantly around 1 lakh citizens, those who are not associated with Congress, have volunteered to join the Yatra at different stages. An exercise to awake the common people towards the Modi's move to finish the democratic institutions and the constitution, the Yatra is a direct assault on the RSS and Modi government. There is no doubt that this would have kinetic effects on the polity and the politics.

This move of Rahul will also obliterate Modi's oft repeated charge of dynastic politics and rule. The yatra will also expose the triviality of RSS and BJP slogan of new nationality of New India. Though Modi has been systematically harping on creating a New India, but sad enough he has miserably failed to put his perception in public domain. If one is to believe what he says,

of resuscitating Indian democracy. Significantly some of the groups, which have been maintaining distance from political parties, after this meet have decided to engage with the Bharat Jodo Yatra. What was worse, scared of this move of Rahul, the corporate media has launched the canard that some NGOs, the "andolan-jivis" have planned to join the Congress.

In fact Yogendra Yadav pointed out that over the last year, there have been several efforts to create such a bridge. Several eminent persons, intellectuals and activists met in Delhi in September 2021 to explore the possibility under the working name "India Deserves Better". Subsequent meetings were held in Bengaluru, Kochi, Jaipur, Prayagraj, and Guwahati. Some of these participants have carried the initiative forward as "Hum Hindustani". The basic idea is to forge a broader unity of all those who wish to reclaim the republic and strengthen the hands of democratic resistance.

On 13-14 August, 'Rashtra Nirman Samagam' was held at Varanasi by a group of activists associated with Gandhian institutions and the JP movement. These included Amarnath Bhai, Ramachandra Rahi, Prashant Bhusan and Anand Kumar. The meeting resolved to launch a multi-pronged nationwide movement to strengthen national unity and save democracy. The conclave represents a significant moment in the history of party-movement relationships in India. The Bharat Jodo Yatra is acting as a bridge between the secular forces and the most active civil society movement of the country. The Yatra success is sure to give a big jolt to the sappers at the national level. (IPA Service)

## Hasina in India

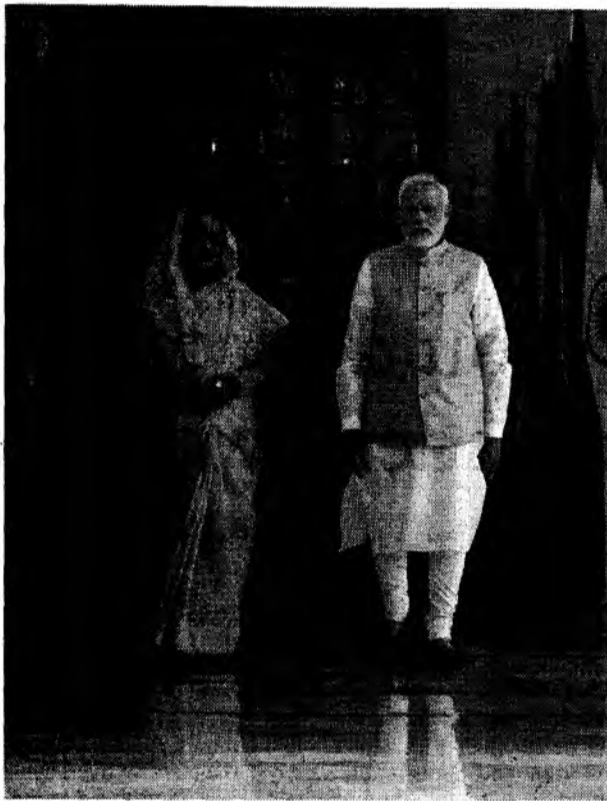
# Reaffirming ties

By Dr D.K. Giri

Bangladesh on withdrawal of water from common border river Kushiya; two, between Ministries of Railways of India and Bangladesh on training of Bangladeshi Railway personnel in India; third, the two Railway Ministries on collaborations on IT systems such as FOIS and other IT applications for Bangladesh Railway; fourth, between National Judicial Academy of India and Bangladesh's Supreme Court on training and capacity building programmes for Bangladesh Judicial officers in India; fifth, between India's Council for Scientific and Industrial

both sides hinted at initiating discussions on a bilateral Economic Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which is expected to raise Bangladesh exports to India two-fold and enhance the country's GDP by at least two per cent.

There was, however, a concern from Bangladesh to rectify the wide asymmetry in the bilateral trade. Bangladesh exports 1.9 billion USD worth of goods to India and imports 16.15 billion USD from India. Sheikh Hasina and her team of Ministers accompanying her would like to at least partly balance the



Research (CSIR) and Bangladesh Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) on scientific and technological cooperation; sixth, on cooperation in areas of science and technology between New Space India Limited (NSIL) and Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited (BSCL) and seventh, between Prasar Bharati, India and Bangladesh Television on cooperation in broadcasting.

In addition to the above, New Delhi provided some information about the projects to be signed and/or inaugurated by both countries. These included the unveiling of the Maitree thermal power plant in Rampal in the district of Bagerhat; the inauguration of the Khan Jahan Ali Bridge over Rupsha River in Khulna, Bangladesh also known as Rupsha bridge, and Khulna Darshana railway line link by making it double line.

Across Asia, India is the biggest market for exports from Bangladesh. In order to deepen bilateral trade,

trade disparity. This would help her answer the domestic critics, who argue that their country importing 600 million USD of rice, mostly parboiled was a sign of India's overarching shadow on the country's economy.

The statement by Narendra Modi should lift the spirits of Bangladeshis. He said, "the trade between India and Bangladesh is increasing rapidly. We have decided to extend cooperation in the IT, Space and Nuclear sectors. Talks are also underway on power transmission lines". On another area, which occasionally becomes controversial is the water sharing, mainly in Teesta River. The Prime Minister said that 54 rivers flow through India and Bangladesh border influencing the livelihoods of a large number of people in both countries. An important agreement was signed on Tuesday on water-sharing in Kushiya River.

On the political front, the indication coming from the

joint statement was that the common ground for understanding and cooperation was growing between two countries. Both leaders were full of appreciation of each other as they resolved to fight common threats of cross-border terrorism, radicalisation and covid like pandemics. Hasina reaffirmed that India is the most important and closest neighbour of Bangladesh. She extolled the bilateralism between the two countries as the 'role model for neighbourhood diplomacy'. Quite an assertion that! She attributed this to the visionary leadership of Modi that continues to add momentum to the bilateral relations.

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## Education and the Government

Editor,  
The heading of a news item in The Shillong Times, 'Lone teacher of EGH school absent for 3 years' (ST September 3, 2022), did not shock me but it causes pain. It shows the state of affairs of education and the Education department of our state. No wonder among the smaller states, Meghalaya is leading from behind in the National Survey conducted by PIE Index 2020-21 in Primary and Secondary Education for the second consecutive year.

We are in the celebration mode of the State's 50th anniversary. It is a time for introspection about the developments in the state. Be it road communication, industry, health, education or tourism, in all these areas, I feel we are far behind compared to other states of the North East itself. We have one of the highest infant mortalities in the state. After construction of the airport in Tura, we say 'the runway is short' for the flights to operate. What a colossal waste of public money and vain hope for the people of Garo Hills.

For any state to grow and move forward, education is the crucial factor, especially

at the primary level. The MBOSE result of class X shows the pass percentage in Garo Hills is ranging between 28-32%. And when we take the result of only government run school, it will be less than 10%, I guess.

Primary schools, with one or two teachers is unfair and injustice is being done to those children. How can one or two teachers impart education in five class rooms? They are not super humans to be present in two class rooms at the same time! This indicates that the government is not serious about education, especially at the Primary level. Will the MDCs, MLAs, Ministers and other government officials send their children to these government schools? No one is bothered about the state of affairs in the villages, be it education, health, roads, etc.

Most of the villages have primary school and in some village's government primary and SSA primary. We wonder the need for two government/aided schools in the same village. Probably the government is not appointing the minimum required teachers (at least one per class) because of its bearings on the exchequer. I feel one of the solutions to this issue is to merge two or three primary schools

and pool up the human and material resources. Children in the villages can and will be happy to walk one or two kilometres. But are the politicians and the government willing to take such steps? No, they are more worried about vote bank and petty interests. It is high time that we wake up and revamp our education system especially at the Primary level.

We celebrated the Teacher's Day a couple of days back. All the teachers need to respond to their inner voice, Am I a responsible and committed teacher or Am I a part of the news item, 'Lone teacher of EGH school absent for 3 yrs'.

Yours etc.,  
Bro K.J. Jose  
(Principal, Montfort School, Jonglapara, NGH)

## The Controversial MoU

Editor,  
We have read an important news item on the front page of your esteemed daily on "Clear Mess in the first Six Areas" (ST Aug 22, 2022). A lot has been written in the media almost daily both in the English and the vernacular newspapers, on the controversial MoU signed by the two Chief Ministers

(CMs) of Assam & Meghalaya on 29 March 2022 in Delhi. The MoU is indeed controversial. For example, in spite of the historical facts and geographical contiguity which are the two most important of the five agreed principles adopted by the two CMs, a large part of the Khanapara sector in the Ri Bhoi district was decided in favour of Assam. According to 'Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteng' written by Dr Homiwell Lyngdoh, LMS, MBE first published in 1938, the entire Borduar area i.e. from Nongkhlaw in the west to Khanapara in the east has been occupied by the people led by Sajar Nangli (Shahjir) who left Jaintia Kingdom around the first part of the 16th century. The people living now in the villages from Bariduar where the University (USTM) is now located, up to Khanapara are still aware of this historical fact. But the present government of Meghalaya had ignored this fact; apparently it was trying to fight shy of the need to involve historians and other intellectuals so that they could decide the boundary issue on give-and-take basis. Hence instead of deciding the boundary line along the National Highway from Jorabad up to Beltola Chariali junction, much of the Khanapara area was given to Assam. It is indeed

a sell-out! The second example is that a large part of the Nonglang Sirdarship created by the British was given away to Assam.

It may be recalled that in the month of July last year, after a meeting of the two CMs in Shillong, they jointly announced the five principles to the media but on the sidelines they mentioned an extraneous give-and-take principle which does not arise as many parts of the Himas/Sirdarships attached to the plains by the Britishers to serve their own revenue interest, have to be restored. The people still remember that the present CM of Assam was very much there in an important meeting in Shillong where the decision was taken to form the new government in Meghalaya in March 2018 after the general elections. Who knows the sell-out might be a quid pro quo!

Yours etc.  
Junior D. Lamin  
Via e-mail

## Pine Mount School affairs

Editor,  
It is with regret that we observe the state of affairs of Pine Mount School that has come to the fore in recent times. In any set up, if the head no longer enjoys the

confidence of the masses it is imperative on the part of that head to gracefully step down to mitigate further collapse of the system.

For instance, if our Chief Minister loses the confidence of his Council of Ministers, it would surely mean the collapse of the Government of the day. The Governor would have to step in even if the Chief Minister had only 10 months left before the general elections. It would be absurd to say that the Governor only recognizes the signature of the incumbent Chief Minister on any paper.

What has happened is a tight slap on the face of the Education Department of the Government of Meghalaya to even suggest that the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination would only recognize the signature of the incumbent Principal for the next 10 months. This shows a lack of political and bureaucratic will to take action where needed. Let heaven's light be our guide.

Yours etc.,  
Allan W. Kharkongor,  
(Concerned Parent)  
Via email

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

*"Caring about others, running the risk of feeling, and leaving an impact on people, brings happiness."*  
— Harold Kushner

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LXX No. 30 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2022

**Leaders and democracies**

IT'S heartening to note that, unlike here, educated high-profile Indian-origin people are making waves and wielding power at the highest levels of governance in the US and the UK. The grim fact is also that those with insignificant academic profiles or credentials are mostly the movers and shakers on the Indian political turf. Suella Braverman, named as UK home secretary by new prime minister Liz Truss, holds the third rank in the ministry, the second being the Chancellor of the exchequer. Meanwhile, Indian-origin Priti Patel has exited and so did chancellor Rishi Sunak after he lost the fight to become the PM. Suella is a lawyer by profession, just as US vice president Kamala Harris whose mother was Indian. These worthies climbed up the ladder and held the top posts even as the population of Indians in the UK as per a recent count was no more than 2.5 per cent and in the US 1.5 per cent.

Clearly, democracy's tone, tenor and content in the West are different from that of India, the Asian nation that claims to be the world's largest democracy. It's safe to stress that quality counts in the Western scheme of things; set against the deeply-entrenched 'chacha bathija' culture here, where nepotism and favouritism are the ways of life in almost every field. Dynasties have made the scenario worse. The result is, merit is the first casualty. Brain power among the 'movers and shakers' is perceptibly in short supply while many among them revel in 'throwing their weight around'. The deep social divides like caste and religion take the upper hand in electoral arithmetic, their sum total leaving a bitter taste behind. Little wonder, then, that Indian democracy lacks the shine of governance systems in the West in terms of merit and brain power. In the long run, where this will lead the nation to is anybody's guess.

As for matters of application of merit in selection of key functionaries of government, the top executive holds the key. This has a trickle-down trend, positive or negative, and it percolates down to the lowest levels. Run-of-the-mill politicians who made politics the end all and be all of their lives with no application of their mind on serious and complex aspects of life are a curse on the nation. Over the years, like bureaucrats, they have formed themselves into a bundle of vested interests. When politicians and bureaucrats compete among themselves to make gains for themselves at the cost of national interests, they defeat the people.

**Rural constituencies 'represented' by urban-yuppie MLAs**

By Patricia Mukhim

One challenge that the rural folks of Meghalaya face is that their MLAs are all Shillong-based. MLAs that are also ministers make flying visits to their constituencies and return to Shillong in the evening. Very seldom do they stay the night. Almost every MLA representing the people of Garo Hills, Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills has a home in Shillong. Some have newly acquired mansions after they became ministers in the MDA Government. Now that elections are knocking at their heads and their hearts have started pumping faster they visit their constituencies much more frequently just so that their faces register in their voters' minds and they are not blanked out.

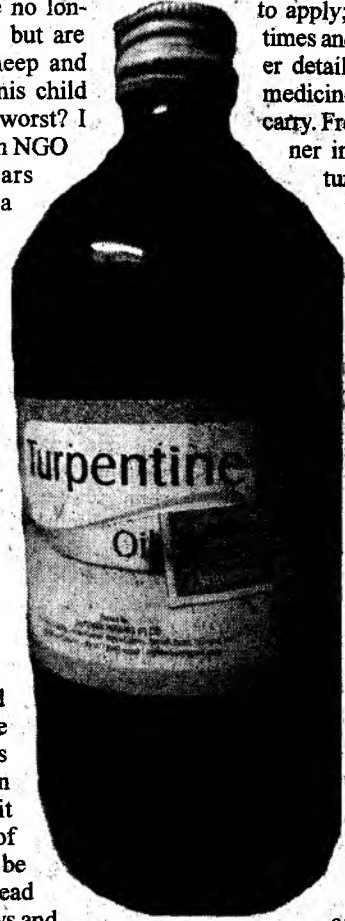
When these MLAs do visit their constituencies it is almost always a VIP visit. They hardly spend time talking to the hoi-polloi or spend a little time visiting the markets and generally talking to people there like he/she is one of them. There is always that air of self-importance even though many have done precious little for their constituencies. Take the case of Mawsynram. The roads leading to this area are still as narrow as they were 20 years ago whereas the roads leading to Mairang and beyond have received a facelift. The MLA who was probably born and brought up in Shillong and spent the larger part of his life as a bureaucrat based in Shillong hardly understands the pain of his constituents that have to negotiate these narrow roads on a daily basis. He does not have to suffer that pain as a well-heeled urban yuppie. If he felt the pulse of the people he would know for instance that the Primary Health Centre at Lawbah which was completed at least two years ago and now has a doctor and other staff functioning there, is unable to admit patients needing hospital care; in other words to activate the in-patient department, although the beds are available. Why so? Because the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) has not constructed the all-important drainage system. Whatever water flows from the hospital drains at the moment floods the surrounding grassy areas and creates a swamp there. This water is more than likely to seep to the nearby human habitations.

An MLA should know exactly how each of the institutions—health, education, agriculture, horticulture are functioning. He/she should know which parts of the constituency face water supply hiccups, electricity problems and which areas need to be connected by better roads so that cash crops can find their way to the markets beyond the places where they are grown. Let's admit the fact that most of the government-

run educational institutions in our state are functioning in the breach, in the absence of supervision and monitoring by the Education Department vide its inspectors. There is a huge chunk of children in the villages of Khasi and Jaintia Hills aged 10-12 years that are no longer in school but are tending to sheep and cattle. Isn't this child labour at its worst? I recall a certain NGO some ten years ago raising a stink on child labourers inside the coal mines of Meghalaya. Why is that same NGO not focusing on child labour outside the coal mines? Is it because there is no one to fund on issues outside the coal mines? And what about the Child Rights Protection Council? Is it not the right of every child to be in school instead of grazing cows and sheep?

In the area of health-care, one wonders why the Director of Health Services cannot make a surprise visit to the PHCs and CHCs to see how they are functioning. Let's admit one thing—without any supervision and accountability mechanism all institutions are not functioning to the optimum. On Thursday

short expiry window? Some other PHCs say they have received hundreds of bottles of 'turpentine oil.' The doctors say that the turpentine oil is meant for joint pain. Funny the bottle of turpentine has no claim about its efficacy or directions as to how to apply; how many times and all the other details that most medicine containers carry. From the manner in which the turpentine oil is being distributed it would seem that the majority of Meghalayans have joint pain. If that is so, then isn't it time to check why so many suffer joint pain? Is it due to weak ligaments or Vitamin D deficiency or osteoporosis or arthritis or what? We have always known that the Health Department is also a money minting department. It is learnt that while the pandemic was a period of great fear, trepidation, anxiety and loss for many, for those manning the Health Department it was a time for making money. Since Covid was declared a health disaster and



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while doing research on the functioning of PHCs in some villages of East Khasi Hills the villagers said they preferred to go to a private doctor because the PHCs don't give them medicines. They are told to buy medicines from outside. In some PHCs the stock of medicines are such that when they receive the medicines the window period of expiry is just about 6-7 months. If the medicines are not dispensed immediately they expire. Why does the Health Department acquire medicines with such a

the intervention was more of disaster management, many of the routine protocols and observances for indenting and acquiring the necessary safety kits (sanitisers, gloves, masks, oxymeters, thermometers etc.) and medicines were waived off and the norms relaxed. The question is why are the MLAs in the present legislature not doing their homework to dig out these money making rackets in the Health Department. Now I wish to point out that there are senior bureaucrats man-

ning the Health Department who I personally have a lot of respect for because they have identified several gaps in the health delivery system and are trying their best to remedy these. But the onus of acquiring medicines and other paraphernalia is the brief of the Director of Health Services and it has been our experiences over the years that all medicine indents and the ones who actually hobnob with medical representatives are actually senior doctors (technicians) and ministers and not bureaucrats. This is because MLAs representing rural Meghalaya just do not care enough to even raise questions that their constituents would like to.

Take the example of Pius Marwein representing Ranikor constituency with 127 villages, some very distant and poorly connected to the district headquarters. We hardly hear of him taking up any issue of substance since elected in August 2018. And because he belongs to the UDP, a coalition partner of the MDA Government his lips are sealed in the Assembly. He too lives in Shillong and does not have to undergo the daily grind over backbreaking roads like the one to Wakhaji, that his constituents have to. This is the tragedy of electing an urban based MLA to take on the onus of a very backward rural constituency.

As election date draws near there is a palpable yearning for change by those who understand that they have been short-changed by every government in the past 50 years. Indeed there is a paradox to the longings of such people because they seem to be in a minority. The large majority of voters are sharpening their knives for the kill. The money that will be floating around during election campaign time will delete all angst for development. Their memory banks will be temporarily short-circuited because nothing else matters except money. Even in the villages when people are asked as to who they perceive to be the winning candidate, they smirk and say, "Whoever has money to throw around." Money therefore is the grease that runs the election wheels.

In these next four months sitting MLAs from distant constituencies will be seen visiting their constituents more often, only to deceive once elected. One would expect outrage from voters that have been ignored if not conned. But no, history repeats itself. We truly get the government we deserve from sleepwalking, apathetic voters with no idea of the future they want. No wonder the noted sociologist, Durkhiem had said that he is sceptical of the power of unaided reason to penetrate the complexities of social and moral reality. In this case Durkhiem should have added the political realities too!

**A story on the fall of cricket**

By Vidyadhar Date

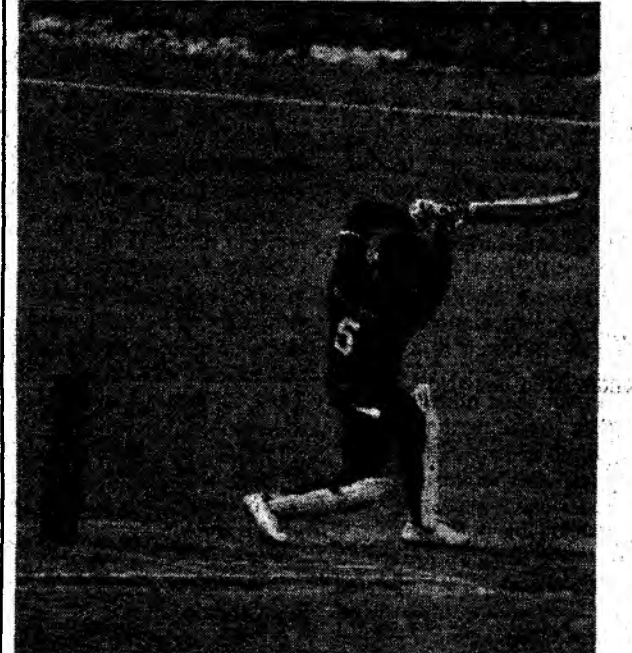
A recently released book about alleged corruption in the Mumbai Cricket Association or MCA is titled 'Bouncer'. The title is appropriate in terms of cricket terminology but it might as well have been called bombshell considering the storm it has created in the governing circles of cricket. This is not unexpected as the MCA is the richest State board in India and the epicentre of Indian cricket. The MCA is a permanent member of the Board of Control for Cricket in India and houses the headquarters of the BCCI in the Cricket Centre within the famous Wankhede Stadium in South Mumbai where international test matches have been played since 1975. The BCCI, as everyone knows, is the richest governing body of cricket in the world and a part of the "big three" of international cricket along with 'Cricket Australia' and the 'England and Wales Cricket Board'.

Ravi Mandrekar, the author of the book (Full name: 'Bouncer - The Story of David and Goliath in MCA'), is a former office bearer of the MCA, is an insider in the game and is President of the Hindu Gymkhana Club. The Club which is one of the founder members of the

politicians and players. He has also pointed out the corruption involved in the distribution of such passes and tickets in some cases. He has also alleged discrepancies, among others, about the number of tickets printed and the number shown to auditors in some other cases.

The book was released in Mumbai recently by Jai Narayan Patel, a former Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, at the Bombay Gymkhana and is printed by Granthali, a noted publishing house devoted to public causes.

Mandrekar is a cricketer himself with a rich socio-political family background. His father was a lawyer brought up in the socialist tradition of the Rashtra Seva Dal and his mother hailed from the family of Ramkrishna Bhandarkar, a major social reformer, scholar and rationalist. He says he has often seen elite members standing with a glass of beer in hand talking against corruption but not standing up to bullies and not insisting on accountability from authorities. The book points us of the problems of corruption in sport, with cricket now a money spinner and tournaments like the IPL bringing in huge sums for the BCCI.



Bombay Cricket Association, the body now known as the MCA.

The MCA was established in 1930 and is the governing body for cricket in the city and the extended suburbs. The MCA is run by a managing committee which is elected every two years by the general body consisting of 350 member-clubs. The MCA owes its rich cricket heritage to the quadrangular and pentangular tournaments played in Bombay with star cricketers of the country participating in them. Bombay was considered the nursery of Indian Cricket and has given the country nearly 70 test cricketers. The MCA has dominated the Ranji Trophy, the most noted domestic first-class cricket championship conducted by the BCCI since 1934-35, winning 41 out of 87 times the tournament has been played. The MCA also has a record 15 victories in a row (from 1958-59 to 1972-73), reflecting the golden period of cricket in Mumbai. Now, Mumbai's Ranji trophy team struggles at the initial stages and has lost to teams from Chhatisgarh and Puduchery. There appears to have been an all-round fall. The book is full of citations, graphs, charts and many specifics. For example, he gives a two-page chart about the distribution of complimentary passes for the India-West Indies match of 2019 in Mumbai. Mandrekar gives a break-up of different stands in the stadium, including the Gavaskar Stand, the Vijay Merchant Stand, the Grand Stand and MCA Stand. And the passes given to numerous categories of people ranging from government officers, police, politicians, income tax, MMRDA, the city planning authority, prohibition and excise, customs,

The message appears to be simple and has been talked about often: cricket has become a business, sans any professionalism. Corrupt elements have infiltrated the game; there is a fiefdom for politicians and their families. This is not how it used to be. Mumbai cricket was formerly run by middle-class, genuine cricket lovers, those dedicated to the sport. M.V.Chandgadkar, an able administrator of the game, was a professor of English at Mumbai's noted R A Podar College of Commerce and Economics, and wrote a history of the first fifty years of MCA. He was a secretary of the BCCI.

When Pepsi was entering the market in India in 1990, it organised international cricket matches at Wankhede stadium for two days and the management agreed to rent out the stadium for Rs.50,000. It was only after protests from members like Mandrekar that the amount was raised several times.

Books like these need to be written about every cricket association in the country and about associations of other sports. We have a lot of glamour writing in sports, and especially on cricket. It is time to take a hard look at what is not sport. Sports writing can and should be a serious work. Dave Zirin, the author of a People's History of Sports in the U.S. and one of the best sports writers, is also an eminent scholar and now has a project to write a biography of Howard Zinn, the renowned American historian. Sports, after all, is about people and character and excellence, and it needs some careful study and scrutiny.

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

Letters to the Editor

**Lackadaisical attitude of SBI, 3rd Mile staff**

Editor, I would like to bring to the attention of the authorities concerned about the lackadaisical attitude of a male staff at the SBI, 3rd Mile Branch. A 93 year old person went to the bank on September 7, 2022 to update his passbook. The particular staff who was approached did not show courtesy to the senior citizen who did not know to update the passbook by using the ATM machine. At the intervention of an acquaintance of the senior citizen who is familiar with bank procedures, the staff concerned was forced to offer assistance. As he was not able to complete the task, he asked the senior citizen to come back after two hours. But when the senior citizen returned after two hours, the task was still incomplete. Even at the time of writing

this letter, the simple task is still pending.

In the month of July, I went to this bank to open an account for my daughter who was preparing to go out of the state for studies. To my dismay, it was the same staff who told us that the bank at the moment does not have enough staff and as such a new account cannot be opened in this branch at least for a month. But when I went to another SBI branch in Shillong, the account was opened on the spot.

Earlier, all staff at this bank were very helpful and polite. Indeed, most people were very happy with this bank and the way it was functioning. But this experience and the attitude of bank staff at this branch towards customers and especially towards senior citizens has left me wondering as to whether I should continue banking with this bank. I am sure that I am not the only one asking this question.

Being a resident of a locality where we have limited

choices when it comes to banking, I request the concerned authorities to kindly look into the matter so that the bank can faithfully serve the people of the localities in the area.

Yours etc.,  
B J Syiemlieh,  
Nongkseh

**Pine Mount School's fall from grace**

Editor, As a past pupil of Pine Mount School this is indeed the school that I and perhaps all the alumni of the school love and cherish. There is a kind of attachment that we have with the school that has moulded us into the beings that we are today. It was an ardent wish of my mother for me to study in this prestigious institution. When I first set foot into the school as a student of Class II, I was a shy young girl and unsure of the new place. With the

passage of time, I became one with the school. Pine Mount became my identity. My teachers were guides we looked up to and so revered and respected. For us, our teachers were placed on a pedestal and they deserve all the reverence.

Pine Mount was then known for its glory and high ideals. These "high ideals" were the ones taught by our teachers in school that indeed had and at least for me have been and will always be my guide. The school wasn't merely only academically oriented. In fact, every school and every educational institution should be one that nurtures minds, hearts and souls. Being in school for nearly 6 - 7 hours has a greater purpose than just book learning. It is here in this place that we form bonds, become families, share our fears and sorrows, happiness and joys. If this may sound like utopia, well let me clear the misconception that there isn't such a place for life is a bundle

of beautiful contradictions. There were ups and downs, the highs and the lows but our teachers were always there for us.

Since I left school, down the line the name and fame of Pine Mount seems to have gradually but surely deteriorated. Being in the news for all the wrong reasons has certainly brought in feelings of remorse and great pain. The school that was an epitome of prestige, distinction, recognition is being pulled down way below its image and glory. We hear complaints from parents of how things are not the same anymore. The school is no longer a model of excellence. There are lamentations from all quarters. But what is heart-breaking is to see the teachers carrying black flags, staging a protest with some of them being teachers, who not only taught me when I was in Class XI and XII, but teachers I cherish and hold very close to my heart.

It is indeed very disturbing. For them to voice their

concerns out in the open only means that things have become so murky and sinister and so out of control that no amount of trying to solve those within the school premises has helped. What is wrong must be set right. Nepotism, favouritism, high-handedness must take a back seat. No one has the right to play with the lives and future of our young minds. They are our pillars of tomorrow and therefore deserve utmost care and nurturing. As an alumnus, my sincere and earnest desire is to see the teachers of my school giving their best and staying happy while the students grow in the glory of, "the high ideals taught in school" and for my school to regain its name, honour and integrity.

Yours etc.,  
Jennifer Dkhar,  
Via email

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

*"Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction."*

— John C. Crosby

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LKV No. 31 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2022

**BJP's 'We Will, We Won't' Black Humour**

IT'S more than evident that the BJP in Meghalaya is a divided house. The Party seems to suffer from a serious default response. One day the BJP in charge of Meghalaya, Chuba Ao says the Party will send in the CBI and ED to check out the scams and that the Party will quit the MDA Government in a month. The next day the capricious MLA of Shillong South constituency who has always been a law unto himself says, 'nothing doing' 'no pulling out of the MDA.' The BJP State President, Ernest Mawrie makes it worse by now stating that there is no scam under the MDA Government. That's no surprise because he is a candidate for the 2023 elections and therefore wants to present the BJP as a holier than thou Party that had no part in the scams that surfaced from time to time. But is that even believable unless the BJP thinks the people of Meghalaya gullible?

It is learnt that in July this year the State BJP in their meeting had decided to pull out of the MDA to cleanse itself of the taint and anti-incumbency of the MDA Government. Prime Minister Modi's agenda of ensuring that the poorest are included in the economic hierarchy through various schemes seems to have bypassed Meghalaya. It is uncanny that the BJP here neither monitors how these schemes are implemented and whether they reach the last mile. That should be the brief of parties in a coalition. Beyond Shillong no one knows the BJP or speaks about the Party at the ground level. The BJP has done nothing by way of rural outreach. Whatever ground was gained by the Party to date is because of the silent work of the RSS, VHP and its other verticals here. The Meghalaya BJP per se has little to show by way of outreach programmes.

The fact is also that the two BJP MLAs who won the elections in 2018 have not been consistent in their stances. One was with the NCP and the other with the Congress. If they won it is because of reasons other than that they contested from the BJP. In Meghalaya there is a personality cult following and people don't vote for a political party but for its nominee. Some people win no matter which party they contest from. This is what makes it difficult for any Party, the BJP included to rein them in. Sanbor Shullai is a law unto himself. How the BJP will fare in 2023 is uncertain as of now, unless the Party is able to instil discipline not in its karyakartas but in its so-called leaders.

**Bharat Jodo: Congress's Yatra for Revival or Gandhi family Survival?**

By Rajdeep Sardesai

Of all the data points that reveal the contrasting fortunes of the BJP and the Congress over the last decade, here is the most striking: the BJP won 7.84 crore votes in 2009 but as many as 22.9 crore votes in 2019 while the Congress won 11.9 crore votes in 2009 and 11.94 crore votes in 2019. In effect, while the BJP votes have almost tripled, the Congress votes have remained static, indicating a stark failure to attract 'new' or 'floating' voters. Which is why the ambitious Kashmir to Kanyakumari Bharat Jodo Yatra is perhaps a final chance for the grand old party to restore a lost connect with the voter before the 2024 general elections.

Rewind to 2009, the last time the Congress bested the BJP in a national election. The Congress was clearly on an upswing, winning 206 seats, its best tally since the landslide of 1984. The BJP, by contrast, was down and almost out, winning just 116 seats, its lowest tally since the party's breakthrough election of 1991. Success can breed complacency: the Congress mistakenly concluded that the 2009 mandate marked a return to an era of dominance when the verdict was actually only another opportunity to build for the future. By contrast, the loss was a wake-up call for the BJP, a realization that the Vajpayee-Advani era was drawing to a close, both their stalwart leaders now 'tired' and 'retired'.

Flashback to 2011-12, the other critical period in the ebb and flow of politics. The Congress-led UPA government was battered by a series of scam allegations, culminating in the Anna Hazare anti-corruption agitation. Instead of using its executive power to challenge the Anna movement, the Congress surrendered the narrative to an inchoate grouping of political novices. By contrast, the BJP capitalized on a distinct momentum shift by craftily aligning with the anti-incumbency mood and then throwing up in Narendra Modi the ideal muscular mascot to confront an increasingly effete-looking Congress old order. The rest is history.

Which leaves open the question: if the BJP could recover from the debris of 2009 to achieve its first parliamentary majority in the space of just five years, what stops the Congress from similarly bouncing back? The answer lies in the three key elements any party needs to script a revival: strong message, inspirational messenger, robust organization. Between 2012 and 2014, the BJP discovered all three. The

message of providing stable, corruption-free governance—exemplified by the 'acche din' slogan—resonated amongst voters who were fatigued by high inflation, scam charges and the compromises of co-

'Pappification' of Rahul Gandhi has meant that the Congress's preferred choice for leadership has never been able to strike a chord with any constituency outside the party's echo chambers,



alition politics. In Mr Modi, the BJP had a messenger whose persona as an aggressive communicator and 'doer' neta was in sharp contrast to Manmohan Singh's docile public profile. While in the RSS and the wider sangh parivar, the BJP had the enthusiastic cadre to ensure last mile connectivity.

In the last decade, the Congress has struggled on all these fronts. It has been unable to enunciate a coherent message that can compete with the BJP's core 'hyper-nationalism' plank. A 'Hindu' versus 'Hindutva' pitch has only confused the rank and file: is the Congress a party that cannot accommodate religious identity because it is wedded to a secular ideal that lacks clarity in the face of cynical vote bank politics? As Sonia Gandhi candidly admitted in 2018, the BJP has managed to convince a large number of people that the Congress is a 'Muslim party'.

The BJP's other great success lies in mocking Rahul Gandhi as a 'Pappu', a sustained, well-choreographed campaign designed to ridicule the Congress leader as unfit for politics. This

his own style of episodic stop-start political interventions hardly helping matters. This credibility deficit has been perhaps most acute amongst the younger social media savvy demographic: the Lokniti post-poll survey in 2019 reveals that the gap in popularity between Mr Modi and Mr Gandhi was the highest in the 18 to 21 age group. And finally, the Congress has been unable to reorganize itself organizationally. As an 'umbrella' party of power for several decades, the Congress perhaps never felt the necessity to nurture a cadre even remotely equivalent to the saffron brotherhood. Grass-root front organisations like the Sewa Dal for example were marginalized right from the Indira Gandhi years to the point where membership began to rapidly shrink. Moreover, a centralized high command culture retarded the emergence of locally empowered state leaders. Just ahead of the 2019 elections, a senior Congress leader disclosed that more than 250 Congress district units were non-functional.

So what is the solution to the gravest existential crisis faced by the Congress in

its history? Message clarity beyond anti-Modism is the first step. If the Congress claims to stand for 'Bharat Jodo', then it must explain what specifically the slogan means in reality and not just as a catchword. Notions of economic equality and social harmony need to be fleshed out beyond just the familiar attacks on the Adani-Ambanis or indeed the RSS's Hindutva politics. Either the Congress provides a clear vision of its alternate economic agenda else the attacks on big business can only prove counter-productive. If social harmony is a rallying cry, then it must be an article of faith and not convenience: short-term alliances with religious clerics like Furfura Sharif in Bengal must be abandoned.

Secondly, the Congress desperately needs an inspiring messenger. Rahul Gandhi appears a reluctant leader, if well-intentioned, his 'power is poison' messaging hardly likely to enthuse party workers who are feeling increasingly frustrated at the prospect of a shrinking footprint across the country. Leadership is about motivation and not entitlement, consistency and not ad-hocism. Either Rahul Gandhi leads from the front or makes way for someone who has the appetite for a fight.

Finally, there is no path to political rejuvenation other than a mass connect. This requires a massive organizational shake-up that must begin with booth level workers. One of the biggest reasons for the BJP's success in recent years has been the efficacy of its booth-driven model: its booth committees and panna pramukh volunteers are at the heart of the formidable election machine. The Congress might justifiably argue that it doesn't have the resources or institutional support to match the BJP's efforts. But if, the Aam Aadmi Party can run such an energetic campaign in Gujarat, where it was practically non-existent till a few years ago, what stops the Congress from getting its act together? Finding excuses for sheer lethargy is no longer an option. Post-script: At the Congress's recent 'Mehngai pe Halla Bol' rally, the focus was ostensibly on rising prices. But restive workers in the audience kept shouting for Rahul Gandhi to take over as party president. In the next few weeks the Congress must decide: is the Bharat Jodo yatra about re-defining the party's message or relaunching the party's star messenger?

(The writer is a senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeep@sardesai52@gmail.com)

**NDTV's Sreenivasan Jain allowed Trump to play on his own terms Exclusive interview reveals Bonhomie between Modi and former U.S. President**

By Sushil Kuttu

In the United States former presidents continue to be 'President' for the rest of their lives. And so, 'President Trump' gave an interview to NDTV and but for the fact that seven seas separated India from the United States, Trump wouldn't have agreed to the interview for the simple reason that within earshot Trump would have known years ago that of the hundreds of Indian TV media, NDTV comes the nearest to aping CNN in its reportage philosophy.

And everybody knows how CNN decimated and demeaned the 45th POTUS. And continues to do so as an addiction can only be fought, not defeated. The grouse against President Donald Trump since the time he was forced to vacate the White House is that to this day he refuses to concede that President Joe Biden defeated him "fair and square" in 2020. CNN, especially, went to town with this Trump infringement and NDTV also made no bones about it.

Of course, Donald Trump did not know NDTV well

the Trump-Modi bonhomie was at its peak. And "yesterday at the interview" was the chance for NDTV to puncture Trump's Modi-ballon. But Sreenivasan Jain let the opportunity slip out of NDTV's hand and this was, perhaps, the ultimate lost opportunity in the history of lost opportunities.

At another point, to another question, President Trump told Jain, "I've had a great relationship with India and with Prime Minister Modi. We were, we've, been friends. And I think he's a great guy and doing a terrific job. It's not an easy job he's got. But we've known each other a long time. Good man."

Jain let that too go without raising a middle-finger equivalent. Donald Trump isn't the sort who doesn't like revelations. For sure, his understanding of Modi must only be skin deep despite the heavy hug-holding. He would have been intrigued if he was told a brief history of Narendra Modi in the best-NDTV rendition. But Sreenivasan Jain didn't ask Trump to explain the



when he sat down with the channel's Sreenivasan Jain and "Hindu American" Shalabh 'Shalli' Kumar for the interview. As it happened, Sreenivasan Jain turned out to be no match to the CNN's then White House correspondent Jim Acosta whose volatile encounters with Trump at White House pressers made him a poster boy of the left-liberal who hated Trump from his shoelaces up.

Unlike Acosta,

"terrific job" Modi has been doing.

Instead, he gave President Trump a clear route to take pot-shots at POTUS Joe Biden, and the Democrats. Sreenivasan Jain appeared too keen to position NDTV as a global media channel with this "world exclusive". Post the interview, the channel was congratulating itself on being the first in the world to make Trump confess there would be a Trump 2.0, and that Trump was continuing

NDTV's Sreenivasan Jain allowed Trump slack and more. This interview wouldn't stand for a "roast" if the stove itself was on fire. For example, Trump told NDTV that "Prime Minister Narendra Modi is doing a terrific job" and Jain let it go, scot-free! He didn't counter Trump with even a whimper.

Sreenivasan Jain gave the impression he didn't want to touch a raw Trump nerve. To his audience at home, this was not the Sreenivasan Jain they had come to accept as a natural-born tough cookie. Jain's line of questioning of 'The Donald' was tame, acetone-free and aseptic; perhaps the most docile journalist Donald Trump had ever faced in a career of journalists.

NDTV's Sreenivasan Jain allowed Trump slack and more. This interview wouldn't stand for a "roast" if the stove itself was on fire. For example, Trump told NDTV that "Prime Minister Narendra Modi is doing a terrific job" and Jain let it go, scot-free! He didn't counter Trump with even a whimper. Jain could have put his foot down and disputed Trump's carte blanche; asked Trump to explain himself; told him most Indians wouldn't give Trump the time of the day after hearing this.

That would have disabused Trump of his long-held view that Modi held India by its pulse. At the 'Howdy Modi' event in Houston,

to allege "vendetta". Trump was asked "But you say this vendetta?" and the reply came from "Hindu-American" Shalabh 'Shalli' Kumar: "Hindu Americans and India must know there's a big parallel from 2002 to 2014, everybody wanted to put Narendra Modi in jail. He was being vilified... Now he's the most popular man. The same thing is happening... President has been, you know, witch hunt. First, the Russian collusion - nothing. Impeachment - nothing".

NDTV let that go too. In fact, it seemed like Sreenivasan Jain was in awe of the "Hindu-American" go-between, and the two had come to an arrangement on the particular line of questioning Trump; and, while at it, also give Modi slack. So, India "has never had a better friend than me", and Trump had given the "broadest hint (to any channel worldwide) yet that he may be running for office again in 2024" because the punch-lines for this "NDTV world-exclusive". (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**Traumatic experience at Nursing College, NEIGRIHMS**

Editor, I have been serving in one of the reputed hospitals/institutes of the state but realising the change of time and the need to upgrade oneself I decided to undergo further studies. That is when I joined the Nursing college in NEIGRIHMS for my post-graduation. I thought I had made a great decision and initially it proved to be that way. The teachers were great and the Principal and other fellow students were also nice. But then as weeks went my once great experience became a nightmare. I was made to undergo a tortuous path which tormented me day in and day out. I was mentally abused by one of the lecturers there and this abuse was so horrific that I suffered from anxiety and frequent panic attacks and ultimately ended with depression. I also had episodes where the stress was just too much and I had even decided to harm myself. These events made me discontinue the course that I was pursuing as the agony due to the hostility I faced were just too

overwhelming. By God's grace I was able to get help through my support systems. I was taken to a professional who counselled me and I was also given some medication. I thought I would just let this pass but then I realise that I should not, because I do not want others to suffer the same fate as I did. Thankfully I received help. But what if I did not? Then the narrative would have been a different one altogether. Others may not be able to come forward and seek help as I did and this would cost lives.

As one who has suffered, I would like to recommend that NEIGRIHMS set up a regulatory body or any agency that will look after the mental well-being of students. This is the most important aspect yet it is neglected because had I not been fortunate enough to have a good support system I would not have been alive today.

I would also like to mention here that the teacher who inflicted the trauma on me lacks all the qualities of an ideal teacher and her professionalism is also questionable. She lacks the quality to listen; despises patience; makes learning teacher-centred and is very critical and hostile towards students. She would often verbally abuse students with words that hurt to the very

core of their being. This is not a one-off instance; it is an ongoing thing that ultimately made me suffer to such an extent that I was not able to eat, sleep or even think right.

This should not happen to anyone. I have put this up with some officials of the State Government and some NGO's to look into this issue and ensure that no student is made to undergo what I am undergoing and to suffer the same fate. As our profession teaches us, "Prevention is better than Cure".

This letter is to create public awareness of what is happening in the Nursing College in NEIGRIHMS now and to bring about change before it becomes too little too late. I hope this will shed light on the current situation and the Director will work earnestly to bring about change to prevent any disaster.

Yours etc., Name withheld on request (Msc. discontinued student)

**Quick response by SBI**

Editor, First of all I thank you and The Shillong Times for publishing my letter 'Lackadaisical Attitude of SBI 3rd mile staff' (ST Sep 3, 2022). I would like to express my

deep appreciation and gratitude to the senior management of the SBI Meghalaya for their prompt action in looking into the matter on the morning of the Sept 9, 2022 itself. In fact, I was taken by surprise when Mr Shyam Kharjana PS to Mr Amit Kumar, Deputy General Manager (B&O) Shillong, called just before noon to say that the DGM himself wanted to have a chat where he expressed his disappointment at what has happened besides assuring that such attitudes by the staff of SBI will not be tolerated.

The prompt action and humble gesture from the senior management of SBI Meghalaya is an example to all that this is the need of the hour to make our institutions work for the welfare of the public at large.

Thanks to the ST and to the DGM (B&O), SBI Shillong.

Yours etc., BJ Syiemlieh Nongkseh

**Roads in Garo Hills**

Editor, Meghalaya is celebrating its 50th year of statehood. It is a time to rejoice and be proud of the fact that we have become a state with the right to rule and govern

itself. Meghalaya with its rich heritage and prominence, certainly needs to feel proud at this moment of history. Its scenic beauty and the topography is marvelous. The beautiful rivers, mountains and meadows would attract anyone to the state. The capital city of Shillong is known all over the world as it is called the 'Scotland of East'. The other name 'The abode of clouds' is very apt for Meghalaya as we receive rains in abundance.

Such a beautiful state, one of the most attractive one for tourists, is lamentable to a great extent, mainly because of the road conditions. It has to lament every time when the citizens struggle to move on the road.

My main point of reference is Garo Hills, particularly North Garo Hills (NGH). I made almost a round trip in NGH and all the roads are in the same condition. There are big and small gutters all over. Daily if you make a trip, you don't need any other physical exercise and your spine will be under repair within a short period. I found most of the roads are in a very pathetic condition.

Road tax, passenger tax, etc are collected regularly. Where is the allocated money spent for different road works? When we celebrate the 50th birthday of the state, is it not the right of every Meghalayan to have proper

roads to travel? The school going children find it extremely hard, especially during the rainy season. When they are walking or cycling to school, other vehicles pass by splashing water as though from a fountain. Whom can the poor children blame, the car owners or the government? I believe they have the right to walk or move on a clean and smooth road to their schools. Their health is also getting affected due to poor road conditions. In the case of elderly persons it is still worse. North Garo Hills became a district in the year 2012 and 10 years have passed but it looks as though nobody really cares for the welfare of the citizens. This state of affairs is true in all other districts of Garo Hills. The culpability is not only that of the present government but the previous ones also need to take the responsibility. It's time to awake, arise and act positively for the welfare of the district, Garo Hills and the State of Meghalaya.

Yours etc., Bro K J Jose Principal, Montfort School, Jonglapura, NGH

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

# Why are some people mosquito magnets and others unbothered?



It's rare to attend an outdoor party in warm weather without hearing people complain about mosquitoes. They swat away, sit in campfire smoke, cover up with blankets and eventually just give up and go indoors. On the other end of the spectrum, there are plenty of people who don't seem bothered by mosquitoes in the slightest.

As a medical entomologist who's worked with mosquitoes for more than 40 years, I'm often asked why some people seem to be mosquito magnets while others are oblivious to these blood-feeding pests buzzing all around them.

Most mosquito species, along with a host of other arthropods – including ticks, fleas, bedbugs, blackflies, horseflies and biting midges – require the protein in blood to develop a batch of eggs. Only the female mosquito feeds on blood. Males feed on plant nectar, which they convert to energy for flight.

Blood-feeding is an incredibly important part of the mosquito's reproductive cycle. Because of this, a tremendous amount of evolutionary pressure has been placed on female mosquitoes to identify potential sources of blood, quickly and ef-

ficiently get a full blood meal, and then stealthily depart the unlucky victim. If you check some, or all, of the mosquito's search boxes, then you may find that you are a mosquito magnet.

## Sensing CO2 and scent signals

Depending on when during the day they are active, mosquitoes use sight, sound and olfactory cues to identify a potential source of blood. Most night-active species rely on olfactory or receptor cues. The most important chemical cue is the carbon dioxide that all vertebrates, including humans, release with each breath and through their skin.

Mosquitoes are very sensitive to CO2 and can sense a CO2 source that is many meters away. Receptor cells on the mosquito's antennae and legs bind CO2 molecules and send an electrical signal to the brain. When more molecules hit their receptors, the higher the CO2 concentration and the closer they are to the host.

However, there are many non-living carbon dioxide sources such as cars, boats, planes and trains. To separate living from non-living sources of CO2, mosquitoes rely

on the secondary olfactory cues that living animals produce. Metabolic processes like breathing and moving generate these scent cues, including lactic acid, ammonia and fatty acids that act as additional olfactory clues that help female mosquitoes zero in on their next blood meal.

So, carbon dioxide production is the first mark of a mosquito magnet. Because the production of CO2 and secondary attractants is linked to metabolic rate, the higher the metabolic rate, the more attractants are produced. Metabolic rate can be genetically determined, but it also increases as the result of physical activity.

The human mosquito magnets you can spot at summer parties may have a genetically high metabolic rate or may be more physically active than other attendees. They may also be undertaking other activities that increase their metabolic rate, such as the consumption of alcohol. Increased metabolic rate is why runners attract more mosquitoes during their cool down stretching exercises.

Pregnant women, perhaps due to their increased metabolic rate, attract a disproportionately large

number of mosquitoes as well.

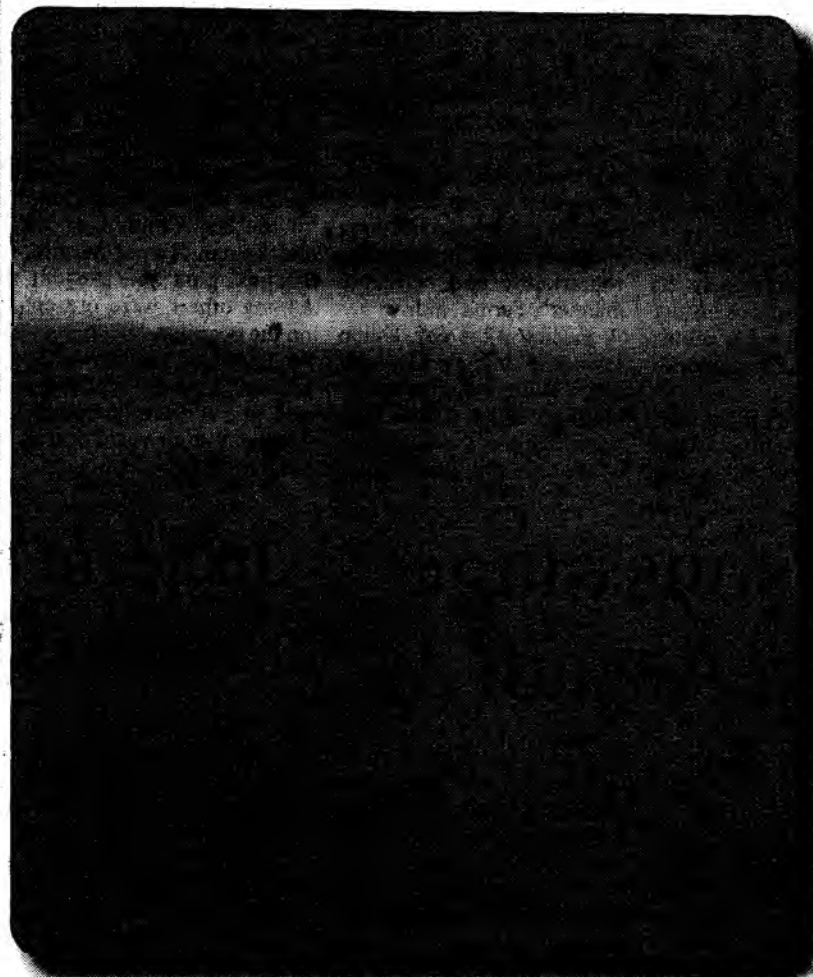
Natural body odours are also important cues used by mosquitoes to select a host. For example, some species of *Anopheles* mosquitoes are attracted to specific components of foot odour. These mosquitoes transmit human malaria and feed

help keep you cool, but will help you evade a mosquito's notice.

Mosquitoes can visually detect motion, again by contrasting a silhouette against the horizon. This is why people who walk near a salt marsh in the middle of the day after a large emergence of salt marsh mosquitoes are inundated by mosquitoes that visually detect their presence.

## Psychological factors

There is also a psychological component to mosquito activity. Some people simply do not notice the mosquitoes around them. A single mosquito flying around some



indoors in the middle of the night. By feeding on a sleeping person's feet, the mosquitoes avoid the head, where most of the CO2 is produced, and reduce the chance of waking the victim.

## Visual cues

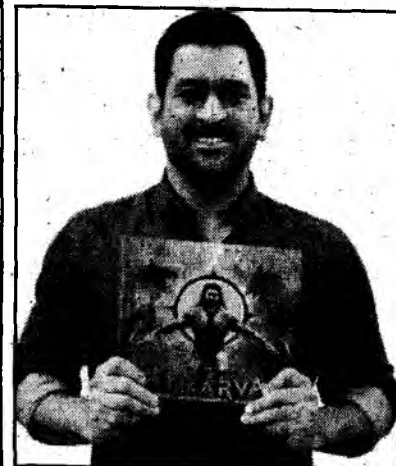
Mosquitoes active during the day and at dawn and dusk also use visual signals to identify a host. Mosquitoes usually fly close to the ground. From this vantage point they view their potential hosts against the horizon. Dark colours stand out and light colours blend in, so the way a person is dressed will determine the number of mosquitoes they attract. Wearing lighter colours may not just

people will elicit a strong response – you've probably seen someone go nuts trying to track down the droning sound of one mosquito in order to finish off the tiny bloodsucker.

Other individuals are not bothered and do not notice the mosquitoes that are attracted to them, even when the insects are feasting on their blood. Some mosquitoes specialize on feeding on parts of the body that are difficult to see and difficult to swat. For example, *Aedes aegypti* is a mosquito species that prefers to feed on humans, mostly around the ankles.

Whether or not you're a mosquito magnet, their bites feel just as itchy! (The Conversation)

## Fantasy-adventure graphic novel *Atharva: The Origin* features cricketer MS Dhoni



Pratilipi Comics, one of India's largest and the fastest-growing digital comic storytelling platforms, combines star power and the burgeoning popularity of the fantasy genre with *Atharva: The Origin* featuring ace cricketer, MS Dhoni as the titular character.

After acquiring the license rights for comics of the graphic novel, written by Ramesh Thamilmani, from Virzu Studios and Midas Deals, Pratilipi Comics has recreated it with all-new character designs, artwork, and creative elements, revolutionising the Indian online comic space.

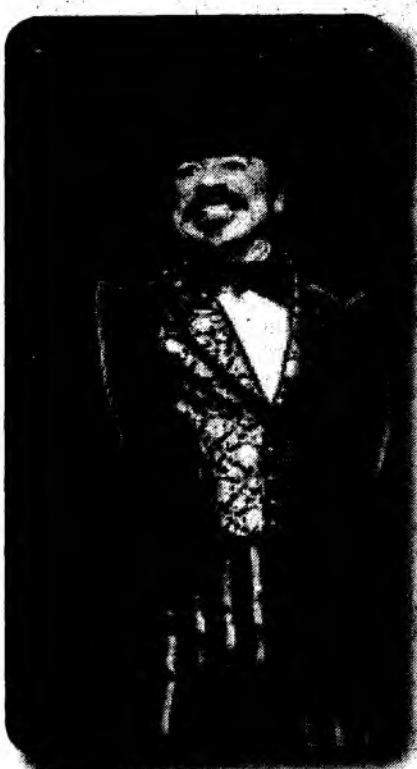
Set in a very young Earth and in a time long forgotten, *Atharva: The Origin* chronicles the adventures of a seasoned warrior who sets out on a long journey where he encounters strange creatures and discovers magnificent lands – a true treat for the soul and the senses.

To ensure this all-immersive experience for the readers, Pratilipi Comics has diligently worked with a team of artists to create this mystical world of *Atharva* for comics.

"It is great to see all the hard work come to life in *Atharva: The Origin*. Pratilipi Comics has captured the essence of our story well in its comic adaptation. The readers are in for an amazing adventure."

Speaking about the acquisition, Sachin Patil, Head of Product and Business at Pratilipi Comics, said: "This is an exciting development for us at Pratilipi and our readers. The high fantasy genre is still in a nascent stage in India but there is still a demand for it. But, with a star like MS Dhoni as the protagonist and a stellar storyline, *Atharva: The Origin* will redefine the fantasy genre in India." (IANS)

## NYC Broadway Week returns for its fall iteration



In collaboration with Mastercard, NYC & Company, New York City's official destination marketing organisation and convention and visitors bureau, on Saturday declared that the fall edition of NYC Broadway Week is now available.

Through September 25, 21 Broadway performances are offered with 2-for-1 tickets as part of the biennial event, which is now in its 11th year. Tickets can be purchased at [nycgo.com/broadwayweek](http://nycgo.com/broadwayweek).

"We are proud to welcome back

our signature fall program, NYC Broadway Week, offering theatre enthusiasts across the City and around the world access to extraordinary productions right here in New York City at an exceptional value," said Fred Dixon, President and CEO

of NYC & Company. Participating shows in NYC Broadway Week fall 2022 include:

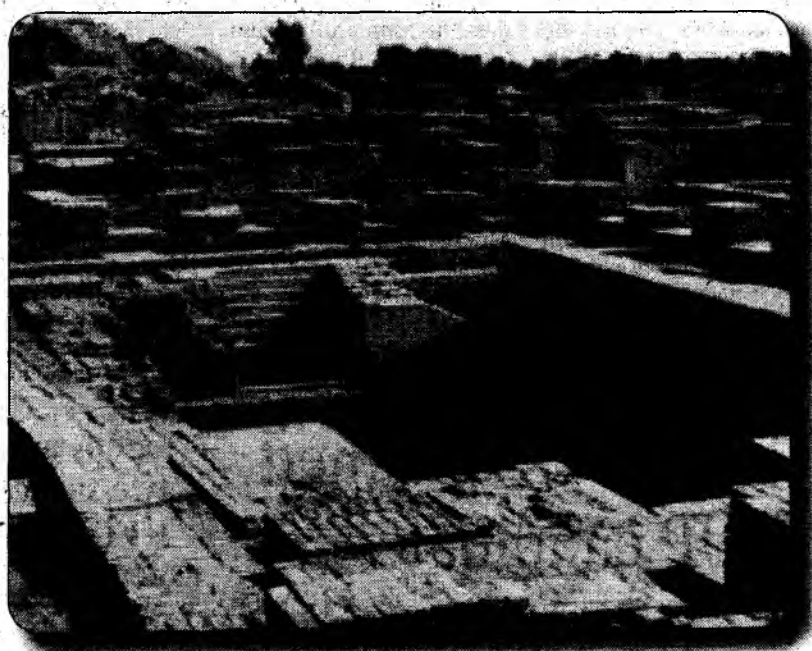
- ▶ 1776
- ▶ Aladdin
- ▶ A Strange Loop
- ▶ Beetlejuice
- ▶ The Book of Mormon
- ▶ Chicago
- ▶ Come From Away
- ▶ Cost of Living
- ▶ Death of a Salesman
- ▶ Funny Girl
- ▶ Hadestown
- ▶ Harry Potter and the Cursed Child
- ▶ Into The Woods
- ▶ The Kite Runner
- ▶ The Lion King
- ▶ MJ: The Musical
- ▶ Moulin Rouge! The Musical
- ▶ The Phantom of the Opera
- ▶ The Piano Lesson
- ▶ Six
- ▶ Wicked

The Broadway League and Mastercard, NYC & Company's chosen payment partner, are partners in the production of NYC Broadway Week.

Dedicated outreach to the Mastercard database, exclusive content on [NYCgo.com](http://NYCgo.com), out-of-home advertising across the five boroughs, digital advertising, commercials running in NYC taxis, and NYC & Company's verified social media handle @nycgo, using both original content and user-generated content, pegged to the hashtag #NYCBroadwayWeek, are all used to promote the programme.

"We are most excited to kick off the fall Broadway season and the return of NYC Broadway Week makes it even more special. Savvy Broadway fans know this is an incredible way to attend a show and we look forward to welcoming you," said Charlotte St. Martin, President of The Broadway League. (IANS/Life)

## Mohenjo Daro may be out of the world heritage list



Pakistan's Department of Archaeology has called for urgent attention towards conservation and restoration work at Mohenjo Daro, apprehending that the site may be removed from the world heritage list if such work was not carried out, media reports said.

The archaeological ruins of Mohenjo Daro had received record rains, measured at 779.5 mm, which continued from August 16 to 26. It resulted in considerable damage to the site and partial falling of several walls, including the protection wall of the stupa dome, Dawn reported.

It was learnt that the Curator of the site in his August 29 letter to the Director, Culture, Antiquities, and Archaeology said: "We have put in efforts to protect the site with our resources."

The role of other departments – Irrigation, Roads, Highways, and Forest – was quite essential for safeguarding the world heritage site, as landlords and farmers had not only

inserted pipes and given cuts to canals and roads to release water into Mohenjo Daro's channel. However, due to negligence on the part of above-mentioned departments, the rainwater from nearby agriculture lands had filled the disposal channel, sources said.

This caused delay in driving out water from the site, the letter said, adding that water had entered even into the campus. After rains, the official concerned at the site had said: "We are facing another emergency in the shape of a constant rise in the Indus level."

Although water level in Indus is low, due to the construction of metal road on the protection dyke near Mohenjo Daro, paired with occurrence of fissures, cavities and dangerous gullies, the department had approached local irrigation officials but in vain, according to the letter. No one had turned up to inspect the site and assess the situation, it said, Dawn reported. (IANS)

# Are you fully focused?



- \* You pick your battles and avoid busy work so you can prioritise each action. For example: as a writer, you sit down and write rather than waste time on formalities, as a chef, you prepare and experiment with flavours, as a working mother, you order food on the weekend to spend time with your kids, etc
- \* You spend less time discussing future endeavours, past achievements and procrastination. You are more focused on future goals and continually seek to improve yourself
- \* Your time is guarded. You refuse useless requests and tasks. Set aside time each day to focus on improving yourself and reaching your goals
- \* You take regular breaks, care for your health and acknowledge that doing so helps your goals
- \* Rather than going in guns blazing, you let your emotions get the better of you and keep your eye on the prize

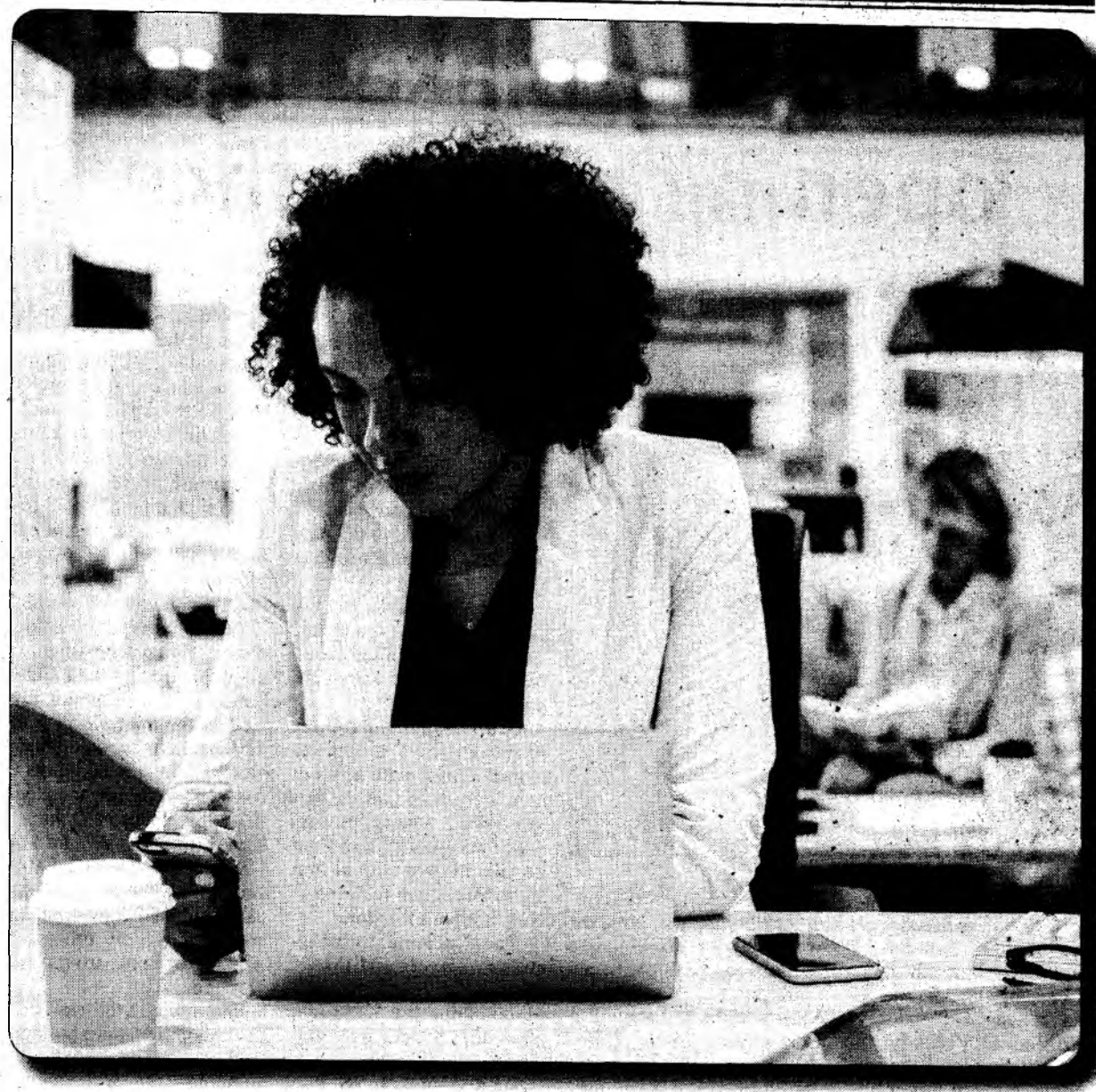
### Signs that you lack focus

Focus and concentration difficulties affect each individual differently. Some individuals struggle to concentrate at work or school, while others struggle to read or engage in other leisure pursuits. Common signs of lack of focus are:

- \* Incapability to undertake typical everyday activities
- \* Restlessness
- \* Cognitive haze or "brain fog"
- \* Problems recalling events that occurred recently
- \* Making choices is difficult
- \* Energy deficit
- \* Making careless mistakes
- \* Missing crucial meetings, deadlines, and appointments, arriving consistently late to the office, school, etc
- \* Inability to complete activities in a timely manner
- \* Frequent instances of misplacing objects or forgetting where they are

Many times, tension, anxiety, and a feeling of being overloaded go along with not being able to concentrate. Malini adds simple tips to improve focus:

- \* **No multitasking:** Working on one thing at a time improves work quality and attention span. For example, don't text before a meeting or play video games while reading papers. Turn off videos when writing an important article and don't check your phone while someone is talking to you, as you'll miss something important and make the other person feel inconsequential. Working in 90-minute intervals followed by 20-minute breaks maximises productivity. Each of us has unique preferences and daily routines. Instead of rigidly sticking to the 90-20 model, change the times to fit your working mode while keeping the cycle of work and rest



\* **Eliminate distractions:** Some distractions are unavoidable (like traffic noise), but others are self-imposed (like having your smartphone next to you at your desk at all times). Begin by setting your phone to silent and putting it in your desk drawer. Close the door to your office or room and inform anyone nearby that you require privacy to do an important task. Find ways to eliminate distractions, even if it requires a period of daily isolation

\* **Produce a focused effort:** If you make focus on production and raise the stakes, you will become instantaneously more invested in the process and do whatever it takes to focus. Consider the anticipated prize you will bestow upon yourself after completing an important endeavour. It may be something that you've always wanted to buy. It could be a pair of trendy sneakers, a watch, sunglasses, a pair of boots, a vehicle, a house, etc

\* **Know what's important:** Don't give priority to the urgent over the important. The "urgent" is the text

message from your significant other reminding you to pick up your dry-cleaned clothing on the way home." The "important" is the due-by-the-end-of-the-day project with the ability to expand your firm and bring long-term rewards. Prioritisation comes into play at this point. Start each day by arranging your responsibilities in order of importance, taking into account factors such as time, deadline and potential impact on your life. A timer is a great tool to develop self-discipline and self-regulation by serving as an external watchdog that guarantees you don't lose focus

\* **Practise self-care:** Don't forget to restore your body's mental and physical resources through exercise, living in the present moment, deep sleep, self-confidence, massage, meditation and active rest. When making daily decisions, having a high level of emotional self-awareness and self-control can help you refuel your own resources and stay focused, even though life is full of distractions. (IANSLife)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 11, 2022

Moon semi square Saturn on your solar return chart and it will give good results. You will be dynamic in your approach and will be very methodical in your work. Your risk taking abilities will bring you good results. You will be men with the Midas touch. You will be a visionary and achieve unthinkable in your profession. You will have many opportunities for growth in your career. Those in business or entrepreneurship will enter into joint venture or partnership. Students will perform well in exams and interview. Financial position will remain strong. New projects and ideas will be executed. Your adventures can pay off handsomely if worked correctly. You can also get involved in a new romantic relation. Your mate will keep on supporting you. The marriage of a family member will get finalized. You will be elated.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**  
The time will be suitable for good works. Your plans will get completed. You will be able to finish your tasks. You will be strong and confident. Your self confidence will be high. You will have support of family and friends. You will be serious in your work and you will be successful also. Those who are unemployed will get job opportunities. Your business will also expand. You will never be sort of funds. Delayed and struck projects will get momentum. Your full focus will be on your target. Student will get success in examination. You will also get chance to travel abroad for business and work. You will also plan to buy a new house/property. You will also be getting home decorated. You will have a wonderful bonding with your mate. You will have pleasant time with your spouse. Your plans will be implemented in your career.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**  
You will be in a dominant position. There are promotion possibilities that you will have. The days will be well planned and spent properly. You will earn a lot with your efforts. You will do well in your business/job. You will be kind, humble, generous and diplomatic in your dealings with people. You will also be practical. Your time will be pleasant and spent peacefully. Your confidence will do wonders for you. You will also be over ambitious. You will also have some guests who will visit you. You will win over your enemies and opponents. You will be spending money on household items. You will also renovate your house. You will be very cheerful. Your government related work will get done.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**  
Your importance will increase at your workplace. You will be able to complete your tasks. Your name and fame will increase. You will also witness rise in income and salary. You will be strong willed to increase your income. Money will flow in. You will be friendly with some important person. You will also enjoy a wonderful love life. Time will be totally suitable. You will also understand your responsibility and fulfill it also. Time will be in your favor. Matters related to land and in property will progress in the right direction. You will be taking care of your parents and in-laws also. You will make your life an ideal one. You will also take loan for your needs. Love affairs or wedding will get momentum.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**  
It is going to be a wonderful week. It will be days of growth and prestige. Your name and fame will rise. A auspicious function will take place. Destiny will favor you on every step. Official work will progress at a great speed. Time is good for professionals. Officials will cooperate you in your work. You will be in the pink of your health. You will be happy in the company of your spouse/partner. You will also have a wonderful time with your family members. You will also get blessings of your elders. You will take any decisions after giving a good thought. Misunderstanding with your colleagues will get removed. Your reputation will grow in work and business. There will be success in daily works and work progress will also be favorable.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**  
Your time will be well spent. It is a fabulous week on your hand. Your financial position will be stronger. You will remain popular at your work place. You will also get the support of your peers and bosses. You will have amazing bonding with your mate. Peace and harmony will prevail at home. You will feel peace and serenity in your heart. There will be freshness in your love relations and you will have a wonderful bonding with your partner. You will be socially active. Time is favorable. It will be beneficial for you to compromise in your legal matters. Your friends and family will be with you. An elder's persons advice will prove to be a boom for you. You will get blessings of your parents. You will work hard and your concentration will prove to be a boon for you. Your enthusiasm will be unmatched. Business tours will give good profits.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**  
You will get a good news from somewhere. You will also make plans for your work. It will be a great week. Your business will do well. You will have great profits in your business. You will also explore additional sources of income. You will also complete your work with double enthusiasm and energy. There might be plan for auspicious work. You can get recognition for your good work. You will be free of mental tensions. You will get support of your family and friends. There is need of hard work to finish your incomplete business. Students will get the

desired results in examinations and competitions. Your presentation of your business plans will go off nicely. You will receive some good news from somewhere. You will get positive and good thoughts. There will be an increase in your popularity.

**Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)**  
Your courageous decisions taken in your business will finally give results. You will be at the fore front of your professional activities. You will also be active socially. You could get rewarded for your work and contribution in politics, media, sports, journalism or entertainment industry. You will also plan to buy a new home. In order to give a new look to your home you will take the help of an experienced person. You will come into contact with people having the same views as yours. You will also enjoy a good rapport with them. Your entire focus will be on earning money. You will fight a battle to win over your opponents in your business. You will get benefits and success from all around. It is a highly favorable time. You will get opportunity to move ahead in life.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**  
It will be a great week. All the important works will get completed without any hurdles. You will explore additional sources of income. Your earnings will also rise. Work related results would be good. You will perform well in your business. You will have to learn the art of living. You will also enjoy a peaceful married life. The atmosphere at your home will be joyous. The time will be totally favorable. You will be successful in establishing a communication at all levels. Your children will perform well. Your bonding with your relatives, friends and neighbors will get stronger. You will try to bring people close to you. The time will be peaceful. Your self confidence will be at a high level. You will have a business on your hand. You will come out with flying colors.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)**  
It will be a wonderful week for you. Your problems will get over with the passage of time. You will be excited about a whole lot of things. But you will like to confine within yourself. Your decisions will prove to be correct. You will also earn well. Your investments will bring good returns. You need to think carefully before taking a big decision in your business. You will not hesitate to take consultation from some expert. You will also get relief from a chronic disease. The time right now is profitable. You will feel relaxed. You will have a sign of relief. Your children will perform well. Your efforts will help you a lot. You will make good amount of money. You will also go for a new partnership in business. Financially you will be stronger. You will also on a business trip.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**  
It is a fantastic week. You will be more aware about your duties. You will have profits in land, building or permanent property. You will not be afraid of speaking the truth. Some persons may not like it. You will also focus on your business and work. Your efforts will help you earn a lot of money. You will earn money and fame in the toughest work also. Friends and relatives will help you a lot. You will do new experiments in your business and get lot of success also. Students will prepare hard for exams. There will be an auspicious occasion at home. You will meet lot of new people. Your contacts will pay off well. You will face your time with patience and satisfaction and move ahead.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**  
A pleasant news that you will receive will lift your spirits. You will buy valuable items for your home. You will be interested in charitable and social activities. You will also plan to buy a new house/vehicle. You will put up disappointments of the past behind you and look ahead for a bright future. You will put everything into your work and get all work done. You will enjoy good bonding with your spouse partner. You will have compatibility with your boss. You will make good progress in your business. You will take all decisions thoughtfully. You will also gain in property. You will enjoy luxurious life. The work done in this period will give you good results. You will also be able to save money for the future. You will live up to the expectations of your boss. Students will perform well.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**  
Your income will increase. You will have lot of happiness and bliss in your life. You will focus on your work and will be busy. You will be working on new plans and new places. Your responsibility will increase. You will have profits in your business. You will be satisfied with what you get in life. You will be full of energy. You will do your best. Excellent results will follow later on. You can step forward in the direction of fulfilling your long time wishes, dreams and ambitions. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. You will try your level best to strengthen the relations. Love birds will have a wonderful time. Your friends will bring happiness and hopes. You will achieve something suddenly. You will get whatever you wish with your gift of the gab and your oratory skills.

## Food connoisseurs taking Internet by storm

Foods that are acidic, sour, sweet, bitter, covered in Indian heritage masalas, and more are all popular in India. Following the advent of digital technology, we have all undoubtedly been guilty of mindlessly scrolling through and watching culinary videos on Instagram. One is undoubtedly been compelled to get out of bed and heading straight to the kitchen if you glance across the Instagram pages of delicious dessert and easy to whip up recipes.

Here's a list of 10 food connoisseurs, some of whom are professional authors, others are banker, etc., but all of them share their passion for food and posting the yummiest social media photos of irresistible treats. Go ahead and follow them:

### shivesh17 by Shivesh Bhatia

Self-taught baker, author and content producer Shivesh is a 25-year-old with a large fan base. He established "Bake with Shivesh" in 2016, a website to interact with people by sharing delectable dessert recipes and passion for baking. So far, he has written two best-selling cookbooks, *Bake With Shivesh* and *Shivesh Bhatia's Desserts For Every Mood* in addition to developing recipes for FoodHall, Delmonte and Britania.

### masterchefmom by Uma Raghuraman

If you enjoy a spicy and savoury South Indian cuisine, you should definitely check out Uma Raghuraman's Instagram account. The mother of two currently has 228K followers on Instagram, and is a magician in the kitchen.

### funfoodandfrolic by Hina Gujral

If you've ever considered making Indian cuisine healthier, follow Hina and enjoy her colourful feed. Learn how to cook using her recipes. When not whipping up food, Gujral, a banking graduate, enjoys reading and playing with her dogs in her leisure time.

### cooking\_with\_li by Lidang K

Lidang K has 36.6K Instagram followers with a bio that reads, "I measure by hand and cook by eye and the best way to teach you is to show you." If you're interested in Naga food cuisine or have already tried it, her channel covers the complete process of making popular Naga meals, like bamboo shoot pork curry and other simple Naga home cook recipes. Lidang, a food lover, captioned one of her Instagram post, "Nothing compares to a basic home-cooked supper. Pork with bamboo shoot, eromba, boiling cabbage, rice and fryums on my plate."

### sailusfood by Sailaja Gudivada

From basic, cosy Andhra food to an all-out Andhra vegetarian bhojanam, Sailaja features everything

Andhra! If you live far away from your native hometown, Sailu's Instagram feed will make you miss home food. She presently has 69.3K Instagram followers and describes herself as a passionate food blogger and photographer who also enjoys organic gardening.

### veganricha by Richa Hingle

Are you a proponent of avoiding animal-based products? Then there's Richa and you. Richa Hingle, who has 346K followers on Instagram, is a foodie who posts about everything plant-based like the, "Vegan Chicken Florentine features soy curls simmered with fresh spinach in a creamy garlic cashew sauce to create a delicious and filling dish that tastes amazing on cauliflower steak, pasta, baked potato or as a sandwich filling! gluten-free. Options for nutfree and soy free". She is also the author of *Vegan Richa's Instant PotTM Cookbook*, which contains 150 plant-based recipes from Indian cuisine and beyond. She also has a blog at [www.veganricha.com](http://www.veganricha.com).

### passionateaboutbaking by Deeba Rajpal

Her Instagram handle says it all, Deeba Rajpal is an avid baker, as evidenced by her feed, which is brimming with creams, colours and frostings. If you have a sweet tooth, Rajpal's account is a one-stop junction for all things yummylicious.

### Anushruti

Anushruti is a Mumbai-based culinary writer, photographer, recipe developer and nutritionist. She maintains the Divine Taste blog, where she promotes her cooking techniques based on traditional ayurveda and sattvic cooking concepts, and incorporates recipes from around the world utilising fresh, seasonal and local ingredients!

### whiskaffair by Neha Mathur

If you're looking for a good cross-section of Indian, American, Asian, Middle Eastern, European, Mexican and International cuisine and recipes from around the world, Neha Mathur's Instagram account with 142K followers shares detailed step-by-step instructions that ensure they turn out good every time; join her on this culinary journey.

### foodfashionparty by Asha Shiv

Asha, a homemaker, discovered that cooking and feeding others gave her solace after marrying and moving to the United States. Stepping into a whole new world, food became her love, interest and something she craved to do every day. Her foodfashionparty account, has 140k followers, and demonstrates her affinity for combining Indian spices with diverse cuisine in a trendy approach. (IANSLife)



*"Reading is to the mind what  
exercise is to the body."*

—Joseph Addison

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No.32 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2022

## Collapse of a temple of learning

ON its 50th year Meghalaya features more often in the 'hall of shame' than the proverbial 'hall of fame.' The latest is the collapse of a once reputed centre of learning for girls, Pine Mount School — started in 1881 to educate the children of British officials based in Shillong and the children of tea planters and managers based in Assam. Immediately after Independence the school was open to children of all citizens. Admissions were based on merit and the capacity of the school to accommodate students. However, this criterion was soon overshadowed by politics and admission was based largely on the political and bureaucratic clout of parents. Others simply could not make the cut despite their brilliance. Pine Mount School has been limping from lack of proper supervision and unplanned growth. Major and minor repairs have not been undertaken. But what irked the students, some of whom have spoken out on social media, are the unhygienic toilets which have created a phobia in them. So much so, some students even had urinary tract infection because they dare not enter the school toilet and restrained themselves from passing urine during school hours. Parents have begun speaking about these multiple maladies that afflict the school only now when things have gone completely out of control.

The question arises as to why an educational institution that has produced gems that are now placed in important positions across the world is being allowed to fall by the wayside. This being one of the premier institutions owned by the Government, why was it allowed to go to seed? Why are funds not being allocated for maintenance? If funds were allocated where were they deployed? The issue of mal-governance has been festering since long. In 2019 when the ICSE students of that batch could not their questions papers on time and there was a near crisis, the Principal was not in the premises to resolve the matter. Even then, instead of taking action the Government ignored the matter with the expectation that it will blow over. Well, the Government must now be squarely blamed for not taking action before things could blow up on its face as they have now when parents, students and teachers are digging in their heels demanding a new Principal. The reason clearly is that the present Principal is an utter failure and has not been able to get her act together despite having made a mess of administration. The Government is faced with a dilemma as promotion to the rank of principal is seniority-based and it appears that senior teachers are unwilling to take on the onus of principalship. Such problems should be overcome by lateral entry through open advertisements. Students cannot suffer on account of Government apathy to amend rules and procedures.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Pine Mount School need immediate intervention; Delay is criminal

Editor,  
It is a sad state of affairs, indeed, to witness the fall of our alma mater, Pine Mount School. Once a great School that churned out highly efficient people that now serve their States and Country in many capacities, it is criminal to watch its decline under mismanagement and inefficiency. The fight to place a better administration in the school is not a new one. In truth, the Alumnae has been battling to bring accountability and transparency in the administration of the school for some time now.

Following a series of complaints, the Pine Mount School Alumnae Association conducted a casual visit of the school in 2019. After this disheartening inspection, the Association came out with an Observation highlighting all the concerns that plagued the School. Few past-pupils from the Alumnae association, in fact, had met up with the Chief Minister to air out their grievances. With some assurance to form an inquiry into the matter, the Alumnae were content to watch the outcome of the inquiry.

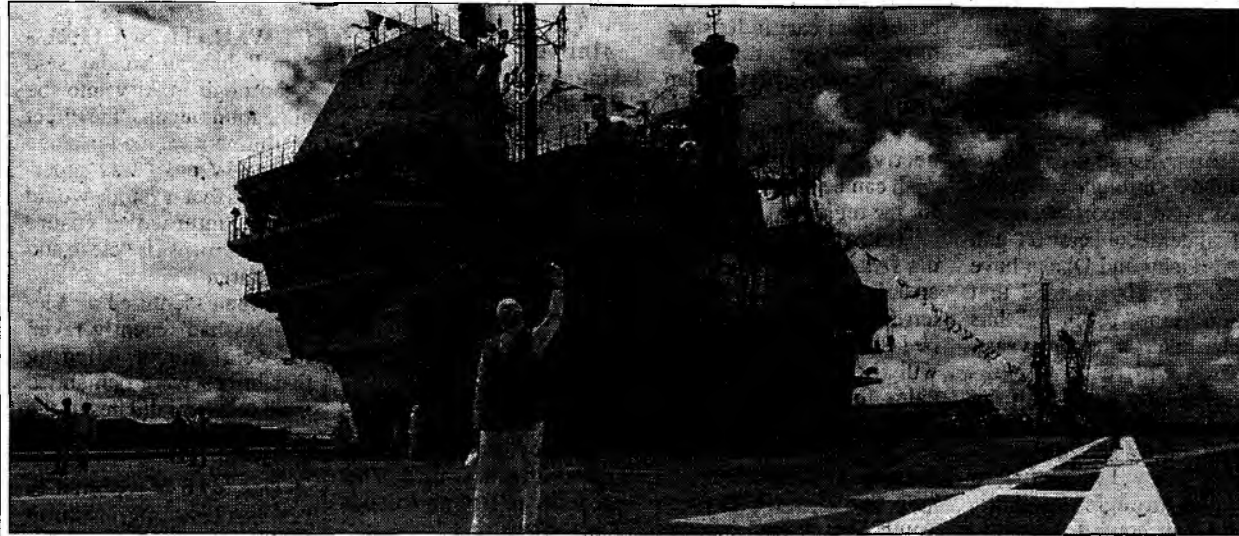
Two inquiries were made. One by the Child Rights Commission and one by

the Department. Many employees of the school were interviewed and questioned. It would seem like a solution was in the horizon. However, the report never saw the light of day. Whether it was due to the pandemic or some delay by the higher ups, the next course of action was never made public. All the while, the school kept declining under the watch of the present incompetent Principal. The students became the worst sufferers.

A rubber band stretched too far will snap. It is not surprising that the teachers of the school have come to a breaking point. Only the efforts of the teachers and concerned parents have kept the school afloat thus far. It is uplifting to see the parents and the students all come out in support of the teachers in their warranted fight for justice. The Pine Mount School Alumnae Association fully stand in solidarity with the teachers as they struggle to bring back Pine Mount from its debilitated state and restore it to its former glory.

The Government stands to lose the most as Pine Mount School was one of the best public schools that was a great pride to our State. Our Alumnae Association have people from across the country and all over the world. It pains us to give them such bad tidings about their beloved school. This time the Government should

With the induction of INS Vikrant as its first indigenously built aircraft carrier, India seems all set to further augment its naval prowess. While, undoubtedly, Vikrant would be a considerable force multiplier insofar as our maritime power projection capabilities are concerned, with the Chinese aggressively pushing for expansive influence globally through both the Belt and Road initiative and a blue water navy, in their efforts to exercise greater dominance in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), it is apposite to ask — how ready is India to counter this threat that could potentially diminish its ability to se-



ecure its strategic, economic and, most especially, trade interests?

India sits astride critical sea lines of communication, a position that uniquely empowers it to become a truly regional naval power. To achieve this objective, it needs to do two things. First, India needs to develop the capacities that would enable it to become the linchpin security provider to nations that inhabit the IOR rim. This would enable India to play a stabilising role in the region by ensuring the security of sea-lanes and providing humanitarian assistance when required.

Second, the Indian navy would require to have substantive tactical presence in the West Indian Ocean Region that consists of, among others countries, such as Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, Kenya, Somalia, the French overseas Island of Réunion, the British Indian Ocean Territory and Diego Garcia, the latter two being colonial vestiges transformed into Western military bases. These two goals are, of course, interrelated. India cannot hope to achieve this with just an aircraft carrier or even two, no matter how

significant an achievement it may seem at first blush. Two carrier battle groups do not really make for a blue water navy until and unless you have overseas military and maritime facilities where the navy can be forward deployed.

The West Indian Ocean Region is, therefore, of critical import. Indeed, India's maritime security strategy of 2015 recognises that for India to have a true blue water navy, there is absolutely no option but to have a naval presence in the region. Thus the worm-eaten strut



of "no bases abroad" is a non-sequitur. Creating a blue water navy is a gargantuan task but simply building more carrier battle groups without the support infrastructure where they have to operate to play a meaningful role can be a self-defeating enterprise.

A more conceptual approach is required to make the navy a player in the Indian Ocean region.

The Chinese are on the ball with despatch. The PLA Navy (PLAN) is far ahead of us in terms of having a substantial presence in the Indian Ocean region. While the commissioning of its newest aircraft carrier, Fujian, in June this year, Beijing is eyeing overseas facilities that would help sustain and support its blue water naval presence with even greater urgency.

This search for overseas bases has even the US worried. Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander of the US military's Africa Command, referred to China's attempts at creating naval bases around Africa as the "most significant threat".

China is focussing on the Indian Ocean with laser intensity. It has invested in ports in multiple countries to

augment its maritime presence. In 2017, it built a naval base in Djibouti that lies on the Horn of Africa adjacent to the Gulf of Aden. With Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka and a surveillance station on Coco Islands in Myanmar, the Chinese have gradually enhanced their maritime footprint and are now looking beyond the String of Pearls at other partners in the western Indian Ocean — Madagascar being one among myriad other potential candidates. With two decades of debt diplomacy in Africa to boot the Chinese



have developed the equities and IOUs to move from a commercial to a military presence on that continent.

The Chinese naval base in Djibouti houses helicopter pads and is big enough to host aircraft carriers and submarines. The Chinese even attempted to develop a facility in the United Arab Emirates, which was nipped in the bud after the US intervened. With China's Ream naval base in Cambodia coming to fruition, its ability to dominate the Gulf of Thailand and, by extension, both the mouth of the Indo-Pacific and South China Sea, as well as surmount the Malacca dilemma, would get further enhanced.

China's 2019 defence white paper is instructive in outlining its naval strategy going forward. It is explicit in stating — the PLA must develop "overseas logistics facilities" and "safeguard China's overseas interests". The Chinese have long spoken of the String of Pearls paradigm which posits that China needs a string of bases across the Indian Ocean to protect Chinese resources and shipping lanes. Through their basing strategy, the Chinese hope to achieve two things — first, they seek to

the Americans, and the French have multiple bases all around the world — partly the legacies of empire and partly due to the Cold War — India needs to assert its own dominance in the region through a carefully calibrated approach that takes the apprehensions of the West Indian Ocean Region countries into consideration. There has been an increase in maritime and security cooperation with the West Indian Ocean Region countries but much more needs to be done.

India needs to leverage its goodwill it enjoys in these countries to enhance naval cooperation and commercial activity. Its basing initiatives, both in Mauritius and Seychelles, seem to have stalled substantively because of domestic opposition fermented by both 'friends' and adversaries who do not want India to acquire a foothold in the playground of the great powers. This undermines our strategic and tactical presence considerably. India must be cognisant of Themistocles's old adage that "he who commands the sea, commands everything". It is as true today as it was then.

(The author is a former I & B Minister and currently a Lok Sabha MP and lawyer)

because of lack of proper amenities. Don't allow anyone to speak to you about the Principal. Let the enquiry committee deal with that. We don't want people accusing you of interfering with the enquiry. What we want is for you to see for yourself the pathetic condition of what we still describe as a Premier Government Girls School of Meghalaya. If you are then satisfied of the need for immediate action, please pass the order for immediate repairs to be carried out. I know it can be done from the contingency funds of the Government. Don't wait for lengthy advertisements for contractors or for delayed enquiry reports on urgent issues that impinge upon the health, both physical and mental, of these innocent children. Do it now! Oh and just to remind ourselves, the teachers, parents and students in this case, to my mind, are simply messengers carrying a message of despair and genuine anguish over the apparent caving in of the institution they all love. Please don't shoot the messengers!

I have a simple request to make and it is to the Minister of Education. Sir, please spare 10 minutes of your time to make an "on the spot surprise inspection," of the school and its infrastructure. Why not do that one day on your way to office. Don't tell your staff; don't allow that usual fussing crowd of babus and officials to accompany you; don't let anyone know you are coming. Go and see for yourself what the teachers, the parents and most importantly the innocent students have to endure daily

project their military might; and second, they aim to sustain their military power at longer distances from their own coastline. However, now their aspirations have gone far beyond the String of Pearls. Both these aspects must lead India to think of newer ways to counter China's influence in the Indian Ocean.

Last, as the Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean grows, it is bound to negatively affect India's ability to both manoeuvre and protect its interests. It is well understood that the String of Pearls Plus and China's Belt and Road Initiative considerably heighten India's strategic vulnerability. While the British,



of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and M M Sundresh had declared that the Supreme Court was ready to 'take the burden' on itself and grant the affected people relief if the government and the courts did not do justice to them.

That these were not just hollow words and grandstanding was proved beyond any doubt when earlier this week when a bench headed by Chief Justice U U Lalit and Justice S Ravindra Bhat passed an order allowing

fundamental rights of such a large population.

Former Chief Justice N V Ramana had raised this issue before his retirement and stressed that there was need to increase the efficiency of the country's criminal justice system. From indiscriminate arrest to difficulty in obtaining bail, the process leading to prolonged incarceration of undertrial prisoners needs urgent attention, he said, while calling for a holistic solution to the problem. The

The appeal filed by Kappan against the Allahabad High Court's order denying him bail.

Kerala-based Kappan, who has now spent almost two years behind bars, was arrested, along with other accused by the UP police in October 2020 while proceeding to report the Hathras rape-murder crime. While initially he was arrested under the apprehension of causing a breach of peace, subsequently, he was booked under the UAPA alleging that he and his co-passengers were trying to incite communal riots and disrupt social harmony in the wake of the Hathras gangrape-murder case.

While Kappan claimed that he had gone there to report on the situation after the gangrape and the trouble over it, various UP courts, including the Allahabad High Court, had rejected his plea saying he had "no work" there in Hathras.

The Chief Justice-led bench, while not going into the merit of the case, declared that the denial of bail was unwarranted. The judges said they were not impressed with the evidences cited by the prosecution for denial of bail by asking whether possession

## SC keeps its word of protecting rights of undertrials

### Many languish in jails for no fault of theirs

By K Raveendran

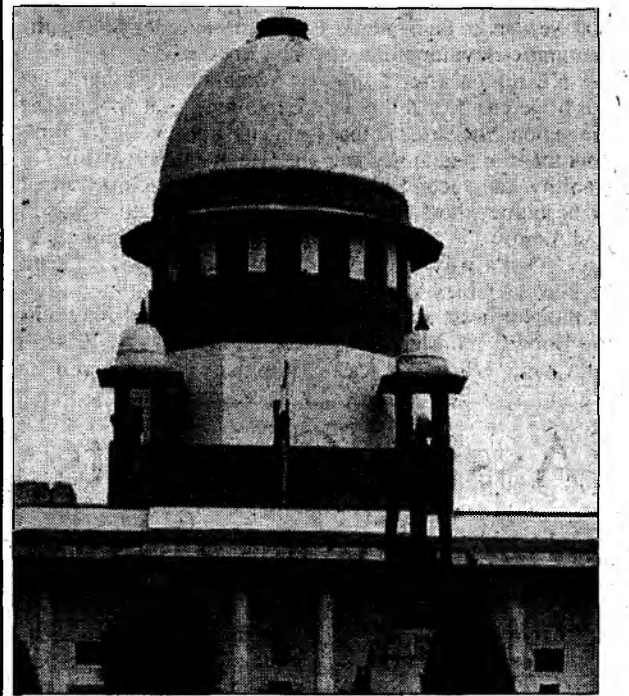
The Supreme Court has kept its word in terms of protecting the rights of undertrials by granting bail to journalist Siddique Kappan, who has spent over two years in UP jails without trial in connection with the Hathras conspiracy case.

The decisive action comes within weeks of the apex court having warned the UP government as well as the Allahabad High Court for not taking prompt action to release undertrial prisoners languishing in jails for more than 10 years despite an earlier order from the court.

A two-member bench

of 'provocative' literature by the accused meant that he was practising whatever was contained there. As long as that cannot be proved, there is no ground to continue to hold him in prison without bail, the court ordered.

Undertrials languishing in jails has been a bane of the country's judicial system, with consecutive chief justices raising alarms over the issue. According to data compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau, four-fifths of all prisoners in the country are undertrials, which amount to a gross violation of the



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#### The sordid Pine Mount School affairs

Editor,  
A question looms large in the minds of every citizen of Meghalaya today and the question is "Why does everything seem to be falling apart at the seams in our state?" Collapsing structures, pot holed unrepaired roads, murderers and desperadoes escaping from jail and running wild and free all over the place, where does our fall from grace stop? Now in the midst of all this, the apparent collapse of a premier

educational institution of the State! Yes I am talking about the sad state of affairs in Pine Mount Girls School, which is unfolding right before our eyes and no one seems to be doing anything about it. I hear the cry of protest from the Government that an enquiry committee has been set up. Let me be as candid and brutal as I can for the situation demands it. We have seen enquiry committees by the hundreds. They come and go. They are simply delaying tactics so beloved of the 'Babudom' to delay things especially issues where the babu has failed and needs a cover up. So, to Hell with the Enquiry Committee. It simply means nothing except as a delaying cover up tactic.

The demand from the teachers is for the immediate removal of the Principal. I won't even touch upon that aspect. Principals come and principals go and it is of least interest to me as a worried citizen. Let the claptrap enquiry deal with it. My interest however is on the health, welfare and general continued well-being of this premier educational institution in the midst of our city. It has produced luminaries that have done the state, the community and Shillong city proud. It has a reputation of being one of the most coveted girls school in the North East. It is an educational institution that has taken more than 100 years to perfect. Seeing

the images and pictures captured on social media on the condition and state of Pine Mount School infrastructure, one comes away with the shocked conviction that the honorable Government and those mandated with the school's upkeep are more or less satisfied to retain the school as a relic of the past rather than as a modern well-equipped portal of learning. Poorly maintained classrooms, inadequate teaching aids and equipment, science laboratories apparently dating back to the 20th century, rotting wall beams, leaking roofs, (God only knows the quality of water provided to the children), filthy and obviously stinking toilets, muddy playgrounds — the bloody Government and the Directorate of Education should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves for letting things come to such a pass.

I have a simple request to make and it is to the Minister of Education. Sir, please spare 10 minutes of your time to make an "on the spot surprise inspection," of the school and its infrastructure. Why not do that one day on your way to office. Don't tell your staff; don't allow that usual fussing crowd of babus and officials to accompany you; don't let anyone know you are coming. Go and see for yourself what the teachers, the parents and most importantly the innocent students have to endure daily

because of lack of proper amenities. Don't allow anyone to speak to you about the Principal. Let the enquiry committee deal with that. We don't want people accusing you of interfering with the enquiry. What we want is for you to see for yourself the pathetic condition of what we still describe as a Premier Government Girls School of Meghalaya. If you are then satisfied of the need for immediate action, please pass the order for immediate repairs to be carried out. I know it can be done from the contingency funds of the Government. Don't wait for lengthy advertisements for contractors or for delayed enquiry reports on urgent issues that impinge upon the health, both physical and mental, of these innocent children. Do it now! Oh and just to remind ourselves, the teachers, parents and students in this case, to my mind, are simply messengers carrying a message of despair and genuine anguish over the apparent caving in of the institution they all love. Please don't shoot the messengers!

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Yours etc.,  
Toki Blah,  
Via email

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

*"The mind is not a vessel to be filled  
but a fire to be kindled."*

—Plutarch

The Shillong Times

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## Meghalaya Assembly: A Moral Collapse

THE proceedings of the ongoing Meghalaya Legislative Assembly sessions are live streamed for interested viewers to follow what's being debated in the August House. The word 'august' has several synonyms such as dignified, stately, noble etc. Words and language used in the Assembly are carefully weighed by each elected representative. The Assembly is a temple of democracy where decency in speech and behaviour is the least that is expected of every member. The role of the Speaker is to ensure that members do not overstep their limits and to expunge unparliamentary language. Sadly, on Monday September 12, the Meghalaya Assembly which was once known to have members that were not just political heavyweights but also strictly conscious of the language they used, has now fallen from grace as one MLA allowed anger and frustration to get the better of him and he let out an obscenity. Whether the Speaker heard what was said is debatable since the member sputtered on about the subject of his ire.

That cuss word will be expunged from the records but the video has gone viral. This, after all, is the era of social media when news and views travel at lightning speed and are interpreted in varying ways depending on the social milieu that a person is part of. Some may laugh it off; others will consider it an unpardonable social slur. Good breeding appears to be a thing of the past as invectives have become part of youth and adult lingo in this day and age. Be that as it may, the Assembly is still a place where decorum rules and should be observed if democracy is to thrive.

No less than the former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind had on November 25, 2020 reminded all elected representatives to engage in a healthy dialogue in Parliament and legislative Assemblies and refrain from using unparliamentary language during debates. In July this year Parliament came up with a tome on what words constituted unparliamentary language. They included not only English words but also several Hindi phrases such as Jumla Jeevi words that were used extensively to define the Demonetisation that happened in November 2018. Other words and phrases included 'crocodile tears,' 'snoop-gate' and even a common term like 'corrupt' among others. While this list is over the top, what was uttered in the Meghalaya Assembly is not even printable. It violates the sensitivities of a society known for good conduct and social graces, no matter how provocative the situation. While gutter language exists in human society, the Assembly is a space of decorum where students come to learn how to debate with elan and without hurting the sentiments of rivals. What would have been the scene had there been visitors or students in the gallery on September 12?

## Letters to the Editor

### UDP's bravado humorous

Editor  
Nothing seems to have amused readers more than the bravado of the UDP leader, Paul Lyngdoh recently when he said that the UDP is the party that would bring in a stable government in 2023. Let me put this straight across with no holds barred. Whether the UDP leadership agrees with me or not, all of us see this Party as bereft of political principles. A case study is the way the party MLAs including the Speaker himself seem to have divergent views on the current coalition. For long they have been in the forefront of threatening to withdraw just as the BJP has been saying. However, till the fag end of the Assembly session they continue to hold on to their seats of power. Take for instance, the police vehicle scam where the Home Minister himself is defending the accused AGP, G Ilangrai while some in the UDP are calling for an investigation. These political antics that the party indulges in are not going to be bought by people. People are well aware that the fleeing of the Ichamaty accused was with

the knowledge and authority of those who allowed those from Ichamaty to leave at the dead of night in bus loads. The question is - who was the Home Minister at that point of time if it was not from the UDP? In some constituencies the UDP is playing a dirty game of its own but it is for the voters to give their verdict in 2023.

Yours etc.,  
Donbok Syngkrem  
Dawki.

### Clean up Pine Mount School mess

Editor,  
The events that unfolded from the Pine Mount School as reported in the media shows that the School is in a deep mess all around. It shows that there is no proper school Managing Committee (MC) for quite a long time to take care of all the affairs of the school. Where is the Director of Higher and Technical Education gone who is the immediate boss of the Principal of the School? Does he regularly keep track of Pine Mount, the Shillong, Jowai and Tura Public Schools, other Government Higher Secondary

# How Institutions are destroyed: The case of NEIGRIHMS

By Anderson Rani

The fall of NEIGRIHMS started when an engineer was appointed the Deputy Director (Administration) against all odds and precedence. This was possible with the connivance of self-centered individuals who are at the helm of the Institute affairs. It is still not clear how the Section Officer of Purchase Department was appointed as the Liaison Officer to liaison with the Union Ministry of Health, Government of India. The fallout of this unprecedented appointment of Administrator without experience in administrative matters has turned the individuals into a 'yes man' not only of the Director but all the corrupt individuals who had advocated his cause.

As per the structural intent of this type of organisation, the Deputy Director is to check-mate the Director in

these many years only looks after repairs. Hence there is no justification to have a Superintendent Engineer for the type of activities they are executing.

It is a well known fact in this Institute the only activity that moves in full throttle is "PURCHASE" and hundreds of crores is being spent during the tenures of different directors. Anything which is more than 10 years old will be condemned, sold at a throwaway price and a new one will be bought. Whether the equipment has been used or not, after 10 years it will be replaced by a new one where most of the time the supplier of the new one takes back the old one in a process known as "buy back". It is also a well known fact that if Depart-

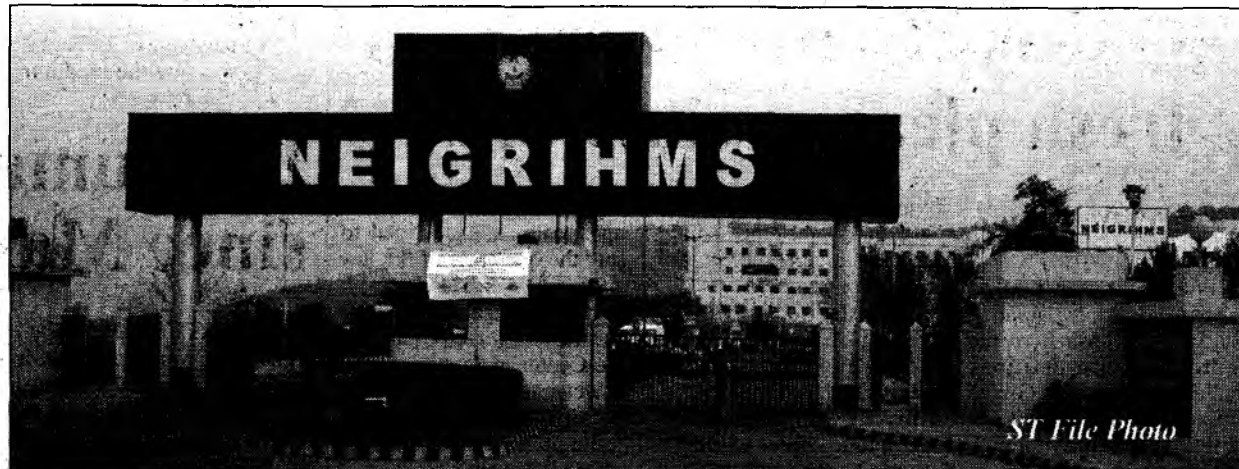
ment spirit. In these few months he has forgotten the spirit of the rules. Everything is now hijacked by the same people who had been working all these years just for their own interests.

For instance, out of all the senior faculty of the Institute the junior-most professor was appointed as Dean. Never before has a junior superseded his senior for the post. These types of appointments are made against all precedents with consequences adverse to the development of the Institute because the Dean is the head of academics and chairs many important decision-making committees.

All these years since the start of the College of Nursing in NEIGRIHMS, a local, senior and experienced lady

individuals and the organisation as a whole. One of the main reasons for many faculties leaving the Institute is the toxic atmosphere where only sycophants (chamchas) prosper. It took 3 long years for the last Director to realise this fact. By then it was too late for him to fight back. I wish the incumbent Director would learn from history so that this Institute can be saved without any waste of time. There are many issues which a newly joined Director is not expected to know but for the person to act merely on hearsay will only add to the problems instead of finding solutions.

The central government had decided a few years back that recruitments for all group B and C employees will be done only with a written test and the merit list will become the final result. With



ments of government rules and regulations but unfortunately in this case he becomes a "Chamcha." When Prof A.G. Ahangar joined the institute as a Director, the first change that happened was the colour of the main gate from its original design to that of a box-shaped structure (original design still inside the box). The gate was painted "GREEN" not because of the environment but because of other reasons. Now after the present Director joined, the colour had changed to blue (not able to make out this time what the colour code means). With the support of the Health Minister of the state, the MP who belongs to the same Church as the Deputy Director gets to hold on to his post for 7 years! With his wit and manipulative talent he had been able to convince the present Director to designate him as a Superintendent Engineer though he is only an Executive Engineer. For those who don't know, the Engineering Department of NEIGRIHMS has no hand in the buildings and ongoing construction in the campus. All these are done by Larsen & Toubro Ltd under the supervision of HSCC directly from the Ministry of Health Government of India, Delhi. The engineering department for all

ran the college but recently she is found to be too old to apply for the job of Principal in a position she had held for 15 years. In 2018 this post was advertised, where she also applied but for reasons best known to the concerned authorities the results were never declared. In terms of manipulating the recruitment rules to suit some, this Institute tops the list. Hence it ends up in a situation where the post of programmer, a Class-1 officer is manned by a person who has no idea whatsoever on what programming is all about. The Deputy Registrar is a graduate promoted from the post of a Lower Division Clerk (LDC). It is also understood that a junior faculty of the college is very optimistic of being elected with the backing of high officials but the pertinent question is: how will the work environment be when a senior person has to answer to a junior she had been guiding for so many years?

There's one thing which the present Principal in-charge has which differentiates her from the rest. She does not allow herself to be used by anyone including the Director. A proper work environment/job satisfaction is very important for maximising the potential of

this new arrangement, the section which handles this process is considered to be very important. Hence the top priority should be to maintain strict confidentiality. To the astonishment of many, there is an order to the effect that the question paper for the post of Store Keeper and Pharmacist (personnel under the direct control of Purchase Officer) should be from a certain organisation! Is this because the Examination Cell of NEIGRIHMS does not have competent people who will know where to get the question papers for a particular post or this is a way to manipulate the results of these two categories of posts? There's a saying in this Institute that tenders for both services/works and goods are prefixed. Is this trend now contaminating recruitment also? The official who started this intrusion into exam procedures in NEIGRIHMS should be prosecuted as per rule and should be punished accordingly before posts are auctioned to the highest bidder. If anyone justifies this misconduct then they are definitely a part of this scheme "Posts for Sales."

Oh the fate of NEIGRIHMS! How did we know that an Institute meant to deliver health care and healing would sink to such depths and there's no one to blow the whistle!

At one end are a range of legacy issues that made the Doordarshan-era teleserial Rajani popular in pre-liberalised India because the protagonist put up a fight for simple, everyday issues - a cooking gas cylinder, a phone connection, a petty loan. In a liberalised India, some of these services are in abundance after the State contracted them out to the private sector. But we also suffer a creeping corporate control and growing corporate power so that workers inside and customers outside take what they get. Every customer is not created equal. Quality of service gets linked to spending power and the revenue the customer generates. We have not been able to protect the rights of most workers and consumers. It makes privatisation sometimes look like a takeover by a new set of moneyed sahibs. This cannot be freedom, particularly for those who remain at the bottom of the pyramid.

The topmost echelons of our bureaucracy remain protected, are fed with housing, cars with beacons, peons and helpers at home and office, and the job continues to be coveted with promotions etched in time, not performance. This legacy of the British Raj, in which "orderlies" are paid by the State to polish an officer's shoes and iron clothes, cannot be a sign of decolonisation. We have not fixed these age-old issues that feed into a colonial way of working, right at the very top of the government bureaucracy. It is not surprising that the rest of the bureaucracy continues in the same tradition, exercising power, control, privilege for anything but service of the people. This, too, is not a sign of decolonisation. Some things have changed but this is more a case of too little, too late.

In fact, whichever way

## Decolonising the Indian mind

By Jagdish Rattanani

"The emotion and structure of the Rajpath were symbols of slavery, but today with the change in architecture, its spirit is also transformed," said the Prime Minister on Sep. 8, inaugurating the new vista called 'Kartavya-Path' and putting behind what has been known as 'Rajpath', or Kingsway, "the symbol of slavery ... erased forever", as an official statement put it. These steps are said to be in line with the Prime Minister's second of five vows ('panch pran' for a New India) in the I-Day speech this Aug. 15: "in no part of our existence, not even in the deepest corners of our mind or habits should there be any ounce of slavery ... We have to liberate ourselves from the slavery mindset which is visible in innumerable things within and around us."

It is true that there are innumerable things that make ordinary Indians live and work with a slavish mindset, not the least of which is the way ordinary Indians grovel for their rights before the brown sahibs that took over and continue to rule long after the white ones left. One of the biggest contributors and perpetrators of this slavery is the way officialdom treats citizens - labourers beaten during the lockdown imposed after Covid-19 struck, citizens beaten outside ATMs immediately after demonetisation, the difficult conditions under which we get simple services like an Aadhar card, a driving license, a transport permit, not to speak of laws that could keep an ailing 84-year-old Father Stan Swamy in jail, right to his death, shifted in his last days to a hospital bed but still under custody. The tyranny of the State, ever present in Independent India, has gotten progressively worse. This cannot be a sign of freedom from a colonial frame that sees people as wayward and needing to be watched and controlled.

At one end are a range of legacy issues that made the Doordarshan-era teleserial Rajani popular in pre-liberalised India because the protagonist put up a fight for simple, everyday issues - a cooking gas cylinder, a phone connection, a petty loan. In a liberalised India, some of these services are in abundance after the State contracted them out to the private sector. But we also suffer a creeping corporate control and growing corporate power so that workers inside and customers outside take what they get. Every customer is not created equal. Quality of service gets linked to spending power and the revenue the customer generates. We have not been able to protect the rights of most workers and consumers. It makes privatisation sometimes look like a takeover by a new set of moneyed sahibs. This cannot be freedom, particularly for those who remain at the bottom of the pyramid.

The topmost echelons of our bureaucracy remain protected, are fed with housing, cars with beacons, peons and helpers at home and office, and the job continues to be coveted with promotions etched in time, not performance. This legacy of the British Raj, in which "orderlies" are paid by the State to polish an officer's shoes and iron clothes, cannot be a sign of decolonisation. We have not fixed these age-old issues that feed into a colonial way of working, right at the very top of the government bureaucracy. It is not surprising that the rest of the bureaucracy continues in the same tradition, exercising power, control, privilege for anything but service of the people. This, too, is not a sign of decolonisation. Some things have changed but this is more a case of too little, too late.

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we look, the ordinary citizen has less and less protections from the might of the State and lately of corporates who rule lives, provide critical services but are not easy to hold to account, particularly when those down the line do the asking.

But the biggest of all is the way India has bought into the idea of what a developed nation might look like. Currently, it is all about the aggregate numbers at the top. We can gloat over how our GDP is now greater than Britain's while refusing to acknowledge that it means nothing for how ordinary people live, of how in per capita terms, India is almost one twentieth of the nominal per capita GDP of UK.

A blind race for the GDP number also signals that India has chosen its path

to be an unfettered kind of industrialisation under which care and maintenance of the abundance of nature is sacrificed at the altar of extraction, production and consumption for the benefit of a few. In this, we appear to find our nirvana, in a development model that has brought no-joy anywhere in the world but has delivered a destruction of natural systems. This industrial era growth in the Western mould is a path of follies of the West that have become a path of the East. So, while there is a movement towards the green economy in the West, slow as it is, we continue to run an extractive economy that we wish to grow faster and faster. A recent example is the "development" assault on the Aarey forest region of Mumbai, and the attempt to dilute orders on the use of forest land. A former Union environment minister once said laws on the environment should not hinder development. This path runs against what is traditionally Indian. It cannot be a sign of decolonisation of India. It is colonisation on a bigger scale than ever because we have overthrown one set of masters in the British but built a new set - in India, the brown sahibs and globally, still the white sahibs who have somehow led us to believe that consumerism is the way of the future. Ideas of instant gratification, mindless consumption and thoughtless production are not a sign of freedom from a colonial mindset that seeks to copy and imitate the exploitative models of the West.

If India has to truly give up its colonial mindset, it must reform the bureaucracy, remove undue privileges for those in power, offer firm, enforceable and many more protections for ordinary citizens and decide on a growth journey that does not mimic the destruction that the West and China have wrought on the environment. All new innovation will come from this space, and we should not be surprised that we missed the new era because, well, our colonial mindset stopped us from seeing the path ahead. This means we must embrace our planet and all nature as living, thriving, breathing systems that nourish and sustain us - a deeply Indian way of thinking that goes back to our very roots. This takes us back to the classical Gandhi - the world has enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed - a very decolonised way of thinking that is now fashionably quoted (if not followed) all around the globe. It is true that Gandhi emphasised duties over rights but he also showed us how it was a duty to stand up when rights were taken away by an unjust and unfair colonial system.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Through The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

to achieve their goal? This is pure politics employed by these teachers to oust the Head of the Institution. This has created a dangerous precedent for the school with equally dangerous consequences for the future of the teachers and students of Pine Mount School.

Perhaps a joint letter of complaint from the teachers to the Education Minister or as protocol demands to the Director of Higher and Technical Education demanding for removal of the head of PMS to replace her with another suitable person would have been better to help them solve the matter. We are unsure if they had adopted that course of action but their grievances were not attended to. Whatever it is, Pine Mount School has sunk deep in the mess and it requires immediate retrieval and complete revival from the messy situation it is currently in.

We came to know from media reports that several parts of the school building need urgent repairs; there are issues with the unhygienic toilets, some of which are no longer usable. There are issues of school fees; of parent-teachers meetings not held and many other unpleasant goings-on. At this

juncture, what Pine Mount School needs is an efficient, capable and strict Principal and Vice-Principal but who are rational and humane in their dealings with teachers and students. At the moment the reputation of Pine Mount School is lost but can it be retrieved? Yes, but only by taking urgent steps to retrieve what is lost by involving all stakeholders.

After more than a century of its existence, we should be having a Class A grade Pine Mount Women Government College in the same huge plot of land by adding the land of the mini zoo as the animals are now shifted to Mawlein Zoo in Ri Bhoi and by adding the whole land originally meant for Pine Mount Institution. Let us hope for the best and let the happy days of progressive Pine Mount School return at the earliest.

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

### Award for Cleanest Tourist Spot

Editor,  
As per media reports it

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 are only two forces in the world, the sword and the spirit. In the long run the sword will always be conquered by the spirit."*

—Napoleon Bonaparte

**The Shillong Times**

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**The Indian hurdle Raj**

FINANCE Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has asked a big question to India Inc, or domestic business honchos, as to what holds them back from getting into the manufacturing sector. Her question is also why they are not making use of the Production-Linked Incentive Scheme introduced by the Modi government, which offered huge incentives and subsidies to the manufacturing sector. A package of Rs. 1.97 lakh crore across 14 sectors was announced last week under this scheme to boost the 'Make in India' agenda. The positives are not to be ignored. India's manufacturing sector has the potential to touch \$1 trillion in three years' time as it has the largest middle class base with purchasing power amid a bulging population of around 1.40 billion. Yet, as is realized by the government itself, lazy India produces "too little".

This scenario has progressively worsened with the advent of Chinese and other foreign goods into the Indian market. Indian manufacturers are not able to produce and sell products even with the same price that the Chinese offer, even as these goods carry the huge costs of shipping and transportation as well. This is happening even as the labour cost in India remains too low and a whole lot of Indians have no work. The dichotomy is stark. A close analysis of the manufacturing scenario here despite the massive customer-base that's on offer points to major lacunae across the spectrum. Governmental policies, including the licence raj that India claimed to have done away with at the start of the economic liberalization in the early 1990s are still persisting and are the main constraints. Bureaucrats and politicians bleed the prospective entrepreneurs dry. The hurdles they set are one too many and the processes cumbersome.

If China succeeded in the huge growth of its manufacturing sector, one key reason is that it has simplified its systems and turned them entrepreneur-friendly. Xi Jinping's first offensive was against corruption in the system. India, rather, makes the systems more complex which in turn encourages bribery. Prime Minister Modi took power with a promise of checking corruption but his anti-corruption agencies are targeting only the political rivals. A government, rather, has to be the facilitator. Projecting a steady climb in FDI means little. The finance minister says foreign investors are in a mood to get out of China and would like to come to India. But, are the conditions here favourable? Frequent changes in tariffs and policies themselves are a dampener to prospective investors. They get caught midway through the process. To add to this are the plethora of 'hurdles and the corruption raj'.

**Together We Must Fight the War Against Drugs**

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

While appreciating the efforts of the Anti-Narcotics Squad of Meghalaya Police in apprehending and arresting the petty drug peddlers and couriers, these arrests must also raise alarm bells that there is more than meets the eye in the illegal business of narcotics which is prevalent in Shillong. Drug trafficking and substance abuse in the Capital and its embedded societal predicaments are no recent phenomenon. Today, the question is not how this drug menace will end. Rather how long or how far will it go and create extreme havoc in the State and society? However, this should not deter us from fighting against it. As the war is raging, we must also equip ourselves with knowledge and wisdom and also explore ways to combat the menace. We must remember that this is not a personal battle but the entire community has to be involved.

Cities around the globe which are plagued with drug trafficking and substance abuse have many gory stories to tell and teach us. The drug cartels have well established and trained private armies and they also enthrone and de-throne governments/rulers at will. The drug cartels are involved in kidnapping and killing people, including government officials and priests who came in the way to meddle with their illegalities. According to Father Fabian Belay, who is also known as the slum priest, "In Rosario, Argentina Drug money is said to be spent by politicians and members of the police, who stand idle as gangs battle for control of lucrative supply chains and locals are left living in fear."

In the ensuing battle against the drug cartels, millions of children are orphaned and youths lost their lives either in violence or substance abuse. The streets are flooded with blood in the recurring gang wars or inter cartel battles or in the battle with the State's forces resulting in huge loss to the economy and human lives on both ends. Besides, the tragedies that befall families who are caught in this spiderweb/cycle of drug abuse, illegal business and violence are beyond description. But there are people who have completely lost their moral moorings and conscience and are becoming rich from this illegality. Thus, our war against drugs must begin by confronting and challenging the cartels.

While it is unfair to compare Shillong with other drugs infested cities of the world, it is important to analyse the reality of the situation in Shillong with re-

gards to drug trafficking and consumption which is rising at an alarming rate unless it is combated:

1. The narcotic drugs supplier, peddlers or couriers are in existence in Shillong. Perhaps they may have formed a well-knit ring or are under the supervision of trans-national drug lord(s) or emerging regional narcotic regent(s)?

2. The amount of quantity seized by the police from drug peddlers across the city in the recent past is indicative that the number of addicts/consumers in Shillong are relatively high and there is a lucrative market with huge turnover. This has also



resulted in the rise of crimes like burglary, chains and purse snatching which has put the lives of commuters/pedestrians and residents in grave danger.

3. The problems are aggravated with poor policing. There is a sharp rise in thefts and burglary in Polo area and the adjacent localities and there are also reports that criminal elements like purse and chains snatchers are openly loitering the streets with impunity.

4. Unfortunately, in Shillong we only witness or read about the arrests of petty peddlers or couriers. We hardly hear that a kingpin or big-time supplier is arrested or a cartel is busted. It may be opined that narcotics trade in the City or State is being carried by a cartel either from within or outside the State, who may be big time business people, who may also fund religious or charitable institutions or political elections etc.

5. If the situation of addiction continues and the supply of narcotics increases the next decade will be disastrous for Shillong. Ultimately, drug trafficking leads to violence, gang war, killings and kidnappings. A cartel will certainly raise their own private militia and time may come that they may occupy the seat of power. And in Meghalaya illegalities of different kinds (from illegal

coal mining and transportation to fake encounters to lynching and extortion etc) are occurring under our noses and it is plausible that drug trafficking may have happened with the knowledge of people in power or close to power. Apparently, the narcotics trade in the Capital is being transacted regularly without fear of the law and Shillong is heading towards a catastrophe of sorts.

6. It is also necessary to segregate drug dealers/suppliers or cartel from local petty peddlers and couriers in our battle against drugs/substance abuse. Of course, there may be drug peddlers or couriers who are im-

ing to become drug lords someday. Social and medical scientists have time and again described the interconnection between drug trafficking or substance abuse with poverty, economic inequality, corruption, unemployment and militancy. Moreover, our youths are vulnerable and are falling prey to substance abuse due to frustration, broken homes and other related societal and psychological issues.

7. There are specific laws to deal with narcotics trade and it would be unwise to comment anything on the legal aspects. Let the law stringently deal with it in its own space and book anyone who is involved in this illegality. But the law alone will not be able to solve and counter the socio-economic harm caused by the narcotics trade and substance abuse. The society has to come and stand together to battle against it.

8. I do not justify the illegal acts committed by either the peddlers or couriers or the addicts. The law is there to punish such illegality, but let us begin the war against drug trafficking and substance abuse by refraining from being judgemental and prejudiced towards person (s) or family (s) who are entrapped in this mess. Rather let us stretch out our hands and lift them from this whirlpool of addiction, illegality

and violence. Through this medium I appeal to every citizen of Shillong in particular and the State in general to collectively think and work together to combat drug trafficking and substance abuse before it goes out of hand. To solve the issue, a long-term plan is needed, one that requires unity, intelligence, bravery, audacity and political will, both at the grass roots (village dorbars/Welfare society(s) and at the state level.

Immediately, Shillong is in dire need of community rehabilitation, counselling and care centres to be run by professionals. These centres should be made universal and accessible to all. More important is that those ensnared in substance abuse/drug trafficking and especially from the marginalized section should be given free access to treatment in rehab and care centres. In my interactions with local families across the city, whose wards are entrapped in drug trafficking and substance abuse, jail is the only option for them as they could not afford the cost of medical expenses in private rehab centres. Perhaps jail is not a bad option if there are available correctional teachings/methods which can be applied to reform or transform people. But how good is the condition of our jails and its system? Rather than correcting people, they may turn them into hardened criminals? A holistic approach towards the problems of poverty, inequality and unemployment must be brought forward. Further, in cosmopolitan city like Shillong the issue of drug trafficking/substance abuse and its interconnected socio-economic realities cannot be narrowly compartmentalized as ethnic/communal problems. Improvised system of policing and the involvement of democratically elected grassroots or community (s) councils are imperative.

Lastly, religious institutions also have to step in as they command a greater degree of mental and moral behaviour of their followers but with the sole idea of helping and supporting the victims and not to convert them. In 2018 during the Vatican Conference on Drugs and Addictions, Pope Francis called for a combined effort to restore human dignity through prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration projects. A combined and collective effort among communities and agencies to implement social programmes aimed at health, family support and education is vital.

(For further discussions and actions on this issue please call or write to me: Phone: 6033005175. Email kyrsoi73@gmail.com)

**A reflection of the 100 years arrival of the Salesians of Don Bosco to Northeast India (1922-2022)**

**Has Christianity destroyed culture?**

By Aiborlang Nongsiej

Has Christianity destroyed our culture? This is the question often asked by many during my school and college days. Teachers and lecturers have also often stated that Christianity has destroyed many of our cultures in Northeast India. The arrival of Christianity in the 19th century is believed to be the beginning of destruction of many cultures in Northeast India. But has Christianity really destroyed our cultures? Personally, I would say 'No'. In fact, it has come to empower us and enhance our cultures; our standard of living, and an improved way of life. It is unfortunate that some individuals continue to harbour such thoughts when most of them have received their education from Christian institutions.

Imagine, what would be the situation in Northeast India if Christian missionaries had not come here. What would have been the standard of living and how disadvantaged would we have been in terms of education? Who developed the Khasi alphabets? Was he not a Christian missionary? In my opinion, most of the scripts of the tribes of Northeast India were developed by Christian missionaries. The contribution of the Christian missionaries to the literature of the tribes is very rich. A concrete example of how the cultural tools and traditions of most of the tribes of Northeast India have been conserved are visible at the Don Bosco Museum, Mawlawi. Who started this Museum? Is it not the Christian missionary who saw the danger of losing the rich cultural values of the tribes of Northeast India? If such contributions are the contributions of Christian missionaries to the tribes in Northeast India, can we say that Christianity has

Fr. Joseph Bacchialero did a thorough research of the Khasi cultures and also collected many oral traditions to preserve them in this particular book which is used by the secondary school students under MBOSE. Likewise, there are many Christian missionaries who developed the cultures and the standard of living of the people in Northeast India. Therefore, we cannot say that Christianity has destroyed cultures. The arrival of the first Salesians of Don Bosco to Northeast India brought several changes and added value to the lives of people in the region. The Missionaries opened schools and vocational training that contributed a lot to the development of cultures and society in terms of education and a better standard of living.

If Christian missionaries had not come to this region we might have perhaps lost our culture and been dominated by the other majority cultures. How many of us appreciate our traditional dress now? Generally, I see people putting their traditional dress such as Dhara (Khasi) and Dakmanda (Garo) only when they go for Church service. Church service is one of the platforms for wearing the traditional dresses. If Christianity has come to destroy cultures, it could have stopped people from wearing their traditional dresses during Church service. But they did not impose any such sanctions because the missionaries respected the culture of the people and helped them to conserve the good culture. Likewise, many of the hymns for the Church services are being adapted to the traditional tunes of the people.

In fact, most cultures are better celebrated with the help of Christian mis-

*Imagine, what would be the situation in Northeast India if Christian missionaries had not come here. What would have been the standard of living and how disadvantaged would we have been in terms of education? Who developed the Khasi alphabets?*

destroyed our cultures? I strongly disagree with those individuals who still hold that opinion against Christianity.

Of course, there are certain practices of different tribes that Christianity has discouraged from practicing, particularly those against certain moral aspects of life. Christianity is a religion of love and forgiveness and most importantly preservation of life. Life is precious and a gift from God, for this reason Christianity discourages any practices of the cultures that are against life such as head hunting among the Nagas. The Salesians of Don Bosco arrived in Northeast India in 1922. They took over the Assam mission from the Salvatorian missionaries who were asked to leave the mission due to the First World War in 1914. The Salvatorians and the Salesians missionaries lived with the people and mastered the language in order to better the mission work. They not only concentrated on giving them Christian faith but were also interested in raising their standard of living particularly through education. The Salesian missionaries worked wholeheartedly to develop the region, particularly to care for the young people. For this reason, many schools were opened, in order to provide education to the youth. The first college of the Salesian congregation in the world is St Anthony's College Shillong. The man behind the beginning of this college is Fr. Joseph Bacchialero, SDB, who also wrote the Khasi book named 'Dienjat Ki Longshuwa'.

The 'Shad Suk Mynsiem' which is one of the most important festivals among the Khasis is being adapted to the 'Shad Paskha' of the Christian (Catholics). This shows that Christian missionaries appreciate our cultures. In general, most of the good cultures of the people are being preserved and adapted in Christian celebrations, particularly in the Catholic celebration. For instance, there are certain individuals who want to represent their culture by stitching the costumes of the priests for the Holy Mass such as chasuble and stole in their traditional way. Therefore, to say that Christianity has come to destroy cultures is totally wrong and unacceptable. For us residents of Meghalaya, Christianity has contributed a lot to improve the lives of people. If Shillong is known as the educational hub of Northeast India it is because of the Christian missionaries. Certainly, the presence of many Christian educational institutions in the city makes Shillong the educational hub of Northeast India. Imagine our state of Meghalaya without Christian educational institutions! What would have been the situation of our educational system and the living conditions of the people? As mentioned above, Christian missionaries came to our region not only to proselytize and spread the Christian faith but also to improve the living conditions of the people in different aspects of life. It is therefore totally unjustified to blame Christianity for the loss of culture.

Letters to the Editor

**Plight of Pine Mount School**

Editor,  
It is very sad to see the century old prestigious Pine Mount School today reaching a critical stage and the subject matter of intense public debate. I admit that teachers of the school are right to revolt against the present Principal for mismanagement and dictatorship etc., but the fault for the school arriving at this sad denouement is that of the higher authorities in the Government and the School Managing Committee whose brief it is to correct the anomalies in the functioning of the School. The problems are not new; they have been fomenting for the last couple of years. It would have been more dignified for the teachers of the school to try and resolve their disgruntlement against the Principal by taking the matter to the Managing Committee and seeking corrective measures through them.

Formerly, during the Assam Government there was a provision for regular inspection of schools at least

thrice a year. The Primary Schools would be inspected by the D.I of schools and the High Schools by the Inspector himself / herself. They inspected every aspect of the administration and management of the schools. When 'Inspection' notice would come, Principals, teachers and students would be gripped by tension. The students knew they would be randomly picked for a question or two and they were told by the school to come prepared. Students had to demonstrate that they were disciplined and very neatly turned out with hair and nails very tidy for they would be checked too and teachers would be held answerable.

(L) Mrs. E.N. Shullai was the First Inspector of Schools in Meghalaya. She was very vigilant and her eyes never missed if anything was amiss. Gone are those good old days! The term 'School Inspection' is invalid now!

Schools today don't maintain basic hygiene and the toilets in all government schools are unkempt. Most schools don't have enough toilets and the existing toilets are badly maintained. I am

speaking from my own experience as a retired Principal of a Government School which I have myself failed to solve despite repeated appeals.

I fervently hope that the agitation of the respected teachers of Pine Mount School will draw the kind attention of the Education Department and that the genuine problems of the School are solved with immediate effect and that the shortfall in other Government schools too are addressed. I wish that Pine Mount School returns to normalcy at the earliest.

Yours etc.,  
Uma Purkayastha,  
Retd. Principal, Govt. Girls' H/S School,  
Shillong - 1

**Lip service called MDA**

Editor,  
Can anybody see the "right side" of the NPP's MDA government led by Conrad K. Sangma, if at all that side is visible? We have the recent inhuman mob lynching in Shangpung, Jaintia Hills, the finger

pointing report on Cheristerfield Thangkiew, the murky affairs inside Pine Mount School, the continuous killings inside the rat hole coal mines in the state despite the NGT ban, vehicle scam of GK Langrai fame, the messy traffic scenario in the streets of Shillong and what have we. Is this a government? Should it not be pulled up in a court of law for total failure and misgovernance? Should Meghalaya vote for the breed in the NPP again in 2023? The joker cabinet ministers, starting with the CM followed by his deputy and the rest are only paying lip service and things are falling apart. You cannot run a state with statements alone. That's why Meghalaya is what it is today. This is one of the most disastrous governments that Meghalaya has ever seen. There is lawlessness, chaos, mismanagement everywhere with no checks and balances in place. Such a state of affairs can only foment lynching, scams, fatalities and murky affairs as the one in Pine Mount School - where the school teachers have to brandish black flags against their very principal. If this

school had been private, this principal would have been long gone. But Pine Mount School is sarkari after all and she can go on as long as she is not thrown out by a Committee. Today despite so much of mishaps in the state the CM and his foolhardy cabinet colleagues have all the audacity and brazenness to continue with their style of functioning. Let us hope for a change in 2023!

Yours etc.,  
BC Paul,  
Shillong - 4

**Dome collapse**

Editor,  
In respect of the collapse of the dome which was placed atop the new Meghalaya Assembly building, normally if adequate safety factors are taken note of while designing a structure in view of the probable deviation in the quality of inputs from the regular ones, the dome would not have collapsed. Also civil structures are designed considering the probable worst natural adversaries they may encounter. If engineers and architects had designed the

Assembly building and experienced engineers had diligently supervised the execution of the project then it is enigmatic that such a mishap could occur. What is sad however is that the dome collapsed some months ago and the IIT Gauhati is yet to give its report. Someone has to be held accountable for such a shameful disaster. But what is sadder still is that the people of Meghalaya have themselves forgotten this episode for which some months ago there were letters galore in this newspaper and on social media. People truly have short memories and by now have forgotten the dome collapse and the person responsible for it is now on the election trail from an urban elite and so-called 'brainy' constituency. It's impossible to imagine such a thing happening elsewhere in the country

Yours etc.,  
BC Biswas,  
Guwahati

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

"Stubborn and ardent clinging to one's opinion is the best proof of stupidity."

— Michel de Montaigne

## The Shillong Times

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### Too Many Enquiries; No Results

HOME Minister Lakhmen Rymbui assured the House on Monday September 12 that separate enquiries would be ordered on the Jowai jailbreak issue followed by the mob lynching of the undertrial prisoners. Once the Government commits to enquire into any matter of public interest it means only one thing- no further discussion on the matter is required. The MDA Government has too many enquiries in its arsenal. The enquiry into the rice scam is not yet tabled in the Assembly. Nor has the enquiry into the Saubhagya scam. The only reason why the enquiry into the Cheristerfield Thangkhiw killing was made public was because of pressure from groups that have decided to keep the matter alive. On their own the Opposition MLAs are disinclined to push the Government to make the enquiry reports public. The alleged scams in the Social Welfare Department and the MeECL (Power Department) have been brushed off by Chief Minister Conrad Sangma as being inconsequential. He has declared that the Committee going into the Saubhagya scam has found nothing and given a clean chit to the Government. Does the public not have a right to read the findings of these Committees? Interestingly, the Opposition has just allowed the Government to get away with trivialising such issues.

Most inquiries are, 'quick political fixes' in response to urgent public pressure. But public money is spent to defray charges of the government nominated members of the enquiry committees. In most cases the terms of reference of the enquiry are vague and generic in nature. Though enquiries are always a government's response to public outcries, the public hardly has a role in determining the members roped in for the enquiry or in determining the terms of reference.

It is also intuitive to note that not a single enquiry so far has resulted in punishment of the guilty. Every enquiry has acquitted those who have prima facie indulged in corruption or murder. To that extent therefore enquiry committees are a farce and governments know that very well. Also, public memory is short. Today the public have forgotten the dome collapse, the Saubhagya smart meter scam and the rice scam. The respective Ministers who lead these departments have the last laugh. The Opposition, if any is focussed on poor roads, traffic jams, the border resolutions with Assam and the casino. There has been no attempt to corner the Government on the findings of the different enquiry committees and the fixing of blame and accountability on officials/ministers. The Jowai jailbreak and the lynching of the escapees thereafter will go down a cul-de-sac because the enquiry will drag on beyond 2023. There is also the enquiry into the ugly goings-on in Pine Mount School. The MDA takes the cake when it comes to enquiries.

# BJP cadres violence in Kolkata has isolated party further

By Arun Srivastava

The manner in which the BJP created the boisterous situation and its cadres indulged in violence near Nabanna the Bengal Government secretariat on September 13 certainly does not underscore BJP's effort to stage a comeback. Instead it makes it explicit that the BJP had contrived a well-designed plan to engineer to widespread chaos and violence in the state.

A closer look at the nature of the protest rally against corruption, would make it clear that it was a part of the BJP's chain to push the country towards violence and communal riots. While the party has been wafting Hindu-Muslim issue in other states; Gyanvapi issue in Uttar Pradesh, Nupur Sharma issue in Rajasthan, Peshwa and Maratha issue in Maharashtra, it resorted to igniting violence in Bengal on the pretext of fighting corruption since the party had no Hindi-Muslim issue at the moment.

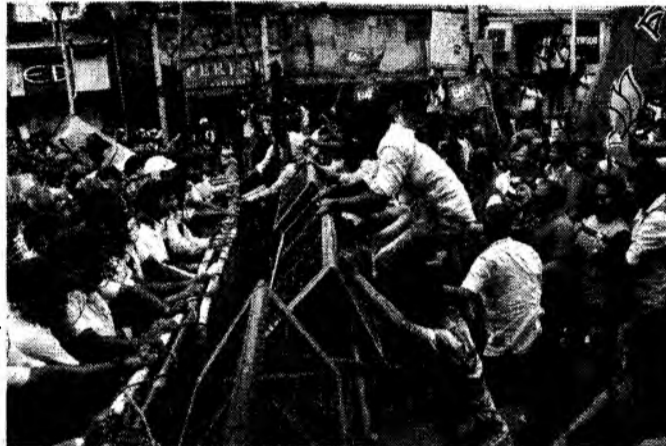
The Modi-Shah combine has turned sceptical of future electoral prospects in the wake of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY). The response that the rally was receiving from different civil society groups on its way has further shaken their confidence. Obviously they had become proactive to neutralise the BJP's gains. In their pursuit they can go to any extent. Every action is fair in a political war. One need not be astonished if the country witnesses fresh bouts of communal strife in the coming months before the Lok Sabha polls.

Strategist Amit Shah and other top leaders are aware of the crude reality that it was an arduous task to foment communal riot in Bengal for unseating Mamata and her party from power. Obviously, against this backdrop the only way before them is to drown the state in reckless violence and implement their long cherished scheme of putting the state under President's rule. While Jagdeep Dhankar, the vice President of India, was the Governor of Bengal a resolute effort was made by some Central ministers and top BJP leaders to unsettle things there but they could not accomplish their mission. They had to abandon the move.

With 2024 Lok Sabha elections which are very crucial for the political survival of Narendra Modi, knocking at the door, the think tank and strategists have become restive. Though the BJP leaders tried to give the impression that their Nabanna rally was

a massive affair, the fact remained that it fell short of their own expectations and the preparation they had done. They had claimed that nearly 2 lakh people would participate but the real number of participant was not more than 50,000.

Nevertheless they succeeded in implementing their plan to ignite violence. The determination of the party leaders to plunge Calcutta and Howrah into violence was clearly evident on the streets of Calcutta, far away from Nabanna, with the BJP



cadres resorting to ruthless violence. They mercilessly beat the police officers of the rank of Assistant Commissioner and burnt their vehicles. They resorted to this nature of violence on the plea that the police did not allow them to march towards Nabanna.

*"A political party enjoys the right to speak against the incumbent government and draw public attention towards its administrative failures. But what happened on Tuesday in Howrah, is really deplorable. The BJP leadership behind the façade of 'Nabanna Abhiyan', one of its biggest campaigns in recent times, was simply giving a shape to its plan to push the state into chaos."*

A political party enjoys the right to speak against the incumbent government and draw public attention towards its administrative failures. But what happened on Tuesday in Howrah, is really deplorable. The BJP leadership behind the façade of "Nabanna Abhiyan", one of its biggest campaigns in recent times, was simply giving a shape to its plan to push the state into chaos.

It was really an unprecedented experience to notice how the BJP used the media, government machinery and even judiciary to further its mission. An apolitical com-

mon person will testify that the protesters resorted to reckless violence, but the BJP leadership was quick to move the High Court and convince it that the police has used brutal means to stop them from reaching Nabanna.

On its part the High Court justifiably directed the state government to send the detailed report about the rally and the police action which had happened near Nabanna. The High Court on Tuesday sought a report from the West Bengal Home Secretary over the allegation that BJP

supporters were forcibly prevented from attending its 'march to the Nabanna' programme. The report has to be submitted by September 19.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Prakash Shrivastava and Justice R Bharadwaj also directed the state government to ensure

protection of the BJP state headquarters in Calcutta. It would have been highly appreciated if the Court had looked at the nature of the violence that was unleashed by the BJP workers in the heart of Calcutta.

The bench directed the state authorities to ensure that no unnecessary arrest is made and no person is unnecessarily detained in connection with the rally. The petitioner in his PIL claimed that BJP workers were forcibly prevented from attending the rally and party leaders were attacked. In Calcutta the police was attacked by the BJP

goons. It is pointed out that the place near Vidyasagar College, where the idol of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was vandalised by the BJP cadres during the year old visit of Amit Shah, witnessed the worst nature of violence.

The pictures of the vandals putting a police vehicle on fire and thrashing the police officers has gone viral. The petition was moved even while the protesters were having a scuffle with the police. Obviously it implied that the petitioner was ready with his appeal long before the protesters formally launched their march. Around 20 police officers were injured by stones pelted by BJP workers.

The BJP leaders would not have complained if the Mamata government had allowed them to put the lives of the people to ransom and vandalise the state secretariat. In a situation where the protesters were burning the cars of some common people and attacking the innocent how could the police not use force to disperse them? The BJP will undoubtedly refute the contention that its cadres and supporters had gone berserk and indulged in violence. It would have been better in the interest of the state and its people if it had asked the state government to furnish the details of the behaviour of the protesters and their actions while marching towards Nabanna. BJP insiders nevertheless concede that the rally was a poor show. The party had spent around Rs 10 crore on this event. A senior leader said "I wish our leaders had coordinated among themselves and drawn up a proper plan".

It is said that a section of the state leaders are not happy with the agitational plans being prepared by the central leaders. They did not care to look at the cultural ethos of the Bengalis. In their whim to rule over Bengal they have come up with many unreasonable plans. It is also pointed out this is because the senior leaders from state are taking the directives of the central leaders seriously. They are also aggrieved at central leadership giving more credence to the turncoats who have migrated from TMC and indulging in dirty games only to settle their personal scores which are completely non-political in nature and character. There are worries in BJP leadership that the September 13 violence might have isolated the party further from the people and that it would have adverse impacts on the panchayat polls next year. (IPA Service)

## PM Modi should strive to improve relations with Xi and Putin at SCO meet

By Nitya Chakraborty

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be visiting the historical city Samarkand in Uzbekistan on September 15 and 16 to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit amidst the continuation of the Ukraine war and the persisting misunderstanding between India and China over the border issues. This will be first in person summit since 2019 of the eight world leaders including Russia, China, India and Pakistan.

The Beijing headquartered SCO is an eight-member economic and security grouping consisting of China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Though the SCO started functioning from 2001, India and Pakistan became members only in 2017. The last 2021 summit at Dushanbe, conducted in a hybrid mode declared that the SCO believes "in principles of mutual respect for independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality and mutual benefit, peaceful

settlement of possible disputes through dialogue and mutual consultation, non interference in internal affairs, non use of military force or threat of force, rejection of unilateral military superiority in adjoining areas". These are pious declarations just like any United Nations charter which the big powers have the habit of ignoring when it clashes with their national interests. Russia, the leading member of SCO, is engaged in the war in Ukraine which has crossed six and half months already with no indication of ending. Ukraine is being helped by NATO powers

background of India defying the US diktat on sanctions of Russian oil supplies. Though Modi has been a part of the US sponsored geo-political strategy in Asia-Pacific, he ignored the US warning and came to an understanding with Russia for increased oil supplies. This step of India was a help to President Putin. In fact, other South Asian countries like Bangladesh are following India and that is a major satisfaction for the Russian president in the wake of strong sanctions by the West. While at the two day meet, India will certainly discuss bilateral issues of interest



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*"Right now, President Putin is not in a comfortable position in terms of both the economic strength of the country as also acceptability to the majority of the population in the country."*

### Letters to the Editor

#### Time to make penal laws stricter

Editor,  
Days after escaping from jail, four prisoners including the infamous I Love You Talang were murdered by an angry mob. Mob lynching, simply put is an act of murder and it can in no way be justified. However, the bigger question is what would've happened to these prisoners had they not been lynched to death. Would they go into hiding forever or would they once again join the world of crime and create fear and terror in society? Considering the situation in this case, what the mob lynchings did was probably the best solution they could come up with, because they can neither trust the police or the jail authorities anymore and they felt that they could not risk the lives of their loved ones with such criminals roaming around.

It is also astonishing as to how 6 people could overpower the securities guarding the jail? Are the guards not trained enough to handle such situations? Are they not trained to use their weapons properly during such emergencies? This is not the first time that accused prisoners have tried escaping from jails, therefore, it is surprising how despite all the suc-

cessful attempts that have been made by prisoners, the authorities still cannot handle such situations.

The other worrisome thing is how people like I Love You Talang, who have already had records of committing violent crimes are able to roam free, able to get bail easily. The Police and the Judiciary really need to step up efforts to safeguard our society.

It is high time for the government to change the laws. The penal laws of the country that is almost 160 years old, needs a change. Punishments need to be more severe, especially when it comes to habitual offenders, because it is hard to reform a person who has become a habitual offender.

Yours etc.,  
Reakor Shisha Kharkrang,  
Laitmynsaw Village,  
Upper Shillong

#### Scapegoating the frontline staff

Editor,  
Everyone from the frontline staff to jail authorities to politicians must help prevent the escape of undertrial prisoners. They all need to work in tandem, otherwise it's impossible to prevent future jail break attempts. This letter comes as a response

to news item that a murder convict was able to escape on June 22 this year after he was asked by jail authorities to wash an ambulance.

Warders/security staff posted at District jails recognize they are a very important part of the criminal justice system and place their lives on the line every day in order to keep some of the worst people on earth from escaping and harming the innocent. The primary task of the warders will be to ensure discipline and general functioning of prisons. However, Jowai jail is grossly understaffed (temporary Warders were also on duty when the September 10 jailbreak happened). Then we have the District Jail, Jowai with a capacity for 130 inmates but currently housing 250 (Info from megprisons Website).

While more emphasis needs to be placed on the issue of preventing prison escapes, in order to accomplish that, jail employees need proper training, manpower and equipment. Politicians need to hold up their end of the responsibility to jail employees and to the public and ensure that the staff and prison facilities receive proper security, tactical and self-defence equipment necessary to perform their jobs.

It appears that there is lack of proper infrastructure, poor quality of supervision,

acute shortage of manpower leading to prolonged hours of duty resulting in fatigue and exhaustion. Furthermore, there is misuse of human rights provisions by some jail inmates up to the extent where jail staff at District Jail, Jowai are not provided with a single lathi to protect themselves or deter unruly activities inside the jail in spite of being outrageously outnumbered.

Two personnel on duty were stabbed repeatedly by sharp objects, one on the head, another on the right arm. They bled profusely and any delay in treatment could have cost them their lives. They are currently in Lalong Civil Hospital. Hence the hasty arrest of Jowai Jail employees on duty shows that this Government is quick to punish without investigation but slow or rather unwilling to do anything about matters with solid proofs around allegations, scams, etc., just because it suits them.

Yours etc.,  
Concerned Citizens  
of Jowai,  
Names withheld on request

#### Time to legalise all mining

Editor,  
I agree wholeheartedly with this paper's editorial

entitled 'Time to legalise coal mining' (ST Sep 8, 2022). In truth, all natural resource mining should be legalised throughout India and the government needs to get out of the way by reducing the burden of regulatory requirements. This would benefit the economy in two ways: first, cheaper prices for the goods that rely on minerals and other natural resources (almost everything we use relies on fossil fuels); and second, more job opportunities as there is an expansion of economic activity in this area.

Western nations, including in particular Australia which is a major exporter of coal, oil and gas, have long understood the wisdom of enabling private companies to profit from mining activities.

However, it is true that all mining is inherently risky. That is why workers in the mining industry get paid significantly more than ordinary office workers - at least in those countries where private companies dominate the sector. The large pay packets of mining workers is to compensate them for the increased risk of injury and death that they routinely bear.

In Europe, the energy crisis where ordinary consumers are seeing a doubling of their utility bills is a direct result of the closure of coal,

oil and gas plants which has constricted the supply of energy. These closures have been advocated for by climate change fanatics who are unable to grasp the concept of weighing costs and benefits in a balanced manner.

India is on the path from a backward nation to a developed country. Ironically, the barriers imposed on mining mean that India is also a net importer of natural resources. This needs to change. India can produce energy cheaply and should not need to import from abroad.

In terms of environmental impacts, countries like Australia that grant mining permits more easily are cleaner than India in every respect: water, air pollution or any other environmental measure one cares to examine. This is because they strongly protect the private property rights of citizens who are adversely impacted by mining. Any mining company that harms someone should be liable to be sued for damages via the judicial system.

Yours etc.,  
Dr Sukrit Sabhlok  
New South Wales,  
Australia

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"Patience, persistence and perspiration make an unbeatable combination for success."

— Napoleon Hill

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 37 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2022

### Greedy BJP, worried congress

CLEAR hints are that the Congress house is on fire. The exit of eight of its 11 MLAs in Goa and their entry to the BJP this week came alongside the exit of Ghulam Nabi Azad in Jammu and Kashmir and announcement of his plans to form a party. The tri-colour party is virtually demolished in two states at a time when Rahul Gandhi has set off on a five month-long Bharat Jodo Padayatra from Kanyakumari with the slogan of "uniting India." His central aim is to raise his stakes and of his party in the run-up to the 2024 parliament polls. By the time he reaches Kashmir after passing through 12 states, the fate of the Congress is anybody's guess.

The Congress as the oldest political establishment still has its roots across the country. It was patently corrupt but not as corrupt as the parties run by regional satraps. The Congress party has a legacy and commitment to the nation, which are unquestionable. It sees India as one and Indians as a unified whole. Yet the weak spots in its present leadership profile are there for all to see. It's run without a full-time president for the past three years and still maintains its composure. However, Congressmen are increasingly wary that the BJP under PM Modi is unassailable. Without any hope to regain power, how long will they sit in the sidelines not just in Parliament but in state assemblies too, is a pertinent point. The sense of their disquiet is being exploited to the full by the BJP to finish the Congress off.

The BJP can never become the only political establishment. The space that the Congress ceded in state after state was grabbed by regional politicians who formed their own parties. They mostly turned these into family enterprises, amassed wealth and are creating empires of their own. The loopholes in the Indian systems allow the corrupt to get away with their act. In the past, such indulgences were not so blatant under the Congress in these states as is now the case with the satraps. Prime Minister Modi himself keeps lamenting about the sway of dynasties in politics. This is amid perceptions that he himself had not promoted his wider family interests. The Congress party is also a dynasty but it, in a wider context, is more than a dynasty. It conducts itself with a better sense of responsibility when national issues crop up. It has a wealth of talent. These are very important. India deserves a strong two-party system at the national level. BJP must take note.

# Assessing the MDA Government: Positives versus Negatives

By Patricia Mukhim

An incumbent government usually carries the burden of failures of previous governments. People tend to forget their own lapses when they sit in the Opposition. The much-discussed medical colleges in the current assembly session are burdens of the past. The Crowborough Hotel now named Taj Vivanta will soon see the light of day after 36 years. That's a hell of a long time. The MDA Government must take credit for this and for pursuing what was for a long time seen as an example of corruption, failure and the lack of a political will to tie up with hotel chains with a brand equity. The Taj Vivanta is that hotel chain that spells quality because of the Tata legacy. In the past there was a dilly-dallying and everything began and ended with politics. A reputed hotel chain from Meghalaya had bid to run Crowborough but that bid was by-passed in favour of an innocuous group that had no past experience of running hotels. That's typically how Meghalaya is run.

**Education:** The cumulative problems in the Education Department have, as pointed out by the Education Minister, been carried over from the past. Governments since 1972 onwards have refrained from tackling the problems of education head on. In the brief period that the Meghalaya Progressive Alliance (MPA) led by (L) Dr Donkupar Roy lasted (2008-2009) some attempts were made to streamline the Education Department and to even come up with an Education Policy. As soon as the MPA government was dislodged, all attempts at reform in the education sector received a quiet burial. In fact, it was during that regime that the white ink scam surfaced - a huge dis honour to the cause of education in the state. Education in Meghalaya is a political football driven by the politics of appeasement. Politicians don't look at the larger picture because the immediate is more important to them. Why should they look beyond five years and be cursed by the voters for not addressing the immediate crises?

The other day the State Education Minister admitted that schools are opened up in every village without looking at the viability factor. Different faith-based organisations start their own schools in villages instead of coming together and pooling resources to establish one good school after ensuring that there are enough students and that the school is able to generate enough resources to pay the teachers. Now that most of the schools either don't have enough students or teachers, when the Government tries

to rationalize and bring a convergence of two or three schools that are adjacent to one another to create one viable institution, there is stiff resistance because those schools belong to different faiths and each one has a vested interest in keeping the institution alive even if it is half dead. And politicians don't want to address such problems beyond a point. So the status quo continues and the biggest losers are the children who find no teachers when they go to school. Naturally their parents find it a useless venture to send their kids to school and find it more lucrative to make them graze sheep and cattle and earn a livelihood at ages as early as 10-12 years.

Looking at the situation in Garo Hills and how schools have been constructed but the Government has not been able to provide teaching staff one wonders if the Education Department actually looks at the revenue model of a school and how sustainable that model is before granting permission for starting one. If any organization starts a school, it cannot later pile on to the Government and expect it to underwrite the expenses. The Government should have done a careful survey before starting a school and should have done so only if there are enough students and there is a budget allocated for payment of teachers' salaries and maintenance of the school infrastructure. Government should not be taking on the burden of schools already started by private parties and organisations without due diligence being given to the sustainability of those institutions. Unfortunately, what usually happens in Meghalaya is that an MLA/minister pulls strings to start a school in his/her constituency merely so that he/she can add that to the list of achievements. Later that school becomes a burden on the exchequer. Schools have rarely been opened on a need-based basis. They have come up on the basis of cheap populism.

**Health:** The biggest challenge to the health sector in Meghalaya is inherent corruption in the Health Department. That the Government spent 816.22 crores for Covid expenses is simply outrageous. Of the above amount, the money spent on infrastructure is Rs 49.98 crore and Rs 739.66 crores on non-infra meaning medicines, PPEs, gloves, masks sanitiser, oximeters and the other paraphernalia which might also include payments to hotels and caterers that supplied food to those under quarantine. But even so an RTI application

might inform us better how nearly a thousand crores was spent on Covid. No wonder it is said that some people make money even out of a disaster. Hence no credit to the MDA Government here. The Health Department was held by BJP, MLA, AL Hek until September 17, 2021 after which James Sangma of the NPP took over as Health Minister. There is a lot of answering to be done on the Covid expenditure. The ruling MDA is fortunate that it escapes scrutiny on most fronts since Opposition MLAs don't really do their homework. Otherwise there should have been fireworks in the House on the humongous Covid expenditure.

Covid was a health emergency. There are other challenges in the Health Sector which too are legacy issues. It is a fact that the PHCs and CHCs are not inspected and that doctors are not available in most of these health centres on a daily basis. If a few conscientious doctors are available, then medicines are not available and other facilities such as X-rays and other diagnostic tools too are not there. In PHCs where diagnostic tools are available there are no technicians. At every level there are lacunae. This writer has visited quite a few PHCs and found that they are still disabled-unfriendly. There are no facilities for ramps for instance. In 50 years we expect better health facilities in the rural outback so that people from villages don't need to make the arduous journey to the district headquarters or to the capital city. Since the Health Department fortunately has a few senior bureaucrats with a mission a health consultant has been engaged to tell them exactly where the lacunae lie and how to mend these and ensure that people get the health care they deserve, although rectifying a long-standing problem is like scaling Everest without any equipment.

Doctors are wary about staying in quarters away from their homes in the city or district headquarters because these are decrepit and many have leaking roofs. Power supply is uncertain. It makes it very difficult especially for those with families to live in these quarters. No wonder doctors make their appearances once or twice as if people fall sick only on those days. Whichever Government returns in 2023 should make Health and Education their priorities.

**Roads:** Roads in large parts of Meghalaya are a disaster. Look at how back-breaking the roads in Mawlai are.

You would think Mawlai is one of the most neglected constituencies. Why is the MDA Government so cruel to the people of Mawlai? Not that other areas of Shillong are better but Mawlai is just pathetic. I was listening to the MLA PT Sawkmie and hoping that like Saleng Sangma the MLA from Gambegre, he too would complain about the horribly pot-holed roads and let out a few expletives but that was expecting too much. Personally, I could not decipher what PT Sawkmie was speaking about.

The roads on the Jowai bypass towards Khliehriat and beyond are torturous. In the Assembly when MLAs pointed at the road conditions the PWD (Buildings) Minister Dasakhait Lamare assured his colleagues that he would 'aggressively' pursue the matter. Am not sure though why he replied on behalf of the Minister PWD (Roads). Roads are the life-line of a state and people are known to have lost elections because of bad roads. Lets see how people judge the MDA on roads.

**Bureaucracy:** Government includes an entire bureaucratic machinery that has to be well oiled. It must be said that most officers are appreciative of Conrad Sangma's style of functioning. Quite a few are his school and college mates and the bonhomie therefore is natural. But some senior officers have confided that Conrad supports a good initiative especially when he finds it pro-people. In the past, officers say that proposals were not only shot down but they were even side-lined for pointing out anomalies or pursuing goals that would have benefited rural communities. It is true that the lower rung in the bureaucracy needs to be motivated and more field oriented and better monitoring of projects would help the State achieve its goals better and faster.

**Conclusion:** Meghalaya features very poorly on human development indicators such as nutrition, maternal and infant mortality and malnutrition among children. The MDA Government has failed to aggressively address this issue.

This article cannot conclude without pointing to the wealth ranking of ruling party politicians, one of whom is constructing a palatial building that has a carpet area of 27,000 square feet in a posh locality of Shillong. The question is: where did the money come from? We can conclude therefore that people enter politics to serve their interests. If the state gains something along the way that is just happenstance. Period.

# Is India turning into a big garbage dump?

By Dr. Mousmi Singh

Believe it or not, yes! Our country is slowly turning into a big garbage dump. We are facing a mounting problem of disposal of solid waste in our country. Until the 1990s, most of the waste was simply dumped in the open until the formulation of Solid Waste Management Rules, 2000. Many Indian cities have still not learned to manage their solid waste. A new set of Solid Waste Management Rules have been enacted in 2016 to combat the issue. The Solid Waste Management Rules 2016 defines Solid Waste as "solid or semisolid, domestic waste, sanitary waste, commercial waste, institutional waste, catering, and market waste and other non-residential waste, street sweeping, silt removed or collected from the surface drains, horticulture waste, agricultural and dairy waste, treated biomedical waste, e-waste, battery waste, and radioactive waste."

**A glance at the Crisis - Mountain of TRASH -** Ghazipur landfill in New Delhi is India's highest rubbish mountain, spreading across an area of 70 acres. Along with the smell, smoke, and

state governments have announced means to curb its use. Several states in India have already banned plastic bags. India has the Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016 and its amendments 2018 to treat and recycle plastic waste.

Extended Producer's Responsibility According to Plastic Waste Rules (PWR), plastic manufacturers and retail establishments which use plastic are legally bound to collect plastic waste. These rules also mandate the responsibilities to local bodies, waste generators, Gram Panchayats, Plastic Retailers, etc. to manage plastic waste.

**The Road to Glory -** Plastic Road is an amazing idea! A most beneficial and much better way of disposing of plastic. An innovative method developed by Rajagopal Vasudevan to reuse plastic waste to construct better, more durable, and very cost-effective roads. The first plastic road was laid down in Tamil Nadu, since then all major municipalities in India have made use of the technology including Pune, Mumbai, Surat, Indore, Delhi, Lucknow, etc.

**Menstrual Waste disposal -** an environmental crisis The sanitary pads commonly used by women contain super-absorbent polymers (SAP), which don't decompose. They gradually break down into what are known as microplastics, which contaminate soil, water, and air. A single sanitary pad could take 500 to 800 years to decompose as the plastic used is non-biodegradable. Possible solutions include proper segregation and disposal, the use of organic, disposable, or cloth pads, and menstrual cups can also be an alternative.

**Waste Segregation -** A simple step that can help save our Planet. Waste segregation is the key to proper waste management. Segregation at the source not only improves collection efficiency but also leads to better processing of waste. **Think Clean Use Colour-Coded Bins -** The use of color-coded bins for waste segregation is a great idea. Also segregating home waste into Dry and Wet waste bins can help in segregation. Eg. Green Dustbins for wet and biodegradable waste like kitchen waste including vegetables and fruit skin, Blue Dustbin for plastic wrappers and non-biodegradable waste, Yellow Dustbin for Glass items, etc.

A pledge to follow the principle of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle-These small steps will make a big difference. Reduce means reduction in waste generation. For example, we can reduce the use of disposable goods like paper plates, Styrofoam cups, plastic spoons, paper napkins, etc. to help save the environment and trees. Reuse Example Newspaper can be reused as wrapping paper or as a packing material. Recycling refers to reprocessing of unwanted materials, into new and useful products.

The problem of environmental pollution due to improper waste disposal is grave and it needs to be addressed effectively. To end the menace of waste generation and disposal and the resulting pollution due to it, we need to rethink and readjust our ways. Let us make our Country, our Planet green and clean once again. Let's Bring the Change, Let's Be the Change!



**E-rase the E-Waste -** It is considered the fastest growing waste stream in the world. It is emerging as serious public health and environmental issue in India. Our country ranks 5th among E-waste producing countries. E-waste or Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) is created when an electronic product is discarded after the end of its useful life. The rapid expansion of technology and the consumption-driven society has resulted in the creation of a very large amount of this waste. Examples of E-waste include laptops, mobile phones, printers, microwaves, etc. Developing countries like India have become toxic dump yards of E-Waste. The release of toxic pollutants associated with crude e-waste recycling can have far-reaching and irreversible consequences. An expedient and prevalent method is simply to toss pieces of equipment onto the open fire to melt plastic and burn away non-valuable metals which in turn releases toxic fumes, carcinogens, and neurotoxins into the air leading to smog formation. Seelampur area in Delhi and Silicon Valley Bangalore are some examples where this has become a grave problem.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Of outrageous allegations

Editor,  
Apropos to the letter to the editor, "Laitumkhrh Hijacked" (ST Sep 7, 2022) as a concerned resident of Laitumkhrh, at the very outset I would outrightly reject such a bizarre and uncalled for statement. How can somebody "hijack" the entire Laitumkhrh? The heading itself was meant to sensationalise to catch everyone's attention. I certainly agree that this locality of Shillong is prime and prestigious and of course the most peaceful cosmopolitan locality in Shillong.

But there are several issues pointed out by James Lyngdoh on which I differ, hence I intend to put forward the unbiased narrative of mine so as not to mislead the people of the locality. Firstly, I would like to ask James Lyngdoh as to how he knows the aspirations and ambitions of Bah A A Jyrwa to grab power by misusing a handful of youth of the Seng Samla? Secondly, did A A Jyrwa force himself to be the headman of the locality or were any of the

other two headmen forcibly ousted from their positions? Such childish perceptions are laughable. And there's nothing like maligning the image of the Seng Samla. To say that they are pawns of someone is very wrong because upon my interaction with them I found most of them highly educated and gainfully employed. So how can they be pawns and how can they be arm-twisted when most of them are able to decide for themselves?

Also I have not heard any complaint by any of the residents of the locality till date saying that any member of the Seng Samla were creating nuisance, intimidating or disturbing the peace and tranquility of the locality. Now how on earth could the Acting Syiem of Mylliem be arm-twisted by A A Jyrwa? Such wild allegations can only come from a deranged mind.

To my knowledge the Acting Syiem of Mylliem has tried his level best to bring all the disgruntled Rangbah Shnong together on five occasions and it was only A A Jyrwa who attended all the meetings. The other two Rangbah Shnongs Messers G B Sawkmie and

S B Nongdhar attended only once and in that meeting they started raising objections and tried to find fault with the Acting Syiem. Had I been in the position of the Syiem, without any hesitation I would have done the same thing and appointed A A Jyrwa as the Acting Rangbah Shnong of the locality and I wouldn't call this a use of muscle power.

It is almost a year now that the Government has lifted all the Covid restrictions including the assembling of people, so, to say that because of Covid the Dorbar Shnong was not convened is just a lame excuse. Who doesn't want an election of new Rangbah Shnong, on expiry of the term which is long overdue? Only a non-resident who does not feel the pulse and sentiments of the locality would want that. I am shocked and astonished with the word "GANG" as there is no one in Laitumkhrh that fits into such a category. I take very strong exception to the use of such a word that casts aspersions on the people of this Shnong. And how can the writer link extortion and intimidation for necessitating the holding of election to the Dorbar?

Lastly, I would like to state that the Dorbar of U Khasi is inclusive of the samla (youth) apart from Rangbah, thus filing of an FIR against the members of the Seng Samla of Laitumkhrh, who are an integral part of the Dorbar, just because they demanded the financial report from the Dorbar is uncalled for.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

#### Disgusting Indian postal service

Editor,  
The postal service in the country spells disaster for lakhs of people every single day. It's no exaggeration! Exactly like rape victims, the aggrieved customers "keep silent". Hardly one bold person in a million bothers to lodge a complaint and seldom does he get a satisfactory solution. I want to cite a case that appalled every discerning citizen, and of course, I am myself. A parcel containing my own recently published books weighing about 16 kilograms were booked from

the Shillong GPO on August 17 for Houston, USA. I sent the parcel with high expectations of its express delivery for which I paid Rs 10,690. But to my great annoyance, that parcel "returned" back to Shillong from Guwahati on August 27 and this was informed to me by a postal man. What all happened to the parcel all those 11 days in Guwahati and who all are responsible for this? It touched a raw nerve. The postal people told me that it is due to the discrepancy in address and the dimension of the parcel. They could have used my two mobile phone numbers before returning the parcel, but the lacked even that simple "common sense."

After getting the full details, I immediately emailed a grievance letter to the Chief Post Master and a copy to Delhi. I insisted that this glaring fault on the part of the Guwahati postal department, which returned it without "proper checking" and thereby wasting our precious time, should not be taken lightly. Within an hour, I received a response from the senior officer, also from New Delhi, who asked the concerned staff to "rebook" the parcel to the US as they

did not find any discrepancy. Of course, this time, the parcel was dispatched with the rider from the top authorities for the "express delivery" with repeated email reminders. But I couldn't believe it when I heard that the parcel had reached only up to Delhi September 7, to be flown to the US! Here I call upon the wise citizens to evaluate the quality of service of the postal department in India. Does it not put the entire postal administration and the government to question? Should the "shrill scream" of the digital age not awaken the postal department from its slumber?

As I write this letter my parcel has just reached New York. I am wondering if it will be delivered to the consignee in Houston before September 16 because the books in the parcel are for a program to be held on September 18. I am in a cold sweat!

Yours etc.,  
Saili Gwali,  
Shillong-2

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"When hardships come into your life  
it breaks you for a while, but when it is done  
with you evolve into a new person."

— Madalsa Sharma

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 38 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2022

### Of misplaced priorities

MAWLAI MLA Process T Sawkmie raised the issue of passing another resolution on the Inner Line Permit (ILP) issue even as he continued to remain silent on the issue of dilapidated roads in his own constituency. The ILP is of course an emotive issue and politicians past and present have ridden this wave and claimed victory but whether this yarn can be spun again and again is debatable. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's reply to Sawkmie's question was interesting. He said the demand for the ILP is a 'process,' and that the three MPs and the State Government too have been pursuing the matter. Indeed, the matter ended there. Most matters ended without the Government having to bat an eyelid. Everything pointed out by the Opposition as well as allies and the fence sitters were explained away in the Assembly. According to the MDA Government there is no wrongdoing and even enquiry reports need not be made public. Is this not fooling the people? Perhaps the people of Meghalaya deserve this since there is absolute silence from civil society and pressure groups who should be the real custodians of democracy.

This time no one spoke about the dome collapse although a considerable amount of time has passed between that shameful moral collapse and now. An MLA who wanted to know what blueprint the government has for managing traffic jams in Shillong city was told by the Transport Minister that the blueprint cannot be put before the Assembly because the matter is before the Judiciary. Since when has a matter been precluded from being discussed in the House simply because the Judiciary is also taking up the same matter? Besides as legal experts opined the matter on traffic jams is a response to a public interest litigation (PIL) and therefore a non-adversarial matter. The Minister should have been briefed by the Advocate General before stating what clearly is a matter he knows little about. The possibility is that the Government is not yet ready with the blueprint on tackling traffic jams and therefore the minister was only indulging in delaying tactics. Since those raising questions in the House too are not aware of legal jurisprudence they are quickly convinced by what the Minister states in the House.

Meghalaya has now instituted a Legislative Research Fellowship where young scholars are expected to engage with MLAs and help them frame questions in the House apart from addressing other legislative issues. Those scholars should look up the rules and inform the legislators on their rights as elected representatives vis-a-vis the judiciary.

# Bharat Jodo: Thinking beyond Electoral Politics

By H. Srikanth

I am no fan of the Gandhis, or the Congress Party. Bharat Jodo yatra is initiated primarily in to revive the fortunes of the Congress party and present Rahul Gandhi as a dynamic leader capable of taking on the BJP in the forthcoming General Elections. Not sure whether this aim is realized. For, every big and small opposition leader in the country today thinks that he or she is the potential PM candidate. Each one is moving the pawns in the political chess game, not so much against Modi or BJP, but against other contending opposition party leaders. Given the competition and disunity among the opposition parties, one is not sure whether others accept Rahul Gandhi as a leader of the opposition front in the General Elections, 2024. India today lacks a leader of Jayaprakash Narayan's stature who could carry opposition parties along with him. Even if a section of the corporate sector in India looks up to Congress as an alternative to BJP, no one is sure whether the Nehru-Gandhi family will revive the faction ridden, disunited Congress to electoral victory. But these doubts do not stop me from endorsing the need for Bharat Jodo campaign.

There is no need to project a false narrative that there was ever a phase in Indian history where the people belonging to different castes, creed, race and religion lived harmoniously singing the song, "Hum Saath Saath Hai". Indeed, there was prejudice which kept the communities aloof from one another. The feeling of 'US' vs 'THEM' was there even earlier. The social reform movements and the Freedom Struggle failed to eliminate the vestiges of feudal and pre-modern ideas and outlooks. After independence, India's political and economic spheres have acquired modernity, but our culture and outlook continued to be a mix of the worst of both modernity and tradition. Barring the times when India was at war with neighbours, or facing terrorist threats, Indians remained a divided lot. Class divisions, caste oppression, and communal riots came in the way of forging emotional bond as the citizens of India. The gap widened further after the Mandal-Mandir agitation took shape in the latter part of the 1980s. The political parties with an eye on the elections consciously fanned communal sentiments and fortified caste and religious prejudices through national level campaigns. Even earlier, there were caste and

religious based parties, but their influence was localized. But the Ram Janna Bhoomi campaign and the fall out demolition of Babri Masjid cemented the cultural divide and turned prejudice into fear and hatred.

As in the Nazi Germany, since the 1980s a systematic campaign has been carried out against the minorities. Many irrational arguments were advanced to whip up a fear psychosis and hatred among the Hindus. The Muslims are held responsible for several problems the country is facing - for population rise, poverty and unemployment; for growth of terrorism and border unrest; for increasing

cancelled under threat from fringe elements which enjoy patronage of politicians and police. Often the people are made to doubt the loyalty of Muslim and Sikh players in Indian cricket team. There is an organized campaign to project Bollywood as a whole as 'Urduwood', meaning pro-Muslims and, hence, anti-Hindu.

Even crime is now viewed from political and communal angle. Those who criticize other communities for patronizing fundamentalism don't hesitate to feed extremists in their own communities. They may vociferously demand death punishment for rape. But the same per-



crime, and for love jihad. The Christians are accused of religious conversions. Even the protesting Sikhs and dalit activists are branded as Khalistanis or Naxals. Smear campaign doesn't stop there. Even the Hindus who don't agree with the regime's idea of Hindutva are nicknamed as 'libros', 'commies', and 'pro-Pakis'. Trade union leaders, activist farmers, environmentalists and tribal activists are treated as criminals. Media and social media are effectively used to perpetrate hatred against anyone who differs from the

sons don't mind condoning rape, and garlanding and distributing sweets, if the rapists belong to their community, or subscribe to their political ideology. Whether one condemns or overlooks the criminal acts depend on whether the victims belong to 'our' or 'their' community. They talk of human rights only when 'our' people are affected. All that 'we' do is right, and what 'others' do is always wrong. The persons who wear the 'us versus them' goggles cannot see the people and events from rational and humanitarian

*The social reform movements and the Freedom Struggle failed to eliminate the vestiges of feudal and pre-modern ideas and outlooks. After independence, India's political and economic spheres have acquired modernity, but our culture and outlook continued to be a mix of the worst of both modernity and tradition.*

regime in power. Not just the political opponents, even artists and social activists became the targets. The last decade has witnessed the killing of several journalists and rationalist writers. Several dalits and Muslims are lynched on the charges of eating or selling beef. Comedians and artists are shown as threats, and their shows are

angle. To them, every person belonging to another caste, creed, region, and language becomes an enemy or a potential threat. Imaginary fears and cultivated hatred have affected even family relations and friendships.

While the masses are preoccupied with petty quarrels over religion, caste, region and race, the regime is push-

ing ahead anti-people's and anti-democratic policies. In normal circumstances, the worsening plight of the people would have united them to fight for their rights. But alas, thanks to politics of hate, the people remained a divided lot. The people, instead of uniting against the real problems of poverty, unemployment, price rise, socio-economic inequalities and human rights violations, are busy fighting over the issues of mandir, masjid, burkha, beef, conversion, Love Jihad, Bollywood, Shivaling, Taj Mahal, Babur, Aurangzeb and Tippu Sultan!

While one may blame the regime in power for the present state of affairs, one cannot bail out the opposition parties.

In their own ways, most mainstream parties have contributed to the mess through the acts of omission and commission. For electoral gains, they have invoked and played with caste, religious and regional sentiments of the people. In different measures, they have contributed to the decline of the constitutional values and made a mockery of secularism and socialism. It makes little sense to blame BJP's politics of Hindutva, when the main opposition parties challenging it practise soft Hindutva, or appease reactionary elements among the minorities in the name of secularism.

No meaningful social change is possible without putting an end to politics of hate. Should the progressive minded people and organizations in the country abstain from the campaign against hate just because Rahul Gandhi is leading it? That does not appear to be the right approach. Contrarily, now is the time they take the lead and exercise pressure on every political party claiming to be secular to take up a systematic campaign against hate politics, and expose those who perpetrate hate. Defeating BJP in the General Elections should not become the only goal. Electoral victory makes little sense if the hate politics continues to thrive. The need of the hour is to project and work for an alternative vision of India that accepts cultural diversity and respects the values enshrined in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution. Preserving and promoting social harmony is possible when the people rise above politics of hate; cultivate rational and humane thinking; build bridges across communities in every mohalla and in villages and towns, and support democratic struggles against the real problems affecting the poor and marginalized.

## Round The States

By Insaf

### Goa Cong Joins BJP Mockery of people's verdict

People's will be damned, is a dispiriting message now coming from Goa. With eight of 11 Congress MLAs joining the ruling BJP with 20 MLAs, and on Thursday last Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar accepting the Goa Congress Legislature Party resolution to merge with the BJP, the State will barely have an opposition, critical to democracy. The grand old party is left with just three MLAs who now beg the question, "If they have merged Congress into BJP, then which party do we (three) belong to?" At the same, their taking a pledge in January at a church, temple of dargah of remaining with the Congress before polls in February 'amounts to defying God! The Congress, at a big loss, still chooses to put up a strong front, terming the crossing over as part of BJP's "Operation Kichad (muck)" and the "break" was fast-tracked because of 'Bharat Jodo yatra's' visible success. Not really, as recall in 2019, 10 Congress MLAs had switched over to BJP and that its accusation that BJP's tactics are only to 'break' doesn't hold good. The grim reality is that the Congress can no longer keep its flock together. Plus, the claim of PCC President Amit Patkar that BJP "has spent Rs 40-50 crore on each person to merge" doesn't carry weight. In all of this, the worst loser is the voter, whose choice of party and candidates meets a big bog in the ongoing political shenanigans. Since its transition to a full-fledged state 35 years ago, in 1987, Goa has had 16 chief ministers, with some holding office for barely a month or even less. Tragic indeed!

### Eying Himachal Polls

The timing of the Union Cabinet approving a Constitution amendment Bill, seeking to grant tribal status to certain communities in some States has raised eyebrows. More so, as the ruling BJP is expected to benefit from it in the Himachal Pradesh elections in November. On Wednesday, the approval was given to the Hatti community in Trans-Giri region of Sirmour district, among other communities in Scheduled Tribes list in Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. The demand is said to be pending since over 50 years. In Himachal, the decision is expected to benefit 1.6 lakh Hatti people, which form an electorally influential community and may favour the ruling BJP, which had swept the polls in 2017, winning 44 of the 68 seats. This time round, AAP has entered the fray turning the polls to be a three-cornered fight other than the Congress. According to calculations, the Hatti community is concentrated in the four constituencies and could play a significant role in at least nine seats in Shimla (once a Congress stronghold) and Sirmour. Importantly, BJP was the first party to recognise the demand during the 2009 Assembly polls and has since incorporated it in its manifesto. The community has put its weight behind it and the timing shall be decisive.

### Inactive Political Parties

Bogus political parties are getting weeded out. On Tuesday last, the Election Commission ordered delisting of 86 'non-existent' registered unrecognised political parties (RUPPs), in 'larger public interest and for purity of electoral democracy'. The number of such parties failing to comply with electoral rules has gone up to 537, since May 25! An additional 253 RUPPs were declared as 'inactive'. The action follows a physical verification by Chief Electoral Officers of concerned States/UTs such as Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh or is based on reports of 'undelivered letters/notices from postal authority'. Worse, these RUPPs

hadn't contested either a single State Assembly or General elections and were still enjoying benefits under Symbols Order, 1968, which mandated putting up 5% of total candidates in Assembly polls. While the delisting, says the EC will help voters make an 'informed decision', it must re-look at the electoral bond scheme, which many political parties say lacks transparency. Incidentally, BJP is its biggest beneficiary bagging 94.5% of the bonds worth over Rs 210 crore. Will it question the Government?

### Bengal's Street Fights

Enough is enough, doesn't apply to at least West Bengal. The street fights in parts of Kolkata and Howrah on Tuesday last between arch rivals, the ruling TMC and opposition BJP, are getting worse. The areas turned into a battlefield as BJP cadres clashed with the police, burnt a police vehicle and beat up a cop, while trying to get past barricades to prevent their march towards the secretariat, to protest against the alleged corrupt practices of TMC. While the BJP accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of not giving political space to the opposition and it was her cadres which stage managed the hooliganism, the TMC said "it's a bigger game plan to destabilise the State this festive season." Will Mamata take a cue from her UP counterpart and rein in BJP 'hooligans'? Her articulate MP Mahua Moitra's tweet gives an idea. She tweeted: "Whether the West Bengal government should follow UP's system and bulldoze houses of saffron camp leaders, which damaged public property... Will BJP stand by its own policy or get their chaddis in a twist?"

### Operation Lotus' In Punjab

First Delhi and now Punjab. The AAP accuses BJP of running 'Operation Lotus' to buy its MLAs and topple Bhagwant Mann's government! On Wednesday last, Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal claimed the BJP attempted to buy '10 party MLAs in Punjab by offering them Rs 25 crore each and ministerial posts.' Similar accusation was made last month but the attempt was thwarted in Delhi amidst huge drama. In Chandigarh, Punjab Finance Minister Cheema said the MLAs were assured "a meeting will be arranged with 'vadde baauji' (big brother) and offered Rs 50-70 crore if they brought three-four MLAs." Plus, BJP had kept aside "Rs 1,375 crore to topple the government, (break away 55 of the 92 MLAs)" like a kitty of Rs 800 crore in Delhi. BJP's state unit says it's 'a bundle of lies' and AAP was only 'trying to divert people's attention from its failures.' But AAP insists 'phone calls were made to MLAs' and following a complaint, the Punjab police has registered an FIR under Prevention of Corruption Act and IPC. Will it crack the case? Or will AAP look as running out of ideas to taint its rival?

### 'Lawless' Bihar

Is 'jungle raj' back in Bihar? The shocking incident of four gunmen going on a rampage in Begusarai district, killing a man and critically injuring 11 people, should have Chief Minister Nitish Kumar worried. Suspension of seven cops for dereliction of duty is a reaction oft seen. But that two motorcycle-borne gunmen went on a rampage firing indiscriminately at people in crowded areas Barauni Thermal Chowk, Barauni, Teghra, Bachwara and Rajendra Bridge, doesn't bode well for the administration. While four suspects are arrested, security beefed up in the district and all entry points barricaded after the shooting, Nitish says he senses a 'conspiracy'. Whose? The BJP offers an answer: "Whenever a 'Mahagathbandan' government comes to power, law and order situation starts deteriorating". Nitish and his deputy Tejaswi Yadav must prove it wrong. --INFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### When money rules

Editor,  
The refusal of the government to revisit the border MOU with Assam and its decision to issue licenses for establishment of casinos in Khanapara despite strong public opinion against them are two examples among many that this government does not regard public opinion as important at all because the government knows that in Meghalaya "public opinion" generally can be equated merely as "strong feelings" of people on issues they hardly understand or care. The government also knows that "public opinion" strong as it may be at a certain period will vanish in a matter of a few days or weeks and we will go back to our usual state of indifference and if pockets of resistance remain, a liberal amount of cash and more spread around among the public and revered institutions come election time will drown out any voices of conscience

Hence, we are bound to have another government of Kleptocrats and some people

especially those who read English newspapers will cry hoarse for at least another five years while the rest will go about their business in a state of usual indifference.

They say that a fish starts to rot from the head. In our case, the rot started to set in as soon as we attained statehood in 1972 and now the rot or corruption has reached the tail and it permeates all walks of life to the extent that it has also influenced our vocabulary. To cite an example, we don't call stolen money by its name anymore; we call it "side income" and that is a clue as to how our minds work.

In sum therefore Money and Money alone will generally be the sole determinant of who or which party wins the next elections.

Yours etc.,  
Samuel Sweet,  
Shillong-2

#### Shillong Traffic Jam

Editor,  
I would like to share my observations regarding traffic jam here in your esteemed newspaper after

having stayed and driven in Mumbai City for more than ten years. Firstly, we cannot compare the situation here with other cities in India. Besides the narrow roads, failure of the public transport system, occupied footpaths, lack of parking space etc, the problems of traffic jams here in Shillong is compounded by the lack of discipline among drivers who are irresponsible, selfish, egoistic and careless. Traffic rules are not followed properly or appropriately here in Shillong unlike in other cities of India.

Blaming the traffic dilemma to the parents dropping their children by cars is indirectly blaming the children. The question is not only about kids going to school by private cars but also how many people use public transport to travel to their offices every day and for other business/work? A design to use a shared school transport system may not help ease the traffic in the city and it cannot be compared with other cities of India where a school bus for ferrying children is preferred. In other cities of India the schools have enough premises and campuses where buses can

pick up and drop kids inside the campus. In other cities, people reside in clusters i.e. colonies and flat systems unlike here in Shillong where people reside in residential houses and buses cannot enter into many of these residential areas or localities due to the topographical setup and lack of accessibility.

The transport system in Mumbai run by BMC (Bombay Municipal Corporation) is one of the best in India where maximum capacity in cab/taxi/bus is strictly adhered to and there are systematic rules where people can only board a bus/taxi at a designated place; people stand in queues while waiting for a bus, entering only from the front and exiting from the back, unlike here in Shillong where bus/taxi sometimes pick up passengers anywhere, even in the middle of the road. The capacity of passengers inside taxis is beyond limits and rules are haphazardly followed.

If we want to see the change, then we need to start with our attitude that is discipline then follow traffic rules and regulations properly whether it is parking, stopping, overtaking, etc. Public

transport system whether buses or taxis need to be organized in terms of frequency, timing, connectivity and passenger friendliness. There are many places where parking can be earmarked and designated properly. Permission to use the roads in the defence areas at Ribong-Upper Shillong, Rhino areas etc for the benefit of the people at large should be sought.

Its high time to develop other areas especially in New Shillong Township whether it is for setting up Shopping Complexes, Supermarkets, Recreation Centres, Gyms, Cinema halls of INOX/PVR type, Parks etc. Lastly, A flyover is much needed to ease traffic jam especially at junctions where traffic is more prone i.e. Ribong, petrol pump-Anjalee areas, Dhanketi, Barik to name a few. The flyover can and must be constructed. If there is a will, there is always a way.

Yours etc.,  
N Lyngdoh,  
Via email

#### Casino lies!

Editor,  
The way the MDA gov-

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Britain's King Charles III attends a vigil for Queen Elizabeth II, as she lies in state on the catafalque in Westminster Hall in London.

Great royal events in the United Kingdom are often a mix of old and new, and the commemoration and funeral of Queen Elizabeth II will be no exception. While there will be several strikingly new features, the seemingly traditional elements are not as old as they may appear. While some newer elements are revivals from the past.

The modern history of royal occasions is one of innovation and tradition to preserve the monarchy's popularity and relevance. Public service and the monarch's ability to represent the whole nation have become the main themes.

The organisation of public mourning for Elizabeth II, which began with her death on September 8 and will end after her funeral on September 19, is a huge national undertaking. However, the funerals of sovereigns have not always been public spectacles.

#### Early commemorations

Since the 18th century, all British monarchs were buried at Windsor and for a long period, funeral ceremonies took place within Windsor Castle.

Changes began with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. In part, this was in recognition of her long reign of 63 years. But it was also a culmination of efforts, noticeable at her jubilees in 1887 and 1897, to make the monarchy more public. This was to encourage greater popular attachment towards the royal family in a society which was becoming more democratic – and potentially more critical of an ancient and privileged institution.

The day of Queen Victoria's funeral was proclaimed a day of national mourning, during which all work ceased. This was done in the expectation that many people would attend memorial church services – which then was the chief means to express public grief and respect.

For the first time after a monarch's death, the Church of England issued special commemorative services for use in all its local places of worship, and the leaders of most other religious communities in the United Kingdom also encouraged the organisation of local memorial services.

Everywhere, church and chapel services were crowded. That Queen Victoria died at her home on the Isle of Wight created the opportunity for further mass demonstrations of grief, as her coffin, on its route to Windsor,

# How Queen Elizabeth II's funeral is different than her predecessors

was carried in a long and slow procession across London, through streets lined with huge crowds. Public processions have remained central to later funerals of monarchs, though now focused around Westminster Cathedral.

#### A public affair

Following the deaths of Victoria's successors, further measures were taken to involve the public.

When Edward VII died in London in 1910, a public lying in state at Westminster Hall was introduced. His son, George V, insisted that access should be "democratic" and nearly 300,000 members of the public paid their respects by filing past the coffin. He also asked that all local memorial services on the day of the funeral begin at the same time as the service at Windsor, to create simultaneous national participation in the prayers of commemoration.

For George V's own funeral in 1936, the day of mourning was replaced by a national two-minute silence to avoid loss of work during a time of economic depression. The silence also linked the king's death with the annual mass ritual of remembrance of the dead of the first world war.

His lying in state was attended by over 750,000 people. Radio broadcasts created a vast audience for the public ceremonies, in a new form of mass participation.

For the commemoration in 1952 of King George VI, who had achieved great public prominence during the second world war, two further additions were made.

After the funeral at Windsor, a special remembrance service was held at St Paul's Cathedral, attended by members of the government, parliament and other national leaders. The memorial services and funeral procession in London became the first royal events to be broadcast by television as well as radio.

#### The commemoration of Queen Elizabeth II

Many facets of royal commemorations since 1901 remain integral to the arrangements in 2022 but there are new elements.

Some of these features result from advances in television and electronic media, others are a tribute to an even longer reign than Queen Victoria's.

The state of the union of the United Kingdom has also influenced the plans that the civil service and Buckingham Palace have maintained and regularly revised since the 1930s for "the demise of the Crown" – known more recently under the code name "Operation London Bridge".

The union has weakened since 1952, with the development of independence parties and devolved administrations. The plans include events to help sustain the monarchy's position in the different parts of the union during the delicate transition between sovereigns. As such, the new king and queen consort will attend "national" memorial services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The unexpected element was the Queen's death in Scotland, which has enabled the organisation of a well-publicised and televised journey through numerous communities. It has also led to a procession and an additional public lying-at-rest of the coffin in Edinburgh to supplement the memorial service in St Giles'

Cathedral. Another factor that has influenced new additions is the public expectation that royalty should be more accessible and visible, which they have become under Queen Elizabeth II.

The transition from Elizabeth II to Charles III seemed likely to be delicate because of recurrent criticisms of the royal family, including the new king. Recent troubles relate to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex and the Duke of York, but deeper concerns date from the breakdown of the King's first marriage, the popularity of Diana and the outpourings of grief after her death in 1997.

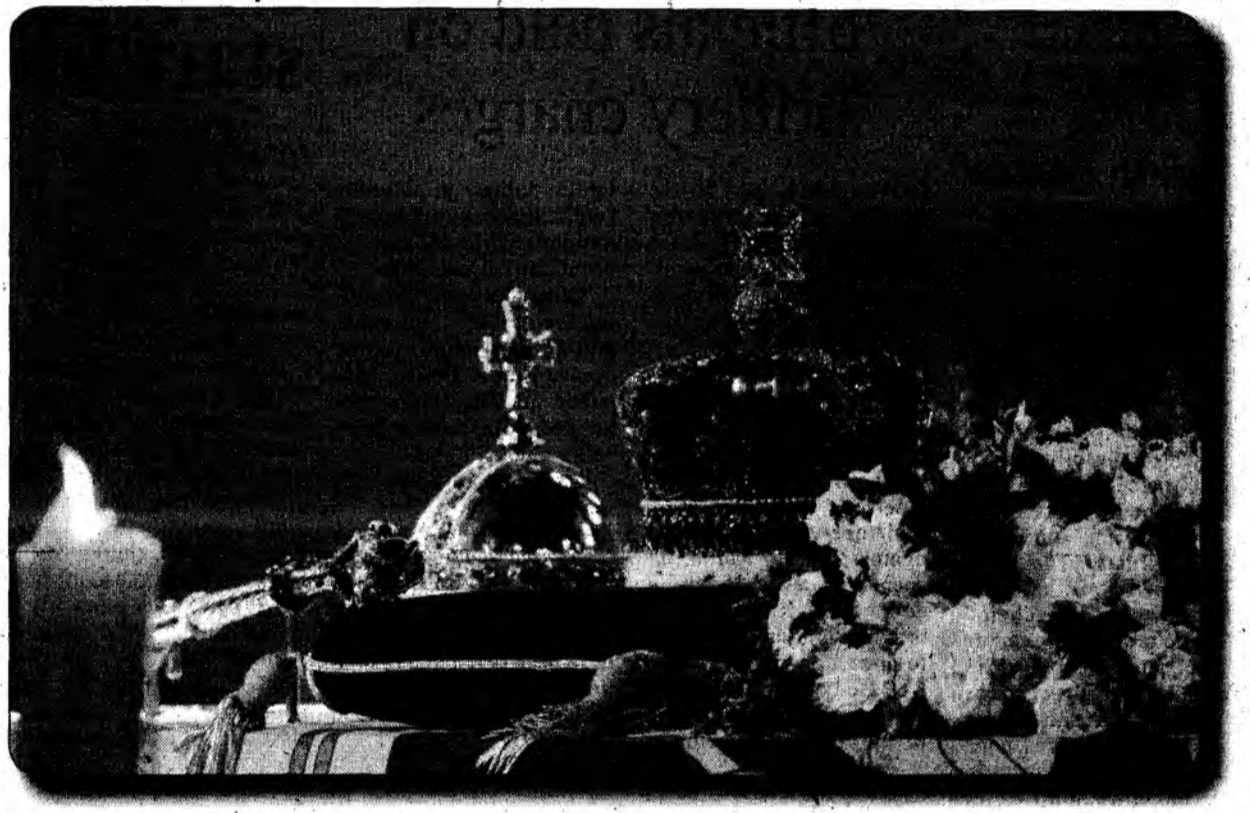
Consequently, additional opportunities have been created for national leaders and the public to emphasise their respect for the monarchy. The return of state funerals to Westminster Abbey, which had been common until 1760, was probably long planned.

The Abbey can accommodate a larger congregation than St George's Chapel Windsor and its central location allows more people to watch the procession – as was witnessed at Diana's funeral and the funeral of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 2002.

Moving the national service of remembrance at St Paul's Cathedral from after the monarch's funeral to the day after the Queen's death has provided a sharper focus for the start of national mourning. The new king's broadcast address, the first broadcast of an accession council and the unusually early televised message of the king's receipt of the condolences and congratulations of Parliament were all designed to ease the change of sovereign in the public consciousness.

There will now be a one-minute silence on the Sunday evening before the funeral, as well as a two-minute silence on the funeral day itself.

A revival of the national day of mourning will also increase public involvement, allowing huge audiences to watch the televised funeral ceremonies and bringing massive crowds to the procession route and screening points in London. Both the great popular admiration for the late Queen and the successful presentation of her commemoration can be measured by the extent to which members of the public are prepared to express their respect. (*The Conversation*)



The Imperial State Crown and the Sovereign's orb and sceptre are seen on the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II, draped in the Royal Standard during its lying in state on the catafalque in London.

# Are literature 'classics' being forgotten by schools in America?

If you went to high school in the United States anytime since the 1960s, you were likely assigned some of the following books: Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*; John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*; F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*; and William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*.

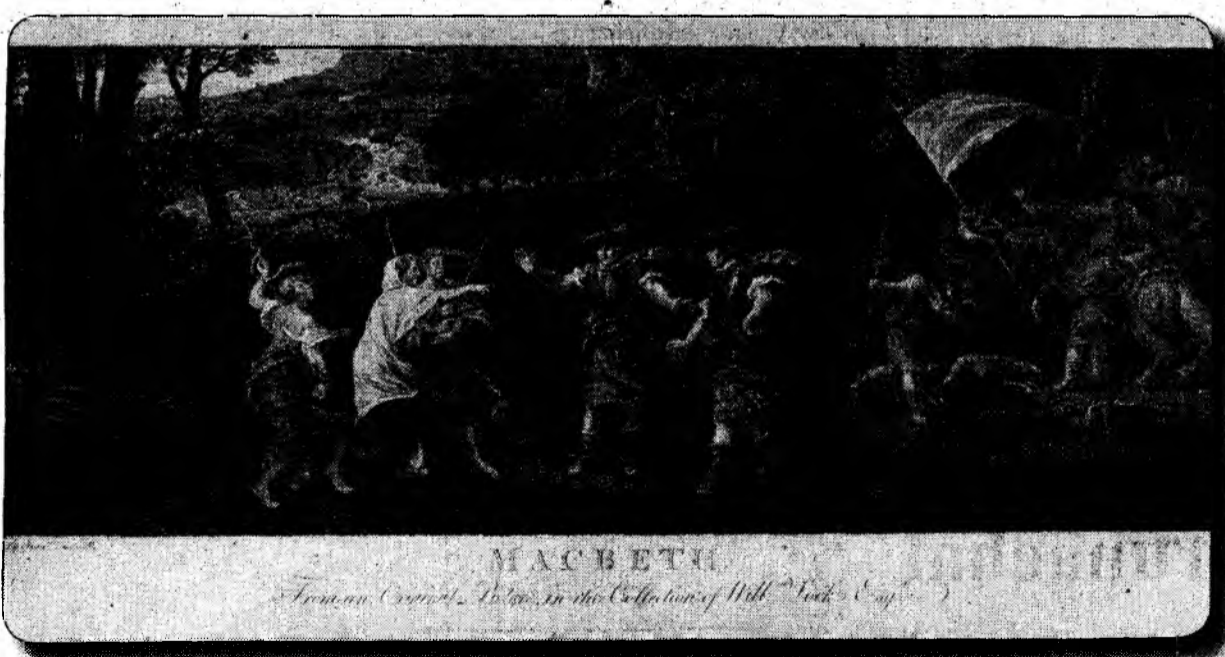
For many former students, these books and other so-called "classics" represent high school English. But despite the efforts of reformers, both past and present, the most frequently assigned titles have never represented America's diverse student body.

Why did these books become classics in the US? How have they withstood challenges to their status? And will they continue to dominate high school reading lists? Or will they be replaced by a different set of books that will become classics for students in the 21st century?

#### The high school canon

The set of books that is taught again and again, broadly across the country, is referred to by literature scholars and English teachers as "the canon."

The high school canon has been shaped by many factors. Shakespeare's plays, especially *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, have been taught consistently since the beginning of the 20th century, when the curriculum was determined by college entrance requirements. Others, like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, winner of the 1961 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, were ushered into the classroom by current events – in the case of Lee's book, the civil rights movement. Some books just seem especially suited for classroom teaching: *Of*



*Mice and Men* has a straightforward plot, easily identifiable themes and is under 100 pages long.

Titles become "traditional" when they are passed down through generations. As the education historian Jonna Perrillo observes, parents tend to approve of having their children study the same books that they once did.

The last period of significant change to the canon was during the 1960s and 1970s, when the largest generation of the 20th century, the baby boomers, went to high school. For instance, in 1963, a survey of 800 students at Evanston Township High School in Illinois revealed that *To Kill a Mockingbird*, first published in 1960, was by far the "most enjoyed book," followed by two books that had been published in the 1950s, JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*. None of these books were yet traditional, yet they became so

for the next generation.

A comparison of national surveys conducted in 1963 and 1988 shows how several books that were introduced to the classroom when the boomers were students had become classics when boomers were teachers.

During the 1960s and 1970s, teachers even reframed *Romeo and Juliet* as a contemporary work. Lesson plans from the era referred to its adaptations into *West Side Story* – a musical that initially came out in 1957 – and Franco Zeffirelli's risqué 1968 film version of Shakespeare's story of star-crossed lovers. It became the perfect hook for ninth graders in a study of Shakespeare that would conclude in 12th grade with *Macbeth*.

#### Efforts to diversify

English education professor Arthur Applebee observed in 1989 that, since the 1960s, "leaders in the

profession of English teaching have tried to broaden the curriculum to include more selections by women and minority authors." But in the late 1980s, according to his findings, the high school "top ten" still included only one book by a woman – Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* – and none by minority authors.

At that time, a raging debate was underway about whether America was a "melting pot" in which many cultures became one, or a colourful "mosaic" in which many cultures coexisted. Proponents of the latter view argued for a multicultural canon, but they were ultimately unable to establish one. A 2011 survey of Southern schools by Joyce Stallworth and Louel C Gibbons, published in *English Leadership Quarterly*, found that the five most frequently taught books were all traditional selections: *The Great Gatsby*, *Romeo and Juliet*, Homer's *The Odyssey*, Arthur Miller's *The*

*Crucible* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

One explanation for this persistence is that the canon is not simply a list: It takes form as stacks of copies on shelves in the storage area known as the "book room." Changes to the inventory require time, money and effort. Depending on the district, replacing a classic might require approval by the school board. And it would create more work for teachers who are already maxed out.

"Too many teachers, probably myself included, teach from the traditional canon," a teacher told Stallworth and Gibbons. "We are overworked and underpaid and struggle to find the time to develop quality lessons for new books."

#### The end of an era?

Esau McCauley, the author of *Reading While Black*, describes the list of classics by white authors as the "pre-integration canon." At least two factors suggest that its dominance over the curriculum is coming to an end.

First, the battles over which books should be taught have become more intense than ever. On the one hand, progressives like the teachers of the growing #DisruptTexts movement call for the inclusion of books by Black, Native American and other authors of colour – and they question the status of the classics. On the other hand, conservatives have challenged or successfully banned the teaching of many new books that deal with gender and sexuality or race.

PEN America, a nonprofit organization that fights for free expression for writers, reports "a profound increase" in book bans. The outcome might be a literature curriculum that more resembles the political divi-

sions in this country. Much more than in the past, students in conservative and progressive districts might read very different books.

Second, English Language Arts education itself is changing. State standards, such as those adopted by New York in 2017, no longer make the teaching of literature the primary focus of English class.

Instead, there is a new emphasis on "information literacy." And while preceding generations of teachers voiced concerns about the distractions of radio and then television, books may have an even smaller share of students' attention in the age of cellphones, the Internet, social media and online gaming.

"We no longer live in a print-dominant, text-only world," the National Council of Teachers of English proclaims in a 2022 position statement.

The group calls for English teachers to put less emphasis on books in order to train students to use and analyse a variety of media. Accordingly, students across the country may not only have fewer books in common, but they also may be reading fewer books altogether.

#### Why teach literature?

Over generations, English teachers have voiced many reasons to teach books, and the canon in particular: to instill a common culture, foster citizenship, build empathy and cultivate lifelong readers.

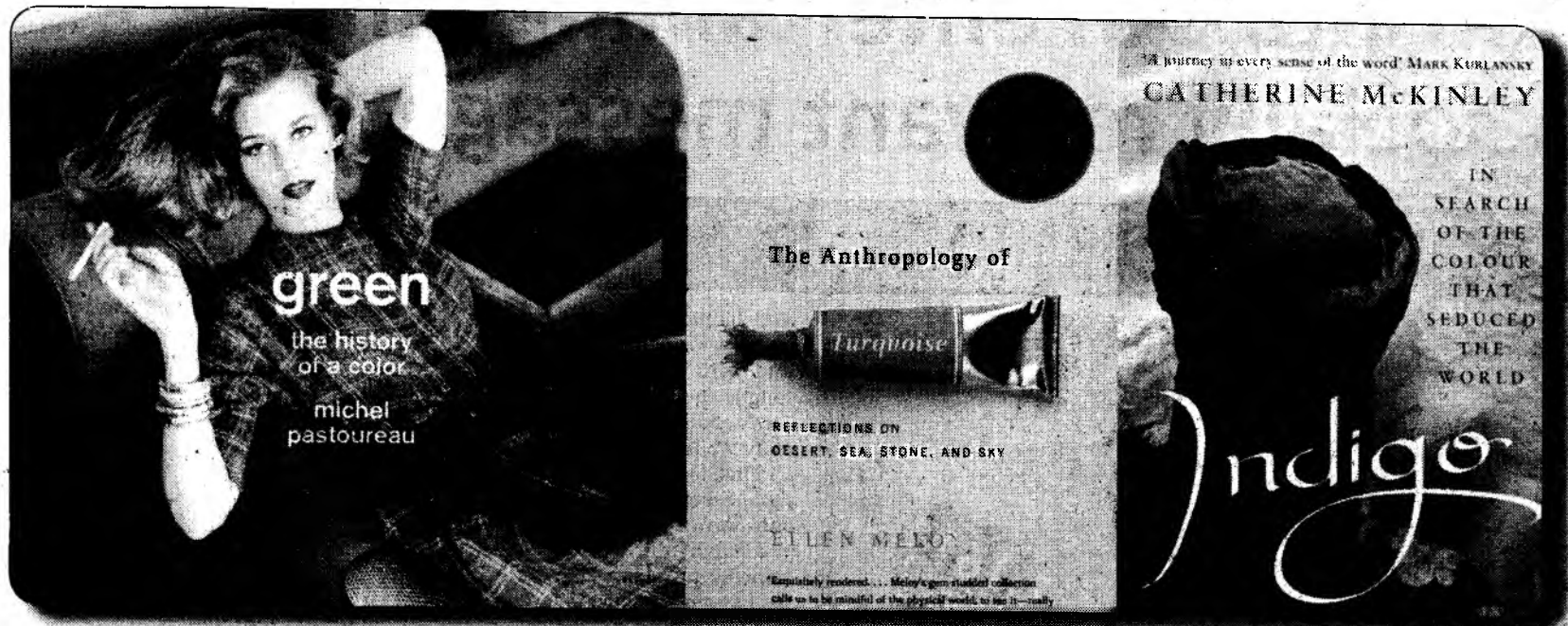
These goals have little to do with the skills emphasised by contemporary academic standards.

But if literature is going to continue to be an important part of American education, it is important to talk not only about what books to teach, but the reasons why. (*The Conversation*)

By Vikas Datta

# Tints of history and culture

## A romp through the deeper significance of colours



It may only be a phenomenon of the electromagnetic spectrum, as analysed by our eyes and brain, but given how much we rely on our sense of sight, colour is a vital element of how we perceive objects, and negotiate our world, while its varied palettes also play a major role in fashioning identities and influence our emotions and thinking.

Even before Sir Issac Newton demonstrated their origin in a beam of light, colours, outstripping the traditional VIBGYOR, have defined human understanding of the world, right from the natural one we are born into to the social one we have constructed ourselves (and still do).

We still judge many things by this standard (including humans), can pledge ourselves to a single colour, or a combination thereof, of our flags and banners, and the concept is abundantly found in our vocabulary to depict ourselves too - "shown his true colours", "red-hot fury", "feeling blue", "green-eyed monster" (jealousy) or simply "green" (inexperience), "yellow streak" (cowardice) and so on. Also, the names of various colours are some of the most mellifluous in the languages - especially English, which had adapted many from other tongues - crimson, azure, turquoise, emerald, mauve and so on.

And then the drive for manufactured colours, to augment those we get naturally, is a microcosm of human history, covering ingenuity, enterprise - and exploitation (remember the Indigo Revolt in Bengal in the late 1850s and the Champaran satyagraha of 1917 related to the forcible indigo plantation for the dye it yielded).

Colours, though they are a visual frame of reference, have a long pedigree in history - not to mention riveting histories, and hence, have inspired books which seek to depict their various shades (pun intended), either singly or severally. Let's look at some of these - from those dealing with the subject overall to those dealing with single hues.

Victoria Finlay's *Colour: Travels Through the Paintbox* (2002) - or *Colour, a Natural History of the*

*Palette* (2003) in the US - a combination of a travelogue and narrative history, is an informative, though slightly meandering, account of the history of the colours of the rainbow and how paints came to be invented, discovered, traded and used.

Finlay, who reveals she first became fascinated with colours when she was eight, and her father showed her the stained glass in Chartres cathedral and explained how the blue glass was made 800 years ago but couldn't be made like that anymore, said that she gave up her job as arts editor at *The South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong to write the book which takes her from then Taliban-ruled Afghanistan to the Australian outback, and from China to Britain.

Starting with ochre, used by Neolithic hunters, she moves to black and brown, where she sketches the origins of charcoal, pencil, and ink drawing instruments, and then white, she traverses the rest of the VIBGYOR spectrum in reverse order.

In the same vein is indefatigable science writer Philip Ball's *Bright*

*Earth: The Invention of Colour* (2012), who seeks to answer where the colour in art, as inspiring and uplifting as in life, comes from to charting the discoveries and developments that have led to the many-splendoured rainbow of modern paints.

Beginning with a lucid discourse on the science of colour and visual perception, Ball, in a slightly rambling and bit Euro-centric book, goes on to describe the materials which artists throughout history have had at their disposal, how they were produced, and how it was not just the artists' needs but progress in industrial processes such as dyeing, mining that resulted in availability of new pigments.

*The Secret Lives of Colour* (2016) by British freelance journalist Kassia St Clair, is meant for those who would seek more visual accompaniment while chronicling the story from "scarlet women to imperial purple, from the brown that changed the way battles were fought to the white that protected against the plague, from kelly green to acid yellow" in how the singular stories of

colour run through human history.

With each chapter on a particular colour has the margins dyed in the particular shade - from gamboge (yellow) to heliotrope (purple) to verdigris (green) under discussion, St Clair says that her work is not intended to be "an exhaustive history" as she breaks down her account into 75 shades from broad colour families while including some "black, brown and white that are not part of the spectrum as defined by Sir Issac Newton". And within each family, she has "picked out individual shades with particularly fascinating, important or disturbing histories".

But when it comes to particular colours, French medieval historian and Western symbology expert Michel Pastoureau is the unquestioned authority - though his range of reference is largely the European society. In the lavishly-produced and illustrated books, he does not only give a historical review of a colour's use through the millennia, but also a psychological and sociological examination of how the colour came to represent what it does/did in different eras.

Beginning with *Blue: The History of a Color* (2001), where he shows how the colour - almost absent from ancient art - picked up interest to become one of the favourite down the millennia, as is reflected in possibly the single-most popular apparel globally (blue jeans), he then moved to *Black: The History of a Color* (2008).

Here, Pastoureau dwells how the colour - declared no colour at all by Newton - has been favoured by priests and penitents, artists and ascetics, fashion designers and fascists as it depicts strongly contradicting ideas: authority and humility, sin and holiness, wealth and poverty, and not the least, good and bad.

*Green: The History of a Color* (2014) shows the changing interpretation of the colour - long associated with nature - down the ages, including when it was associated with ill health, and other times, with its more usual representation of life and renewal.

*Red: The History of a Color* (2016) tells how the colour transformed from a position of privilege - including serving as the word for

colour in several languages - to being seen as indecent, immoral and luxurious, to revitalising itself to mark progressive and left-wing movements, and finally, *Yellow: A History of a Color* (2019), Pastoureau moves beyond Europe to East Asia, India, Africa, and South America, to tell the entrancing story of its evolving place in art, religion, fashion, literature, and science.

There are many more dealing in more detail with some primary colours.

In *A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire* (2006) Amy Butler Greenfield recounts how the discovery in Mexico by the Spanish Empire of cochineal, a crushed insect dye which yielded a never before seen brilliant red colour, and the efforts to keep its origin a secret led to empire building, piracy, espionage, scientific advancements (and infighting), as well as the colour's connotations through history.

Catherine E. McKinley's *Indigo: In Search of the Colour That Seduced the World* (2012) also shows how the precious dye created problems for another part of the world - as she traces its relationship to the infamous trans-Atlantic slave trade, apart from its influence on fashion, and its spiritual significance.

A work more akin to Pastoureau on this shimmering shade is Catherine Legrand's *Indigo: The Colour That Changed the World* (2013).

Then Simon Garfield's *Mauve - How One Man Invented a Colour That Changed the World* (2002) justifies its title as it shows how the accidental lab creation of 18-year-old chemistry student William Perkin, who was trying to synthesise artificial quinine, in the mid-1850s totally changed the spheres of both dyemaking and fashion, broke down the barriers between pure and applied science, and gave birth to industrial chemistry.

Ellen Meloy's *Anthropology of Turquoise: Reflections on Desert, Sea, Stone, and Sky* (2003) is spell-binding look into what the colour - and the gem - mean to us.

There are many more but reading any of these shows how colours, which most of us take for granted, have had significance for us.

### 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 18, 2022

Moon square Sun on your solar return chart and it will give mixed results. You will face some tensions. You will have to take journey related to your work. You will have financial issues to deal with. There can be some arguments with your bosses at your work place. You will not be able to coordinate with your subordinates. You may also lose a valuable item. But things will change for better. Money will start coming in. You will win confidence of your bosses. Your behavior will also become more friendly. Your colleagues will also cooperate with you. You will have gains in your business. Health will be best. Students will try for higher goals and get success too. Auspicious functions will take place at your house. You will have consultations with others. You will do extra work and also get extra income. Over intelligence need to be avoided. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



You will show lot of maturity and wise head in handling situations which may give you some tensions. You will do your work sincerely and with a lot of dedication. Your approach will be unselfish and you will think about progress of your team as a whole. You will also not push your personal goals ahead of others. This will bring lot of name, fame and respect for you. You will be able to defeat your enemies and opponents with ease. You will give value to your relationship and refresh your old ties. You will share wonderful bonding with your spouse/partner. You will also perform well in exams/interview. You will get the fruit of your hard work. Husband and wife will assist each other in their respective works. Your health will pose no problems. You will have a good time with your family and friends.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



Some problems may come your way in the beginning of the week, but in the later part of the week you will be sitting on a sound footing. Your work will start getting completed. You will explore new options in your business/work. Students will acquire knowledge required to get success in their field of study. You will prepare notes for your exams. Lot of time will be spent in studies and preparation. Your love life is going to be wonderful. There is possibility of signing new contracts in business. You will also get work orders from abroad. You will also finalize marriage of your children. You will get benefits during travels. There will be a gathering at your house or some other place in which you will meet relatives, colleagues and old friends of yours. Take special care of your health.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



You may have some health issues in the initial days of the week. But gradually your problems will get solved. Some ankle and allergy problems may surface but you will be fine soon. You will also make changes in your diet. Some unexpected guests will visit your place and it will give you lot of happiness. You will be busy in welcoming them. There may be delays in your works that you have not visualized but things will get completed with your hard work and efforts that you have put. You will not feel lonely and will remain in the blissful company of your family members. Your life partner will be your biggest strength. You will win debates and arguments with your opponents. You will be able to accomplish all your work with the help of someone.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



It is going to be a auspicious and money giving week. You will achieve a lot in your field of work. Your business will also prosper and flourish. You will make accomplishments. Your efforts will be recognized and you will be rewarded with success. Your peers and bosses will support you a lot. It is a good week for those studying. You will get success in exams and interview. Those who are in media, fashion, writing, dance and entertainment field will do well. You will gain eminence in your field and could get a award too. A lot of auspicious functions will be held at your home. You will meet your old friends and relatives. You will be never sort of money. You will also plan to start a new business. You will focus your strength and strong points.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



It will be a prestige enhancing week. You will get good results for efforts you have put in your work. You will pay equal attention to even minute aspects. This is the secret of your success. You will remain in wonderful spirits and will be very positive about your plans. You will also do justice to your work. This is the ideal time to fulfill your dreams and desires. Your income will be good but your expenses will also rise. There is a possibility of new contracts in your business. Love birds will have a wonderful time. They will understand the feelings of each other well. You will also discuss something vital with your spouse/partner.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



There will be pressure to finish your work in time. You will make change in your style of working and do the needful. Your mood will change with the passage of time. You will be happy and cheerful. Your work will be done with ease. You will find yourself suddenly a lot free and light. The self-imposed barriers and restrictions will get removed. Ujiter and Moon will bring happiness to you. You will also value your ties and will keep your relationship energetic. The graph of your popularity will peak and reach new heights. You will also make plans to meet your in-laws and

parents. There will be a special arrangement at home. Some auspicious function will take place. Your dear ones will make time spent with you memorial and unforgettable.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)



It is a good time to complete your work and increase your income. You will get mental satisfaction, peace and strength. Money will keep coming. You will also impress your bosses with your attitude. You will also meet a special person who will be of immense benefit to you. All the hard work you put in the past will bore results now. You will also plan to start a new work/project. There will be joy and peace in your personal life. Love mates will come closer to each other. You will also make contact with your siblings who will be of great help to you. You will focus on your work and energy. You will get success in official matters. The quarrels and disputes you have with your neighbors will get resolved. Your health will be fine. You will get rid of tensions. Time will be spent happily with your family members. You will also plan an outing with them.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



There will be increase in marital happiness. You will be serious towards your work and business. You will also pay attention to house hold needs. You will fulfill your responsibility well. Those who are appearing for departmental administrative and competitive exams will get success. You will also get a good news about your child. Your prestige and respect will get enhanced. The time is favorable. Your superlative efforts will win admiration of one and all. You will have no shortage of money. Loan that was given to a third person will get recovered. Your contacts will prove beneficial for you. You will complete whatever work that you undertake. You will desist from interfering in affairs of others. You will also remain careful in business dealings. You will enjoy good rapport with your partner/spouse. Your siblings will also give lot of respect to you.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)



An urgent matter will be brought to your attention. You will also work hard to resolve it. The matters will get sorted out much to the satisfaction of all. You will also focus on meditation, yoga and exercise to get mental peace. You will take all precautions to remain fit and fine. Students will also get admission into institutes of their liking. Love birds will have a amazing time. You will catch the attention of people because of your unique style and ability. Contact with higher people will be made. You will strike a good bargain in your business. You will also make a wise decision. It is a time to look ahead for future. You will get profits from somewhere. Your business activities will increase. You will hold your position because of your intelligence.

Capricorn: (December 24 - January 20)



Your confidence will increase. In order to show your worth and abilities, you will remain active and agile. People will indeed appreciate your contributions. You will work with lot of dedication and sincerity. But you need to work with caution. You will also get promoted in your job. You will also plan to invest heavily in a big project somewhere. It will prove beneficial for you. You also need to pay your taxes timely and regularly. You will take responsibilities of your duties as only you are going to be accountable for them. It is a good week for people connected to the publishing, media world, film and fashion industry. You will get marital bliss. Husband and wife will have good understanding. Your relations with friends will be good.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



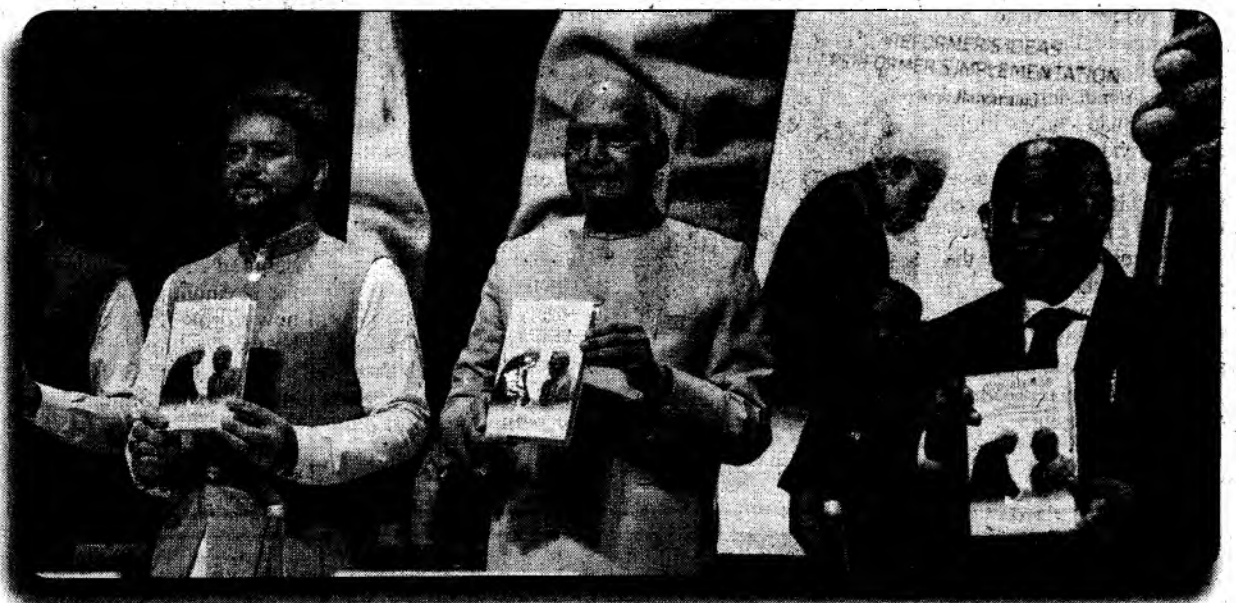
Your works will get done with ease as your bosses will help you a lot. But stay away from risky ventures. Your efforts will bring lot of happiness. You will also be able to realize your dreams. You need to be careful in your dealings with people. Your social interactions with people will increase. You will get guidance and help from your elders and it will make tasks easier for you. You will move on the path to progress. You will also take care of your diet. Some special work will get done but you will feel light at heart. Your well planned business decisions will also give you gains in the long run. You will be loyal to your partner. Your life partner will give you lot of support. It is a golden period to achieve something. Students will perform well. Your memory power will also increase. You will get success in exams/interview.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



The tide of time is very mighty. It will clear lot of your doubts and you will also know the truth of life. You will get to know the real face of some persons whom you have trusted in your life. You will also achieve your goals. You will also get what you have always wanted in your life. Your friends, family members and colleagues will help you a lot. You will share wonderful bonding with your mate. Celebrations for some festivals are in order and this will bring lot of happiness and cheer for you. It will be a very enjoyable and fun occasion. You will also make use of internet and social media to get your work done. You will also plan to buy a new house or property. Avoid interference of any third person in your life. Financial condition will get better.

## Kovind's book *Ambedkar and Modi* draws parallels between the two



Former President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday released a book titled *Ambedkar and Modi: Reformer's Ideas, Performer's Implementation* in presence of Union Minister I & B Anurag Thakur, MoS Dr L Murugan and former Chief Justice KG Balakrishnan.

While speaking at the launch of the book, the former President said that this book is a collection of Baba Saheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's multidimensional ideologies and their works for the nation. Whether this is industrial development, labours' rights, self-reliance, electricity and water resources' development, planning wise development of cities, education or gender equality, this book gives ideological foundation and solid information on these important issues, said Kovind.

The book has been compiled by Bluekraft Digital Foundation and has a foreword by music composer and Rajya Sabha member Ilayaraja.

In 12 chapters dealing with domains as varied as infrastructure, education, socio-economic mobility, gender equality, self-reliance and many more - the book not only presents Ambedkar's vision of India, but also takes into account

several achievements of Modi and his government.

"Along with the maker of our constitution, Baba Saheb contributed immensely for the banking, electrification, labour management, revenue sharing system and education system of the country", the former President said while launching the book. "This book contains 25 pictures which give Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unconditional love and respect to Baba Saheb. PM is perhaps the only leader in the country who organised Samvidhan Gaurav Yatra during the 'Heerak Janti varsh' which was held for the first time after the implementation of the constitution. It is the episode of 2010 when he was the chief minister of Gujarat," he said.

Baba Saheb had always special emphasis on the development of the cities as he always used to say that the pressure of rising population should be minimised on the agricultural land and modern transformation be carried out in the cities to change the lifestyle. He also used to say the waterways as the pathway for the development which is being characterised by the Narendra Modi government. The Modi government has implemented the vision of Baba Saheb", Kovind added.

With utmost importance to the Jal

Jeevan Mission, PM has forwarded the vision of Baba Saheb. It is an example in itself of how the Modi government has linked the vision of Baba Saheb to the common masses, he further added.

"I would like to say that this book is a testimony that PM Modi is a true disciple of Baba Ambedkar", the former President concluded.

"Many people did the work of collecting votes and making statues in the name of Dr Ambedkar. But his vision was for the upliftment of the deprived class, if someone is implementing it step by step on the ground that is Prime Minister Narendra Modi", said union Minister Anurag Thakur while speaking about the book.

The Union minister added further that Dr Ambedkar always believed that industrial development would prove to be a liberator for the underprivileged society. And today be it Make in India or self-reliant India, or PIL schemes, all this work is being done in that direction under the PM Modi government.

"Today we can proudly say that India of Baba Saheb's dreams is today marching with full confidence with the superpowers of the world under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi", he said on the occasion. (IANS)

"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: LXV No. 40 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2022

### Vande Bharat, make in India

THE long-ailing Indian Railways now has a reason to cheer. The second version of the semi-high-speed train manufactured under PM Modi's ambitious Make In India initiative claims to have registered a speed of 180km per hour when it did a test-run on the Ahmedabad-Mumbai route. In actual run, this could be much less. India's fastest train, Gatiman Express, built to run at 160kmph, has average speed of only 115kmph; which itself was due to significant improvements in speed effected by the Modi terms in eight years. Till then, the maximum train speed here was around 70kmph. Speed has to do with the make of the train, technicalities, and the compatibility of the tracks. Major improvements in the ageing tracks and technology are important also in terms of ensuring passenger safety.

The first concern of the Railway ministry since Modi took charge in 2014 had been of improving safety; and the accidents on the railways have largely reduced. At the same time, the two terms of the Modi government did not register any impressive growth for the Railways. Trains now run in China with Magnetic Levitation technology—Maglev—at a speed of 600km per hour; Japan's bullet trains ran at a speed of over 300kmph for the past over two decades. Trains in South Korea run at 350 kmph. India, thus, is still in the old league. Modi had promised bullet trains for India between Ahmedabad and Mumbai, to start with, but this is yet to materialize.

While the Vande Bharat attempt is appreciable, this also raises a question mark on the Make In India initiative in terms of quality. For one, the coaches built by the state-owned Integral Coach Factory, Tamil Nadu, lacks class—set against the modern trains in Asia, Europe and much of the rest of the world. They even look archaic with only marginal changes in design. The coach factory in Kapurthala also produces old-fashioned rakes. This is why efforts by India to win train export orders even from nations like Nepal did not gain traction. So too with the attempts made with poor Latin American countries. They were not impressed. A quality product will have takers. When quality is a casualty, no marketing push can help. This is a problem with all our state-owned enterprises. The incompetence of those who fashion trains like Vande Bharat is legion. The argument is, the cost of production of these trains, also styled as Train 18, was cheap—some 40 per cent less compared to trains from Europe. Big question is, who is impressed?

## Jairam Ramesh wrong in blaming TMC, Left, AAP for Congress decline

By Nitya Chakraborty

In the renowned writer Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel "Kapalkundala", there is a famous dialogue "Pathik, tumi ki path haraia-cho" (Traveller have you lost your way?). Scanning the observations of the Congress spokesperson Jairam Ramesh in the course of the Bharat Jodo Yatra on its ninth day in Kerala, it seems that the dialogue of Kapalkundala is apt for the Congress Party which is currently on to a 3500 km Yatra through 12 states and two union territories in 150 days led by the indomitable 52 year young Rahul Gandhi.

Since Ramesh is the official spokesman of the Congress Party, it is apparent that whatever he said about opposition parties on Thursday had the clearance of Rahul Gandhi. If that was so, it was nothing but a self goal of the Congress Party which instead of uniting the people against the divisive activities and hate mongering of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP, is directing its fire against the opposition parties which it is seeking as its allies in the fight against the BJP.

Ramesh launched a scathing attack on the Trinamool Congress, CPI(M) and the AAP saying that the Congress was ready to work towards opposition unity if there was a need for it but the party could not have such a deal with parties intent on weakening the Congress. Only a few days ago, in the beginning of the Yatra, Rahul Gandhi said that the Congress along with the other opposition parties will take on BJP. That was a welcome departure from his earlier statement from the Udaipur Chintan Shivir few weeks ago that the Congress is the only party capable to fight the BJP.

Out of the total of 150 days of proposed Yatra, only nine days have passed, September 16th is the tenth day. Yatra has got good response and this must have gone to the head of the Congress

leaders. Ramesh's observations on the three opposition parties' role in the decline of the Congress is totally untrue. The remarks are so far away from the ground reality that the opposition leaders are wondering how the Congress could damage the efforts of building all out

CPI(M) led Left Front in assembly elections. BJP was no threat at that time. The Congress and the Left Front represented the main opposition till 2016 assembly polls. The Congress decline started from 2016 as also the Left's downhill journey. The space vacated by the Congress and

state as a ruling party. AAP has every right to expand its base and if it is at the expense of the Congress, it is quite ethical. Now the Congress is afraid that AAP will cut into Congress votes in Gujarat. But the ground reports say, that AAP will cut both Congress and BJP votes in the state. Congress should put its organisation in proper shape in Gujarat rather than blaming AAP for weakening the Congress.

In the Gujarat campaign, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal is saying that "you may elect a Congressman as legislator but you will soon find him in BJP." Within few hours of his remark, 8 out of 11 Congress MLAs left the Party and joined the BJP in Goa. Who is responsible for this decline of the Congress strength? Certainly not AAP.

In last Goa assembly polls, two AAP MLAs were elected. They are still with the party. These AAP legislators were also under pressure from the BJP, but they did not defect; the eight Congress MLAs did. Congress leaders should do some real introspection about the party's organisational shape and should not be in a hurry to blame others.

Bharat Jodo Yatra has another 140 days to continue. The Congress cavalcade will travel through ten more states. People including those from the opposition are wishing the Yatra all success so that the message of keeping the Constitutional ethos of the country intact reaches wider sections of the countrymen to arouse them against the divisive forces represented by the BJP and the Narendra Modi Government. Congress leadership has to ensure no such comments divisive to the opposition unity are aired again during the Yatra. The Congress can be an integral part of the anti-BJP opposition front when it respects the others. This should be crystal clear to the party spokespersons during this long haul. (IPA Service)



unity against the BJP at this crucial moment.

First, the CPI(M), Ramesh said that the CPI(M) and the BJP are the two sides of the same coin in Kerala. This is preposterous. The Congress has every right to fight the CPI(M) in Kerala as they are traditional rivals. But in the course of a Yatra whose aim is to unite the secular forces against BJP, making such insane remarks is unpardonable from opposition perspective. The Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala has been fighting the RSS and the BJP for long. The Congress is also certainly fighting the BJP in its own way. The electoral compulsion of gaining most seats from Kerala in the coming Lok Sabha polls should not lead to such biased remarks from a seasoned political leader like Ramesh.

Now about Trinamool Congress. Ramesh said Mamata Banerjee was singularly responsible for the rise of BJP in West Bengal. Ramesh is a person with impeccable academic credentials. His friends know how the facts are always at his fingertips. He has demeaned his stature by making such remarks. Trinamool came to power in 2011 by trouncing the

the Left was taken over by the burgeoning BJP which got emboldened after Narendra Modi and the BJP came to power in 2014.

In 2021 assembly elections, the Congress did not get a single seat and this was followed by its abysmal performance in the bye-elections and civic polls. The Congress has now two percent of the voting share in Bengal. In the coming Lok Sabha polls, the Congress may very well lose its present two seats. Who is responsible for this Congress decline? It is the Congress Party in the state itself along with the party high command. The Congress had no guts to fight the BJP. Only Trinamool had that organisational power to take on BJP in Bengal and it showed that in the 2021 assembly elections as also later. If the Congress supporters at the block level deserted the party and joined Trinamool, the reason is the organisational collapse and not 'Trinamool's intent to weaken the party'.

Let us talk about AAP now. AAP that way is not like the other trusted anti-BJP parties—the Left and the TMC. AAP, after winning Delhi has trounced the Congress in Punjab and taken over the

## A path to a "developed" India

By G N Bajpai

Historically, India has been the land of riches. As the eminent historian Will Durant wrote in the book 'The case for India': The British conquest of India was the invasion and destruction of a high civilisation by a trading company utterly without scruple or principle, careless of art and greedy of gain, over running with fire and sword a country temporarily disordered and helpless... In 1 AD, for example, according to the distinguished British economist Angus Maddison, Asia had the largest economy in the world then, with India as the single biggest contributor. India's GDP then was 100 times that of the UK. Systematic loot brought devastation to the land.

The process of recovery has been slow. Yet, the nation has come a long way since. India's economy now is the 5th largest (by nominal GDP) and 3rd largest (by PPP), one of the fastest growing large economies in the world. India is now a middle-income market economy. Yet, inequity, inequality and a large, growing population means that millions of Indians are still waiting for economic emancipation.

The Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his August 15 speech this year set out five vows (panch pran) on the path to the nation reaching the milestone of 100 years of Independence in 2047. The first of these is to turn India

numbers alone. Currently, India's GDP is \$3.2 trillion. This means the nation's GDP has to grow over six times in the next 25 years if the nation can crossover to become a developed India. The question that comes up in most minds is, "Is this achievable?" My answer is simple: "It is difficult but not impossible."

India is acknowledged to be an entrepreneurial society. Currently, India is the third largest creator of new enterprises and unicorns in the world. Unicorn is an enterprise with a valuation of over \$1 billion. It is a matter of satisfaction that our start-up ecosystem has been substantially reoriented. Thousands of India's youth are aspiring and attempting to be employers rather than becoming employees.

It would be appropriate to design a comprehensive plan for India to create 10,000 Unicorns in the next 25 years and with a few hundred becoming 'Decacorns'—enterprises with a valuation of over \$10 billion. These enterprises alone could add over \$12 trillion to India's GDP.

NASSCOM noted in a blog post that 66 Unicorns of India employ over 3.3 Lakh employees, which makes an average of 5,000 new jobs created by a Unicorn. Thus 10,000 Unicorns will have the potential to create over 50 million new jobs in the next 25 years.

A number of expressways

*"Leaders think and act at the intersection of two axis: the first, between the past and the future; and the second between abiding values and aspirations of those that they lead."*

into a developed nation. In his words: "... to move ahead with a big resolve. And that big resolution is of a developed India; and now we should not settle for anything less than that."

Leaders think and act at the intersection of two axis: the first, between the past and the future; and the second between abiding values and aspirations of those that they lead. Aspirational India is restive. Modi has political understanding of that India. As the leader of the nation, he first talked about the values and principles as he and his party see them, and then proclaimed what India has been waiting to hear. For strategies to inspire the country, leaders have to communicate objectives for rallying and assuaging doubts. This of course cannot be an overnight game. Talk has to be accompanied by action, and the last eight years have seen quite a bit of action, not all of which has gone down well and has cost political capital.

The government under Narendra Modi has invested a significant amount of political capital in some key structural reforms like the GST, the IBC, RERA, the MPC. It has sought to focus attention on mobility, cost reduction, convenience and delivery mechanisms through work on the PM, Gati Shakti, a multi-modal connectivity plan bringing 16 ministries for integrated planning of infrastructure connectivity projects, and other digitisation and e-governance initiatives. However, the country has to cover a lot of ground yet. It calls for sustained efforts and a comprehensive re-orientation of the institutional framework, resources allocation and delivery mechanisms. In terms of numbers alone, most economists consider countries with GDP per capita ranging from US\$12,000 to US\$15,000 per capita as developed nations. The United Nations expects India's population to reach 164 crore by 2047. Simple arithmetic suggests that to be considered a developed nation, India's GDP should be around \$20 trillion in 2047, if we talk

have already come up and many more are under planning and completion. The States should build new modern smart townships to house a population from two to ten lakh along the expressways. Every township should be an exclusive centre for one or the other selected sectors. In these townships, apart from civic infrastructure and amenities including power and broadband connectivity, modern industrial hubs suited for the selected sector should also be built. Adequate space for every entrepreneur with robust and workable plans should be offered for use "as equity participation by the State". The alternative could be telescopic increasing revenue share as the enterprise progresses. The nation should become a risk-taking partner rather than a provider of subsidies, grants and/or loans at subsidised rates.

Silicon Valley counties are a vivid demonstration of ultra-success stories of start-ups, Unicorns, Decacorns and even trillion-dollar enterprises. Public Private Participation (PPP) is also possible to supplement the States' financial resources and even in the erection of townships. Sovereign wealth funds, and pension funds are pooling moneys with private equity networks in search of returns. These could be long term partners in the game plan with a value proposition.

The success of leaders' objectives does not depend upon the coercive power of the State but on inspiring the immediate team and followers to translate that vow of development into reality. Inspiration bears upon the plans and programmes that emerge along the way. Narendra Modi has been commanding his entourage well. But the commands must turn into inspiration and lead to action and change on the ground.

(The writer is a former Chairman of SEBI and LIC. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Christianity and Culture

Editor,  
The article by Aiborlang Nongsiej (Shillong Times Sep 14, 2022) asks the question "Has Christianity destroyed culture?" and ends with the conclusion that it is "totally unjustified to blame Christianity for the loss of culture". If one begins a discussion with a question, it usually includes both sides of the debate. I was therefore disappointed to read a one-sided article. If one is dogmatic about cultural aphorisms or axioms, it forecloses a discussion. Nevertheless, it is true that Christianity has brought benefits to converted communities and the author has cited some of them. I fully agree with much on his list.

Studies of the influence of Christianity and conversion on colonized and indigenous cultures would fill an encyclopedia and it is difficult to present this body of literature in a single article, much less in a letter to the editor. Many of these books and papers have been written by church leaders and theologians, but also by anthropologists, historians and sociologists. It is pertinent to remember that many tribes underwent mass conversion. Rev C. F. Andrews, the Anglican priest, a leading missionary in India, decried the practice of aggressive conversion as "trafficking in the souls of men". The early missionary ac-

counts described tribals in derogatory terms such as savages, superstitious, heathen, primitive, and pagan. Cultural knowledge and practices were denigrated. Church documents have described a well-known festival among the Khasis as a sex orgy, and decried the practice of families sleeping in one room. Church members were banned from attending even the harvest dances. The Garo Jungle Book includes numerous examples of denigration.

Several contemporary accounts have described the mixed effects of Christianity on culture. One is the book "Welsh Missionaries and British Imperialism" by Andrew May, a professor of history at the University of Melbourne and a great-great grandson of Thomas Jones. Another book is "Voices from the Margins" by Jangholam Haokip and David Smith. Verrier Elwin, considered the father of tribal anthropology, wrote 25 books on the tribes of India. He lived the last decade of his life in Shillong. Prof Tiplut Nongbri states that "Elwin was averse to Christian missionaries for the contempt they exhibited towards tribal cultures".

The formation of the Seng Khasi in 1899 represented an effort to hold back the "onslaught of Westernisation and the heavy influence of Christianity in the 1800s". According to one report, "the traditional practices of the Khasis were at the edge of a precipice— one nudge

and the identity would be lost forever." The pioneer 16 Khasi youth came together and formed the Seng Khasi to protect the indigenous religion and culture.

Cultural identity is an important factor for individual and communal well-being. To enable a holistic existential view of ourselves as tribals, we must take a balanced view of the profound changes exerted on our society by external influences.

Yours etc.,  
Glenn C. Kharkongor,  
Via email

#### Unemployment a ticking time bomb

Editor,  
I find it hilarious to read the figure of 1.8% unemployment rate given by our Chief Minister when replying to a question in the Assembly recently. From where did the officers who briefed the Chief Minister obtain this figure of 1.8%? From the Employment Exchanges? If so, don't they realize that our armies of unemployed no longer register themselves with these Employment Exchanges because they have become useless a long time ago?

More hilarious still is that the opposition members swallowed this kind of information without raising so much as a squeak. Are our 60 legislators living under a rock? Of course! Otherwise, they would have seen that

with a few exceptions, every family with adult children has at least one member without a job. The disconnect of our legislators from reality is unbelievable!

In reality youth unemployment in Meghalaya is not less than 40-50% and increasing and without a doubt, this is a ticking time bomb but who cares?

Yours etc.,  
Samuel Swett,  
Shillong-2.

#### Uncaring attitude of PHED

Editor,  
What if you are continuously served with contaminated food by an irresponsible person? You might fall sick, while the one who served will incur a trail of negative karma. Whether one agrees or not, the retribution of negative karma is far more "painful." I will not go deeper into the inevitably far-reaching consequences of inhumane attitude/action, but PHED has "incurred" a load of negative karma for years together. The health of a section of the urban population has been adversely impacted due to the uncaring attitude of the authorities of PHED. Well, how can we excuse this Department when muddy water with oily substance spouts out from the PHE waterpipes? This is ethically unpardonable. No authority has the RIGHT to make the public "drink

murky untreated water."

It may be mentioned that my previous letter—"PHE should not supply untreated water" (ST August 8, 2022) was in response to the desperate request by some of the concerned people, including some eminent medical doctors from the town. Of course, that letter also prompted a quick response from the Director of Health Services (DHS), but the PHED is seemingly non-committal, and it is still turning its deaf ears. Therefore, cloudy water continues to gush out of our PHE pipelines! How long does it take to fix such things? Should the public not be notified about the water treatment plant if there is any breakdown? In the official parlance, it is a serious case of dereliction of duty.

A conscious citizen Mr. AN Kharmawphlang in his rejoinder titled, "Non-potable water in 21st century Meghalaya" (ST, August 9, 2022) thundered—"If the Government in 50 years has not been able to provide the residents of the city with clean, pure water, then what are we celebrating 50 years of statehood for and 75 years of India's freedom?"

One medical doctor from a locality retorts that supplying untreated water and thereby putting the health of the public at risk is not a small crime. If the authority concerned is so "irresponsible" and management so lackadaisical, who can guarantee that some evil-minded persons would not jump over

the fence and throw poisonous or harmful chemicals into a water tank? There is every possibility for such a misdemeanour.

Another poor lady, a vegetable vendor, says, "We lower class people do not have the luxury of boiling water every day; moreover, the price of LPG cylinders has increased substantially. The PHED should empathise with our condition and must supply us potable water. Are the authorities of the PHE not human beings?" I totally agree with this poor vendor. Yes, most of the households in the state do not have water filters and they usually filter the muddy and slippery water with a cloth and then drink it.

What an irony that we boast of living in the digital age and passionately want to digitalize our lifestyles with an array of 5G gadgets while at home, we or fellow brothers are forced to filter the water like in the primitive age. Nothing is more disgraceful than this. Is PHED listening, or does it still want to accumulate more negative karma by making the public continuously drink non-potable murky water? Its silence can never water down the divine retribution.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
Via email

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"We do not remember days,  
we remember moments."  
— Cesare Pavese

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 41 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2022

Empire under Charles

QUEEN Elizabeth II was finally laid to rest on Monday, September 19. The late queen's son King Charles has now taken over the reins. For the mostly truncated 'British Empire' it's time now to pause and reflect. With 14 nations other than the UK still owing their allegiance to the monarch, the passing of the crown to a new generation comes seven decades after her installation in 1952. She ascended the throne five years after India gained Independence from the British Raj, and the epoch-making event of 1947 in Delhi was followed up in later years with grant of Independence to several nations that were a part of the Empire that had spanned around the globe. Behemoths like Australia and Canada still under the writ of the British monarch maintain an economic feeder line to the UK but also face growing public opinion for republic status. Barbados was the latest to declare Independence a year ago and Jamaica has begun such a transition. Australia is currently under a pro-republic government while New Zealand hopes to be a republic in the near future. Attempts are on for Scotland to gain independence from the UK, just as Ireland did in the past. In other words, the British monarchy is bound to see its grip progressively getting reduced.

UK, on its part, will continue to hold its economic might as it remains the world's 15th largest energy producer, set against a population of less than 70 million people (seven crore). A week ago, India overtook UK as the world's fifth largest economy, for the second time, while Britons face an economic stagnation for the past 15 years, its inflation at near 13 per cent, the worst in 40 years, and the Ukraine war adding to the economic mess in view of the higher energy bills.

Queen Elizabeth, despite her high aura, was a tower of silence. She communicated to the world through her gracious smiles. Yet, the monarchy held awe under the queen, the people's support for her overwhelming. By contrast, only a third of the people appear to believe Charles as King would rise to their expectations. The relatively low esteem is reflected also in the calls to make his son, William, the monarch. However, in a nation of free expression of ideas, such talks are only natural. It is likely that King Charles would now begin earning more respect. In real terms, the monarch intervened in governance on the rarest of rare occasions. The good or bad side of governance by people's elected representatives in respective nations do not affect the king's, or queen's, credibility or esteem.

The monarchy continues its rule.

The Sunday Shillong Times of the 18th Sept 2022 came up with a much appreciated news item on its front page headlined "Bishops in North east raise alarm over climate change, vows action". One comes away with three distinct impressions from the above report. First, its indeed refreshing to note the Church stepping out of its cloistered dogma that its only duty is to save the soul. Christ did say "Man does not live by bread alone" meaning the recognition and acceptance that man's physical and corporeal needs are as important as his spiritual wellbeing. Second, is the Church through its Bishops, calling on a society blinded by greed and avarice to be mindful of its own survival which now faces eminent danger because of our disrespect of the environment around us. This is especially true for the North East of India, defined as one of the World's prime bio sphere reserves, but which is daily falling prey to unscrupulous timber merchants backed by equally greedy but ignorant politicians. Third and the most interesting part of this news report is the collective vow, pledge, promise, call it by whatever name you like, the conclave of Bishops have made to protect the environment of the North East of India. To quote from the report the pledge goes as "As we pledge to protect God's creation, let us be protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another, and of the environment." An inspiring vow no doubt, motivated by a sincere concern over the fate of this beautiful region but question is, do we have the vision, a concept and the technology to do this?

Let us continue with this essay by admitting that the North East region comprising of eight small states except Assam and inhabited by more than 200 different communities with their own individual customs, culture and languages, forms one of the most diverse and fascinating pattern of the colorful fabric called India. Within the region we find almost all types for forests ranging from the Coniferous forests on the upper reaches of the Himalayas to the dense, evergreen rain forests of the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys. The concern of the Bishop's conclave is of the steady and rapid dwindling of these forests and their natural resources aside from the environmental services they provide, not only to the region but to the entire world. The reason for the sharp decrease of forest cover in the NE is not hard to find. It started with the British in their search for tea plantations to serve their cup of "chai" and also hard timber for railway sleep-

# NE Climate Change: Concerns and solutions

By Toki Blah

ers. It is simply the result of the demand and supply Law of Economics. The sad fact is that the supply came from non renewable sources which when destroyed would take years if not centuries to recover. Sadly even after independence a non-visionary, ignorant system of political governance continues with this unsustainable form of natural resource exploitation. It is a system that most are slowly realizing is not the best in the world. In fact it is the worst. Yet the above laws of Supply and Demand continue. So we need to come up with a developmental para-

environment, even if warnings were sounded by forest and environmental experts, was overruled by a pliant political system. Yet it is this very same political entity that is so vociferous and boisterous on saving the environment on every tree plantation day. Hence if there is need to increase our internal edible oil production; if there is simultaneous need to preserve our environment and forests while so doing; if there is also need to introduce sustainable development through proper management of our natural resources, can the NE shrug off this obnoxious plan to



digm for the region that continues to support the above law of economics, without being exploitative. We need a sustainable Natural Resource Management system instead of the unsound exploitative paradigm currently under practice. Question is can it be done? Answer-lets try and examine the answer below.

In the recent past there was a huge uproar over some NE State Governments' decisions to convert large tracts of land falling under their respective jurisdiction to palm oil plantations. Apparently this was considered necessary because of three main purposes. First it was to augment India's rapidly increasing demand for palm oil which it is currently importing and proving a drain on our foreign reserves. Second that it would bring the much needed livelihood prospects to the rural areas of the region. The repugnant prospect of cutting down large swathes of indigenous forest cover to accommodate palm oil plantations was simply glossed over in the almighty name of "DEVELOPMENT". Thirdly and the most probable reason was the spineless bending over and pathetic "Yes Sir; No Sir" mentality of NE political leaders to wishes of those seen close to the throne of the NDA at Delhi. Patanjali and other Indian corporates, in close proximity to the ruling dispensation at Delhi, wanted entry into the NE for massive Palm Oil Plantations and so "Abracadabra", and it's done. It's as simple as that. The negative ecological impact of introducing foreign, alien species into our

deforest so as to give way to Palm Plantations? Let's see if it can be done.

Wikipedia tells us of a little known fruit scientifically called Hodgsonia and says, "Although the flesh of Hodgsonia fruit is inedible and considered worthless, the large, oil-rich seeds are an important source of food. The kernels are occasionally eaten raw; they are slightly bitter, possibly due to an unidentified alkaloid or glucoside, but "perfectly safe" to eat. More commonly, the seeds are roasted, after which they taste like pork scraps or lard; many mountain peoples consider these roasted seeds a delicacy. In addition to eating the seeds alone, the Naga incorporate them into various types of curry. The Karbi Community of North East India cultivate it in their backyard gardens and consume it as a side dish during a meal. They call it Hanthar Athe." Further information states, "Chinese lad seed is a fast-growing, very vigorous, large, woody, climbing plant producing stems that can be 30 metres long and supporting itself on other plants by means of tendrils. The plant produces large, edible seeds that are very rich in oil. Commonly used for food within its native range, the plant has only been brought into cultivation since the 1970's, and is now an economically important oil plant in southwest Yunnan".

In the Southern slopes of Meghalaya (the Ri War area) cultivators in the Pynursla area call it Soh Ben. It has different local names all along the southern warm

slopes of Meghalaya and perhaps too in the warmer reaches of Ri Bhoi. It is a great delicacy for the locals. It is a creeper that claws its way to the tops of forest trees; produces a Football No 1 size fruit whose seeds are what is described above. People collect the fallen fruit, separate the seeds which they then feed their pigs for fattening or roast the same and sell it at the local weekly haats. An attempt to produce an image of the fruit is given here ( in the hope that someone in the state will recognize it ) but a far better description can be obtained from Wikipedia or other knowledge search engines on the Net.

Between 1999 and 2000 the then Planning Adviser of NEC got an analysis of the edible content of the Hodgsonia fruit ( Soh Ben) available from the warm southern slopes of Ri War. The analysis came back with a staggering 50% + edible oil content. This, by far is the biggest oil content from any natural nut, palm or fruit. Wikipedia again has this to say about the oil content of Palm oil "The oil palm produces bunches containing many fruits with the fleshy mesocarp enclosing a kernel that is covered by a very hard shell. The FAO considers palm oil (coming from the pulp) and palm kernels to be primary products. The oil extraction rate from a bunch varies from 17 to 27% for palm oil". Hodgsonia as pointed above exceeds 50%+ oil content.

Edible oil has an ever expanding global market and as such we in the NE are literally sitting on a gold mine as far as this economic issue is concerned. Forests in the region belong either to the Government or the communities. The proposal for the sustainable economic management of this natural resource (Hodgsonia) is attempted below. 1. Let us preserve our existing forests in the warm areas where Hodgsonia can be grown. 2. Government should facilitate the concerned communities to plant, grow and care for the creeper in these forests. 3. This should be a community led project with the Government as the prime facilitator. Gestation period for harvesting is three years which is quite short. 4. Government or private parties to set up oil extracting plants of various sizes in areas where the plantation is considered viable. 5. Communities collect the fallen seeds from the forest floor and sell to these extracting plants. 6. Profit and livelihood is community and not individual based. 7. A sustainable forest cover is thus preserved by local communities that earn a livelihood through ecological and environment friendly management of their natural resources. It can be done.

## Remembering The Godfather in Casino Capitalist Meghalayan Age

By Angela Rangad & Tarun Bhartiya

This year, both Meghalaya and the classic gangster film The Godfather are celebrating their Golden Jubilee. Coincidence or not, rewatching the newly restored 4K version of The Godfather trilogy helped us understand the narratives of democracy, governance and economy of Meghalaya. One has aged well and become a classic, the other is simply getting old and decrepit.

"It is not personal but strictly business"

- Michael Corleone

The good cop, bad cop routine continues. Mr. Conrad Sangma 'provisionally' says No to Casinos while refusing to roll back the Meghalaya Regulation of Gaming Act and Rules 2021, just days after his brother Mr. James Sangma on behalf of the MDA (NPP, UDP, BJP, HSPDP, PDF, Ex Congress) was up defending the Casino plans with appropriate buzz words like revenue, tourism, investment, development.

But think a little beyond the veil of these well pronounced words and go into the inception of these ideas. Every so called developmental plan or government policy under this govern-

ment appears to be a route to the private/family pockets/ interests of individuals in power or what street level gossip euphemistically describes as Hi-Level. Whether it is four laning of roads or CoVID purchases, Greenfield airport or 100 crore Casino investment or contracting out health services or Crowborough hotel, or smartening up Shillong, these plans do not start with the needs of the state or greater common good and its citizens but with Hi-Level conversations about private profiteering.

spend money. The usual Trickle Down argument of the poor receiving the rich man's crumb. And finally the desperation argument - if Meghalaya doesn't do it others will.

"While our state is blessed with great scenic beauty, other states of the region have taken up various measures to boost tourism, thereby giving stiff competition to our state in the tourism sector. This is because they share similar topography and some of them have additional attractions in the form of historical and archaeological structures," justified Mr. James Sangma.

Mr. Sangma sounds like the Senator Patrick Geary from The Godfather 2 who facilitates licenses for Michael Corleone and his mafia friends wanting to clean their illegal earnings via legal casinos while mouthing inane words like employment and development for his voters. If the experiences of non regulation of coal mining or the recent CAG report on Booze revenue is anything to go by, one is not sure about the taxes from casinos and gambling licenses. And the gambling industry is notoriously for under reporting its



ment appears to be a route to the private/family pockets/ interests of individuals in power or what street level gossip euphemistically describes as Hi-Level. Whether it is four laning of roads or CoVID purchases, Greenfield airport or 100 crore Casino investment or contracting out health services or Crowborough hotel, or smartening up Shillong, these plans do not start with the needs of the state or greater common good and its citizens but with Hi-Level conversations about private profiteering.

Considerations see to be - 1 (my family) have managed to create a land bank, think of a project where I can monetise that land. A businessman hasn't been able to finish a hotel project, can we think of a policy that will allow it to rise from its ashes? Maybe in lieu of the policy, the businessman can sell part of his ownership to some mysterious LLP, an entity designed to opaquely allow the Hi Level to earn returns/ rent without any daily headache of running a company. The old days of suitcases full of cash are gone, now it is balancesheets, accountants, offshore parking and round-tripping of money. If that can be done at the national level by globally renowned capitalists, why should Meghalaya remain behind.

People say the abandoned hotel on the Assam-Meghalaya border at Khanapara on the Meghalaya side is where the Casinos will come up. Apart from the simple question of who is now the owner of that property, we also need to ask whether the investment of 100 crores is not a round tripping of Hi-Level money. Anyway amidst the imagination of offline Vegas style lights, sounds, entertainment of blackjack, slot machines and roulette - licenses for online gambling are part of the package.

Because quite a lot of the opposition to Casino is based on 'moral/religious' ideas, the Govt. has it easy. They begin by the usual cliché of tax revenue - the argument that Meghalaya will earn revenue through taxes levied on non Meghalayan people's vice, Hotels shall provide employment and casinos will bring high value tourists who shall

sales and profits. The side bets on the table would anyway remain outside the purview of the tax regime.

Yes, there would be growth in income but not of the state but of the crony/family organisations who shall control this regulatory as well as casino business regime. As Hyman Roth, crime boss in The Godfather tells Michael Corleone:

"What I am saying is, we have now what we have, always needed, real partnership with the government."

If the tax revenue argument is flimsy, the tourism argument is a joke. The real story of tourism development in Meghalaya is the story of small entrepreneurs, small landowners, village communities. It is not some five star establishments distributing their largess around. Moreover, any moron can see that having casinos next to Guwahati is merely going to benefit Assam and not Meghalaya. Why won't the gambler go to Kaziranga for a day trip rather than Mawphlanur!

Unlike The Godfather films where there is still a semblance of distinction between crime, business and the government, the story of economic activity these days is the dream of Hyman Roth coming true. Casino or coal or infrastructure is an enterprise to grab public resources and concentrate it in Hi-Level hands.

But the extreme inequality and desperation of the masses that this crony capitalist regime creates also breeds resistances that do not buy into the slick speeches or useless dreams. As Michael Corleone tells Hyman Roth in Havana, Cuba just before Fidel Castro's rebel forces send the dictator Batista packing:

Michael Corleone:

I saw a strange thing today. A rebel was being arrested by the military police. And rather than be taken alive he exploded a grenade he had hidden in his jacket. He killed himself and took a captain of the command with him. Now, soldiers are paid to fight; the rebels aren't.

Hyman Roth:

What does that tell you?

Michael Corleone:

They could win. (Angela Rangad and social justice organiser Tarun Bhartiya is a documentarian)

Letters to the Editor

### Maladies of MeECL

Editor,  
Of late we see the plight of the employees of Meghalaya Electricity Corporation who are deprived of their timely receivables like reimbursement of medical expenses, travelling expenses, compensatory wages for working on holidays, allowances for working in shifts, over-time wages etc. The pensioners are not getting their retirement benefits, medical reimbursement, leave encashment benefits, gratuity etc. Of late, release of their pension is also being abnormally delayed.

The beneficiaries of MeECL (consumers) are also disgruntled because of poor quality of power supply though the electricity tariff is mounting.

The general public worry at the different levels of corruption surfacing from time to time. Those in the know are worried at the swift breakdown of its machinery, resulting in power interruptions and colossal waste of water resources.

The reasons for all these shortcomings are glaringly

visible in the prevailing work culture of its employees. They may cite the interference of politicians as the major reason; but if one visits the vital installations like power generating stations and Grid Substations that are the resources for its earning and improvement of its financial health, usually situated in remote areas, where 24 hours in a day is divided into three shifts of approximately 8 hours, and operational duty of each shift is to be performed by a set of employees of different grades, one will find the indifference of its employees there towards their duties. The set of employees who are supposed to work for 8 hours at a stretch are actually staying for days together at the work place, while others are enjoying holidays at their home in Shillong or other cities/towns; and this practice continues.

Even the repairs/maintenance staff who are supposed to be alert 24x7 are also casual like office-goers, in their approach. The quarters meant for these employees have been razed to the ground because of no occupancy. The consequences of all this is poor quality of operations and maintenance of the equipment that results

in frequent breakdowns, because no person can be effectively attentive to his job for more than 10 hours at a stretch, in a day.

Though the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) - a control system architecture comprising computers, networked data communications and graphical user interface for high level supervision of machines and processes has made the operation of a system quite simple and easy, but tendency of lazy people is to ignore the warning signals that the parameters provide, for prompt attention, thus requiring nine stitches in place of one i.e. serious break-downs. Of course financial constraints in procurement of spares etc. and repair of components, also contribute to the improper upkeep of the installations. It's a vicious circle.

Hence serious vigilance is to be exercised to restore the work-culture in MeECL, improve its working environment, both technically and logistically and exposing the employees to suitable training courses as per the manuals of the manufacturers of sophisticated equipment to empower them and eliminate their ignorance of handling such equipment.

Yours etc.,  
Manoj Rai,  
Via email

### No Decorum in the Assembly

Editor,  
In the recently concluded Assembly session the Opposition bench took up various matters especially on the educational front where we are way behind even in comparison with neighboring Assam. The most critical aspect was the statements being put up by the TMC MLA Mr. Himalaya M. Shangliang who spoke at length about the educational sector that needs reforms. Sadly the State Education minister whose name we all know and also the Party he belongs to seems to take things lightly and made a mockery of himself and of the MDA government. If the UDP talks about bringing a stable government it is doubly doubtful with the kind of MLAs it has in the state assembly who do not take things seriously. The attitude of the Education Minister is highly objectionable. He does not show any interest towards the school teachers and the students which is why we have such a pathetic

educational system. Such legislators should be shown the exit door in 2023.

Yours etc...  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,  
Via email

### Covid expenses: Govt should come clean

Editor,  
In the recent Assembly session the Covid expenditure was shown to be Rs 816.22 crores. This is an amount that is over the top whichever way we look at it. Sadly, this was not adequately discussed in the Assembly by members of the Opposition who do not seem to set any priorities for themselves. Somebody has right commented that some people make money out of disasters even while others are dying due to lack of medical attention. We hope and pray that something like Covid will not revisit us so that those with bad intentions of misutilising public funds don't get the opportunity to do so. Rs 816 crores if judiciously used would have been adequate to complete the two medical colleges at

Shillong and Tura.

The corruption in Meghalaya is abominable and the same people who are at the helm of wrongdoing and injustice are also respected church members. In fact, as we get into the polling season, the Church will use its clout to get its members elected. The Church has never condemned corruption. I wonder why the Church should have a problem only with the casino and gambling? Isn't this a selective outrage? Or better still hypocrisy? It's time for the Church to introspect into its acts of omission - omission to take up issues that afflict the poor that Christ was most drawn to. Today the Church is drawn to those with money and political power. How distant the Church is today from the teachings of Christ is all too visible! But truth shall prevail and those who believe they can get away with robbing the poor will be defeated in their evil intentions.

Yours etc.,  
RJ Nongrum,  
Via email

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"Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth."

— Oscar Wilde

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 42 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

### New tidings in Kashmir

AS the first multiplex for film screening opens in Srinagar, the message is loud and clear. A society that has long been feeling only a strain and huge pressures due to violence and insurgency is beginning to ease. Not that all is already well with the life in Kashmir -- scenes of Pakistan-inspired terrorism and a matching offensive from the security forces for the past three decades cannot be so quickly erased. The multiplex with a seating capacity of 520 has the added attraction of a food court. Two multipurpose cinema halls in Pulwama and Shopian districts are already open. All these are bound to be of help in restoring the old glory of Kashmir as the paradise of tourism. It would mean plenty of jobs for the local youth.

Terrorist-sway through infiltrations from Pakistan had bled Kashmir and disrupted normal life. A turnaround was effected with a bold decision by the Centre in August 2019 through abrogation of the special status and also the state status for the province. Central rule was imposed. While the Opposition made a hue and cry, the Union Government stood its ground and, more importantly, made sure the protests lost its steam. Old politicians there have seemingly been neutralized and a new leadership profile is emerging. A veteran like Ghulam Nabi Azad, planning to launch his own party there, would look at the state of affairs anew; and the approaching elections there could lead to the establishment of a popular government. Azad has made it clear that he cannot promise the moon to Kashmiris and the ending of the special status is irrevocable. He's being realistic, quite unlike most politicians of the day. This must be seen as a good sign for Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir requires a responsible leadership that can promote both economic growth and the cause of national integration. Creation of jobs for the youths is of prime importance.

Kashmir had always been a part of India. An old promise to the UN to hold a referendum shortly after Independence had not been implemented in letter and spirit. But Kashmiris have been participating in Indian elections all these years; an assertion of their national identity. A referendum thus is an old story to which only Islamabad wants to hang on to. Pakistan may try muddying the waters in Kashmir but it cannot be at the cost of the peace of the people. Fact is that the Kashmiris in Pak-Occupied province on the other side of the border are in a bigger struggle for survival. They neither have peace nor freedom nor the normal comforts of life.

# Wake Up Education Minister: The Alarm is Ringing

By PR Lyngdoh (A Crying Teacher)

The unsavoury and unsympathetic attitude of the education department to the sad plight of teachers in our state has played out in the happenings of the last few months. Almost every day there are news items, editorials and social media posts about the pathetic state of education in the state. Even though a bright spotlight is shining on the Department it is unable to see the mess that it is in. This situation does not bode well for the education of our children. That the school education system in Meghalaya is the worst in the country is undeniable. If this generation is lost because of poor education, our grandchildren will be no better off. There is no point in blaming the previous government. No doubt, many systemic problems are long-standing but this government has had almost five years to set things right. Instead, the downside continues.

### The PIE Index

The Performance, Infrastructure and Equity (PIE) Index, published in July 2022, reflects both outcomes and processes pertaining to school education in India. It is built on the foundation of earlier indices from UNDP, UNESCO, and NITI Aayog. Data was drawn from the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2021 conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and 2021 statistics prepared by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA). These are authentic data sources, which the Education Minister cannot dismiss or deny.

Apart from learning outcomes, the PIE Index reflects the state of school infrastructure: electricity, water, computers, toilets, library and medical checkups. It also reflects the differences in academic performance based on social factors, such as gender. The full report can be accessed at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/pie-index-2020-21/>.

Overall, Meghalaya ranked lowest in the country. In fact, it is the lone occupant of the Level 5, the bottom category. All other states are in higher categories. Meghalaya ranked lowest in Mathematics and English and in infrastructure (including computers). Sikkim and Manipur were the highest in the Northeast. The PIE results are not surprising as they reflect similar results from The School Education Quality Index (SEQI) of NITI Aayog.

### MBOSE

Not much needs to be said about the sad state of MBOSE. The low pass rate, the dearth of science schools, the substandard textbooks, the abysmal facilities, and the dismal state of teacher training have been time and again brought up in the media. NCERT has provided recommendations for the approaches to schooling of

tribal students, but little has been heeded. The poor quality of school education is one of the prime reasons for the high dropout rate. MBOSE needs a complete overhaul.

The SSLC pass percentage of 57% is among the lowest in the country. Compare this with Kerala 99%, Jharkhand 96%, Sikkim 94%, Karnataka 86%, and Manipur 76%. According to the Unified District Information System for Education Plus for 2019-20. Tripura, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh, Assam have more than 25% dropout.

What happens to these vast numbers of failed students. After studying for 10 years, they are rudely shunted out of the system. Some repeat, most of them fail again. They fall into the cracks of society: labeled as failures or dropouts, doomed to a life of unemployment, poverty, drugs, militancy or vagrancy. Is there no alternative education for them? The newly announced National Higher Education Qualifications Framework provides the opportunity for new strategies, but our Department of Education is completely bereft of ideas.

### Higher education and MPURB



Up to now, the Meghalaya Private Universities Regulatory Board has been a silent spectator to higher education, disoriented and lost in the rapidly changing landscape of higher education. The MPURB Act 2019, is an ill-devised and self-restrictive document. It exists merely to regulate private universities and has no constructive or supportive role for higher education.

There are no imaginative clauses in the Act and most of it is a fallback to UGC regulations. The creation of the MPURB seemed like a knee jerk response to the CMJ University scandal, and its main job seems to be about preventing such scams. Meghalaya was one of the early states to promote private universities, and could have been a leader in this sector. An opportunity to create a body that would shepherd

and guide the young private universities was lost.

The Meghalaya State Education Policy 2018, though a brief document has some noteworthy provisions. Perhaps the MPURB could use these provisions to carve out a useful place for itself. Though the policy envisages the creation of a State Higher Education Council (SHEC), this body has not materialized. Several roles have been assigned to the SHEC which the MPURB could take up. One is the intention to compile data on higher education in the state for the purpose of creating a 'sound perspective plan'. A second provision is to "come up with a framework for the promotion and enhancement of standards of research". Another provision is to "design and offer need-based leadership programs" for administrators and faculty.

A proactive MPURB could bring the private universities together through seminars and workshops to promote and enhance higher education. There are many ready-made topics for these conclaves: NEP 2020, SDGs and education, online and blended learning, and marketing higher education to the region and neighbouring

higher education presumably to attract investors and to expand existing institutions, and here lies another opportunity for progress.

### Empathy and compassion are needed

The cold and uncaring manner are daggers of discouragement for the teachers. Comments on social media from responsible citizens are spreading. One post says, "Attn: Education Minister... Sad state of affairs... my heart cries out... is this what we want... teachers to the streets... exposed to the elements?". One response was, "Heartbroken to see teachers facing this crisis. May God be with you in this time of hardship."

Compare this with the recent story of the Manipur minister, Thongam B. Singh. He saw a picture of an eight-year old Tamenglong school-girl cradling her two-year old brother in the classroom of Dailong Primary School, because there was no one at home to babysit her brother. He visited the family, and promised to pay the girl's educational and hostel expenses till she graduates. She is already admitted in one of the best schools in Imphal. The girl and the minister have won many hearts and she has promised to study hard.

### Conclusion

Rather than making an effort for partnership with educational institutions, the Education Department takes an adversarial attitude. A case in point is the recent protest at the Secretariat by teachers. In an effort to appear firm, the Education Minister donned the role of Home Minister, made threats, further exacerbating the situation and it was only the diplomatic interventions by the Deputy Chief Minister and the Chief Minister that eased the tension.

Perhaps something can yet be salvaged. Firstly, reach out to experts by convening advisory panels, and holding consultations. These conclaves must include stakeholders in education, experts from the private institutions and truly motivated individuals, rather than bringing in outside consultants, retired bureaucrats or academicians only from the public sector. These discourses must yield a gap review, a needs analysis and blueprint for action. Secondly, set up a body composed of local stakeholders and neutral experts who will monitor the progress of education in the State based on measurable indicators and who will continue to guide the Education Department towards the fulfillment of stated outcomes.

There needs to be a mindset of partnership with institutions, teachers and parents for the development of good education in our State, rather than being at loggerheads with all stakeholders. If all work in tandem, surely brighter days can lie ahead.

# Student suicides: Live don't die

By C.S. Krishnamurthy

"Goodbye... I can't take the pressure any longer... I'm not doing well in exams... no one is responsible for my death..." - a girl from Chandigarh.

"I'll come back as a ghost to haunt my teachers..." - a note of a student from Bangalore.

An 18-year-old student dejected at not securing expected marks in NEET reportedly ended his life by jumping into a river.

The National Crime Records Bureau data shows that 10159 students committed suicide in 2018 and 11396 in 2020.

### Pressure of perfection

Students of my parents' generation were often the first of their families to go to college so they didn't "compete". Pupils these days constantly compete, yet feel inadequate. The ravaging pressure to be "the best," triggers teenage brains to make impulsive choices, suicide being one of them. Drugs, alcohol, and firearms are the routes to self-destruction in the West; in India it's exam stress.

In all campuses? Is counselling full-time or part-time? Is the budget in the areas of "guidance and counselling" adequate? Are the deep-rooted causes such as harassment by the troika of teachers, family members, and peer pressure addressed?

Students desire to escape the problems they think are too big for them; suicide seems like a way out. The tragedy is that they opt for a "permanent solution for a temporary problem".

Some teachers have difficulty holding students accountable for their school-work or lack of it due to the intervention of parents and administrators, resulting in students not learning to take responsibility for their own work.

Are teenagers unready for adulthood? New India's obsession with fancy degrees and anxiety about rankings is a serious issue. Psychiatrists say footfalls to their clinics increase every year "before exams and after results".

Many children wake up with academic-related as-



Disturbing numbers show how education is perceived in India. Clues to suicide plans are overlooked, perhaps unknowingly.

Is fear of failure the only reason why students die of suicide? In a society obsessed with socio-economic success, personal choice and self-exploration have been neglected over the constant need to prove one's academic credentials. This is widely seen among students. Suicide-prone deaths outnumber adolescent deaths due to AIDS, cancer, or cardiac arrest.

The education system does not generate sufficient job opportunities. The stress to get into a reputed institution is massive.

Domestic and peer pressure incite feelings of depression. If your home is riddled with chronic stress, poverty, trauma, or familial issues, your problems seem colossal. Academically, you'll fall behind. Students from English-medium "convent" schools ridicule their peers who studied in government schools in the vernacular medium.

Parents and teachers often confuse encouragement with pressure. Students need to relax without the pressure to be perfect 24/7/365. Many students set high standards for themselves; when parents have them on a tether, it is psychologically harmful. The Indian Council of Medical Research says that as many as "12.8% adolescents suffer from psychiatric disorders."

Parents have caused an ambience where stellar feats in anything their children attempt is expected. This begins when children are toddlers. They believe that meeting societal standards will make them successful. This mindset can never be fruitful; perfection is a mirage.

The death of a child is a parent's nightmare, worse when self-inflicted. After a suicide, loved ones struggle to make sense of the tragedy.

Are our institutions ready?

College students are naive because this is a "critical transitional period" when they move from adolescence to adulthood, when they attempt to enter new/reputed institutions, ensure good grades, and plan for the future.

Are our institutions capable to assist students overcome these challenges? Are trained counsellors present

signments. Fear of failure gives them nightmares. The pressure to excel gets deadly.

Daring themselves is fine but not at the cost of their lives. Some students also take performance-enhancing drugs to "keep nerves stress-free during exams".

### How to respond

Not all suicides can be prevented, but vigil should be the first option. We need to understand two basic things: They need love; they need self-esteem. Caring makes a difference between life and death. One moment is sufficient to elevate the mood of a dejected person. Reinforce the fact that many individuals who fail in one area succeed in other fields.

When your friend is depressed, ask if she/he is okay. When we are physically ill, we seek medical treatment; our loved ones take care of us at home. Apply the same method with mental health or depression, too.

Emotional backing helps avoid "extreme steps". Distress tolerance, stress management, exercise, avoiding self-loathing, and asking for help are crucial skills that must be inculcated in all children. All schools should have a year-long class, ideally in the 4th/5th grade, about thoughts, emotions, and behaviour.

Help them grasp that the most important thing in school is the mind and how to express emotions. Make them proactive rather than reactive.

Children are less resilient today. Schools need social, emotional, and character-development curriculums. Motivation needs compassion.

Behavioural changes as well as variations in mood, sleep, eating patterns, and energy levels all matter. Suicide-prevention workshops with mandatory mental health departments in every campus and periodic teacher-parent-student meetings definitely help.

Remember your high-school days? Weren't they filled with the joy of learning, socialising with friends, competing in team sport events, and thoroughly enjoying the benefits of adolescence? Don't we have nostalgic views?

We have thousands of youngsters chasing a chimera. Shame on us for getting to this place! Suicide is not a choice. In the end, life's challenges are still worth it! Death: Let it happen; don't make it happen!

### Letters to the Editor

#### MDA Govt: An assessment

Editor,

It is high time to evaluate the performance of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) Government in the last 4.9 years. This is the first Government that has dared to physically handle the highly explosive border issue. The first phase of the border settlement following six areas of border disputes between Meghalaya and Assam was sealed by the signing of the MoU between Meghalaya's CM, Conrad Sangma and Assam's CM, Himanta Biswa Sarma in Delhi with the blessings of India's Home Minister, Amit Shah, in spite of protests from various stakeholders. The second, but the final phase, is the settlement of another six areas of border disputes between the two states which is not expected to be a cake walk. The MDA Government must determine not to keep the issue pending if it means business but it ought to reach the final

settlement once and for all like the first phase. If it does so, it will be the greatest achievement of this Government.

Insofar as the other issues are concerned there is nothing worth mentioning here other than the routine government activities and here too there are many sectors which are found badly wanting. Whether we look at health, education, roads and communications, power, public health and sanitation, environment, forests, soil conservation, agriculture and horticulture etc., there is no improvement at all. In the social sectors there are no signs of improvement; instead, there is deterioration galore. Trade and commerce is stagnating; the economy is shrinking, the gaps between the minority rich and majority poor are becoming wider with every passing year. Inflation is soaring every passing day and making life even more difficult for the poor. Unemployment is rising at an astronomical rate while the MDA government is recklessly indulging in

spending sprees and useless exercises like expensive exhibitions like the Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival, Meghalaya Kayak Fest, Autumn Festival, Megh Film Festival, Winter Tales, Me-gong Festival et al. In total these fanfares add up to about 15 crores only for the coming autumn, not to take into account the previous years except during COVID. Then we have the spending spree in trips to Delhi and abroad by the CM, Ministers and officials: the spending spree on paying crores of rupees to so many Advisers to the Chief Minister, Chairpersons of Boards and Corporations. Add to this the huge expenditures on Commissions manned by so many retired bureaucrats. Then we have the scams in various Departments such as the Power Department, the new Assembly building project, road projects, the ISBT project, Water Supply projects, Coal mining and transporting, Transport, Health - COVID expenses, revenue leakages and so many other countless ir-

regularities.

So where are the achievements? What type of progress report does this government give us the people of Meghalaya especially the VOTERS for 2023? I am afraid there are only negative reports except for the daring border settlement which remains inconclusive at the time of writing of this letter.

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

#### SC to adjudicate on inclusion of Secular & Socialist in Preamble

Editor,

In the last week of this month the Supreme Court is likely to hear a case filed by Dr Subramanian Swamy ex-member of parliament which is related to inclusion of words Secular and

Socialism during the period of Emergency. The apex court is to decide the validity of inclusion of these two words in the Preamble of the Constitution. As the matter is sub-judice we cannot discuss the merits and demerits of the case. We know that for any introduction of Constitutional amendment the fundamental concept is whether the consent of the common man was taken. This is the main credential for any constitutional amendment. To underline the importance of public opinion or consent, I quote the following four cases.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once called a joint Parliament Session to discuss the Hindu Code Bill and when one of members asked Nehru why he is calling a joint session when there is no opposition to this Bill, his reply was that in a parliamentary democracy public opinion/will is a must otherwise democracy will have no meaning. In the NDA-1, twice an Ordinance was issued on Land Acquisition but the Government failed

to satisfy the other parties on what will be the status of occupants of rental land. Ultimately Government did not introduce the Bill in Parliament. A third instance is in Judicial appointments where the Bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament as well as by many states but it was challenged in the Supreme Court and the Government lost the case because it had not taken any public opinion in this matter. The last and recent example is the repeal of three Farmers' Bills where public opinion was missing. During the Emergency public opinion was never sought but rather imposed on them. Hence it is better to let the Supreme Court decide on the inclusion of the words Secular and Socialist in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.

Yours etc.,  
Yash Pal Ralhan,  
Via email

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"A dream is your creative vision for your life in the future. You must break out of your current comfort zone and become comfortable with the unfamiliar and the unknown."

— Denis Waitley

## The Shillong Times

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### Assembly dome: MDA must answer

WHETHER or not the TMC will come to power in Meghalaya is immaterial. What is of significance is the body of work related to Meghalaya by national spokesperson of the TMC, Saket Gokhale. He has been able to put his finger on the pulse of the State and unearth all the ugly dealings indulged in by the MDA Government. Indeed, with the MDA Government there is a stench of corruption in every department where funds are parked such as the PWD (Roads), (Buildings), PHE, Health, Mining and Geology, Social Welfare, among others.

The TMC has now found out that the contract for the Meghalaya Assembly building in New Shillong which was in the news for the infamous dome collapse was given to the firm - Uttar Pradesh Rajkiya Nirman Nigam Ltd (UPRNNL), which then sub-contracted the whole work to two firms that were earlier disqualified on technical grounds. How the first firm was able to get away with subcontracting the work to the two firms is itself the crux of the matter because that needed the consent of the higher ups in the PWD (Buildings). Who in the hierarchy of power gave the concurrence for the sub-contracting part? The public has the right to know this. That the NPP as a party has patronized the Engineer who oversaw the construction of the Assembly building shows that the Party is cocking a snook at the public. The message from the NPP is that the people can continue to question it but it just does not care for public opinion. Such levels of arrogance have never been seen in any political party in the past.

Even with the corruption in the Police Department, the matter is now sought to be hushed up as the matter recedes from media headlines. It is learnt that the AIG(A) in question who is alleged to have single-handedly acquired 29 vehicles of all makes and parked them at his home without registering them for want of the necessary documents, has been questioned by the enquiry committee. How is it that the entire government process of acquiring vehicles based on the need in the Police Department was short-circuited? Is it not the right of the public to know now as to how the case is proceeding? Why is there so much secrecy on every front? What is the Government trying to hide? In the past there were several pressure groups that took up matters of corruption with all seriousness they deserve. These days these groups have gone into hiding for reasons best known to them. Other civil society groups too seem to have lost steam. Meghalaya's future is precariously poised even as the NPP looks at a second tenure in 2023.

# The Slip between the Reservation Policy and the Roster System

By Adelbert Nongrum

Ever since the adjournment motion moved by this writer on the last day of the Autumn Session was not carried for lack of support from fellow legislators, I have been receiving queries as to what was it about the Roster System that I had wanted to present before the House. So in order to try and give a definite explanation, I am taking the route of this newspaper article. Readers kindly bear with me as this is my first attempt at writing, and I am able to do this article only because of encouragement and assistance of well-wishers, who feel that the critical message about the slip between the cup and the lip that I could not put across in the Assembly that day should not be lost.

**Raising discussion in the Legislature**  
To start with, during the Question Hour proceedings on September 25, I had put a Starred Question to the Government as to what type of Reservation Policy was followed for the last 50 years. The reply given was "Reservation Policy is applied for the vacancies advertised in each recruitment". Based upon the categorical reply, coming from no less than the Chief Minister in-charge Personnel, it made me question whether the principle of the Reservation Policy was actually being followed in letter and spirit by the Roster System, or was there a slip somewhere.

The Speaker of the Assembly had admitted a Resolution submitted by me on the subject of Roster System, but as the Resolution could not be taken up during Private Members Business for lack of time, I had little option but to move a motion for adjournment to discuss the subject as a matter of urgent public importance. What I had prepared to speak about was, 'the implementation of the Roster System and the sudden disparity in reservation opportunities to candidates from different communities.' However since the adjournment motion could not be carried in the House, only the initial part of my prepared script found time to be read out.

In the following paragraphs therefore, I present the extract of my prepared script verbatim, with the sincere hope that the understanding I have on the Reservation Policy may be of benefit to others who may wish to look at the flaws in the Roster System.

Before the month of April this year, the term 'Roster System' was perhaps nowhere in our imagination and understanding. When it suddenly came into the limelight after a High Court order, and thereafter being much discussed in the local news and in public discourse, indigenous citizens of the state wanted to know what this 'Roster System' is and how it is going to affect the already contentious issue of Reservation Policy? Such a delicate situation gave room for many to volunteer pitching in their views on the subject, and being limited by incomplete explanations, people at large started asking

random questions, including pointing their fingers at some of us who have been raising the issue of Reservation Policy publicly.

Amidst this growing anxiety, we saw two pertinent developments in May and June. First, an Office Memorandum from the Personnel Department on Maintenance of Reservation Roster; and second, the first job advertisement wherein, against particular posts, reservation was shown in favour of a certain community and not for the others. Fear of disparity was already in the back of our minds when we read the OM, but the fear became shockingly real when the job advertisement came out.

To say the least, it was a big blow to the sense of fairness and impartiality, in what is supposed to be equal

a careful reading will reveal that the OM of 2022 talks about Reservation of 'Posts', whereas the OM of 1972 does not lay down a Resolution on Reservation of 'Posts' but rather a Reservation of 'Vacancies'. I'm sure we are all familiar with the difference in meaning between 'posts' and 'vacancies', and I hope it explains what I said about the OM of 2022 being "not in tune" with the OM of 1972.

Hence the Reservation Policy that we have been having all along since 1972, is a Reservation of Vacancies, and it is only with the OM of 2022 that the Policy has suddenly changed to a Reservation of Posts. Let me now jog our collective memories to the Budget session of the Assembly in March this year. I had moved a resolution on the State Reservation Policy

*The big question is who has authorised this new change in the Reservation Policy? Can it even be done without amending the principal OM? I have to say that this wrong move is like lighting a fire. Has the Government given any thought to the extent of public anger that will arise out of suddenly changing the opportunities of reservation between the two major communities of the state, without first taking the views and consent of the people who are stakeholders? Government cannot just do what it likes.*

opportunities for recruitment in State Government jobs. That's when affected candidates belonging to the deprived communities started to question the Roster System, and even started doubting the intent of the Government in implementing it without thorough consultation with stakeholders.

As an elected representative, I am duty bound to look into the concerns of young job seekers in my constituency. On hearing their grievances I had to do due diligence to research and find out if something was out of place in the Roster System. And what I found is this - The OM of May 10, 2022, which lays down the guidelines for the implementation of the Roster System appears to be alright but it is certainly not in tune with the Reservation Policy as laid out in the OM of January 12, 1972.

Let us read what guidelines 'A' of the OM of May 10, 2022 says after the heading 'Quantum of Reservation', and I quote - "The Reservation of Posts in favour of the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes will be as per Resolution No. PER 222/71/138 dated 12th January 1972". Resolution PER 222/71/138 dated 12th January 1972, says, "There shall be a reservation of 40% of the vacancies in favour of Khasis and Jaintias; b) There shall be a reservation of 40% of the vacancies in favour of Garos. A quick reading of the two OMs may look fine, but

asking for a review and revamp of the outdated policy, and I had presented that the OMs sustaining the policy were flawed on the basis of Census demographics. Barely a month after the Budget session ended, an Order of the Hon'ble High Court of Meghalaya, on a Writ Petition which was admitted the previous year, relating to a complaint on the preparation of Gradation List for matter of promotion in one Government department, and which involved the consideration of the state Job Reservation Policy, observed that there is no Roster System in the state, and that the Bench was constrained to raise a question how Reservation Policy could be implemented without a Roster.

I will not delve further into the High Court order, nor into its subsequent Orders in the suo moto PIL relating to preparation of Roster but will skip directly to the OM of the Personnel Department of May 10, 2022 relating to Maintenance of Reservation Roster. This particular OM is the key action taken by the Government in pursuance of the two aforesaid High Court orders. In my humble opinion central to the issue is how candidates belonging to one community are today being deprived of reservation in vacancies to new recruitments in posts under State Government service, and I am not just speaking theoretically. Look at the public notice issued by MPSC dated Septem-

ber 9, which is a corrigendum to earlier job advertisements relating to 59 posts. Another public notice appeared the following week as corrigendum to earlier advertisements relating to 121 posts. We can see the disparity in reservations allotted to the different categories. Can we remain silent to the negative outcomes of the Roster System in depriving candidates belonging to one community? Deprived for no fault of theirs, but only because after the preparation of Reservation Roster as per the guidelines of the new OM, the implementation of the State Job Reservation Policy has suddenly changed from earlier 'vacancy' based reservation to now 'post' based reservation.

The big question is who has authorised this new change in the Reservation Policy? Can it even be done without amending the principal OM? I have to say that this wrong move is like lighting a fire. Has the Government given any thought to the extent of public anger that will arise out of suddenly changing the opportunities of reservation between the two major communities of the state, without first taking the views and consent of the people who are stakeholders? Government cannot just do what it likes.

There is another thing about the OM of May 10, 2022, that most people may not be aware of yet, which is that the OM has put forth not just one Roster System, but in fact two. One Roster System for posts at Directorate/Head Offices, with Reservation of 40:40 in favour of the two major communities of the state; and a Second Roster System for posts at District offices, with Reservation of 80 percent combined, but with preference to local candidates residing permanently in the District. Now this condition of "local candidates residing permanently in the District" is going to open up an entire new controversy, because 50 years of statehood has brought along a migration of communities in search of livelihoods and employment, and Districts are no longer a demarcation of just one community. Even as I write this article, DC offices in various Districts are imparting training and giving instructions on preparing Reservation Roster in every State Government office. So whether we like it or not, the issue of the Roster System is very much real, and the subject of Reservation Policy cannot just be pushed aside, or be silenced.

There is this metaphor in English about an ostrich sticking its head in the ground, which implies that it is unreal to think that if we bury our heads in denial, the issue won't be seen. We cannot afford to have that kind of attitude. Rather, we ought to clearly weigh all contesting views and review the one-important slip between the Reservation Policy and the Roster System. In doing so we will also recognize that the future of the young people across the state is in the hands of its elected representatives.

(The writer is MLA of Shillong North Constituency)

## Mikhail Gorbachev: The endgame chronicler

By Chiranjib Haldar

The Pizza Hut advertisement aired in 1997 had two diners contradicting each other; economic confusion, political instability and complete chaos versus opportunity, freedom and hope. But both the dissenter and supporter of Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet Union patriarch, converged on one commonality in the visual as all echoed 'Because of him, we have many things...like Pizza Hut'. Gorbachev is just a bystander to the commercial's drama: a verbal spat between a fiery, pro-reform young man and a dour sullen, middle-aged father. The celebrity promo proved two data points. Either Gorbachev was a sell-out or the sight of a man, who once commanded a superpower, hawking pizza - showed the vacuity of popular culture.

That in essence sums up Gorbachev's legacy, a Soviet iconoclast who was also the architect of the dissolution of the socialist republic. Some say he was a flawed reformer on an impossible mission. But most laud his extraordinary vision as he ushered in glasnost and perestroika, unheard of in authoritarian regimes. Despite being at the helm of affairs, he had the gumption to assert that change was mandatory and at that very moment even if it meant sacrificing his personal triumph. When leaders outlive their countries, they carry a burden. According to his biographer, William Taubman, Gorbachev reciprocated his successor Boris Yeltsin's hatred and told a scribe 'When they hang me, make sure they don't hang Yeltsin from the same birch tree'. Taubman terms the relationship as a Shakespearean conflict; 'Gorbachev played a role in creating Yeltsin as his nemesis and then Yeltsin paid him back in spades.'

Eulogised by western powers but reviled at home, Mikhail Gorbachev had to live with this dichotomy throughout his life. Many Russians who fall back on Soviet nostalgia, have always blamed him for destroying a bloc and bolstering nationalists who successfully liberated the Baltic Republics of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and elsewhere. Gorbachev shared an esoteric relationship with President Vladimir Putin. While he criticised Putin's decision to contest for a third stint, calling his policies 'an obstacle to progress', Putin termed the downfall of the Soviet Union as 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century'. This falls in line with the Kremlin spokesperson's harsh tribute to Gorbachev as 'a historic statesman but too romantic about the West.'

Did Gorbachev actually liberate millions by default is a question that will continue to haunt future historians. For behind the trademark Port wine stain on his forehead, here was a leader ahead of his time, one whose cautionary tale has drawn varying conclusions from a majority of his own countrymen who have denigrated him over the years. Glasnost and Perestroika, the twin flagship ideals so dear to his socialist reform momentum were never akin to western liberal democracy. But somewhere down the line, the mental silos of a generation felt the unshackling of chains and an end to sclerotic thinking. His seminal thought process moved at breakneck speed after the fall of the iron curtain, a premonition even Gorbachev never had.

1991 was a tumultuous year both for New Delhi and Moscow. When India was on the cusp of change and liberalisation was about to take off, Gorbachev was placed under house arrest in an attempted coup by the hardliners that fell abruptly with the President reasserting control. Yet, Gorbachev never tried to curtail the forces he had unleashed even at the cost of vicious opposition by the Communist gerontocrats. Soon after Ukraine's independence referendum in December 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved, paving the way for Boris

Yeltsin and the Russian Federation. Many commentators say it is ironic that reforms championed by Gorbachev hardly survive in Vladimir Putin's Russia today as the modern tsarist state marches towards consolidation.

Though Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi hailed Gorbachev as a crusader of peace, the Indian Left parties blamed his reformist policies for obliterating communism to trashbins in various parts of the world. In its 14th Party Congress in 1992, the CPI(M) underlined grave concerns about 'the anti-socialist trends that started emerging through glasnost and perestroika'. In a tough resolution, dogmatic Marxist stalwarts at the congress had noted that 'Capitalist prescriptions were being doled out as solutions to socialism's problems by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) under Gorbachev's leadership. Again in 2002, then Politburo member Sitaram Yechury had asserted 'Gorbachev and the liquidationist leadership of the Soviet Communist Party thus emerged as the children of the illegitimate relationship between revisionism and imperialism'. For the Indian Left, Gorbachev and his policies were always anathema.

Did the Soviet Union collapse only because of Gorbachev's policies? Economic reforms under perestroika allowed cooperative businesses and lifted restrictions on foreign trade to kickstart the sluggish Soviet economy. But these very reforms with honest intent backfired. Government spending soared with a ballooning deficit, inflation and food prices galloping. The highly subsidised agricultural sector was now a profit economy and not producing at controlled rates in the Soviet era. The first truly democratic polls in Soviet history in 1989 and the creation of a new Congress of People's Deputies also had an undesirable aftermath. Decentralisation of power from the entrenched communist bureaucracy to local power control estranged party mandarins and deprived Gorbachev of a power elite to support his reforms. It also encouraged nationalist upsurges both inside and outside the U.S.S.R.

Perhaps, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel's tribute sums up the West's infatuation with Mikhail Gorbachev as she said, 'He exemplified how a single statesman can change the world for the better.'

In 1988, shunning the Brezhnev doctrine, he declared that each country had the right to choose its own political and economic system. The upheavals that followed in the Warsaw Pact nation even shocked Gorbachev. He had wanted to reform Communism, not to annihilate it by cataclysms. It was the hardliners who quickly grew distrustful of perestroika since it imperilled their own powerful positions and deviated away from Communist orthodoxy. The day the Berlin Wall fell, Soviet troops were cemented to their barracks, a credit which the peacemaker deserved but never claimed.

The adulation Gorbachev received in the comity of nations was often marred by despair at home. A Nobel laureate who witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union like ninetins after reaching a pinnacle of acclaim, Gorbachev had an instrumental role to play in a peaceful resolution to the Cold War. Two hallmarks of his era would be setting in motion a series of revolutionary changes that transformed the map of Europe and his faith in the Enlightenment that dismantled a system based on apparatchiks and lies. In the Pizza Hut commercial, when all yell 'za Gorbacheva', the last shot shows an old lady, a babushka dressed in black, looking into a great distance. It's a zoom out into an uncertain future and the Ukrainian imbroglio has only underlined that.

(The writer is a commentator on society and politics.)

### Letters to the Editor

#### The MDA Puzzle

Editor,  
To tell the truth most of us are in total despair as to the beginning and end of all the scams, the social discussions that never seem to end, the political squabbles, war of words, queries and high level enquiries. We hear day by day of increasing controversies that seem to be firmly attached to the present MDA Government of Meghalaya. Thinking about them simply makes one's head go dizzy with the daring, the boldness and shamelessness of it all. Waking up every morning is like waking up and looking at a circus of clowns. One Minister says something; the other says something else while a third comes

out on direct contrast and opposition of what the other first two had said. The object of it all is to keep the public amused and entertained. The overall awesome ridicule of it all is on the ridiculous behavior of members of the cabinet, where you find to your complete astonishment an Order of Trappist Monks (people who have taken the vow to maintain silence and not to speak) has been established within the MDA. If this is not true then how come many of the ministers prefer to maintain complete silence on their own departments and depend on their blabber mouth colleagues to answer on their behalf. Take for instance the Urban Affairs Minister who incidentally also happens to hold charge of PWD (Roads). Now these two departments

are the worst performing yet the Minister has nothing to say in his department's defense. So either he does not know what is going on in his department (which is most likely) or he just doesn't care (which is equally possible).

Then look at the partners of the MDA and what they have to say about each other. Speak in private to high officials of the UDP and they have nothing nice to say about their senior partner the NPP. The oft repeated charge against the NPP is that it is treating them like ignorant younger brothers. Statements and solutions to problems are settled by the NPP without so much as a "what do you think?" query of courtesy to the smaller partner. The UDP is simply gearing itself to get a majority and to give their senior partner a

solid kick on that part of the anatomy that hurts the most! The biggest grudge the UDP seems to harbour against the NPP is the manner in which the Minister Education (a UDP fellow and one who was most incompetent to handle Education. But that is another story) was isolated during the teachers' agitation and the limelight seeking NPP brushing the Minister aside when a compromise was reached with the agitating teachers.

Well, as I said before controversies, squabbles, rows and fallouts are the everyday affairs of this Government. Now we have the BJP threatening to walk out of the Government but with the lone BJP MLA who incidentally is just beginning to enjoy the perks of a cabinet post, the lone BJP member to defy his

own party. Total confusion in an already confusion compounded Government.

So the question before the people of Meghalaya is very simple. In 2023 are we going to elect another hot-potch Government for the entertainment it will provide or are we going to vote for a change? I am dead sure; totally certain; absolutely confident that the answer from the public will be a big, "WE WANT A CHANGE." So far so good but the fear is that what we shall get is just a change of faces. The performance and service will be the same. Entertainment will be provided to the full but we shall have to pay for that entertainment with the future of our children. Not that many of us care as we have already given up all hope.

So welcome 2023 and may a worse Government than the MDA come to power. Don't be surprised then that we shall start fighting among ourselves; there will be major agitations and God help us all if another Covid scare should break out. There is only one consoling thought. At least then the Centre should begin to take notice of the breakdown of governance and that long cherished demand of declaring Greater Shillong as a Union Territory will finally come to pass.

Yours etc.,  
Jorbor Phrangngsi Chyne,  
Via email

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

"Hope lies in dreams, in imagination,  
and in the courage of those who dare to make  
dreams into reality."

— Jonas Salk

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 44 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2022

### Muslims and integration

APPRECIABLY, an attempt is being made by the RSS to facilitate reconciliation with Muslims. Five Muslim intellectuals held talks with Sarsangchalak Mohan Bhagwat at his own initiative in the national capital this week. This is a continuing process set in motion by the RSS of late. The ruling BJP, mighty as it is, is guided largely by the RSS. Admittedly though, the RSS is not the last word on India. India has an elected leader, an institution by itself that represents the people's will and aspirations. Such leaders emerge from a lot of churning — other than those propelled by dynasts. Prime Minister Modi had made it clear at the outset in 2014 that the Indian Constitution will be his Gita. His emphasis, rightly, was on rule of law and not religion. The Constitution gives equal rights to all citizens. This presents Muslims an opportunity to reassess the scenario, position themselves to engage more positively in all spheres and ensure integration with the rest of the society.

In integration, however, there exists a huge deficit. Fighting against the establishment will have a high price to pay. Indulgences like Modi-baiting cannot be developed into an art in every election without one being mindful of collateral damage. Christians and Parsis have negotiated with the Indian system despite all its defects and not allowed religion to overshadow national concerns. Christians as a community are guided by the wisdom of the church while Islam is set against the anachronisms of the mullahs. These hotheads made a mess out of Afghanistan where disaster at its worst. Hinduism is an all-encompassing religion and holds aloft the concept of Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam (world is one family). Some leaders of entities like the Hindu Mahasabha or the Viswa Hindu Parishad with leaders like Pravin Togadia are spitting venom and vitiating the atmosphere. By contrast, the RSS conducts itself in a responsible manner. It is changing with the times.

Mohan Bhagwat had stated that the RSS treated all Indians in the wider framework of 'Hindus'. He ruled that Hindu outfits need not go and search for an idol inside every mosque to raise a new issue a la the Babri Masjid. Bhagwat is now making an attempt to solve issues like the Gyanvapi, erected in Varanasi by Emperor Aurangzeb in 1669 after demolishing a Siva temple. Hindus insist on prayers on the outer wall of the mosque, where a temple exists. The matter is before court, which is the normal way to go about to solve contentious issues. Saner counsel must prevail on the part of all. Problems arise when and where there's a deficit of this.

# Religion as agency for human rights

By Patricia Mukhim

Every person embraces one or the other faith. Since Meghalaya is a Christian majority state this article will focus on this faith group. Christians get together every Sunday in churches; they get into a groove and go through the same, repetitive rituals. There is no challenge to break the status quo of song preaching and worship. The rituals are so embedded in the Christian psyche that any attempt by anyone to suggest a new breakthrough path is considered a threat. People have become so used to the comfort zone drawn around them that they don't expect any change and perhaps consider change a threat to the very idea of Christianity. And yet this is not what Christ did and taught during his lifetime which is to challenge the power structures of his time.

When Christ said, "Give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar," he did not mean that his followers should wash their hands off the politics of the day and only concentrate on things spiritual. The human person does not live only in the realm of the spirit. She needs food to eat, hospitals and healthcare facilities to address her physical ailments. She needs a functional education that can stimulate her intellect and help her make intelligent choices in life and above all in electing the right candidate to take on the mantle of leadership of the state. Education is also needed to empower her to speak up when the MLA/MP does not live up to expectations and begins to get into a self-service mode at the cost of his/her constituents. A Christian intellectual rightly defined Christ as an existential social reformer and the first socialist.

I would recommend to all laid back preachers of the Christian faith that they read the book by Obery Hendricks - The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' teachings and How They have Been Corrupted. Obery, a PhD in Religion from Princeton University, is described as a life-long social activist and one of the foremost commentators on the intersection of religion and the political economy in America. He is the most widely read and perhaps the most influential African-American biblical scholar writing today. Cornel West the author of 'Race Matters' calls Obery Hendricks "One of the last few grand prophetic intellectuals."

At one of his many lectures Dr Hendricks urges the Christian preachers to follow Jesus' seven political strategies which include — treating the peoples' needs as holy, giving a voice to

the voiceless, exposing the workings of oppression and challenging the established order of things. Are preachers today even remotely following any of the above? Or are they too hesitant about shaking the hornet's nest lest they lose their subscriptions? Dr Hendricks further explains himself thus, "To say that Jesus was a political revolutionary is to say that the message he proclaimed not only called for change in individual hearts but he also demanded sweeping and comprehensive change in the political, social and economic structures in his setting in life — a colonized Israel." At an event, Dr Hendricks expressed deep disappointment with political leaders who profess to be Christian but do not act in ways that reflect Jesus' teachings. He said, "Christianity is about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, protecting the most vulnerable but some elected officials are only concerned with their own interests."

Reading the book, "The Leadership Strategy of Jesus," by Michael Hyatt one

*When Christ said, "Give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar," he did not mean that his followers should wash their hands off the politics of the day and only concentrate on things spiritual. The human person does not live only in the realm of the spirit.*

learns so much from people who have courageously done a deep dive into the life and times of Jesus without caring if it offends anyone, which is so unlike what our preachers do today which is to literally walk on eggshells especially when the high and mighty are around. No wonder they have lost their cutting edge and their preaching is blunted. If their teachings cut straight to the heart we would have seen people speak up against the mighty scale of corruption around them. Alas! People are lulled into a sleep where money alone is the quick-fix agent.

Michael Hyatt in his book says, "So much of the activity I see among leaders today is focussed on reaching the masses. Successful leaders speak at big conferences, host popular television shows, publish bestselling books, write successful blogs or engage in social media. Simply put, their goal is "breadth." They want to influence. They want to extend their influence to as many people as possible. Nothing wrong with that. But Jesus had a much different leadership strategy. That's not where he started."

Hyatt elucidates that Jesus'

goal was not 'reach' or popularity. On the contrary he actively discouraged publicity. Citing the example of what he calls Jesus' jaw-dropping miracle such as making a lame man walk or bringing the dead to life, Jesus is remembered to have said, "Tell no one what you have seen" (Matthew 8:4; 16:20; 17:9; Mark 7:36; 8:30; 9:9; Luke 5:14; and 8:56). In short Jesus was a publicist's nightmare because he shunned publicity. How are our preachers today in terms of wanting to garner publicity? Need a reality check here.

Jesus, Hyatt says, focussed on true depth and long-term impact and to achieve this he followed a 5-pronged leadership strategy. The following are Jesus' leadership strategies

1. He led himself. This is where all leadership starts. Self-leadership precedes team leadership and public influence. If you can't lead yourself, you can't (and shouldn't) lead others.

This is why Jesus often withdrew to quiet places to pray (Matthew 14:23; Luke

5:16; 6:12; 22:41-44). He battled the devil to prove his character (see Matthew 4:1-11). He knew that his character—his identity—was the foundation of his ministry.

2. He confided in the three. Jesus had an inner circle comprising Peter, James, and John. He took them on special outings (see Matthew 17:1). He allowed them to witness his greatest glory (Mark 9:2-3) and his deepest temptations (Mark 14:33-34).

He prayed with them (Luke 9:28). He taught them things He did not teach the others (Matthew 17:2; Mark 5:37-43). He even introduced them to His heavenly family (Matthew 17:3). They were his closest friends and confidants.

He trained the twelve. He chose the twelve disciples to be "with him" (Mark 3:14a). He taught them and also gave them assignments (Mark 3:14b-19). However, he also shared with them his daily life. Like the Apostle Paul would do years later, he poured into them his very life (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Because of this, he entrusted them with power to do the work he himself had done.

In fact, he promised them that they would actually do greater works (John 14:12-14).

He mobilized the seventy. Jesus had a smaller, more intimate group to whom he gave specific assignments. He sent them out two-by-two. He asked for a BIG commitment. He gave them virtually no resources. Yet he demanded that they perform miracles. He told them to expect opposition (Luke 10:1-12) and promised no earthly reward (Luke 10:18-20).

He taught the multitudes. Jesus had a public ministry. He occasionally spoke to thousands. However, he didn't pander to these groups or "tickle their ears." He confronted the status quo, jarred his listeners' sensibilities, and often taught in parables. Interestingly, he didn't feel the need to clarify everything. He often left his audience confused and wondering what he meant. His goal was apparently to shift their paradigm and get them to think.

Jesus' leadership strategy evidently worked well. Within a generation, his followers turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

Hyatt rues that after interacting with leaders at every level for over three decades he finds that most of them focus only on the last two strategies and leap-frog over the other three. In short, they have a public teaching ministry and are good at mobilizing groups for specific assignments but few take the time and have the conviction to intentionally train a small group of disciples. There are even fewer leaders who build deep relationships with a handful of confidants. Sadly, even fewer still lead themselves well and hence do not have the lasting or far-reaching impacts they could have.

In the final analysis, Hyatt confesses, "The older I get the more value I see in going deeper with a few. Leading the masses may feed my ego, but it won't guarantee an impact that will outlive me."

I first heard of Obery Hendricks and Michael Hyatt while at the Leadership Training Institute in Maui, Hawaii and since then I have followed their teachings and find those to be invaluable goalposts to pursue.

At this juncture when we are engulfed by the fog of corruption at all levels of governance and when a sort of hopelessness overwhelms us even as we await the 2023 elections, one wonders if any of the church leaders who approached the Government to protest against the opening of casinos and legalising gambling whether they have even once questioned the corruption in the MDA Government? Is gambling the only sin? So why this hypocrisy?

## India needs to display less inhibition about free trade

By Ajit Ranade

Three years ago, India abruptly walked out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a free trade agreement among 15 nations, including China. The RCEP trade negotiations had been going on for nearly 10 years, during which India had been an active and enthusiastic participant. The present RCEP grouping represents about 30 per cent of global GDP and is rising. Intra RCEP trade without India is worth 2.3 trillion dollars. The RCEP agreement finally came into force on January 1 this year (they were waiting and hoping India would join). This agreement encompasses broad areas of cooperation and seeks to eliminate nearly 90 per cent of all tariffs, making it a sort of economic union.

India's apprehension and eventually not joining was perhaps due to a fear that Chinese goods would enter duty-free into India, swamping the home market. But our trade deficit with China has been growing steadily for the past three years, and even total trade volume has increased, notwithstanding the clash in Ladakh. India's GDP growth also seems to be back on track toward a 7 or 7.5 per cent growth. India will eventually benefit from the 'China plus one' strategy of many global investors, as they seek to set up factories outside China, in other coun-

which cover investment rules, labour and environmental standards, greater integration of manufacturing value chains and so on. The CPTPP is ambitious and is now alluring enough for even China to be knocking on its doors. South Korea and the United Kingdom may be seeking entry too. Note that Japan now has a free trade agreement with the European Union since 2018. That means the EU too has a foot in.

The United States is paying a price by being outside CPTPP (and of course the China dominated RCEP), in terms of lost trade opportunities, and decreased geopolitical clout. That explains the aggressive initiative it has taken in the formation of IPEF. This 14-nation grouping represents 28 per cent of GDP and a substantial trade volume too. It has four pillars, comprising trade, supply chains, tax & anti-corruption and clean energy. The IPEF allows members to opt out of any pillar. Here, too, India displayed some squeamishness by opting out of the trade pillar. India's trade minister said that since there were issues like labour and environmental standards, digital trade and public procurement involved, and around which there was not a consensus among IPEF members, India had chosen to opt out. He also hinted that higher labour standards

*So what is the point of staying out of the trade pillar? Indeed, right after opting out of RCEP, India has aggressively pursued bilateral free trade agreements with Australia, United Kingdom, UAE, Canada and the EU. Why then the hesitation when signing with regional and multilateral treaties like the IPEF?*

tries like Vietnam, Thailand or even India. By not signing the RCEP, India may have denied its chances of attracting investments in various parts of the manufacturing supply chain in sectors like electronics, textiles and automotive. That is because when investors choose to locate their investments, which span a whole value chain, and when the chain has to cross boundaries, they would choose to be inside RCEP territory to enable seamless movement of the goods. If India is outside the RCEP, it poses a disadvantage for investors in value chains, when the rest of the chain is in RCEP countries. So, by narrowly focusing only on the trade deficit aspect of RCEP, India may have missed the value chain bus. Also keep in mind, India already had a free trade agreement in place with 12 out of 15 countries before its decision to walkout. It has now signed a free trade agreement with Australia too, the 13th out of the 15 RCEP nations.

There are three big trade groupings in the world which straddle big parts of Asia. Apart from RCEP, the other two are Comprehensive and Progressive agreement for Trans Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Indo Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). The IPEF launched recently in May includes 14 countries, and CPTPP includes 11 countries. Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Japan and Brunei are members of all three groupings. India is not present in two out of the three. China of course is not in IPEF or CPTPP, because these two groupings were brought together explicitly to keep China out.

The CPTPP is a modified version of TPP, which was led by the U.S. under the leadership of President Barack Obama. But under President Donald Trump, the U.S. withdrew from TPP and has not rejoined the newly named CPTPP. It was meant not just to be a trade agreement, but to influence and shape the emerging trade rules in the Asian region, and to counter the clout of China. Thus it has provisions

imposed by countries like U.S.A. and Japan could be detrimental to developing countries like India.

That was effectively implying that India would choose to adhere to lower labour protection standards, or allow more "dirty" industries with lax environmental standards, to gain a competitive advantage in global trade. But those days are gone. And India has de facto agreed to harmonise labour and environmental standards with the West, since it is also pursuing a free trade agreement with European Union. So what is the point of staying out of the trade pillar? Indeed, right after opting out of RCEP, India has aggressively pursued bilateral free trade agreements with Australia, United Kingdom, UAE, Canada and the EU. Why then the hesitation when signing with regional and multilateral treaties like the IPEF?

India's growth is critically dependent on being globally competitive in both manufacturing and services. We also have to be committed to the principle of openness in international trade. Our tariffs should be moderate, and we have to desist from frequent and instinctive protective measures to shield our domestic industry from global competition. And with our commitment to employment generation (not just value addition), India can benefit more from global engagement. The window of opportunity due to 'China plus one' will not be open forever. Labour intensive exports give us our competitive edge, be in textiles, tourism, agro-processing or software services at the higher end. It is in our interest to embrace free or nearly-free trade across all sectors. In a world slowing down due to a recession, even if our share of trade goes up from 3 to 4 per cent, that would be a huge boost for the Indian economy. And that is eminently feasible only if we are less afraid of open and free trade.

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

### Letters to the Editor

#### Public apathy is shocking

Editor,  
JP Chyne's letter The MDA Puzzle (ST Sep 22, 2022) like that of a few others is hard hitting though humorous. I wonder why such writings do not appear to have any impact on the public who are enduring the tyranny. The easiest tool to tame the malpractitioners is to insist on their Accountability both on technical and financial grounds as per the Rule Book which unambiguously specifies that everybody who handles public money should follow. Above all, ethics should play a conspicuous role, when public figures justify their action.

On the Dome Collapse, the contractors, who worked for maximum gain with least spending, should not be blamed. The ability to extract maximum and best output from them indicates the capability and efficacy of the Supervising Engineers. They should also have basic knowledge about the strength of the materials and the structure.

#### Bold initiative in SCO by India

Editor,  
India and all participating members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) deliberated on the regional security situation and want to enhance trade and connectivity in the summit which will meet next year in India. It was also decided that India would take the initiative for new SCO working group on traditional medicines. In April 2022, the World Health Organisation (WHO) inaugurated its Global Centre for Traditional Medicines (GCTM) in Gujarat. This is the first and only global center by WHO for traditional treatment.

It is indeed a welcome move by WHO to establish the Traditional Medicine Centre in Jamnagar to usher in a new era of traditional medicines globally. The centre will start the practice of traditional medicine in the

world in the next 25 years. PM Modi along with the Mauritius PM laid the foundation stone for the Centre in the presence of WHO, DG Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. This is the first of its kind WHO, GCTM. It will go a long way in enhancing wellness in society. Traditional medicine in India is often defined as including practices and therapies such as Yoga, Ayurveda, Siddha — that have been part of Indian tradition historically. Other alternative medical practices include homeopathy that have become part of Indian tradition over the years. Ayurveda and Yoga are practised widely across the country; the Siddha system is followed predominantly in Tamil Nadu and Kerala; the Sowa-Rigpa system is practised mainly in Leh-Ladakh and Himalayan regions such as Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Darjeeling, Lahaul and Spiti. India has committed an estimated \$250 million to support the GCTM's establishment, infrastructure and operations. The GCTM will focus on evidence-based research, innovation, and data analysis to optimise the contribution

of traditional medicine to global health. Its main focus will be to develop norms, standards and guidelines in technical areas relating to traditional medicine.

Jamnagar has been chosen due to some factors. An interim office of the GCTM is planned to be set up at the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (ITRA) which is in Jamnagar. The Central Public Works Department is expected to set up the office by July 31, at an estimated cost of Rs 13.49 crore. ITRA, supported by the Gujarat government and financed by the central government, is the first University to offer education and training in the field of Ayurveda across the world, according to the Ministry of AYUSH. The University is a WHO collaborating centre for traditional medicines. The WHO and the central government are also aiming at using technology and innovation, such as artificial intelligence, to map traditional medicine trends, innovations and patents, linking to WHO's Innovation Hub.

India is also one of the fastest growing economies among the largest economies

of the world.

At the SCO summit PM Modi promoted India's innovation, start-up model and stressed that India is focussing on a people-centric development model and is supporting innovation in every sector so that and today there are over 70,000 start-ups and over 100 unicorns in the country. It is worth mentioning that once (Late) President Pranab Mukherjee had expressed regret for not initiating this start-up programme when he was finance minister. PM Modi also explained how India is going to be a manufacturing hub and will generate the maximum jobs in the country.

After overcoming Covid the world is exploring new areas of research and sustainable health practices. Due to climate change the world faces several problems including food shortage for which definite steps are needed to be taken. India with its vast diversity of ecology and geography is best placed to practice sustainable agriculture.

Yash Pal Ralhan,  
Via email

#### Shocking silence

Editor,  
JP Chyne's letter is indicative of a society that has lost its moral spine. How can there be silence on the collapse of a dome in the heart of democracy where people's issues are to be taken up? It only means that people are themselves quite happy with the prevailing culture of corruption. Meghalaya really deserves the Government it gets because Democracy as someone rightly said is a lot of hard work. Other than teachers protesting for non-payment of their salaries have we ever seen anyone staging a dharna on a public issue that is unrelated to their personal welfare? We are a selfish society and such societies deserve an autocrat at the helm. We should be grateful that Conrad Sangma is not a dictator. Things could be worse.

Yours etc.,  
Julian Diengdoh,  
Via email

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"In believing too much in rationality, our contemporaries have lost something."  
— Krzysztof Kieslowski

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 45 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2022

Police personnel and the law

ON the police vehicle scam and other matters, Home Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui said that the Government would study the enquiry report to see if the findings have violated any laws, before taking action against the officer in question – the former AIG (A) currently posted as Commandant Special Forces-10. Why was the Enquiry Committee set up in the first place unless there were irregularities? And now that the irregularities have been diligently pin-pointed by the Enquiry Committee regarding the purchase of vehicles that were not registered on ground that the Committee has found untenable, why is the Government dragging its feet in taking action instead of showing that it means business and will deal with such irregularities which it refuses to call a 'scam' swiftly so as to send a message that such malfeasance will not be tolerated. The fact that Government is dragging its feet in this and other matters like the Meghalaya Assembly Dome collapse suggests that the Government does not care about these blatant acts of corruption. For is it not corruption for a police officer to misuse not one but several official vehicles when those police units that are in dire need of vehicles are deprived of them? And the fact that even fuel for those vehicles being deployed for personal use was paid for from the public exchequer is itself a serious overreach. In such a situation delay means only one thing – the Government has a vested interest in not following the case to its logical end without delay.

The problem of corruption is that it erodes the credibility of all state institutions and in the above case the institution of the Police which is a law enforcing agency. The erosion of public trust in the Police Department makes it vulnerable because people tend to take the law into their own hands as had happened in the Jaintia Hills recently where hardened criminals who escaped from prison were lynched. This lack of trust in the Police also reduces its legitimacy. When the public witnesses that the Government is going slow in punishing the corrupt they begin to normalize corruption. When corruption becomes a social norm as it appears to be happening in Meghalaya, everyone starts seeing it simply as a way to get things done.

Systemic corruption has reduced Meghalaya to a rent seeking economy. Rent seeking is an economic concept where an individual or entity seeks to increase their own wealth without creating any benefit or wealth to the society. Rent seeking activities aim to obtain financial gains and benefits through manipulation of the distribution of economic resources. This is happening far too often, so often that it is normalized. Herein lies the danger.

Initially, with respect to the misinformation/fabricated details shared by the concerned individual (Mr. Anderson Rani) in the special article titled "How Institutions are destroyed: The case of NEIGRIHMS" in the Editorial section of The Shillong Times dated 13/09/2022, it was felt that NEIGRIHMS should not respond to such "baseless allegations" but since the writer apparently does not only have little knowledge of government rules/procedures but also has chosen to ignore truth/facts by accident or by design, it is the moral responsibility of the Institution to provide factual information not only for the benefit all respected readers and informed citizens, but also so that the morale of the highly dedicated doctors, nurses and healthcare delivery support staff of NEIGRIHMS is not negatively impacted. Institutions are likely to be 'damaged' by such "malicious misinformation" as fabricated by this individual who appears to have been misled by certain disgruntled and frustrated persons who find it convenient to resort to slander in the face of failures, lack of professionalism and work ethics.

1. The Deputy Director (Administration) aka DD(A) of NEIGRIHMS, which is a Central Government Autonomous Institute is appointed on tenure basis, as per Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) rules and Recruitment Rules notified by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India (MoHFW, GoI) through duly approved selection processes and NOT "...with the connivance of self-centered individuals who are at the helm of the Institute affairs" or "with the support of the Health Minister of the state, the MP who belongs to the same Church as the Deputy Director..." as has so irresponsibly been stated by the writer. It is a fact that the tenure of the last DD(A) was extended by MoHFW, GoI. It was done solely on the basis of the eligibility of the Officer. His tenure was extended as per DoPT rules, till December 15, 2021. For further clarification in this regard, information may be obtained from the MoHFW, GoI.

2. It may be clarified that the Section Officer of Stores & Procurement Section was designated as "Liaison Officer" in May 2017 by Dr. D M Thappa, the then Director of NEIGRIHMS, as there were few officers with the experience of having worked in Central Government Organizations/Institutions across India, at that point of time.

3. The writer is obviously

ignorant about the details of this issue, like many others, and about government rules and procedures as he states that the Executive Engineer (EE) managed to manipulate the current Director to designate him as the Superintending Engineer (SE). For his information, the Director NEIGRIHMS does NOT have the authority to do so. The post of EE was upgraded to that of SE till further orders without financial implications by the MoHFW, GoI. The comments about the responsibilities of the Engineering department and the relevance of the post of SE merely reflect the ignorance of the writer.

4. With respect to the writer's statement "the only activity that moves in full throttle is Purchase", it is clarified that there are purchase of books, journals, manpower services, estate services, civil works, electrical services/stores, general stores, medical stores, drugs, medical assets etc. which are being processed by different sections of the Institute including the Library, General administration, civil, electrical, stores & procurement section, as per delegated authority and the rules in force. NEIGRIHMS spends a sizeable amount of its budget for purchasing various types of goods/services to discharge the duties and responsibilities assigned to it and these purchases are made following a uniform, systematic, efficient and cost effective procedure, in accordance with the GFR 2017 rules as amended from time to time and other orders/memoranda/regulations of the Government. The entire procedure of procurement is on a digital platform to the extent of availability, in accordance with Rule 149 of the General Financial Rules, 2017 issued by the Ministry of Finance, Department of Expenditure, that has mandated that all Government Organizations procure all goods and services available online on GeM (Government e-Marketplace) GeM only (www.gem.gov.in). The above are placed on record and may be shared for the information and education of the esteemed writer/citizens.

5. It was noted that the writer, not indicated to be a medical/health professional has commented on a technical issue like operation theatres. The eight (8) units of fully Modular Operation Theatres (OTs) with five units of IP integration processed were planned since inception but could not be finalized, by the Institute. The same are noted in the minutes of the 28th Standing Finance Committee held on 13th January 2009

and inept persons being appointed head of institutions which you won't find anywhere else in India. NEHU seriously needs a rejig and overall change at least from the current dispensation. If the VC has an iota of shame left, he should voluntarily resign and leave his position to someone more capable and someone not interested in material wants but educational emancipation.

Letters to the Editor

Road rage kills

Editor,  
Apropos to the news item titled, "City resident dies in hit-and-run case; biker unidentified." ST Sep 22, 2022) it is shocking that a senior citizen, Biman Talukdar while trying to cross the road near Civil Hospital crossing was knocked down by a speeding biker so badly that he couldn't survive the blow. A bubbly and full of life senior citizen, Biman (Moloy) Talukdar, definitely had no premonition that his life would be cut short so rudely and abruptly. I am sure the culprit hasn't been apprehended as yet, and have grave doubts whether he will ever be traced out. There's either no CCTV or the CCTV is not working in such a busy junction where thousands of vehicles and two wheelers pass throughout the day and night. It is all the more surprising that such an accident could take place as early as 7 o'clock at night when this road is choc-a-bloc with vehicles, and a number of traffic policemen are normally deployed to control traffic there.

I vent my frustration and anger through this letter on the utterly chaotic traffic scenario in Shillong city. How many more Bimans are we going to lose before the law enforcers of our city wake up to the road rage let loose by arrogant, speeding bikers /two wheelers? Scores

of these bikers/two wheeler riders care a fig about traffic rules; they criss-cross the roads at high speed and have become a menace not only for pedestrians, but also for other motorists. They have, in fact, become a nuisance on the Shillong roads.

Statutory authorities have time and again asked the traffic rules enforcement wings of states to apprehend and book underaged, unlicensed riders / drivers, rash drivers, uninsured vehicles/two wheelers, but such action is apparently not being undertaken in Shillong. A crack down on errant riders / drivers is overdue, and I urge the concerned authorities to please take immediate and stringent action to restore sanity on our roads. Being a resident of Laitumkhrh, I have a few suggestions pertaining to traffic control in this part of the city.

The Laitumkhrh Police Point circle has become frightening for drivers and pedestrians alike. Responsible and strict traffic policing is needed here to avert mishaps. At least three traffic policemen should be deployed at vantage points round the clock to control traffic here. Traffic moving from Police Point towards Jacob's Ladder through Don Bosco Square is sometimes asked to take the straight right and sometimes to go around the back of the statue which is rather chaotic. This should be avoided

and the Traffic Police may please decide on one point from where the right turn is to be taken. Similarly, traffic coming from Dhankheti towards Don Bosco and Police Point is sometimes allowed to go straight ahead and sometimes made to go around the statue. This results in a chaotic jam as three lines of vehicles, one straight from Dhankheti side, the second caused by diversion around the statue, and the third from Shillong College/Upland Road converge on one point and jostle to proceed towards Police Point on one lane. Diversion of traffic from Dhankheti around the statue may be stopped to ease this chaos.

At Dhankheti junction, vehicles proceeding from Malki towards Don Bosco and vehicles coming down from Loreto towards Jowai Road are allowed to move simultaneously which is dangerous and may lead to accidents / pile-ups or multiple vehicle collisions. This should be stopped to immediately to avert mishaps.

I request Shillong Traffic Police to kindly pay due attention to this letter and take remedial measures immediately.

Yours etc.,  
Mohitosh Chakravarty,  
Shillong-3

"KSU Locks Office of NEHU VC" dated 23/9/2022, ST, I would like to acknowledge and applaud the KSU for raising very impactful and grave issues concerning NEHU off late.

The clinic has been bereft of medicines since time immemorial; the examination department takes months to issues certificates; hostels are in dilapidated conditions and most importantly, the arrogant Vice Chancellor being forever out of office in pursuit of "academia". This happens when a person affiliated to an organization and who is a puppet in the hands of people with hidden agenda are appointed to head an educational institution. To those unaware, they can check out the videos circulating on various social media platforms to see for themselves the level and standard the VC has reduced himself to and how he has made a mockery of such a dignified post.

The man at the helm cannot utter a complete sentence in English let alone serve the interests of the students. Perhaps the white "Verna" vehicle and the pride associated with the chair has instead curtailed his responsibilities to his job and duty to serve the educational pursuits of the North Eastern region and the tribals in particular. This brings to light the larger question of Meghalaya bearing the brunt of incapable

Yours etc.,  
Mohitosh Chakravarty,  
Shillong-3

NEHU Saga  
Editor,  
Apropos the news item

NEIGRIHMS unnecessarily maligned

By Dr Vikas Jagtap

under the Chairmanship of Secretary, MoHFW, GoI, New Delhi. It is confirmed that the Medical Superintendent had conveyed that several surgical disciplines like General Surgery, Obstetrics & Gynecology, Urology, CTVS, Orthopedics, Ophthalmology, ENT, Neuro-Surgery, Surgical Oncology, and invasive procedures like endoscopy etc., are being undertaken and with increasing work load, OT capacity had to be augmented as it was considered essential and inevitable. Hence, eight (8) modular OTs are being established by maximizing the utilization of the allocated area on one floor, that would result in the most effective and optimal synergy of all concerned - Doctors, Anesthetists Nursing Officers, Technicians and Support staff of the Operation Theatres.

6. With respect to the replacement of old systems/equipment, as and when the respective Departments convey that equipment/systems being used by them have completed their lifecycle as per contract and in case of obsolescence, non-availability of maintenance/service support from Manufacturers/OEM, on the recommendation of the condemnation board, the Institute processes the disposal of the said units and processes purchase of their replacement by trading the old units as per provisions in Rules 176 and 217 of GFR 2017, on the approval of the competent authority.

7. Regarding the mention of the appointment of the junior most professor as Dean, it would be good if the writer had done some elementary homework and educated himself about matters related to appointments at NEIGRIHMS. It may be clarified that Director, NEIGRIHMS does not have the authority to appoint the Dean. The appointment of the Dean, NEIGRIHMS is done by the MoHFW, GoI, on tenure basis. Incidentally, amongst many others, one thing that has been appreciated by the Faculty & Staff of NEIGRIHMS about the current Director is that he does go 'by the book' and follows all rules.

8. It is also noted with concern that the writer has questioned the Recruitment process which is based solely on a merit based examination. It is for the information of all esteemed readers that the recruitment processes at NEIGRIHMS are in strict compliance with MoHFW and DoPT rules, regulations and instructions regarding the same.

9. The derogatory comment about the working at-

mosphere at NEIGRIHMS is truly deplorable. The entire NEIGRIHMS workforce functions as one happy family and has performed admirably in the face of adversity as was evidenced in the Covid-19 pandemic. That having been said, we concede that we have a few non-productive and misguided employees in our family who would be better served if they invested their time and energy in their allotted duties. Incidentally, we note with pride that despite the shortage of manpower the current Director was highly reasonable and did not hesitate to issue NOCs to the Faculty members who wished to avail of opportunities elsewhere, including at AIIMS Guwahati as most of them wished to relocate to Guwahati which happens to be their hometown.

10. On the baseless allegations regarding the post of Principal College of Nursing, once again the writer has been disappointing. In 2018, the Ministry had advised re-advertisement of the post since the parameters indicated in the advertisement for the post Principal, College of Nursing was for Direct Recruitment and not for Deputation as per the Statutory provisions. Interviews for the post were held very recently (11th August 2022) and the results too have been declared. The "local and experienced lady" that has been alluded to by the writer was not eligible for the post, and was fully aware of this fact. She approached the High Court in this regard and the verdict was not in her favour. Just to educate the writer regarding the Recruitment Rules (RRs) for all posts at NEIGRIHMS – the Institute strictly follows RRs that are approved by the Health Ministry and are in public domain.

In view of the above, it is disappointing to note and does not appear to be a coincidence that a spate of letters and this particular special article full of factually incorrect information and twisted facts with the intention of portraying NEIGRIHMS in poor light have appeared in the past few days.

For us, however, it is important to ignore such rants and nurture excellence, especially with PMSY Institutions like AIIMS, Guwahati expected to be fully operational soon. NEIGRIHMS, being the premiere medical super-specialty institution in this region will continue to strive and move ahead keeping in mind the best interest of the healthcare requirements of the people of the entire North Eastern Region.

(The writer is Public Relation Officer, NEIGRIHMS)

Pradesh assembly elections only months away, the Congress is likely to be facing infighting within the state unit. Ram Lal Thakur, MLA from Naina Devi, refused to withdraw his resignation from the post of party vice-president, annoyed with an appointment in his constituency without his approval and consultation. Himachal Pradesh Congress president Pratibha Singh has been lamenting the infighting within the Congress and blamed it for the massive defeat in the previous Assembly election. However, she has also said that the issue has been addressed to some extent ahead of the upcoming elections. Presently, the Congress has a number of influential leaders well-heelled in their respective areas, such as Mukesh Agnihotri in Una district, Sukhwinder Sukhu in Hamirpur, Asha Kumari in Dalhousie, Dhani Ram Shandil in Solan, and Kaul Singh Thakur in parts of Mandi district. However, none of the leaders is as popular or acknowledged as the late Virbhadra Singh, evident from the kind of immense state-wide popularity the former CM had enjoyed. The void following Singh's death gave rise to a tussle within the state unit on who should be the party's main face in the Himalayan state. Senior leader Anand Sharma, who was also an important part of the group of 23 leaders that wrote a letter criticising the style of functioning within the party, recently quit as chairman of the party's steering committee for the Himachal Pradesh elections.

BSP Trains eyes on UP Muslims after 2022 debacle  
The BSP's strategy for 2024 general elections is regaining its lost base among the Dalits and the Muslims. After BSP registering its worst UP assembly elections defeat in terms of seats, winning only one seat in the 403-member House and garnering just 12.8% of the votes, the party is planning to focus more on Muslim votes in UP. Due to the aggressive anti-Muslim campaign by the BJP, the community voted en bloc to support the SP. The anti-BJP Hindu community voters too voted for the SP after the transfer of the Muslim vote. Now, the BSP has launched a massive membership drive as the first step towards consolidating its position ahead of upcoming local body elections in the state this year end. While Mayawati would come to terms with any political party to beat the BJP, the BSP supreme aspires for the maximum number of seats to contest in Lok Sabha polls.

Opposition leaders to gather at chaatla's samman divas rally  
Indian National Lok Dal president and former Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala has bisected the entire state to make his party's Samman Divas rally at Fatehabad on September 25 a success. INLD is trying to unite anti-BJP parties on one platform. NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar are expected to attend this program. Former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury, National Conference's Farooq Abdullah, former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav, Meghalaya Governor Satya Pal Malik, former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, former Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, Akadi Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal, RJD leader Sharad Yadav have all been invited. CM Mamata Banerjee has not yet revealed her cards regarding this rally. While KCR, who is trying for opposition unity, has not yet clarified his stance. Efforts are being made to form a non-BJP opposition front through the rally and OM Prakash Chautala has been trying to help the INLD stage a comeback in Haryana politics. (IPA Service)

Pawar applauds Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo yatra  
Seeing the success of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra in Southern India, NCP chief Sharad Pawar has acknowledged that big padyatras or foot marches like 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' have a political impact and people welcome with such sincere intent. However, Pawar recalled: "When Chandrasekhar (former Prime Minister) had taken out a similar padyatra, it had received a tremendous response. I had also taken out a march from Jalgaon to Nagpur (in 1980) for farmers." On the other hand, Sharad Pawar asserted that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is ready to conclude her differences with the Congress in the national interest, and come together to form an alliance of opposition parties ahead of the 2024 general elections.

Prashant Kishor meets Nitish Kumar, keeps Bihar leaders guessing  
Prashant Kishor's recently took a dig at Nitish Kumar by saying that "Fevicol should make him a brand ambassador for being glued to CM's chair". Rebutting the ridicule, the JD(U) national president Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh strongly lashed out at the poll strategist and said that Kishor was merely a businessman and not a politician. Singh said Kishor has been making use of different tactics just to sell his products like a salesman, and the same is quite evident in other states also. However, Kishor surprised everyone by paying a visit to Nitish Kumar triggering speculation of a collaboration in the 2024 national elections. Pawan Verma, a former leader of Nitish Kumar's JD(U), reportedly arranged the meeting and was also present. Nitish Kumar didn't reveal much about the meet-up, dismissing it as a routine conversation. The Bihar CM smartly played his card by meeting Kishor and gave a message to the people of Bihar that Kishor was still his man. Now, the people of Bihar are confused vis-à-vis Kishor's current status, whether he is a Nitish or BJP agent or just a sales-

Manoj Kumar, sdb  
Via email

Money oriented or people-oriented Govt?  
Editor,  
As a citizen of our beloved state of Meghalaya and as a resident of our beautiful city of Shillong, I feel greatly concerned about the development of events recently. Shillong is already witnessing a series of ills affecting its citizens especially the youth. Our city of late has become a drug trafficking centre. More and more of our tribal youth are getting caught in this web of tragedy. Shillong today is one of the most drug-affected cities in the region. Drug addiction has become the nightmare of society and the anguish of many a family. Recently, the Government has added woes to misery by licensing so many wine stores. The stretch of road from Polo

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Political delicacies

By Rahil Nora Chopra

If Gehlot wins Congress top post, will pilot be new Rajasthan CM?

A thrilling game of check-and-mate has started within the Congress, with speculations looming large on whether Sachin Pilot would get the throne of Rajasthan in case Ashok Gehlot called a meeting of the party MLAs and apprised them that he'd file his nomination for the post of the party president, while assuring that he would still remain accessible. "I am not going anywhere, don't worry," he has reportedly said. Even though senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh has asserted that the party adopted a one-man, one-post resolve at the leadership meet in Rajasthan's Udaipur earlier this year, but Gehlot said he could well hold, not one but three simultaneous posts, signaling that he was not ready to give up his Rajasthan role. On the other hand, Sachin Pilot had joined Rahul Gandhi in Kerala on the latter's much-acclaimed and ongoing Bharat Jodo Yatra. Speaking to the media, Pilot said that one person couldn't hold two posts in the party, clearly hinting that Gehlot would need to step down as Rajasthan CM if he had to become the Congress president. Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi is said to have promised the CM's chair to Pilot ahead of the 2018 elections. When instead Gehlot was picked after the election results, Gandhi is said to have reiterated his promise to Pilot and asked him to be patient. However, Gehlot is moving to a bigger position and has some leeway, this may open an opportunity for Pilot to occupy the throne of Rajasthan.

Pawar applauds Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo yatra

Seeing the success of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra in Southern India, NCP chief Sharad Pawar has acknowledged that big padyatras or foot marches like 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' have a political impact and people welcome with such sincere intent. However, Pawar recalled: "When Chandrasekhar (former Prime Minister) had taken out a similar padyatra, it had received a tremendous response. I had also taken out a march from Jalgaon to Nagpur (in 1980) for farmers." On the other hand, Sharad Pawar asserted that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is ready to conclude her differences with the Congress in the national interest, and come together to form an alliance of opposition parties ahead of the 2024 general elections.

Prashant Kishor meets Nitish Kumar, keeps Bihar leaders guessing

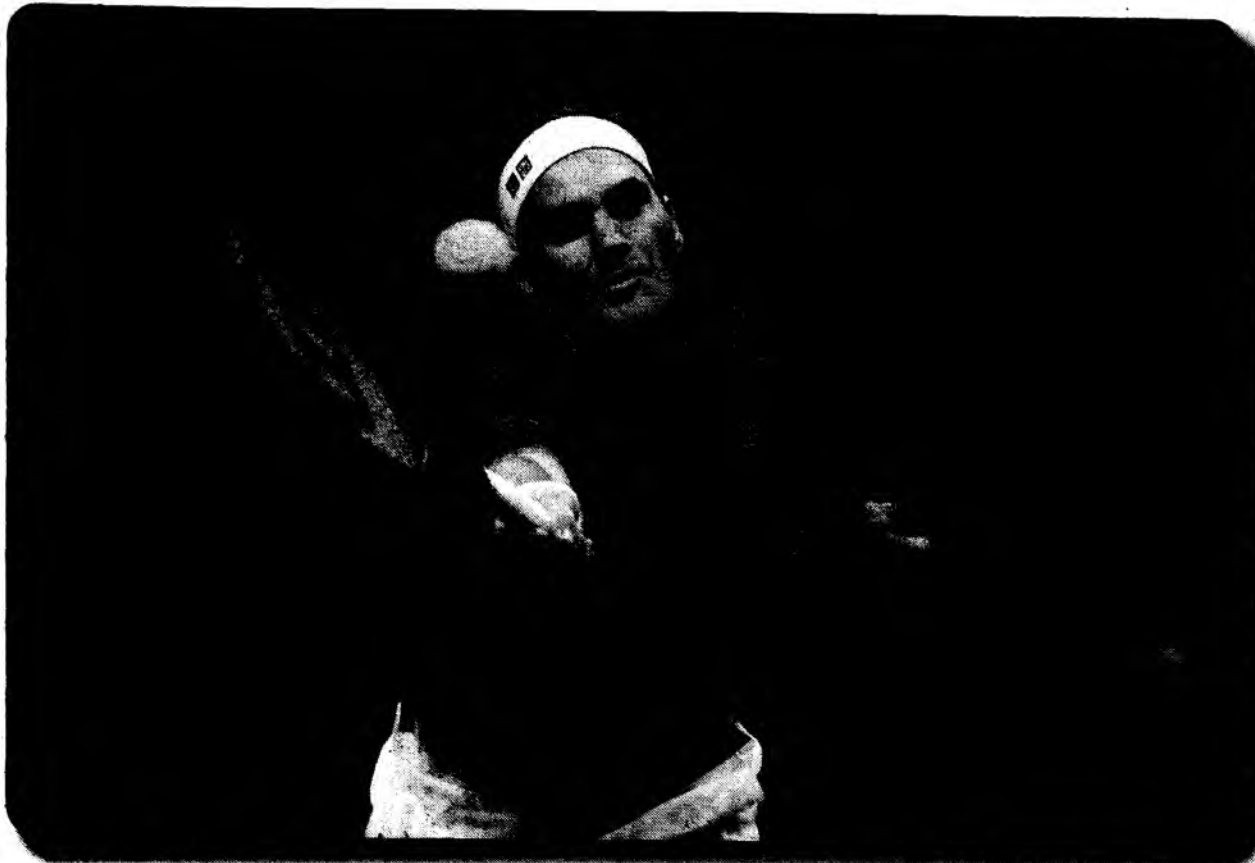
Prashant Kishor's recently took a dig at Nitish Kumar by saying that "Fevicol should make him a brand ambassador for being glued to CM's chair". Rebutting the ridicule, the JD(U) national president Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh strongly lashed out at the poll strategist and said that Kishor was merely a businessman and not a politician. Singh said Kishor has been making use of different tactics just to sell his products like a salesman, and the same is quite evident in other states also. However, Kishor surprised everyone by paying a visit to Nitish Kumar triggering speculation of a collaboration in the 2024 national elections. Pawan Verma, a former leader of Nitish Kumar's JD(U), reportedly arranged the meeting and was also present. Nitish Kumar didn't reveal much about the meet-up, dismissing it as a routine conversation. The Bihar CM smartly played his card by meeting Kishor and gave a message to the people of Bihar that Kishor was still his man. Now, the people of Bihar are confused vis-à-vis Kishor's current status, whether he is a Nitish or BJP agent or just a sales-

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# Federer's illustrious career proves that greatness is more than just winning



Roger Federer's retirement from competitive tennis means the sun is starting to set on a golden generation of men's tennis, underpinned by the extraordinary feats of Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic. News of his retirement has reignited debate about whether he is not just a great of men's tennis but the GOAT: the greatest of all time.

For many, Federer stands alone at the apex of this and every other generation. But this view is not borne out by the numbers. Federer has won fewer grand slams than Nadal and Djokovic, spent fewer weeks at world number one than Djokovic, and won fewer ATP titles than Jimmy Connors.

However, raw numbers are an inadequate measure of sporting success. For one thing, they obscure the effect of events that disrupt equality of opportunity across the generations. For example, the numbers do not reflect the recent COVID inter-

ruption (and subsequent exclusion from competition of the unvaccinated Djokovic), nor do they capture the transitional period from amateur to professional tennis.

How many grand slam titles would Rod Laver have won had he not been banned from grand slam events for five years (1963-1967) following his departure from the professional tour? Laver won 11 grand slams during his career, including a calendar grand slam (winning all four slams in the same year) both prior to, and following, his ban. The achievement of even one calendar grand slam has eluded Federer, Nadal and Djokovic.

Even if we had a fair and accurate means to compare sporting success across generations, this would not settle the question of greatness. For sporting greatness is not reducible to sporting success. This distinction may be what Federer fans allude to when they refer to him as the GOAT. Rather than nostalgia for a

time when the numbers stacked up in his favour, they may be pointing to a broader notion of sporting greatness.

## What makes sporting greatness?

We should embrace a more nuanced understanding of sporting greatness than one restricted to rankings and titles. Victory is one sporting value among many. To operate with the restricted view overlooks important sporting values that were the hallmark of Federer's career: excellence, aesthetics and integrity.

## Excellence

Federer played "total tennis". He possessed the full repertoire of skills and capacities - elements of excellence - that the sport tests and makes possible. During his prime, he could serve-and-volley to win points quickly or grind out long rallies from behind the baseline.

As he entered his mid-thirties, he

reinvented his game to play on the baseline and take the ball earlier. While his rivals relied on executing a narrower set of "excellences" supremely well, Federer adapted his game to whatever the circumstance demanded by showcasing different elements at different times.

## Aesthetics

The great players do not just perfect the sport as it is, they alter our understanding of what it can be. While aesthetics is central to a sport such as gymnastics, it is incidental to tennis. An ugly point counts for just as much as a sublime point; ungainly strokes can be as effective as elegant strokes.

However, Federer's style was uniquely pleasing to the eye. He brought tennis to new aesthetic heights with the grace and fluidity of his strokes and his smooth explosive athleticism. He showed that efficiency need not come at the cost of beauty. His style eliminated the distinction between racket and player; in his hand, the racket was an extension, not an addition. Federer

revealed new aesthetic possibilities in tennis while never compromising on the pursuit of excellence.

## Integrity

Finally, Federer's greatness also lies partly in his ethics. His integrity as an athlete was most clearly evident in how he conducted himself on the court, how he managed his rivalries, and, perhaps most memorably, how he competed against his greatest rival.

For one so acquainted with winning, Federer knew how to lose well. Throughout his career of more than 1,700 matches, he never retired from a match, never feigned or submitted to injury as a contest began to slip away. He was awarded the ATP sportsmanship award 13 times, an accolade voted on by his fellow professionals on the men's tour.

At each stage of his career, he cultivated relations of reciprocal respect and appreciation with his main rivals, whether it was Andy Roddick in his early period, Nadal in his middle period, or Djokovic in his late period. Through his rivalry with Nadal in particular, we witnessed competition at its best - a mutual quest for excellence in which both players laid down a challenge to each other, and in so doing extended each other's abilities and improved one another in the process.

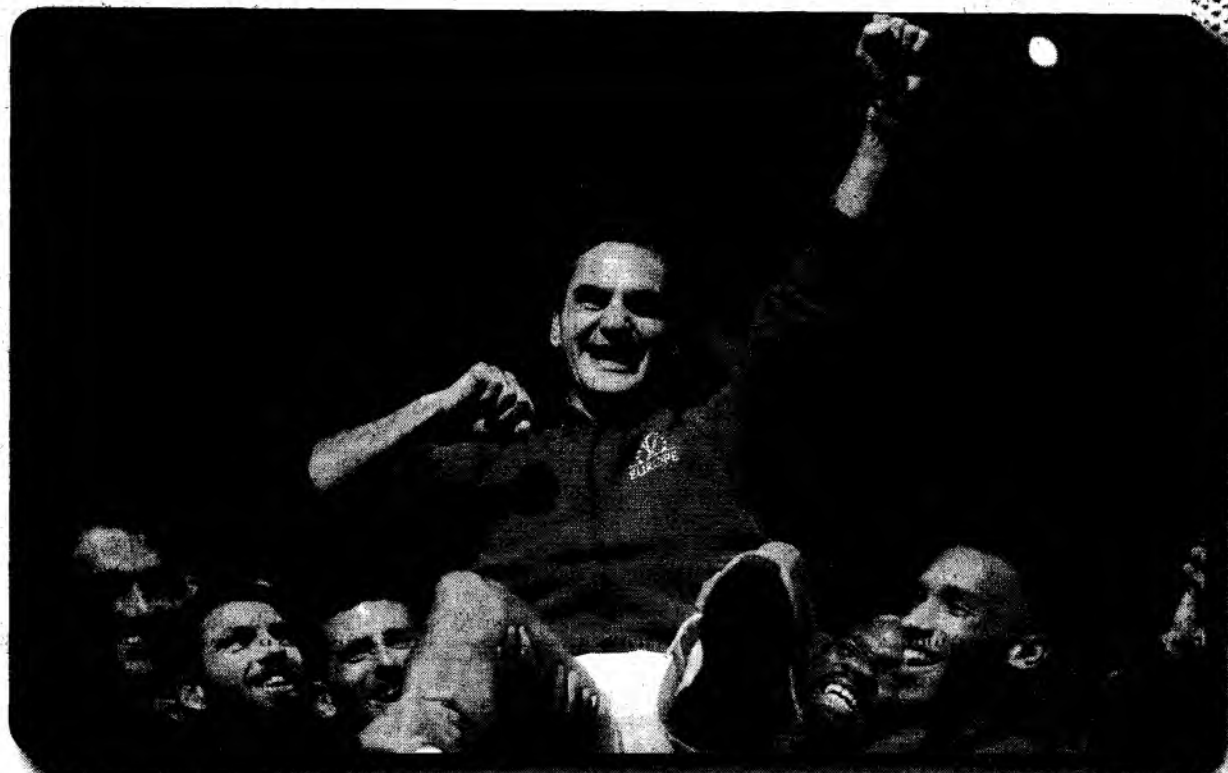
While their complementary strengths and weaknesses combined

to make for compelling contests, the moral quality of the Federer-Nadal rivalry also stands out. They showed us how to compete well. They competed as fiercely as two athletes can, for the highest stakes in their sport, yet neither resorted to the morally dubious means of cheating or gamesmanship.

Even when chasing history, they proved that competition does not have to be cutthroat. Their example puts the lie to any cynical view of competition according to which rivals must be enemies and every opportunity for advantage must be seized. In doing so, Federer and Nadal have done a service not just to tennis but to sport.

Federer has honoured and deepened a tradition of tennis that stretches back through his idol, Pete Sampras, and Sampras's idol, Rod Laver. This tradition prizes attacking flair, fluid technique and impeccable conduct. The modern history of men's tennis arguably begins with Laver, so it is appropriate that the Federer era ends this weekend at the Laver Cup.

In the final analysis, where Federer stands in the pantheon of great tennis champions is less important than how he broadened our understanding of sporting greatness itself. Success is part of it, but only part - excellence, aesthetics, and integrity also define the greatest of all time. (The Conversation)



## Achieving zen in your 30s



More and more people hope to develop a Zen mindset. Achieving Zen, however, is not about re-organising life and work around 30, when you might be in the heat of your career. Instead, it focus on cultivating a sense of serenity through discipline, harmony and love. Being mindful enables one to remain fully present in their experiences and pay attention to what is going on. While practising mindfulness consistently can have significant benefits for the body, mind and spirit, it's not always simple in the beginning.

Stress at work and pressure from relationships get incredibly hard to handle, especially in your mid-30s. First of all, stress cannot be physically handled by the body, and managing it mentally may be more difficult. A person may experience stress for a variety of reasons, some of which may be more complicated than the problems they dealt with earlier in life. But practising mindfulness and being in the now can help reduce stress and enable people to live joyful, distraction-free lives.

Here are 10 tips to practice mindfulness in everyday life:

### Pay attention to the breath

Breathing is a natural process that occurs rhythmically and naturally. When people pay attention to their breath, it takes them out of their mind and into the body. As a result, a person can momentarily free himself from the churning thoughts, worries and fears, reminding the person of who he is - his inner spirit, not the thoughts.

### Eat mindfully

It has become the habit of people to scoff down their meals while distracted by mobile phones, TV or constant conversation. This doesn't allow them to enjoy the delicious taste and smell of the food. Also, one is less likely to feel nourished and satisfied because the person "misses out" on the fact that he ate. Instead of getting distracted while eating, one must focus all the attention on the food and enjoy every single bite. Mindfulness should be brought to almost every daily activity like bathing, walking, doing chores, etc.

### Connect with the senses

The senses - smell, touch, taste, sound and sight - are the gateways into the present moment. But when people are lost in thought, they don't experience what the senses are picking up. Therefore, it is important to pause to soak up the beautiful aroma of the coffee. The misty mountain

air. The diversity and beauty of flowers in the neighbourhood. One should put love and attention into everything to experience the joy and peace it can bring.

### Observe unpleasant emotions

Feeling upset, annoyed or down is common among human beings. But, it is essential not to try to impose a different emotion on what one is experiencing at the moment. Being in the present moment and opening up the sentiment is an excellent way to practice mindfulness without immediately running away from it. Instead, a person should try to impose a different emotion on what he's experiencing. Additionally, one should see himself as separate from emotion.

### Bring awareness to the communication patterns

Talking and listening, along with periods of silence, is a part of the communication process humans are adapted to. Therefore, one should notice the states of mind during these activities to bring mindfulness into communication. Significantly, one must notice the silence and the sounds in between the silence.

### Don't believe everything that comes to your mind

People shouldn't believe everything they think. The mind often makes inferences and assumptions that aren't true. Thoughts are images, words and sounds that pop up in mind. But most of the time, people get hooked on their thoughts and believe them to be true. But one doesn't need to. While practising to be present at the moment with mindfulness can help one stay calm and relaxed; thoughts will creep into the mind. The idea is to change the relationship with thoughts. Seeing thoughts as just thoughts instead of facts makes a real difference.

### Meditate daily

Meditation can bring immense benefits to the body and mind and increase energy, inspiration, happiness and inner peace. One doesn't have to sit for long hours to meditate. Even 10 minutes a day can have a positive impact on life. It will also strengthen the mindfulness muscles, so people will find it much easier to stay in the moment throughout the day.

### Practice gratitude

Gratitude happens to be the best attitude. Gratitude is when a person discovers how to want what he/she has and not want what he/she doesn't have. Gratitude can be practised at this very moment. A person should think of how blessed he/she is to have a certain thing, say for example good books. Other people may not have the means or opportunities to buy such books. Also, one must be grateful that there is food on the plate while millions of people around the world die of hunger.

### Listen actively

While talking to another person one must listen actively without thinking of how to respond to what the other person has to say. In a conversation, it is important to try to listen actively while putting the whole attention on the other person. Listen with the ears, heart and intuition. This can help change the quality of your conversations.

### Designate time for specific things

One should keep certain times of the day designated for specific activities. A time for work, a time for bathing, a time for cleaning, a time for eating. This ensures that those things get done on a regular basis without any hindrance. One can designate time for his/her own activities, whether that is work or cleaning or exercise or quiet contemplation.

Mindfulness is a practice that people should practice each and every moment of their life. Practice these tips to not only stay mindful but feel happier and stay positive in life. (IANSLife)

## Sacrifices we make for love

Compromises are a crucial part of relationships. Any couple can attest to the significance of "meeting halfway." Even being somewhat accommodative in a relationship is regarded as healthy. But even if it results in the greatest concord, can you make compromises on everything?

As per dating App QuackQuack's survey, 45 per cent of respondents felt that dating entails making sacrifices. Indeed, it is a two-way street. You must make certain sacrifices in your life if you desire peace and harmony. According to 32 per cent of the male respondents, late-night talks caused them to alter their eating, sleeping, and dressing habits. While certain life changes are inevitable, others shouldn't be made because of your relationship. 41 per cent of those over 30 said that one should never compromise on the fundamental qualities that make us who we are.

QuackQuack Founder and CEO Ravi Mittal shared, "Among the approx. 1.20 million mutual matches per year, we witness people choosing partners with similar habits and core values. The trend shows one out of six people unmatched owing to conflicting ideals."

In light of this, the poll reveals that 22 per cent of respondents from Chennai and Hyderabad stated quitting a behaviour that their date found repulsive. Six out of eight guys admitted to quitting smoking and drinking after finding a partner. Most of these guys concurred that it just improved their health, but 9 per cent said they felt in control.

### Love over Friendships?

Did you know that a new relationship often leads to the end of an old friendship? It's a proven fact! Three out of ten survey respondents from Bhubaneswar and Guwahati admitted to breaking up with at least one buddy because their partner "did not agree." One of the things that suffers the most from compromise in a relationship is friendship. 25 per cent users described how certain matches failed because their closest pals of

the wrong sex. They treasured the friendship more than someone they had just met online since it caused too many uncertainties and mistrust in their relationship.

### Clash of Beliefs and BAE!

Ideals and core values were one thing that the majority of respondents said they had never changed for love. Between the ages of 25 and 30, 54 per cent of both men and women said that their views define them. If that prevents them from dating specific individuals, then so be it; nonetheless, giving in on that is not an option. Five out of the eight respondents said they frequently connect with others who have similar life goals. That not only gives you more topics to discuss, but it also keeps relationships peaceful.

### Age Old Rivals: Work and Love

The main source of friction in relationships has consistently been work. Participants in the study were split on whether or not making concessions at work would be too costly in terms of interpersonal harmony. According to 31 per cent of working women, forcing them to give up their hard work to pursue their career ambitions is unfair. When given the choice between love and employment, 29 per cent of males pursuing higher education said they would choose the former without a second thought.

### Sweet Taste of Freedom

Have your pals who have been together for a long time ever made jokes about how they feel the nose closing in on them? But is it a joke? An independent person would never be required to give up their freedom in a healthy relationship, according to 35 per cent of women over 30 from Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities. It is not the same as giving in to your every want, especially if it veers toward immoral behaviour. Why would your heart long for anything like that if you are in a loving relationship? There is nothing wrong with taking some time for yourself. (IANSLife)

# The Mendicant Prince – a dramatic recreation of century-old mystery

A hundred and fifty years ago, Bhawal was a prosperous zamindari in the eastern part of undivided Bengal, in size and income next only to that owned by the Khwajas, the nawab family of Dacca.

In the winter of 1909, Ramendranarayan Roy, the ailing second prince of the Bhawal, travelled to Darjeeling with his wife Bibhavati, brother-in-law Satyendranath and a retinue of officials and servants, after his physicians advised a change of air. Three weeks later, a telegram from Satyendranath arrived at the Bhawal estate with news of the prince's demise and his cremation.

But that was not the end of the matter, because 12 years later, the story took a bewildering turn with the arrival in Bhawal of a mendicant who claimed to be the long-lost prince and the heir to the estate.

After a protracted legal battle that went right up to the Privy Council, in what was known as the Bhawal sannyasi case, the mendicant was accepted as who he claimed to be – the heir to the estate.

This is a saga that has captivated renowned academic and Sahitya Akademi Award winner Aruna Chakravarti – she was the long-serving Principal of Delhi University's Janki Devi College, where she taught for 40 years. After meticulous research, she has dramatically brought alive this intriguing tale of dual identity and the inexplicable quirks of fate in *The Mendicant Prince* (Picador India), her 16th novel.

"I first heard of the Bhawal case at the age of ten. But even at that tender age it left a powerful impact on me. I was captivated by the intricacies and unanswered questions. But I never thought of writing about it till recently, when some friends distantly related to the Bhawal family, urged me to," Chakravarti said in an interview.

Given that she had written two fictional family histories, on her own family in *The Inheritors* and the Tagore family in *Jorasanko and Daughters of Jorasanko*, she was "lured by the idea but resisted it at first."

"It was too big and complex a project. The facts of the case were out in the public domain. What more could I add to them? A fictional representation would not be easy. A meticulous adherence to the facts together with the dates was imperative. A creative reconstruction of the case as well as the lives and times of the concerned persons called for tremendous imaginative power and an equal amount of discipline and concentration. I thought I wouldn't be able to pull it off," Chakravarti explained.

Then, during the COVID years, "when the whole world went into hibernation and there was nothing else to do, nowhere to go" she started working on it.

"COVID worked in my favour. In the complete silence and the total absence of activity, I found myself getting entrenched in the slowly unraveling world of queens and mistresses, liaisons and stratagems, suspense and mystery that constituted the background of the Bhawal story," said.

But, while COVID gave her the space and silence to organise her thoughts, it was COVID again that put hurdles in the way of research.

"For all my other novels I have made it a point to do an extensive amount



of field work. This time, travel being rendered impossible, I had to depend entirely on secondary sources. Books and periodicals, both English and Bengali, provided the basic facts. Articles in Bangladeshi newspapers, of which there were a significant number, helped me to understand and visualise the context in which the drama had unfolded. Through these readings, the sights, sounds and smells of feudal Bengal in the twilight years of the British Empire started slowly taking hold of my senses," Chakravarti elaborated.

Two films, *Sannyasi Raja* and *Ek Je Chhilo Raja*, offered a few glimmers but these, however, were negligible.

"What came in truly useful was the first-hand research I had done for my earlier work such as my translations of the Bengali masters and my own creative work. For example, my translations of Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Bei Samay* (Those Days) and *Prothom Alo* (First Light) helped me obtain brilliant insights into the lives of rajahs and zamindars of the era, their decadence and dwindling influence under the rising power of the British.

*The Mendicant Prince*, however, showcases a somewhat later period when British imperialism was slowly eroding under the pressure of an awakening nationalism.

Chakravarti also had the privilege of conversing with some relatives and family friends of the Bhawals.

"They were not structured interviews. Some family gossip and reminiscences were shared from time to time. The identity question and quirks of fate were embedded in the history of the case. All I did was attempt to bring them to life by weaving, in between the facts, personal revelations of the characters, especially the women of the family. That part is purely fictional," Chakravarti said.

Playing the Devil's Advocate, is there a parallel between Ramendranarayan Roy and Gumnami Baba?

"The only parallel that can be drawn between the two is that both had been ascetics. Ramendranarayan claimed that after the incident of his supposed death, he had lost his memory and joined a band of mendicants. After twelve years of living as a sadhu he had remembered that he came from a place called Dhaka. Advised by his guru to go to Dhaka he had done so and, once there, the recovery of his memory was swift."

"He realised that he was the second prince of the realm and demanded his rights as heir by moving the courts. His plea that he had suffered from amnesia in the intervening period had been put to the test by several doctors during the trial and was upheld by them and subsequently by the judge."

"Gumnami Baba's case was different. He didn't claim loss of memory or identity. He said he had no name and no fixed place of residence. Thus, his true identity remains unconfirmed to this day. The consequence of his rigid commitment to remain incognito was that very few people had actually seen him in person. Which is why he was considered by some to be Subhas Chandra Bose," Chakravarti elaborated.

The book concludes with the funeral of Ramendranarayan Roy. What became of the Bhawal pargana after that?

"The Privy Council verdict came in July 1946. The Partition of India took place a year later in August 1947 and Bhawal became part of (East) Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). Ramnarayan Roy, the adopted son of Anandakumari Debi (the wife of Ramendranarayan's younger brother Rabinranarayan), succeeded briefly to his share of the zamindari. When the zamindari system was abolished in 1950, he moved to Kolkata. He visited the estate from time to time but these visits seem to have stopped after 1960. As part of the settlement of Ramendranarayan's share, a sum of Rs 8 lakh, was offered to Bibhavati. But she refused to take it."

"The Rajbari (zamindar's mansion) houses several government establishments. It has also become a tourist spot and visitors are taken on guided tours of parts of the palace and its grounds."

Chakravarti has had a distinguished career as an academic, an administrator and as a writer. She has received the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Vaitalik Award and the Sarat Puraskar. She has been shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize for her first novel, *The Inheritors*, while another novel, *Suralakhmi Villa*, has received the distinction of being designated "Novel of the Year (India 2020)" by the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. How did she manage to strike a seamless balance between the two careers?

"Looking back, I think one complimented the other. Administrative work was fulfilling at one level. Dry and uninspiring at another. I felt I was doing some good to society by improving the lives and minds of my students through practical measures like raising funds for extracurricular activities, inviting good speakers to inspire them, procuring more books for the library, and bettering academic standards by choosing the best teachers. The job also provided the bread and butter. But I needed something more. I needed creative satisfaction. And that came from my writing."

"I worked at my office desk all day looking forward to the evening when I could go back home and write. I wrote till late into the night and got up the next morning refreshed and ready to take on my administrative responsibilities. Balancing the two worked well for me," Chakravarti explained.

Her next book, *Through a Looking Glass: Stories*, published by Om International, has just come out. It is a collection of nine stories, each with an enigmatic woman at the centre.

"The volume holds up a mirror to middle class Indian society by exploring the hidden, secret spaces of women's lives; the inner recesses of their minds, and their perception of loss and suffering. There are studies of strength and weakness, triumph and defeat, unfulfilled desires, illicit liaisons, psychological traumas and family secrets – in one explosive mix," Chakravarti concluded.

Such is what brilliance is all about! (IANS)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 25, 2022

Moon conjunct Venus on your solar return chart and it will give fabulous results for the whole year. This will be a challenging year. You will be able to expand your business. Your mutual understanding with your boss will be perfect. Things will be on your side in government related matters. Take all investment related decisions wisely. Your financial condition will remain stable and you will never be short of funds but your expenses will also rise. New job/business offers will keep coming. Hard work and efforts are the key to success. If you put all your efforts in work then things might be good for you. Students will get admission in courses/institutes of their choice. You will find solutions in your problems with patience and courage. It's a good year for love-affairs. If you are in a relationship it is appropriate time to get married. You will enjoy good bonding with your partner.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It will be a fantastic time period. Your pending work will get accomplished and you will enjoy a peaceful state of mind. You will work in a relaxed manner with a purpose. It is a good week for engineers, IT professionals, media persons and technicians. You will also make plans to travel to your parents or in-laws. Things will be better. You will also attend a function or party. You will be in happy company of your friends and relatives. You will also get full credit for your worthy deeds. You will enjoy a wonderful romantic life. Your name and fame will also spread far and wide. You will remain active in your work and social obligations. With your hard work you will achieve something worthwhile. You will also use your experience to expand your business which will give you lot of success.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This week will prove to be wonderful for you. It is going to be a very auspicious time period for you. You will plan to buy a house or vehicle. You will get affection and love from mother as well. You will have money gains. You will also plan to go on a religious trip or pilgrimage with your family. You will also get a promotion in your job/business. You will work on your strategy reaching greater heights. Professionally wise also discharging your domestic duties with responsibilities. You growing professional status will help in your business expansion also. You will earn lot of money with your efforts. Your activities in a variety of fields will make you more energetic. Your positive attitude will make you stand apart from others. Some auspicious function will take place at your house.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Your hard work will give you amazing results. You will also meet an important person. Your leadership qualities will get reflected in your personality. You will look after your family well. Your earnings will also increase. You will win admiration and attraction of one and all. You will impress everyone. You also need to avoid clashes and confrontations. Don't take any decision in a haste. Keep your cool. You need to wait patiently for things to move in their mutual course. You will enjoy the changing season and will also plan to go out with your family. You will also get admission in institutions of your choice. You also need to utilize your time judiciously. Any investment you make at this juncture may give you good returns.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

It will be a very pleasant week for you. You will be able to discharge your professional duties with lot of confidence. You will also make good progress in your career. You will also discharge your domestic responsibilities quite comfortably. You will also fulfill your ambitions. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. It is a high time to fulfill your contractual commitments in business. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time. You may also develop avid interest in spiritual matters. You will have a philosophical view towards life. With a cool and peaceful mind you may dwell happily meeting your personal and social obligations. Your siblings will listen to you. You will work in team spirit and strive to achieve your aim. You will be able to finish all your pending work.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your prestige and reputation will swell. You will get lot of name and fame. You will make excellent progress in your job/business. You will even get a good response from strangers. It is because of your humble and gentle attitude. Your prudence will make you earn much money. You will also work with much tact and wisdom. Your high level of talent and wisdom will get accepted. Love mates will understand the feeling of each other well. You will also be able to establish an effective dialogue with your family members and friends. You will also get much satisfaction from your personal ties and work. You will be financially well off. Love affairs matters will be successful. A person may feel neglected. You will take care of his/her emotions.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You will understand the trends of time. This will help you move in the right direction and be in a progressive mode. Your leadership qualities will also come to the fore. You will also be in a right frame of mind. You will also take care of your family members with much affection and love. You will have soft feelings for a person whom you love. You will

also plan to get married. You will also plan to go on a short holiday trip with your family. This shall also be the time of your relaxing and enjoying. You will also remain quite clear about your goals in life. You will progress fast in your work. You will establish contact with your seniors. You will also get involved in charitable works. There will be amicability in relationship with your spouse. Your elders will need your support and they will also help you a lot. You will also be happy in spending time with your dear and near ones. Chances of gains in partnership will double. You will get a lot of success on the strength of your efforts. Your work will be well organized. You will do your work in a systematic and proper manner. You will also share nice relationship with your spouse/partner. You will also work with people who have opposite views. You will also do lot of travelling due to your work obligations. You will remain cheerful and in a good mood.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This week will bring astonishing results for you. You will get success in your work. You will also have many sources of income and you will spend your money wisely. You will establish contact with your seniors. You will also get involved in charitable works. There will be amicability in relationship with your spouse. Your elders will need your support and they will also help you a lot. You will also be happy in spending time with your dear and near ones. Chances of gains in partnership will double. You will get a lot of success on the strength of your efforts. Your work will be well organized. You will do your work in a systematic and proper manner. You will also share nice relationship with your spouse/partner. You will also work with people who have opposite views. You will also do lot of travelling due to your work obligations. You will remain cheerful and in a good mood.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It is a success granting week. You will enjoy a very favorable phase. You will get happiness and the main thing is that you will remain satisfied. All decisions taken by you will prove to be correct. Matters related to money will never be a problem for you. You will earn well and get money that was given to someone else. The confusion that was there in your mind will get removed. You will also spend your time in reading informative books. Your desires will get fulfilled. You will make progress in your works and personal relationships. You will also pay attention to your business and do to the best of your ability. You will also get a good news from somewhere. The differences that you were having with your neighbors will come to an end. There will be an increase in your confidence and earnings.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

You will feel peaceful and happy. You will have happiness in your married life. Husband and wife will understand each other's feelings. The time is full of good tidings. You will have very good discussion with your family members. There will be lot of moments of joy and laughter. You will have gains in your business. Even those appearing for exams and interview will do their best. There will be an improvement in the situation. Your life will get back on track and gather momentum. You will be very careful in making new investments. You will take intelligent and sensible decisions regarding money. From the viewpoint of monetary and material matters you will have to adopt a kind and helpful attitude.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The whole week will yield excellent results. You will get success in business/work. Those works will get completed which were connected to your good luck. Husband and wife will share amazing bonding. You will get full support and happiness from your spouse/partner. Something good and positive will take place. Emotions will dominate. You will get success in exam/interview. You will prove to be a helping hand for your family members. There will be normalcy in your work. Your financial status will be strong. There will be some house related work. You will plan to buy a house of property. Money will be spent in the maintenance of your vehicle. You will be serious in financial matters.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The whole week will bring you lot of success. You might have to make efforts in order to match your steps to the fast pace of life. You will be successful in achieving your objectives. You will get tremendous success in your job/profession. You will remain active in social issues and share your emotions which will help you in making useful contacts. Your days will give lot of mental satisfaction. You will meet your friends and relatives after a long time. You will devote lot of time to enhance your skills. You will also fulfill your desires. You will take aid and advice of your friends in important matters. You will feel the desire to put in all your efforts so that you get success in your work. This quality of yours can bring romance and new ventures into your life.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Your time will be happily passed. At this time your outlook, values and behavior will undergo a change. You will get lot of respect and prestige. It is a good week for business related trips. You will also pay lot of attention to the needs of your family members. Your life partner will prove to be a great advisor and helper. You will also do your office work with great enthusiasm and your efficiency will increase. You might be given a major responsibility. You will also have to make a lot of efforts in order to get admission in the course, school and college of your choice. Results will be good in the end. Your financial position will remain strong. Some auspicious function will also take place at your place.

## Songbirds with unique colours more likely to be traded as pets: Study

People like beautiful things. This comes as no surprise: beauty underpins highly profitable businesses, from cosmetics and art to the illegal wildlife trade, which reaps up to US\$23 billion (£20 billion) annually according to some estimates.

Tigers and pandas show that aesthetic value can be an asset to wildlife conservation, attracting public support and funding. On the flip side, anything that you might want to preserve in the wild so you can look at it, somebody else will probably want to own for the same reason.

The unsustainable trade in plants and animals can rapidly deplete wild populations and put species at risk of going extinct in certain areas, or even globally.

Songbirds (birds in the order Passeriformes) are an interesting case study. This group contains the greatest number of bird species, many of which are traded and many of which are threatened with extinction.

Canaries, for example, were originally sought as pets for the beautiful music they sing. But we need only look at their striking yellow feathers to see that colour – and beauty – also play a role in the popularity of songbirds.

Recent research I conducted with colleagues at the University of Florida in the US, the Centre for the Synthesis and Analysis of Biodiversity in France and Massey University in New Zealand, showed the colour of a songbird's plumage predicts the likelihood of it being traded as a pet and its risk of extinction.

### Colour by numbers

How do you quantify colour? We started off using data on the red, green and blue values of the colours that make up each species' plumage. This is a standard way to quantify colour, which readers might be familiar with from television screens, for example.

Each primary colour of red, green and blue takes a value ranging from the minimum of zero to the maximum of 255. And these so-called



RGB values together denote a specific colour. For example, a bird with 255 red, 204 green, and 255 blue would appear pale pink.

Unfortunately, you cannot easily identify and classify colours using these RGB values, so we converted them into colour categories using some simple maths. We used 15 categories, including the primary colours (red, green, blue), secondary colours (yellow, cyan, magenta), tertiary colours (orange, chartreuse green, spring green, azure, violet, rose), and the additional categories of brown, light (including white) and dark (including black).

Using a 3D graph with one axis for red, one for green and one for blue, we plotted every species according to the colour of its plumage. This allows you to see how rare the colours of different species are, based on how far away their colour is from others in the 3D space.

For the entire community of birds occurring in a given location, you can also look at how many colours are represented by those species based on how much of the 3D space they occupy. This we refer to as colour diversity.

### Species at risk

Our results showed certain colour categories, such as azure and yellow, are more likely to be found on species that are traded than those that are not.

We believe that yellow is a common colour in the illegal wildlife trade partly because there are simply lots of species that are yellow. Azure, in contrast, is a colour found

on far fewer species, but when it does occur it seems that it is highly likely to be on species that are heavily traded.

Other colours, such as brown, are less likely to be found on traded species compared with those that aren't traded. Species with more unique colouration, such as pure white, have a generally higher probability of being traded.

What does all this mean for biodiversity? We identified nearly 500 additional species that are not currently traded but are at risk of being traded in future based on their colour and how closely related they are to currently traded species.

Since the tropics contain the greatest diversity of colours, in terms of both the range of colours exhibited by songbirds and the number of colourful species, this is where most colours would be lost if all currently traded species went extinct. The loss of these species would mute nature's colour palette, leading to a dearer bird communities with less colour variety globally.

This is just the first step in understanding the aesthetic value that underlies the trade in songbirds. A better understanding of what motivates this trade can help identify species that could benefit from monitoring and trade regulation. Equally, identifying, celebrating and conserving hotspots of colour diversity has the best chance of conserving the aesthetic value of colour, as well as the overall biodiversity boasted by the tropics. (*The Conversation*)

**"When you are tough on yourself, life is going to be infinitely easier on you."**  
—Zig Ziglar

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LXV No. 47 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2022

**Congress, sure steps**

It's now abundantly clear as to how things will shape up in Rajasthan within the Congress where a vacancy for the chief minister's post has abruptly arisen. Once Ashok Gehlot shifts base to Delhi with the proposed filing of his nomination for the post of Congress president he can no more hope to directly control the party affairs from ground level in the state. His dilemma, however, is understandable. It would be suicidal to him locally to let his arch rival Sachin Pilot assume the post of chief minister. This, however, is believed to be a fait accompli as Gehlot cannot afford to stand against the will of the "first family" — which is seen loaded in favour of Sachin Pilot. Pilot had been angling for the CM's post ever since the last assembly polls and was restive under the rule of Gehlot all along. The high command had effected a truce every time Pilot sought to push his case for the CM's post. Gehlot always had the last laugh. But perceptions now are that it will be incumbent on Gehlot to altogether move out of Rajasthan, base himself in Delhi and concentrate fully on re-building the party in the Hindi belt and beyond.

Notably, the other main contender for the post of party chief, Shashi Tharoor, has already defeated himself with the expression of an apprehension that he might not have his way. At the most inopportune moment, he quoted Theodore Roosevelt to stress that his critics do not matter and, win or lose, a fight is worth it. This, after Tharoor's weak spot was effectively exposed by a party leader by asking as to what he did for the Congress other than writing letters to Sonia Gandhi (and tensing her up) "when she was in hospital." It was sarcasm at its height. Once the family -- still a tower of strength to Congressmen -- made it clear at the outset that its backing was for Gehlot as the next party chief, the decks were somewhat cleared. The other possible candidates whose names came up like Manish Tiwari, Digvijay Singh or Kamal Nath do not command a wide appeal. Nor does Gehlot at this point of time for that matter. What adds weight to his candidature is his link to the will of the first family. But it is clear Gehlot has the fire in him if only for the way he reigned supreme in Rajasthan, outwitting the machinations of all those set against him there. There, thus, are shades of Modi in him.

**Letters to the Editor**

**Shops forced to shut for dorbar shnong election**

Editor,  
On Saturday the election of headmen of Laitumkhrah, conducted by the election committee constituted by the Acting Syiem of Hima Myliem happened on Saturday, September 24. Before the election, prior announcement was made with instructions that shops and business establishments are to close on the day of the election. It is learnt that no order was issued by the district administration to permit closure of shops. On Friday Sept 23, some boys who introduced themselves as seng samla entered most of the shops around Laitumkhrah and threatened shop-owners that they are to close their shops during the election of Rangbah Shnong between 9 am to 12 noon. Interestingly whenever the dorbar shnong was convened in earlier years no such call for bandh or closure of shops was ever issued by previous dorbars.

The intimidating steps taken by some elements took everyone by surprise and most shopkeepers are wary of the situation and citizens who usually proceed for morning marketing caught completely unaware even as their civil liberties were curtailed. And since the standing order of the Meghalaya High Court prohibits any call for bandhs, closure of medical shops and other business establishments, the failure of the district administration

to tackle such incidents has prompted those with vested interests to issue diktats at their whims in the name of the dorbar shnong. Therefore it is time that all dorbar shnongs be brought under uniform rules of functioning throughout as failure to bring them into the ambit of the law will create further situations in which normal life of citizens will get affected and most of which will go unreported.

Yours etc.,  
Wankitbok Pohshna,  
Via email

**License to kill**

Editor,  
Appropos of the letter, 'Road Rage Kills' by Mohitosh Chakravarty (ST September 24, 2022) where he pointed out to the danger of speeding vehicles, especially of two wheelers. However, I feel it is pertinent to raise a few questions here. Firstly, who has given these rough bike riders the license to kill people in the streets of Shillong? These bike riders show unnecessary stunts, kill people and run away with utmost inhumanity and sadism as the shocking incident that happened to one of the senior citizens of Shillong, Biman Talukdar right in front of the traffic signal near Civil Hospital reveals. Talukdar lost his life due to a high speed bike that hit him with great force. Everybody is aware that the roads in Shillong are not for high speed bike riding as they are choked with traffic. These unruly bikers not only frighten the pedestrians amidst heavy traffic

but also the drivers of the four wheelers remain scared. It is because they overtake mostly from the wrong side and often take abrupt right turns in front of moving cars without any indication, thereby jeopardizing the safety of car drivers. Should the car even give a gentle push inadvertently the biker would fall down and may even be crushed. Such rough bikers should be stopped at any cost. It is thus suggested that either the speed of the two wheelers be controlled mechanically by a governor to only 40 kmph either by the manufacturers or it might be made a strict rule so that the bike mechanics in Shillong can do the needful.

Secondly, on seeing such rough riders the traffic police should immediately stop the speeding bike and if the biker speeds away then inform the next traffic signal over walkie-talkie and take the bike rider into custody and enforce strict penalty on him so that he does not dare to exhibit such foolish stunts again in his life.

Yours etc.,  
B Dhar  
Shillong

**Irregularities/ Illegals in Govt appointments**

Editor,  
As per a news item under the heading "HC tells government to ensure fairness in selection process" (ST, September 24, 2022) it is encouraging to note that people are approaching the courts to get

justice in cases of favouritism and nepotism in government appointments. All along we knew about the unfairness in government appointments but our young people prefer to merely complain among themselves instead of taking any bold steps to obtain justice.

It is also encouraging to note that some RTI activists have also unearthed several irregularities in appointments in several government departments and Directorates. However, it appears that what has been unearthed so far is incomplete, to say the least. If these RTI activists make some more effort they will definitely be able to bring to light more irregularities in government appointments in newly created Directorates like the Directorate of Food Processing and especially the Directorate of Dairy Development, Mawiong where relatives and friends of higher ups have been appointed with full pay or on contractual basis without any advertisements as legally required.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

**Of killer bikes**

Editor  
A senior citizen lost his life in a tragic road accident on September 20. He was hit by a speeding motorcycle while crossing the road at Civil Hospital point. This kind of accident at this point is not new. Is there any possibility of reducing the chances of such accidents from recur-

**'Rethinking tourism' - The Way Forward**

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

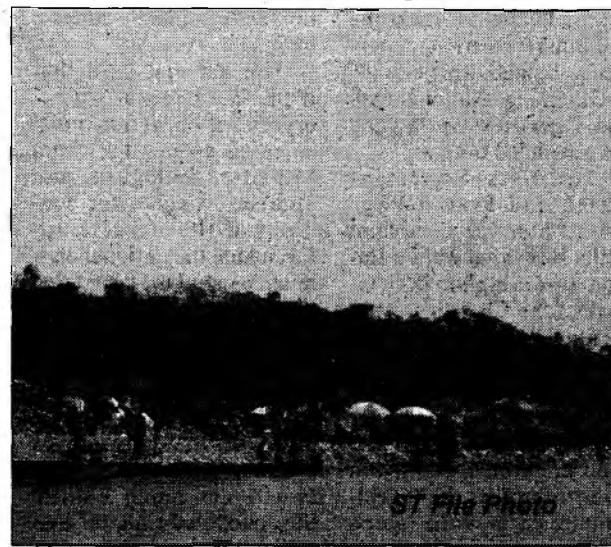
September 27 is celebrated as World Tourism Day. This year's theme is 'rethinking tourism'. In Meghalaya, this year too would see celebrations across government, tourism agencies, educational institutions, etc. While there is a sense of joy, there is also a concern over the problems in tourism. Meghalaya tourism is becoming a case of 'throwing pearls at the pigs'. It is a bummer and a frustration. Amidst the potential of life-changing impacts, there is a lack of proper thinking from the State Government and stakeholders. Most of the measures/schemes such as tourism accommodations, transportation, legalised gambling, etc look like stop-gap steps just to provide employment. There is a lack of thinking as to how these would integrate and contribute towards tourism development.

At present, the tourism operators operate the way they wish with no cohesiveness. For example, a village engages in community-based tourism without any basic knowledge of tourism services such as food, accommodation, waste management, etc. Add to all that, there are no rules/policy on carrying capacity, training of human resource, financial benefits sharing, etc. In such a case, how is tourism supposed to be an intervention for development?

Now, how did 'rethinking tourism' come about as a theme? It is basically an outcome of the unfavourable impact of the covid-19 pandemic. As the global tourism economies are heading back to their normal levels, there is a thought process on the need to transform tourism. This transformation has to do with the creation of destinations with sustainable practices. Embedded within, is the effort towards creation of 'resilient' tourism businesses on the platform of consistent savings habits and best financial practices. In Meghalaya, this sort of thinking has not dawned as yet. Forget about resilient businesses, the recent statement of the State Government on legalised gambling is just plain bizarre. This is because gambling cannot be considered an effective strategy to tackle the competition faced from other destinations of the north-east region. It neither has the scale or the demand to be effective.

Few hotels will have casinos and few tourists will be involved in it. Gambling is not the unique selling proposition of Meghalaya. Or is the state government thinking of replacing 'natural-beauty' with gambling? That would be suicidal.

To tackle competition there is a need to analyse the strengths and build on them. Identify the opportunities and work on them. The strength is natural-beauty and the opportunities are niche tourism like cuisine, health and wellness. Is the government not looking into these as they are less pleasing to the eyes? But, there is a silver



lining. At least the Government has publicly on record acknowledged that there is competition from others. This can be taken as a start for devising better strategies and policies.

If we go by the 'tourism area life-cycle model', Meghalaya tourism is very well into its development stage (initiation and growth stages are already done). After this, the other two stages are saturation and decline. Theory tells us that the nature of saturation and more importantly decline would depend on the strategies and initiatives undertaken at the development stage. Point being, whatever is done now must add value to the tourism sector. Hence, what value do events like cherry blossom festival add to tourism development? Do they bring responsible and high-spending visitors? Do they promote best business practices and sustainable environmental focus? The answer is all in the negative. As such, it would be best if the

money earmarked for such events are rather effectively spent on the promotion of Meghalaya tourism. Spend the money specifically. If you like, do a tourism surgical strike. It is learned that today Meghalaya is a well sought-after destination by South India. But, there is a lack of awareness about its tourism products and services. Taking advantage of this, the Government may devise an effective promotion campaign of Meghalaya through the print and electronic means. In addition, the money is better spent on providing training to the current stakeholders on best practices and service

properties that call themselves a resort but operate like a homestay/guest house. There are some who position themselves as a lodge but they operate like a hotel and vice versa. Is this a problem? Yes it is. This is because now-a-days tourists are particular about the accommodation that they seek and they pay accordingly. For example, a tourist books a guest house for a stay by paying a certain amount but the services are that of a homestay only. The tourists will be disappointed. On the contrary, a tourist books a homestay accommodation but the services he experienced are nothing short of a hotel. The homestay will make lesser margins. This confusion has to be cleared. The only way to do it is to guide the businesses to name and classify their accommodations according to the services on offer. The tourist will get what they expect and want to experience. Here, the tourism thinkers, strategists and government need to come together and properly structure accommodations in a professional and honest manner. The same goes with food, beverages, transportation, etc. The government may set up a team to do a year-long stock taking of the businesses and come up with a lasting solution.

In the end, many have written and given perspectives on Meghalaya tourism. In summing them up, the suggestions are basically two. First, address the problems of carrying capacity, waste management and service quality. Once these are addressed, many other things like the goal of having high-spending tourists will fall in line. Second, formulate a 'tourism development model' of Meghalaya. Will it be based on community and nature or adventure and wellness or casinos and gambling, etc? Decide now. This will require a proper study by looking at the ground realities and not do things based on guesswork or hunch. It is admitted that most of the suggestions here are unsolicited, but the government would do well to at least examine their feasibility and viability. Else, if things continue the way they are, Meghalaya tourism will not be maintainable into the next generation.

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

quality. Look at possibilities of setting way-side amenities like rest rooms and wash rooms. Spend wisely. In a recent discussion with some youths at the university, there was a feeling that events like cherry blossoms are best left to a consortium of private agencies to engage in. The government may just be a participant/sponsor in the exercise. Well, these boys and girls are not wrong!

If we go by how tourism accommodations are coming up, it is a disaster. For now, let us look at the structural aspect. There is a mix-up of terminology. The proper distinction between a lodge, homestay, bed and breakfast, inn, tavern, guest house, resort, hotel, etc is absent. People are giving whatever name they please and there is no one to check on it. For example, there are many accommodations which call themselves a homestay but their operations and services are like that of a guest house/resort. Similarly, there are

ring? Most of the time the roads in Shillong are jammed with excessive traffic. Whenever the roads are free there is a tendency especially among some bikers to over-speed. As overbridges or subways for crossing the roads are out of question, at least having speed breakers on the roads (with white marks) at vulnerable points may help to reduce the danger of road crossing to a certain extent.

If feasible the concerned authorities may consider this suggestion.

Yours etc.,  
J Bhattacharjee  
Shillong - 4

**On criminalising environment polluters**

Editor,  
The recent meeting called by the EKH District Commissioner Isawanda Laloo with various environment-conscious NGOs, particularly - OCU, My Shillong, My Pride and Rangbah Shnong of various localities, was a great move forward. "EKH DC meets Rangbah Shnong, OCU to accelerate river cleaning effort" ST, 14th Sept).

What OCU's members have done in the past three years has inspired many other groups of people, including several NGOs. It has also become the talk of the town. All schools should encourage their students to actively participate in the river cleaning drive at least once a month. This is the best way to instill environmental awareness

in young minds. As suggested by Rangbah Dong of Nongmangsong D Kurbah, installing CCTV cameras at strategic points is a must. No person has the right to "throw garbage" into the rivers and drains. Such nasty acts must be "criminalised" forthwith with heavy fines and imprisonment. This fact must be advertised through digital and print media. Rejuvenating the streams and rivers alone ensures the healthy environment of the town.

Yes, the government should also consider announcing rewards for those who can secretly take photographs of offenders while they dump garbage in the rivers/drains. Better still if those photos are pasted on the notice boards of offices of District Commissioners, Municipality, Pollution Control Board, and Offices of Superintendent of Police and other Police Beat Houses. "Public shaming" is the most powerful deterrent, and we can get quick results. People should not remain idle when the heat of climate change stares right in the face of civilisation. Anyone contributing to hurting the environment should be dealt with a firm hand. Let's scream in chorus against the environmental polluters.

Yours etc.,  
Saili Gewali,  
(Member, International Human Rights Commission)  
Shillong

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

**Do we Really Care about politics?**

By Nangkyltiew S. Warjri

There is a saying, 'If you are not interested in politics that doesn't mean that politics is not interested in you'. One government after the other, had failed to meet the expectations of the masses. Most of the political parties especially those that are in the Opposition usually take the side of the people whenever the government implements any policy or passes a law which is contrary to public welfare. But after being elected and being in government those same Opposition political parties proceed in the same way as the previous one! This has made people to lose hope in politics as they believe that it being an instrument of change for the betterment of the society and the state at large has failed the people. Their hopes are shattered and they feel it is better not to participate in voting anymore.

There are people who believe that politics remains politics whichever political party or candidate we vote for and there are people who still hold the faith that if we really choose the right party or candidate there will be a change they had hoped for. These two beliefs remain suspended in peoples' minds. Politics is today a subject of discussion not only among adults but also among the youth.

As Meghalaya is heading for the state general elections

representatives. They lack knowledge about how the system works and this led to the increasing role of bureaucracy not only in policy implementation but even at policy making. Though the Constitution of India does not provide any qualification for any candidates to stand for election but choosing and having an educated and committed candidate always makes a difference. In brief, when we look back at history, our leaders during the Hill State movement; the emergence of the middle class and educated leaders to lead the movement always had fruitful results. But today, the manner in which we elect our representatives has muddled the image of our state because of their low performance in delivering good governance and services.

The abysmal number of highly educated leaders of representative in the present legislative assembly and the failure to meet the problems of the public not only make us unhappy but even puts our generation in darkness. However, we cannot ignore the fact that even today, there are still some representatives whose service delivery and conduct matches our expectations.

As we talk about politics in our state, we must take note of our concerns and

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which will take place early next year we see political parties preparing to finalise and declare their candidates for different constituencies in the State. But as a concerned voters and citizens, the question that I would like to ask is, "Do we really care about politics?"

People want change but fail to choose the right candidates. We tend to forget that we are the masters rather than servants. We forget that our vote is our right and therefore we take our votes for granted. We usually point out whenever the government takes any steps that affect the masses while we forget that we can get rid of a government if we choose to. If we want to achieve our dreams for change we must first change ourselves, our mindsets and make sure that our thoughts for positive change can be turned into reality only through our wise votes. Yes, we cannot deny the role of money power during the election period, where candidates purchase votes from the voters. We know for a fact that choosing our representative after taking money from them is like giving away our rights to them to exercise on our behalf. Not only that, taking money and choosing our representative is like encouraging them to engage in activities which involve corruption of public money. During elections they might promise to undertake all kinds of work but as long as we still vote them for money we will end up the same way as we usually have. So, as we dream for a good government to govern our state we as voters must do away with all these negative traits that have given us successive bad governments that do not deliver and which have therefore put us in a worse situation.

Choosing a legislator requires us to do some research and assessment in order to elect the person we need. When we look at the existing MLAs, we find that some of them are not fit to be our

responsibilities. We can no longer take elections for granted. Instead, we need to remember that our vote - a single vote can make a difference. Remember our state is in a critical condition but we still have a chance to rebuild and restore the prestige and fame of Meghalaya as we have in the past, and the unhappy and unsatisfying feeling in us with those who hold the reins presently can only be changed through our votes during election.

In 2023, as concerned citizens we must question ourselves and ask if we care about politics? Caring about politics does not mean we care only about ourselves but for the future generations. Thus, if we care about politics it means we care for our generation by voting for the right representative and the right party to power. Right means when we choose happiness over regret. There will be numerous candidates and political parties that will come to ask for votes. But we must stick to our thoughts that come what may we will choose the best out of them. If we fail to choose the right MLA it is not because of lack of choice but because we lack responsibility.

Once again, if we really want to see the change we wish to see, we will have to change ourselves in a way in which we look around and understand politics. We must give a chance to those candidates who are well educated and have a commitment towards serving the state and not giving any space for money to buy our votes and rule over us. We must vote with care and as responsible citizens as any wrongful decision made by us in 2023 will make us regret that decision all throughout our lives. This wrong choice will take a huge toll from the future generations.

(The writer is a student of Political Science, Synod College, Shillong. Email: nangkyltiew98@gmail.com)

"Nothing is more expensive than a missed opportunity."

— H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

## The Shillong Times

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### Shillong's intractable traffic ordeal

IN the autumn session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, some members of the Opposition wanted the Government, specifically the Transport Minister to inform the House on what blueprint for action has been worked out to address the present intractable and perhaps inscrutable traffic dilemma. The Transport Minister got out of the pickle by claiming that the matter is sub-judice and therefore the House cannot be informed of the Government's action plans. This is a constitutional predicament since all three arms of the Constitution - the legislature, executive and judiciary are equally matched. However, since the primary function of the legislature is to enact laws, it is the basis for the functioning of the other two organs, the executive and the judiciary. The legislature is sometimes given primacy over the executive and judiciary because until and unless laws are enacted, there can be no implementation and application of laws by the other two arms.

It is in fact a matter of grave concern that something as basic as ensuring the smooth movement of traffic should concern the Meghalaya High Court. But the Court had to step in owing to its commitment to public interest and because of the lackadaisical attitude of the Government (read executive) which has had to be pushed to the wall on several public issues before it rose to take action. The traffic chaos in Shillong seems to defy solution but that is because all Governments have resorted to populism instead of taking the bull by the horns and taking far-reaching decisions. The attempt to please a section of voters is what has queered the pitch in Meghalaya. All tough decisions in the larger public good have been shelved for fear of losing popularity. Take for instance the idea of school buses which was mooted by the District Administration, East Khasi Hills some seven years ago. The educational institutions, particularly of the elite variety actually cocked a snook at the suggestion and the Government of the time capitulated because it is beneath the dignity of children of senior government officials and politicians to travel on school buses. Some parents have used the alibi that school buses are unsafe. Yet there are institutions such as the Kendriya Vidyalaya, BSF among others whose students safely commute on school buses. Since the peak school hours are also the time when traffic management becomes a nightmare for the few policemen on the road, schools should therefore be the first targets to be disciplined. Next follow the care users and lawless two wheelers that kill with impunity.

An improved and effective public transport system is imperative to reduce the burden on roads and solve to an extent the traffic ordeal.

Recently while addressing a gathering at the U Soso Tham Auditorium, the Chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Mohan Bhagwat declared that everyone in Meghalaya is a Hindu. According to him, all those who stay in India are part of the Civilization of Bharat whose values have been named as Hindutva. As such all those who reside within it are by default Hindus and do not need conversion. Through this he wanted to allay the fears of people who were worried that the Sangh wanted to convert everyone (including the Khasis) into Hindus. However this is a very wrong reasoning since the Khasis are not Hindus but it is the Hindus who are actually Khasis. This may appear to be a strange statement but in the following paragraphs it will become clearer why this is the case and not the other way round.

According to the Khasi creation myth, in the beginning there stood a tall tree in a hill (today located along the Shillong-Guwahati road) called Sohpet-Bneng. The tree was so tall that its branches reached the sky. Earth at this time was uninhabited by people except for the trees and flowers that grew in abundance. It was this beauty which attracted the heavenly beings to often visit the place. To descend upon Earth these beings used the tree as a staircase. In fact Sohpet-Bneng means navel of heaven.

These heavenly beings found that the land around the tree was very fertile and started cultivating it. Altogether there were 16 families who would come down to Earth for cultivation. However they never stayed for the night. After the work was done they would promptly return to heaven. Now according to the version provided in the 1920 book 'Folk tales of the Khasis' by Rafy there was one heavenly being who wanted to remain back on Earth to realize his own ambitions. So one day when only 7 of the 16 families went down to cultivate he took his axe and cut down the tree leaving the 7 families stranded on Earth. Having no way left to return, these 7 families decided to stay on Earth. It is from these 7 families i.e., the Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum (the seven huts) that all nations on Earth are said

## By Bhogtoram Mawroh

to have sprung. These seven families who came down from Heaven to stay on Earth became known as the seven sub-tribes of the Khasis, viz., War, Jaintia/Pnar, Lynggam, Maram, Diko, Khyntiam and Bhoi, i.e., the Hynniewtrep people. All the groups except one are still found to be residing in specific locations around Meghalaya. The only sub-tribe which has become lost with time is the Diko. There have been speculations as to who this group might now be, with some suggesting that it denotes the Garos who also follow the matrilineal customs. However, in my opinion, since all the six groups have been accounted for in Meghalaya the last group are what we today call

*According to the Khasi creation myth, in the beginning there stood a tall tree in a hill (today located along the Shillong-Guwahati road) called Sohpet-Bneng. The tree was so tall that its branches reached the sky. Earth at this time was uninhabited by people except for the trees and flowers that grew in abundance.*

the non-Khasis, i.e., every other group in the world. This is because all human beings were once staying in heaven and only the 7 families who came down populated the Earth. Out of the seven, six are currently the ones which make the Khasi people today. So the remaining people on Earth are actually all the non-Khasis who came from the lost tribe, i.e., the Diko.

As the Dikos left Meghalaya and wandered to different corners of the Earth they divided themselves into distinct cultural groups. One of those groups are the Hindus who today are found spread throughout the Indian sub-continent. Although they had become distinct in their traditions, the Hindus still looked up to the Khasis (who still stayed closer to the now destroyed stairway to heaven) when creating some of their customs. The story of U Manik Raitong from the same book gives a clue how that happened.

A long time ago there lived a great Syiem (Khasi King) who ruled over vast territories and great many people. This King had a beautiful wife, the Mahadei. Within his kingdom also lived a poor

the hut of U Raitong. Upon gazing on him and hearing his sweet music she instantly fell in love with him.

Many months later the Syiem came back from his travels to find that the Mahadei had given birth to a son. Knowing that the child could not be from him and afflicted with grief and shame, he vowed to extract extreme penalty on the person who sullied his honour. He called a great durbar where all the inhabitants of his realm were invited to come to take part in a test. All those who came were ordered to offer a plantain to the baby who, it was reasoned, will accept one only from the real father. U Raitong did not come first because of his vow but was ordered to come for the test. And surely when U Raitong offered the plantain the baby took it, thereby proving him to be the father.

Enraged the Syiem ordered him to be burnt alive on the pyre. U Raitong did not protest and only asked that he be allowed to build his own pyre and play his own dirge. Having donned his fine robes he walked into the pyre playing his melodious tunes. Hearing the music, the Mahadei who had been confined to her room, burst through the door and ran towards the pyre. Upon reaching it, she threw herself in the fire to die with her lover. On learning of this, the chaste wives of India, i.e., Hindus, decided that they could not allow this sacrifice to be more famous than the holy bonds of matrimony. Hence, they would now offer themselves on the pyre of their husbands to prove their devotion and fidelity.

And thus the custom of Sati was born. What the Khasi creation myth and the story of U Manik Raitong proves is that all the non-Khasis in the world are actually descended from the lost Khasi sub-tribe, the Diko which includes the Hindus. Since the Hindus still stayed close to the Khasis they continued to look up to the latter for guidance in creating their customs and traditions, Sati being one example. So when Mohan Bhagwat says that everyone is a Hindu, he is wrong. What he should have said instead is that everyone, not just in India but throughout the world, is a Khasi. That would have been the correct statement.

Now it happened that because of affairs of state the Syiem would often be gone for long periods leaving the Mahadei behind. On one such night, when the Mahadei was restless she heard the faint sounds of music wafting through the night breeze. At first she thought it was the fairies signing. But after hearing the same strains for many nights she proceeded to the source of the music. Soon she found herself in front of

## Do we have the political will to solve the Shillong traffic imbroglio

By Toki Blah

I refer here to the Letter to the Editor "Road Rage Kills" (ST Sept 24, 2022) by one Mohitosh Chakravarty. One read this missive with a deep sense of sadness accompanied with that sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach that this will not be the last time such a distressing incident happens but that perhaps it is just a precursor of worst things to come. Truth is Shillong streets have become the most dangerous public places on the face of the earth. Let's face it and accept the grim reality that they have become death traps for the unwary, especially for pedestrians. The reasons for this are many. Narrow footpaths of the city, meant for two abreast, are now occupied by hawkers (who apparently due to an ass of a law have the Right to Livelihood on spaces that are specifically meant to protect the Right to Life of those of us who are unfortunate enough not to possess a car). This forces the hapless pedestrian onto even narrower roads buzzing not

central server which in turn will determine whether the vehicle is legally permitted or not to ply. Secondly, these same sensors will monitor the speed limit within the city. 20 KmPH is better than not moving at all. The monitoring mechanism will provide police with the number of vehicles who violate this rule. It is disgusting to see two wheelers fly as if they are competing on Le Mans instead of sensible driving on a congested road. Thirdly, with the help of the monitoring system and the foot traffic constable, two wheelers should be strictly restricted to obey traffic rules and not drive on any side of the road. When traffic comes to a halt, they should fall in line behind standing vehicles and not occupy every available empty space. The absence of traffic sense especially in two wheelers is one of the major factors leading to traffic snarls in Shillong. If Mizoram can instill discipline and road sense in its drivers, why not Meghalaya. Fourthly, no vehicle will be

*"We can't expand the roads because of the absence of a Municipality to enforce the Roadside Land Control Rules 1964 which in brief stipulates that no building should be allowed within 60 ft from the centre of a road. We are limited, constrained and inhibited by our own lack of vision and please accept that there is very little the Police can do and that it is unfair to blame them for their inability to improve traffic within the phenomenon of a crumbling urban infrastructure."*

only with four wheelers but criss-crossed with speeding unruly two wheelers who believe that any vacant space, on the right of the road or on the wrong side of the road is theirs to transgress and speed on. We can't expand the roads because of the absence of a Municipality to enforce the Roadside Land Control Rules 1964 which in brief stipulates that no building should be allowed within 60 ft from the centre of a road. We are limited, constrained and inhibited by our own lack of vision and please accept that there is very little the Police can do and that it is unfair to blame them for their inability to improve traffic within the phenomenon of a crumbling urban infrastructure. Five years hence I foresee a situation where vehicular movement within the roads of Shillong will become not only a nightmare but an impossibility.

So is there a way out? Perhaps but it will depend

registered, and if already registered will lose registration if it cannot prove it has a parking place aside from a road. Fifthly, only one light vehicle per person per family will be allowed. Again sounds very drastic; will affect the right to property but should be done for the benefit and convenience of the larger public.

Last but not least it is the duty and responsibility of an elected Municipal Board/ Corporation (a term that seems to carry a dirty connotation in Shillong. Why is unclear) to provide parking spaces, embarking and disembarking points; improvement of drains, laying of water pipes etc. This brings in coordinated Urban development within one single empowered authority. Dorbars are unable to do this. We must accept that fact. In Shillong different departments with no responsibilities, links or sense of cooperation with one another carry our development

*"The monitoring mechanism will provide police with the number of vehicles who violate this rule. It is disgusting to see two wheelers fly as if they are competing on Le Mans instead of sensible driving on a congested road. Thirdly, with the help of the monitoring system and the foot traffic constable, two wheelers should be strictly restricted to obey traffic rules and not drive on any side of the road."*

on a strong political will especially a united political will of those MLAs whom we elect to make Laws (irrespective of party affiliations) who hail from Shillong and adjacent constituencies. We need strong and stringent traffic laws for Shillong. There is no need to reinvent the wheel but following effective and workable traffic laws from more sensible cities will be of big help. Firstly, all vehicles beyond 10 years old should be banned from our roads. They become scrap. Sounds drastic but it has been employed in cities like Singapore, Bangkok with great success. Electronic sensors placed at strategic roads will catch and register the number of each passing vehicle. relay the same to a

works. Result- damaged roads that belong to no one. So if we are serious about Shillong becoming once again a livable city, then harsh but realistic measures need to be taken. We cannot go on living in the settlement and habitation concept of our forefathers. They never had to deal with a city. We do and we have to come up with laws appropriate with our expectations from such Urban habitation. Otherwise Shillong is going to become the biggest slum in Asia.

It's true the Police are there to control traffic but we as citizens and the Law Makers must provide them the Legal and Social infrastructure to work in. Otherwise let's forget and from now onwards keep quiet about Shillong Traffic dilemmas.

## Letters to the Editor

### Drinking water straight from the tap

Editor,  
This is with reference to Salil Gwali's letter, "Uncaring attitude of PHED" (ST, Sep 19, 2022) where he writes, "muddy water with oily substance continues to spout out from the PHE water pipes," and the consequences that the public in general and the under privileged in particular have to suffer on a daily basis. In his letter Gwali had also referred to A N Khar-mawphlang's letter, "Non-potable water in 21st century Meghalaya" (ST, Aug 09, 2022) where the writer questions, "If the Govt in 50 years has not been able to provide the residents of the city with clean, pure water, then what are we celebrating 50 years of statehood for.....". As another resident of Shillong city who has faced and is still suffering this same fate for the last many years I would like to make the following observations.

When I read about how citizens of several developed countries drink water directly from the tap, it makes me wonder when we in Meghalaya will be able to achieve such levels of progress in governance especially in this particular field of human activity. So I ponder at the situation we are in till today, it's just by God's grace that we have survived so far.

But then I remember reading the comment in the media by our former Chief Minister, Dr Mukul Sangma in 2013 that so far as development is concerned, compared to other states we are years behind and when compared to other developed nations of the world, Meghalaya is centuries behind. I ask myself therefore as to when will my children and grandchildren be able to drink water directly from the tap.

But why can't it happen in my lifetime? On July 27, 2021 the Chief Minister of Odisha Naveen Patnaik inaugurated the, "Drink from Tap project" making the city of Puri the first city in India to provide "high quality drinking water directly from the tap on a 24-hour basis." According to the Chief Minister, the residents and tourist visiting Puri will not need to move around with water bottles and "Puri would no longer be burdened with 400 metric tonnes of plastic waste annually." He also added, "Our effort to ensure availability of pure drinking water is important for the good health of the people." This project is currently being expanded to other cities and urban centres of Odisha.

If Odisha can do it in Puri why not in a small state like ours beginning with Shillong as part of the 'smart city' project? It all depends on the political will of those in power and the farsightedness and wisdom of the voters

who put them there.  
Yours etc.,  
Michael N. Syiem  
Via email

### West Bengal's recruitment scam!

Editor,  
The arrest of Bengal's Industries & Commerce minister Partha Chatterjee by the ED (Enforcement Department) on July 23rd, 2022 for his alleged involvement in the School Service Commission recruitment scam, has made TMC's sworn adversaries, especially the BJP in a great mood. But this has also embarrassed Mamata Banerjee, the Bengal Chief Minister, no end. Reportedly, there are many more Bengal ministers who are currently under the ED's scanner and have to face identical fates. If these unethical misdeeds are proved to be true, such representatives ought to be severely punished as per the laws of the land. Hence, Prime Minister Modi must be rightly acclaimed for living up to his commitment, "Na khaunga na khane dunga".

However, in my interaction with some senior citizens they have queried on why one of the biggest recruitment embezzlements called Vyapam scam unearthed in 2013 that took place in Madhya Pradesh, which was then and even now, ruled by the Saffron party, the same legal zeal of

the ED, as seen in Bengal, not pursued? This scam dwarfed, they say, Bengal's alleged scam. Evidently such colossal frauds could not have occurred without the knowledge of those at the helm of power. In these social machinations Rs 2000 crores is believed to have been exchanged as bribes, decades ago. Perhaps to bury this gargantuan misdemeanor, 40 accused and potential witnesses met with mysterious deaths. They were mostly of relatively young ages of 25 to 30 years. They died mostly in road accidents. It was reported that 23 victims died of unnatural deaths! Perchance, someone may have said, 'dead men tell no tales.' In the aftermath of these unethical misdeeds the then BJP Chief minister's image was tarnished and thus BJP lost a lot of its moral sheen, belying Modi's much trumpeted utterance: "Na khaunga na khane dunga".

Ironically, as wonders never cease, defending the Government, the then MP, Home Minister B. Gaur had sarcastically asserted that, "Whoever is born has to die one day." God forbid, that such mysterious deaths do not recur in West Bengal!

Yours etc.,  
Jerome K. Diengdoh,  
Shillong-2

### Humane sportspersons

Editor,  
Last Saturday two great sportspersons hung up their

boots. One is twenty grand slam winner Swiss tennis legend Roger Federer and the other is the highest wicket taker in international women's cricket our very own cricket legend Jhulan Goswami. Flowing tears of Rafael Nadal after Roger Federer's farewell match in London tells us how great Roger Federer is not only as a sports person but also as a human being. Interestingly the same touching scene also happened on the same day also in London when India's cricket Captain Harmanpreet Kaur could not hold her tears before Jhulan Goswami's farewell match at Lord's. This also speaks a lot about Jhulan Goswami as a person and as a team member. These two golden moments are to be remembered.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

### Worsening traffic jams

Editor,  
As a commuter, having to use the Rhino Point on one's way towards the Civil Hospital, every single day, I wish to share the agony and frustration that creeps into my tortured mind. It's been a very long time now that vehicles coming from Last Bus Stop are made to take a U Turn from Anjalee Petrol Pump, reach Rhino Point again and then move towards Civil Hospital. The traffic arrangement here was perhaps an attempt to prevent traffic

congestion along this route. Ironically, we experience a more stubborn traffic jam along that route especially in the morning during school hours. At times it takes vehicles 10 - 15 minutes to get back to Rhino Point. For those of us who have to proceed towards Civil Hospital and onwards, to be made to go all the way from Anjalee Petrol Pump and be stranded in traffic is an absolute waste of time. To beat the traffic, if vehicles try to use the route via the Cantonment area, they are not allowed to do so by the army personnel. One time when I had used this route I was made to reverse my vehicle when I reached the gate at the Civil Hospital point making it even more cumbersome and frustrating. I am certain that this is a dilemma faced by all commuters who are using this road day in and day out.

I simply wish to make the following suggestions:

1. Why not allow vehicles going towards Civil Hospital take a right turn at Rhino Point like before? Such vehicles will not add up to the congestion.

2. If the route via the cantonment area can be made open for public vehicles as before, it would be of great help to us citizens.

Yours etc.,  
Jennifer Dkhar,  
Via email

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"A creative man is motivated by the desire to achieve, not by the desire to beat others."

—Ayn Rand

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 49 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2022

### Opening up of SC

WHAT'S constant is change. What remains stagnant erodes in strength over time. So too with our systems, most of which were put in place shortly after Independence 75 years ago. Change therefore is the order of things. India's judiciary, which retained its systems with rare zeal all these years, will have to change with the times too and make itself more responsive to the people's aspirations. The society today is vastly different from that of the 1950s. Those who fail to understand the need for change are those who are comfortable with the system or who derive undue benefits from them. They obviously have a vested interest in carrying forward with what's stale. In this context, the historic first formal live-streaming of the Supreme Court proceedings on Tuesday comes as a whiff of fresh air.

In a test case, the proceedings before the ceremonial bench on the date of retirement of the former CJI NV Ramana were live-streamed in August. The system was further tested in the last two days and was found to be implementable. In fact, the Supreme Court order favouring live telecast of the proceedings in matters of constitutional importance was delivered in 2018. The matter, after a long lull, was taken forward by a unanimous decision of the apex court the other day by present CJI, UU Lalit, to start this process from September 27. This was the same day the original decision was taken four years ago. Implementation of decisions here takes its own sweet time as those who run the nation have set a slow pace for themselves. When offices begin functioning from 8am in most nations, the working hours here start from 10 am, or 9 am in some segments. This is only a reflection of the lethargy that marks our life.

Selective live-streaming of court proceedings, now in respect of constitution bench cases, is fine for a start but the cause must be taken forward. Courts in India are "sacred" and no criticism is allowed. This does not mean there is no reason to criticise courts. As long as judges retained a halo of being fair-minded and beyond influences, this was fine. But, even the last CJI, Ramana, exited from office recently with a baggage of serious allegations, one of these being that he took land costing Rs 250 crore for free from the Telangana government. The 'crores for bail' bribe scandal of the past is fresh in our minds. All these go to stress that more transparency in the functioning of Indian courts is most welcome in these times of a crisis of confidence in the system.

# NEHU and NEP 2020

By H. Srikanth

During the last one year, NEHU has taken several initiatives for implementation of the New Education Policy, 2020. Many talks, seminars, and workshops were organized on NEP 2020. The university endorsed CUET and CUCET for admission of the students. It constituted a core committee to design the curriculum for Undergraduate (UG) and Postgraduate (PG) courses. After considerable deliberations, the committee has come out with a draft curriculum structure for UG and PG. The curriculum was placed at the Committee meeting of Heads and Deans. The administration instructed departments to prepare syllabi under the draft curriculum. As per the NEHU Ordinance, all changes in the curriculum and syllabi are to be approved by the Academic Council. Hence, the Committee members and even the teachers association have requested the university to place the matter for discussion and approval in the AC. Informed and meaningful deliberations become possible when all stakeholders are aware of the proposed changes and their implications.

At the outset, it is necessary to know that the UGC's National Curriculum Guidelines focus primarily on UG programs. Some central universities like Delhi University have designed the UG curriculum and syllabi, and have expressed the intention to implement it from this academic year. No initiative is taken even in these universities for introduction of NEP in the PG programs, as the UGC is yet to come out with clear guidelines. Given that the PG program is a logical extension of the UG, it makes better sense to implement NEP 2020 first in the UG before one introduces it in the PG programs.

Implementing the NEP curriculum and syllabi at the UG level is easier in universities like Delhi University, or even in the University of Hyderabad, which run five-year integrated UG-PG programs in different departments. However, in NEHU, where the university is under central government, but the UG colleges are under the administrative and financial control of the state government, implementation becomes a little complicated. In Meghalaya, there are different UG colleges—some located in cities and some in semi-urban and rural areas; some with adequate infrastructure and permanent affiliation, and others with limited infrastructure and temporary affiliation. Given the diversity, there is a need

for proper consultation with the college managements to know whether they are all capable of implementing the NEP curricula and syllabi at the UG level. If consultations take place only with premier city based colleges, one does not get a complete picture. We have seen how the decision on CUET boomeranged when proper consultations did not take place.

When the UGC comes out with clear guidelines on the national curriculum for PG, it will be easy to come out with curriculum and syllabi for the PG programs. Right at this moment, what NEHU has come out with is only a draft curriculum designed by a committee constituted by the university. The committee, in its proposal for a two-year PG program, suggested inclusion of one multidisciplinary course, one skill enhancement course, and proposed one full semester for dissertation. It is

modifications here and there, the departments will be compelled to package and fit the existing syllabi in the new curriculum structure. Such an exercise will end up as old wine in a new bottle, and serves no purpose in imparting new knowledge.

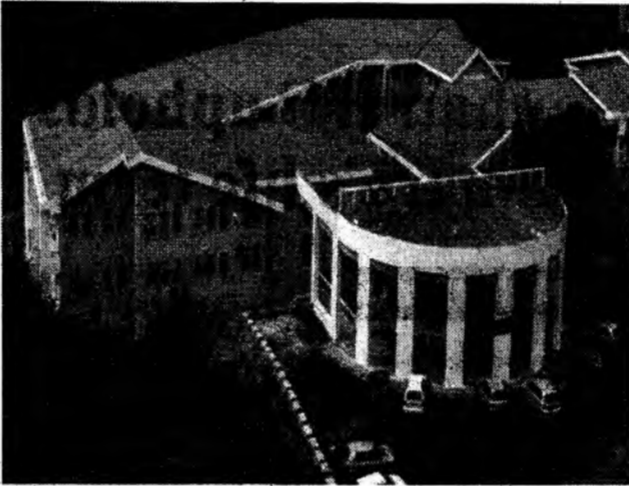
The introduction and administration of skill-based courses at UG and PG levels are going to be a herculean task. One is not sure what skills are to be imparted and who will administer the skill-based courses. Given the paucity of teachers, it will be too much to expect them to take the additional responsibility of imparting skill based courses. The teachers may be good in their respective subjects, but most of them don't know how to impart skills. Skills are not something that can be acquired by reading books and articles. Skills involve knowledge that one learns through years

of a dissertation also requires a thorough discussion. In practice, a semester means only four months. Flexibility in curriculum is required if all requirements of dissertation—from the problem identification, review of literature, synopsis writing, collection and analysis of data, to dissertation writing—should be fulfilled. It is also necessary to spell out who would evaluate these dissertations—the teachers in the departments, or experts from outside. Given the vacancies in teaching positions, it becomes difficult for existing teachers to guide so many dissertations when they are to carry on the normal teaching and administrative duties? The AC should address these practical problems associated with research guidance.

The university probably needs more time to think and address these issues and problems associated with the implementation of the NEP. The argument that NEHU will secure better ranking if it implements the NEP is faulty, for, none of the high ranking and leading central universities in the country—JNU, Hyderabad, Jamia Millia, Aligarh, Pondicherry—have gone for implementation of the NEP at PG level. It is by strengthening the infrastructure, by filling up the vacant faculty positions and by increasing the academic publications and activities in the university that NEHU will be able to enhance its NIRF ranking. Faulty and hasty implementation of the NEP will neither increase the ranking, nor help improve the quality of higher education in the state. Education is not a race. No university will be showered with laurels or receive additional grants, only because it is among the first ones to implement the NEP. The experience of CUET / CUCET experience at national level cautions us to wait and watch how things move and not jump into the bandwagon without adequate preparation.

Being a central university, NEHU does not have the privilege of opting out of the NEP, 2020. However, it has the option to choose alternatives available within the structure of the NEP and decide on the nature and pace of implementation, keeping in view the logistics at the ground level. Responsible academic administrators are expected to take all precautions to ensure that the changes that they seek to enforce shall improve the quality of education and benefit the generation of students who seek admission in higher education.

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not yet sure yet whether the National Curriculum for PG would be on similar lines. If it is going to be different, the exercise will end up as futile. It is necessary to have parity across the universities in matters relating to academic calendar, credits, papers offered and tenure of dissertation. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to put into practice the NEP's idea of transfer of credits across the institutions.

Mere change in the curriculum structure serves no purpose if the syllabi are not updated to suit the new requirements. But any meaningful syllabus revision requires considerable deliberations and consultations. Earlier, when NEHU went from annual system to semester system for the UG program, all that it did was to divide the one year syllabus into two parts and fit them in the semester pattern. The same process is likely to be repeated if the university insists on implementing the NEP in the ensuing academic year. With little or superficial

of practice in the concerned craft. Teachers teaching History, Philosophy and Education cannot impart training in tailoring or carpentry. Similarly, those who are not leaders themselves cannot impart leadership skills to the students, and those who are not creative writers cannot pass on creative writing skills to their students. More deliberations are needed at the university and college levels to understand which skill-based courses are useful and possible to impart. It will be counter-productive if the university pushes ordinary academic papers as vocational or skill enhancement courses. One should discuss how the departments implement these courses when the universities and colleges don't have infrastructure and expertise to serve such unfamiliar courses. Appropriate government agencies, NGOs and experts should be roped in to administer vocational and skill-enhancement courses.

The proposal to devote one semester at the PG level

## Shaking up India's Grand Old Party

By Jagdish Rattanani

The late senior Congress leader and General Secretary Vitthalrao N. Gadgil once sought to explain how much the Congress was embedded into the fabric of the nation by a single statement: Go to any village in India, he said, and you will find three permanent fixtures—the postman, the policeman and the Congress party. That was of course a long, long time ago. But as long as some kind of connection with the grassroots was alive, the party had a system to read, connect and build its base and ground its agenda in the people. That connection was eroded over time, and led to a further and accelerated decline as a bureaucrat, much acclaimed at one time, was handed the controls by the Congress and ruled for two terms that finally ended with the BJP becoming the dominant party of the nation. Under Dr. Manmohan Singh, a career bureaucrat, there could be no connection with the last mile. His game was to manage up. The economic crisis meant that the reforms he launched under his predecessor P V Narasimha Rao had to be placed on an even keel. In the process, the language and the emphasis of the government, and of the Congress party willy-nilly, changed from talking about the people at the grass roots to the language of liberalisation and privatisation and globalisation—all of which had nothing to do with the vast mass of India. Dr. Singh often visited Mumbai but never could hold a mass rally to meet with everyday party workers. More common was a lunch meeting at the Cricket Club of India, arranged by the then Mumbai party chief and businessman Murlidhar Deora.

It is important to recall some of this narrative as the Congress seeks to open

up, hold elections and have a democratically elected leader take charge of the party. This is an important milestone in the history of India's GOP. The party needs change, internal democracy will do it a world of good, dynastic control is of course a problem but none of this points to the deep collapse of a party that is seen to have turned away from the needs and aspirations of the ordinary people and the toiling classes. The Congress did do many course corrections; it went aggressive, for example, on the right to work with MNREGA, the school mid-day meal schemes but the tone and tenor could not be changed. The narrative stayed of a party turning away from the poor and the downtrodden, enmeshed in corruption and engaged in pursuits of powerbrokers rather than peasants. The result is a party at the bottom of India's political heap.

The Congress today needs a head who can make some fundamental changes and offer a clear alternative to the current dispensation. First, of course, it must reunite the nation, a theme akin to the 'Bharat-jodo' yatra of Rahul Gandhi, but it also needs a new narrative on the economy, a new narrative on peace, non-violence and sustainable growth. All of this has to be taken as a well packaged message to the people of India, notably in the northern States where the party has taken a beating and ceded all ground to the BJP. Shashi Tharoor, who has turned up as an aspirant for the position of Congress President, is not that person. He may be suave, well-meaning and well spoken. But he represents the G-23, which is not to be opposed because they spoke up against the Congress leadership but must be recognised and named as a subset of the same failed group whose members acquired power because of the party and contributed very little to its growth. Tharoorisms are good for a twitter feed; they cannot win votes, connect with the masses or stitch together a powerful new narrative that is a desperate need of the hour. That Tharoor thinks he can or should stand for the position in itself shows how much removed from the challenge before the Congress he or his sympathisers might be.

Curiously, the person doing good work just at this time is Rahul Gandhi with

*"The economic crisis meant that the reforms he launched under his predecessor P V Narasimha Rao had to be placed on an even keel. In the process, the language and the emphasis of the government, and of the Congress party willy-nilly, changed from talking about the people at the grass roots to the language of liberalisation and privatisation and globalisation—all of which had nothing to do with the vast mass of India."*

the nationwide walkathon that is underway. He has called it a 'tapasya', or penance, as he tries to reconnect with the masses, read the mood and discover how he and the party can explain the steep decline of the nation into a climate of hate and division. Rahul Gandhi's language is looking good, his statements carry meaning and while the real test will come as he enters the north of the nation, right now it appears that a rather strong narrative is taking shape. Quite simply, it says, an attack on fellow Indians is an attack on India; the flag must be respected but also the values that the national tricolour stands for. Some of these are clean and simple themes that can go far in helping re-build the party and the nation. Needless to say, the party must simultaneously go through the internal election, place an elected head at the helm and go on to build more positions that are democratically filled. In the end, the party will gravitate towards those who are connected with the people and can bring in the votes. If the 'Bharat-jodo' yatra continues to earn the goodwill it has thus far, that leader down the line and over the years may well be Rahul Gandhi but then he can rightfully claim to have earned the position and not got it as a birth right.

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### Letters to the Editor

#### Plaque of renowned educationists at Laitumkrah Rotary

Editor,  
Through your esteemed newspaper, I would urge upon the State Government and the Shillong Municipal Board that since the rotary at Laitumkrah Police Point is being refurbished and since the area is host to some of the most renowned schools and colleges of the state and the NE region, the monuments, statues or plaques honouring eminent educationists and poets such as Rev Thomas Jones, U Soso Tham and Rev Fr Hopeful Elias Khariang should find a place there. This will serve as a befitting tribute and memorial for the contributions made by these intellectual stalwarts for the people of Ka Bri U Hyniewtrep. Rev Thomas Jones gave the Khasis the written alphabet; Soso Tham is remembered for his graphic poems on Khasi society and Rev Fr H Elias was a Khasi poet, critic and author. It would also be befitting to remember the first settlers of the then Laitumkrah Village before the Salvatorians fathers bought 'U Lum

Tyngkong'.  
Such a plaque at the heart of the busy educational hub of the state will mark a new beginning to the learning ecosystem at a time when the State is celebrating 50 years of statehood.

Yours etc.,  
Wankitbok Pohshna  
Laitumkrah

#### Read the Khasi folk tales Mr Bhagwat

Editor,  
The special article, "Khasis are not Hindus, Hindus are Khasis," by Bhogtoram Mawroh, (ST September 27, 2022), is an excellent write-up. Mawroh has based his arguments on the 1920 book, "Folk Tales of the Khasis" by K.U.Rafy which has been digitized by Internet Archive in 2007 with funding from Microsoft Corporation. I am in sync with the argument of Mr Mawroh who has rightly concluded that Mohan Bhagwat is wrong to say that everyone is a Hindu and that instead he should have said everyone is a Khasi. Through this letter I would urge Mr Bhagwat to read the "Folk Tales of the Khasis" by K.U.Rafy which is available for free at [www.archive.org/details/](http://www.archive.org/details/)

folktalesofkhasi.00rafyrich/page/n1/mode/2up. This would help him to gain insights about the Khasis.

Yours etc.,  
Gordon Wahlang  
Via email

#### Full & correct disclosure important

Editor,  
This is to further place a comment on the recent letter, "Illegalsities /irregularities in Govt appointments" (ST, September 26, 2022). It is indeed a matter to be appreciated that some concerned citizens have had the courage to unearth the "illegalsities /irregularities in appointments to various Government departments and Directorates. The concerned citizen(s) must have put in a lot of effort in doing so and we do need such tofcbearers to keep the officials in the system on their toes; not to frighten them or threaten but simply to spread the message of justice and ensure appointments on merit and capabilities. However, in doing so, may I also place a request to all such concerned citizens that prior to such publications they need to conduct proper ground survey. I am not here

to speak on behalf of any Department/Organization/Directorate, but simply questioning the modus operandi adopted by the concerned citizen in approaching the two named Directorates. Let's take the Directorate of Food Processing. Was any RTI filed to the Department on that matter? Did he/she find any abnormalities? Do he/she know who the "relatives and friends of higher ups" are? Can he/she state how many have been appointed with full pay and how many on contractual basis? Are they connected to the higher ups?

The concerned citizen should do a background check and verify the claims made. Start off by checking how many staff are employed at present and also seek the advertisement for their recruitment. If these appear to be in order then I am sorry to say that the letter has misguided me and a lot of readers, especially the hopefuls who were supposed to look up to people such as you. Let us all be ethical in our criticism but also with a strong proof, else we would be shamed if we cannot justify our allegations. In short, let us not use this platform to misguide the readers.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

#### Voice against PHED muddy water

Editor,  
I also wish to add to their voices of Salil Gwali, AN Kharnawphlang and Michael N. Syiem on the issue of muddy piped water and the irresponsible management of the PHED of Meghalaya. As Gwali has pointed out in his previous letter, "Uncaring attitude of PHED" (Sept 19, 2022), I also believe that this public health office of Meghalaya has incurred negative karma. It has committed a grave sin by making innocent people, who cannot raise their voices, drink contaminated muddy water. The condition in Upper Mawpream area is worse, particularly during rainy days. Is it not shameful that in the 20th century we are condemned to drink dirty water? What are all our leaders doing if the public is not safe and is forced to live like in the primitive days? How can our leaders enjoy five-star facilities when they cannot fulfil the basic needs of the poor public?  
I also call upon the Hon'ble High Court and all the vocal Opposition leaders like Mukul Sangma, George Lyngdoh, HM Shangpiang to take this matter seriously

in the larger interest of the public. Most of the people living below poverty line cannot afford any kind of water filters as pointed out by Gwali. They also cannot boil water to kill harmful germs since the price of a gas cylinder is increasing day by day. The Government should do a survey and take full account of the ground realities, particularly concerning how poor people are living life. What Michael Syiem has said is cent percent correct. We are just surviving by the grace of God amidst all these callous government authorities.

I am also thankful to The Shillong Times, which has become the voice of the voiceless. Through this public platform, the 'letter to the editor' column, the public should expose the anomalies in the departments concerned. My point is also that educated people should not remain silent. They should put pen to paper and write against a system that does not deliver. This is what democracy demands.

Yours etc.,  
Rupesh R. Nath,  
Shillong

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"Cultural inequality is not grounded in race or ethnicity."

— Charles Murray

## The Shillong Times

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### Time to right historical wrongs

ON September 25, the RSS Chief, Mohan Bhagwat who was on a visit to Meghalaya made a bizarre statement at a public function. He claimed that everyone living in 'Bharat' is a Hindu and there was no need to convert anyone from this stated position. For the tribal people of Meghalaya whose integration and initiation into the Indian political system began in 1948 after the Khasi chieftains signed the Instrument of Accession (IoA) under questionable circumstances, Bhagwat's histrionics naturally caused outrage. Bhagwat was speaking at a public function largely attended by adherents of the local RSS and members of the BJP.

From his statements it can be gleaned that Mohan Bhagwat does not have a rounded understanding of the state and people of Meghalaya other than that fed by acolytes from the local RSS. For a very long time the Khasi-Pnar people who did not embrace Christianity were, for want of a better official description, simply labelled as "Hindus" in official documents where individuals have to declare their religious affiliations. This has stuck on and resulted in those holding fast to their indigenous faith practices being deprived of scholarships from the Ministry of Minority Affairs. Hence it is religion, not ethnicity that determines one's minority status and which is patently unjust because those following the indigenous faith are as backward, poor and in need of financial assistance for their education as those belonging to minority religious groups such as Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Buddhists etc. That this patent injustice has continued for 75 years without any public representatives being able to convince the Central Government that this needs rectification also shows just how weak and fragmented the voices of the North Eastern representatives in Parliament are.

It merits mention that Late JJM Nichols Roy argued vehemently in favour of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution even when fellow members of the Constitution Drafting Committee from Assam tried to checkmate him. The Sixth Schedule has stood the tribals who are pitted against a majority non-tribal population of Assam in those days, in good stead insofar as safeguarding their cultures and practices are concerned. But it perhaps never occurred even to the astute Nichols Roy that such a situation would emerge when a section of the tribals who held on to their indigenous faith practices would be deprived of their minority status merely because of a wrong nomenclature. It is pointless to debate Mohan Bhagwat's absurd statement. As an RSS heavyweight his brief is to assert the superiority of Hindus and fuse it with the semantics of Bharat - the ancient name of this country that certainly excluded these hills. Instead, what needs to be done is to right the wrongs of history and restore to the people of the Indigenous faith - Niam Khasi, Niam Tre, their rightful place in the Constitution.

# Meghalaya Reservation Policy: Adjustment of Competing Claims

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

As bound by duty, the MLA of 17 North Shillong had moved the adjournment motion in the Assembly and also made public his views on the Reservation Policy. Unfortunately, on both occasions he was not able to expound his idea of "review and revamp" in concrete terms. Whereas his other colleagues seem to have no clue and perhaps some vested interests are taking a communal position on the issue which will only create discord amongst the communities it intends to serve.

Apart from the many ills, one good thing which can be credited to the past Ministers/Legislators (Khasi, Garo as well as others) were their efforts to maintain the mutual respect and sensibilities in critical matter like reservations. The series of Office Memoranda on Reservations notified by various governments reflected their magnanimity and commitment to the belief that Reservation should foremostly serve the last and the least.

There are three aspects in the debates on State's Reservation Policy, viz: (i) historical (ii) execution vis a vis the formulae and (iii) roster system. The Reservation Policy of Meghalaya can be considered as the historical agreement made between the two dominant tribes, the Hynniewtrep and Achik, and for the benefit of other smaller tribes and minority communities in the State as well. It is evident that the informed decision was taken by the Government then as references were made to important judicial decisions by High Courts and Supreme Court of India on the subject matter, one of which was the majority judgement made by Justice Gajendragadkar in the case, the General Manager, Southern Railways vs Rangachari on 28 April, 1961, where he observed that Article 16 (4) requires the State to satisfy that backward class of citizens were not adequately represented in its services.

It is amply clear that representation is the principle for reservations in the State and the Government's resolution Dated 12 January 1972 reads- "... keeping in view the inadequacy of representation of these communities in the services under the autonomous State of Meghalaya in terms of their population that, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency in administration, the following reservation shall be made in favour of Schedule Tribes and Schedule Castes... (a) there shall be a reservation of 40% of vacancies in favour of Khasi and Jaintia (b) There shall be reservation of 40% of vacancies in favour of Garos

(c) there shall be reservation of 5% of vacancies in favour of any other Schedule Tribes of Autonomous Districts of Assam now within Meghalaya and Schedule Castes of Assam"

The Government of Meghalaya had also prescribed the working formula or system based on which the Policy, which is as delicate, complex and sensitive as Reservation, is to be implemented. Therefore, paragraphs 2 to 6 of the original Office Memorandum Dated 12 January 1972 contained the said formula or system which has to be adhered to by every appointing authority. However, the question remains as to whether the formula helped the policy to achieve the objectives, it was framed for? Or has it benefitted only one particular community or both or every community? Is the formula discriminatory or biased against a particular community or communities? Every formula employed in the process is subjected to test and scrutiny by the Courts etc.

In the process the Government had from time to time amended/ altered the resolution in order to adjust with the competing claims and also to address the issue of inadequacy of representation so that the spirit of reservations is not diluted. Amongst the initial amendments was the rectification in the deficiency in the appointment of posts /vacancies in District Offices. It was found that non-transferable posts reserved in one District for the Schedule Tribes belonging to another District were not filled up even after it was carried forward to the following year. This has created administrative difficulties and dislocation. Therefore, the policy was amended by providing the combined reservation of 80% of posts in favour of Khasi and Jaintia and Garos, apart from 5% in favour of other Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. (Office Memorandum No. PER.272/72/5 Dated Shillong, the 18 December 1972)

In 1974 further alteration was made for the fixed period of one year so as to meet the short fall in direct recruitments from the 40% quota which belongs to the Garo community. It was found that the number of suitable Garo candidates available for filling up the reserved vacancies fell short of the reservation made in their favour. Hence the Policy was altered in the interest of administrative efficiency and resolved that

since the 40% vacancies reserved for the Garos could not be filled up, the remaining vacancies in the quota reserved for the Garos shall be treated as "unreserved vacancies" and should be filled up only from amongst suitable candidates conversant in Garo language, customs and usages, preference being given to persons belonging to Garo community from areas even outside Meghalaya. For this purpose, a person can be considered to be conversant in Garo language, if he is able to read, write and speak Garo fluently." (The Office Memorandum Dated 28 May 1974). Such decision cannot be construed as partisanship towards a particular tribe, rather it is the reflection of the collective struggle to ensure that no tribe or community is left behind.

The specification of Tribes/Castes who are to avail of the 5% reservation is issued, vide Office Memorandum No. PER.222/71/Pt. III/22 Dated 25 November 1976- "there shall be reservation of 5% of vacancies in favour of Rabhas, Boro-Kacharis and Koch permanently residing in Meghalaya and any other STs and SCs as specified in the fourth schedule and second schedule respectively to the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act 1971 insofar as they relate to Meghalaya. Subsequently, the Policy is amended, vide Office Memorandum dated September 12, September 1979, to enable the State to conduct a special recruitment for selection of candidates from under-represented groups in regard to which deficiency is continuing.

Interestingly, in 1981 the question arose as to how to regulate those reservations in a situation where the number of vacancies is small. Thus, the Government resolved that where the number of vacancies is 9 (nine) or less, the same shall be treated as reserved vacancies in favour of the protected communities as specified in the said Resolution and Office Memoranda" (Vide Office Memorandum The 19 December 1981). The State Government has had to make one-time relaxation of the reservation policy in order to meet the shortage of human resources in selected technical and specialised posts and services. However, this relaxation was time bound and valid till the December 31, 1988. (No. PER (AR) 92/85/205, dated 16/11 Jan, 1986)

While upholding the spirit of reservation, Governments in the past have explored multiple formulae for implement-

ing the policy as it is intended to be. Besides, the Government (s) also considered and decided that Public Undertakings and Government Aided Institutions should make reservations in their services on the lines adopted by the State Government. The concerned Departments must adhere to the principle of reservation as envisaged in the Government Resolution and invariably followed when making appointments to posts and services under the Public Undertakings and Government Aided Institutions under their control (No. PER.222/72/32, dt, 16/6 June, 1973).

In these fifty years, the State has been plagued with systemic failure, favouritism, arbitrariness, nepotism and corruption in employment, recruitment and appointment to posts and services. In April this year, the Meghalaya High Court stepped in to streamline and rectify certain flaws in the execution of Reservation Policy and ordered the implementation of Roster system. Following which the Meghalaya High Court itself immediately via Full Court Resolution notified the twenty-point roster system in respect of the entry level posts in High Court, District Courts, Sub-Divisional Courts and other institutions under the control of High Court of Meghalaya (Vide Notification No. HCM.II/39/2022/Estt Dated Shillong 14 June 2022). As bound by the Court Order, the Government of Meghalaya has also notified the guidelines for the roster system. But the delay and unscrupulous execution of the policy have had its toll on the youths as recruitment results and appointments are now being stalled for want of a Roster System.

There are more ways than one to implement the Roster System and it remains to be seen how the Government of the day executes this diligently. Will the roster system achieve the objectives of uplifting the backward and under-represented classes? Perhaps, roster system is sensible as a rule to govern the complex matter of reservations. To review and revamp the policy one should not deviate from the established grounds that reservation is primarily meant for the economically unsound and politically backward sections of society. The reservations formulae in Meghalaya must take into account crucial issues like (i) landlessness (ii) poverty/inequality (iii) backwardness of Districts/Blocks and representation.

An undated government file noted the intensity of the matter in these words "... The adjustment of these competing claims is undoubtedly a difficult matter..."

## Separation of ethnicity from religion & religion from politics

By Rev. Lyndan Syiem

On Monday, 26 September, The Shillong Times carried the news report, "Everyone living in Bharat is a Hindu": RSS chief." This statement by Mr. Mohan Bhagwat has gained some support and much publicity, but it has also produced a lot of opposition over the conflation of religious and ethnic identity, and the superimposition of a religious label over socio-cultural identity. This is not a new statement by the RSS, and it has been uttered on many occasions and at many places all over the country. But when it is spoken by the organization's top leader at a public function on the soil of Meghalaya, there will naturally be questions at the local level. On what basis are we the Khasi-Pnar and the Garo tribes of Meghalaya now labelled as Hindus? More importantly, for what purpose has such a labelling been made?

The identification of the Khasi-Jaintias and Garos as Hindus because they are inhabitants of Bharat is historically incorrect. We have never been a part of ancient Bharat, nor of the Mauryan Empire, nor the Gupta Empire, nor even of the medieval Mughal Empire. It was only after the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-26 and the subsequent Treaty of Yandaboo that the plateau now known as Meghalaya was conquered and occupied by the British during the years 1826-30, 1835 and 1866-73. This led to the region's gradual integration with the British Empire in India and eventually in 1947, accession into Independent India.

Today, very few in Meghalaya will seriously and systematically litigate over the Instrument of Accession signed by our traditional rulers in 1947-48; fewer still will sacrifice material comfort and their children's security to pursue Independence from the Indian Union. Admittedly, the Instrument of Accession is a great subject for academic debates and is often used as a rhetorical point during political campaigns. To the reality is that the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo tribes are willing citizens of a diverse, democratic India, where most of us do not need the label Hindu to reinforce our identity.

Yes, it is true that in ancient times the Persians and Greeks used the exonym 'Hindu' to refer to people living near and beyond the Indus river. However, by no stretch of history or of imagination was the term ever applied to us, the hill tribals living far East of the Ganga river. In any case, the word 'Hindu' in the present time legally and officially refers to a particular religion, which is numerically the third largest religion in the world and the largest in India. The tribals of Meghalaya do not uniformly follow one religion, so to include them under Hinduism is technically incorrect, as is evident from the decadal Census data. There is also a Constitutional definition of Scheduled Tribes (which we are), and religious identity is not among the parameters. So yes, some among the Khasi-Pnar and Garo tribes are Hindus or accept the label, but not all of us do.

By the same reasoning, it would be incorrect to call Meghalaya a 'Christian state', just because 74.59% of the population (2011 Census) are affiliated to this particular faith. It would be more appropriate to call it a Christian majority state, just as India is a Hindu majority country. On the whole though it is best to keep religious identity apart from ethnicity, apart from socio-cultural identity, and far, far apart from politics. This position has classically been articulated as 'separatio ecclesiae et civitatis', separation of Church and state, or more generally, separation of religion from the state. This does not mean prohibiting individual members of various religions from participating in government and politics, but it does mean the responsible distancing of religious organizations from

the government machinery and the political process.

I had written an article in The Shillong Times on 2 June, 2022, defending the separation of Church and State, entailing a responsible separation of religion from politics. At that time, there had been criticisms from the Christian activist perspective, that my position was a non-starter and that the Church in Meghalaya was afraid of challenging corruption and publicly calling out those in power. There was a suggestion that the church plays Pontius Pilate to safeguard its own interests. If you think carefully however, once it becomes accepted for apex church bodies to regularly and officially criticize government policies, procedures, problems and personalities, you can no longer protest when other religions in the state follow suit. What you would call interference in our delicate social and cultural fabric may be defended as ideological conviction.

So to my activist friends demanding the Church's intervention in every administrative and political crisis, this conservative traditionalist would advise individual members, rather than the hierarchy, to respond. It is easy to criticize the Church in the media; it is a soft target that will rarely fight back. But it is much harder to personally work for people's empowerment at the grassroots level, and to accept the challenge of exposing corruption in high places, and not just short term dalliances either, but dedicated, long term service.

And then to those questioning the church's alleged silence over socio-political issues, I would inform you that building denomination-wide consensus over every issue is difficult, time consuming and creates the precedent of having to respond afresh to every subsequent issue. More ominously, once you sow the seeds of religious groups intervening in political matters, you will reap the harvest of a tribal community breaking apart. We the Khasi-Pnar people are tightly-bound together not by religion or politics but by the sacredness of clan, community life, marriage relations, historical consciousness and language.

We all know that this is the pre-election season and that a statement by any church or any religious group can be interpreted as pro-government or anti-government, as support or criticism of a party or a coalition. Individual members of all religions, as citizens of India, are free to commend or criticize policies and practices of the government. They are free to enter and to exit political parties, free to make political statements. But it is not so for the Church, nor is it prudent for the clergy to speak or be present at events that can be construed as support for or criticism of a particular party. When we show the example of responsible distancing, we are helping to build a meritocratic democracy and signifying that people ought not to be swayed by appeals to religious identity or denominational affiliation.

It was the perceptive G.K. Chesterton who wrote, "Whenever you remove any fence, always pause long enough to ask why it was put there in the first place." Some activists would have us breach the fence between religion and politics, others between religion and ethnicity, without pausing to count the ultimate cost on society, culture and community. Please realize that this is a Constitutional fence that was erected by the great generation of freedom fighters that had actually fought British imperialism on the streets, on salt marches and Satyagrahas, and spent years in jails. They had sacrificed family and fortune to achieve our freedom and they had attempted to preserve that freedom in the Constitution, in the three branches of government, in the free press and in an educated, enlightened electorate. May we all be faithful to the letter and spirit of the Constitution.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Hostels & guest houses: Urban neighbourhood challenges

Editor,  
Urban development has brought multiple changes to how land is used, and the mushrooming of hostels and guesthouses is one of the few changes that have emerged. With the increase in the number of colleges around the city, various new economic opportunities have surfaced. Individuals with resources such as land and buildings have tapped into the hostel or guest house economy to fulfil the demand of students and tourists. Wealthy land-owners who grew up in Shillong have now set their sights on distancing themselves away from the city and moved to gated mansions with high-fenced walls surrounded by peace and tranquillity. However, their interests now lie only in commercialising their previous homes or land resources within Shillong. In the process, they tend to forget that their assets (buildings) have neighbours and residents that surround them. The privilege of also moving away from the city is not economically viable

for everyone with skyrocketing land prices.

Hostels have mushroomed in various localities, most of which do not generally have a 'warden' or do not issue guidelines. The wardens' role is also questionable as they are often of the same age group as the hostellers and are often exploited and underpaid. The experience of living next to a hostel in Jylli Shop, Nongthymmai, has been eye-opening in the worst way. Considering that the hostel is associated with a college, it is undoubtedly even more alarming to witness the environment they are exposed to. What goes on till the wee hours is only experienced by the neighbours. The selfish nature of the students and the institution is a poor reflection of what society and education have become. Is imparting knowledge now limited to the campus and restricted to formal education?

Teaching humans to co-exist and be respectful of their surroundings (neighbours) in this age of social conflict and violence is necessary. Daily reports on police seizing drugs in Meghalaya make the student demographic vulnerable, especially among unsupervised and troubled youths. Furthermore, I am sure that

various residents in Shillong within urban neighbourhoods have faced similar experiences living next to hostels and guesthouses. These instances remind me of my college years in Delhi, having witnessed local residents being infuriated with the student community partying in certain localities, most of which have been ghettoised. These new commercial developments (hostels and guesthouses) have reduced the quality of life in urban neighbourhoods. Now that the government is keen on promoting "Tourism", the weekends in Shillong have seen few guest houses occupied by drunken youths. With Shillong now gearing itself up for a wide range of festivals to promote mass tourism that profits the pockets of a few, we can expect more chaotic weekends within urban neighbourhoods.

The change in attitudes of the land owners in Shillong reflects the effects of the neoliberal capitalist outlook that has integrated itself into our socio-economic world, where our interests are driven by profit. The profits are then used to support consumerist and lavish lifestyles. We might preach 'community', 'sustainability', 'equality' and 'development' in our

tourist advertisements, political campaigns and education pamphlets. However, in practice, within urban neighbourhoods growing sense of individualism and selfishness has crept in. All these changes are a testament to the fact that Shillong is truly an unplanned city. It has become a space where its value lies only in terms of commercialisation. We must remember that the present commercial hubs are still homes to various residents who cannot afford to leave. Commercial gentrification of urban spaces has reduced the quality of life—steps to maintain the quality of life need to be rethought.

Furthermore, urban planners/dorbar shmong need to review measures to regulate proper land use to protect and balance economic interests as well as the quality of life of residents. Although guidelines for guesthouses exist, ensuring they are implemented and practised is another challenge. In addition, a comprehensive hostel policy defining what hostels should entail is the need of the hour to place accountability on owners with the increase in crimes and substance abuse.

Yours etc.,  
Alexander L Passah,  
Via email

#### The all-Indians are Hindu metaphor

Editor,  
The recent statement by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on his visit here has created quite a flutter. This might pass for a "moderate" comment among BJP supporters, hence let me break it down a little, to shed some light on that alarming statement.

Stating "all Indians are Hindus" may come across as inclusivity to Hindus but to people from other religions, tribal backgrounds like ours, and castes that are treated horrifyingly, it is a deceleration of assimilation, an instrument of colonisation by the brahmin hegemony. It's saying, "you may think of yourself as independent in your way of life but only we make the rules." In a sense, it's equating, being Indian with being Hindu. When the RSS says all Indians are Hindus we need to understand that for them there is no difference between the two, hence that is the main reason that they can't think of Muslims, Christians and any other religious followers as Indian. One of the traps

laid by the Hindutva brigade involves this false equivalence between the Hindu and the Indian identity.

The reason they consider all Indians as Hindus is that they think we all come from the same stock (like cattle) and we are biological descendants of the same ancestors. Our great and unbroken chains of kings and rulers were interrupted by invaders from outside (Muslims), and colonisers (British) and they converted a lot of "Hindus" to Islam/Christianity. This is the stated reasoning behind movements like Ghar Wapsi- "return home" (to your religion), because the RSS thinks everyone should accept that they are of the same stock, and if we don't respect or heed it, we should be heading to Pakistan.

The Hindu identity is just one of the many identities that exist within India and nothing more.

Yours etc.,  
Robert R Khongwir,  
Via email

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

*"Failure at some point in your life is inevitable, but giving up is unforgivable."*  
— Joe Biden

**The Shillong Times**

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**PFI down, not out**

THE firebrand, pro-Islamist Popular Front of India has finally taken a huge hit. The outfit that had spread its wings to several states from Kerala and Karnataka and reached out also to UP, Bihar and Delhi in the past 20 years faces an abrupt ban from the central government. Reports are that it has dissolved itself. Hundreds of top functionaries of the PFI have been arrested in simultaneous late-night raids by National Investigation Agency and Enforcement Directorate from multiple locations since September 22 and its offices are being sealed. Except for a day's hartal in Kerala and stray protests elsewhere, the PFI was hugely rattled. Even the murmur of protests has died down while even entities like the Muslim League have welcomed the central offensive. It would however be foolish to believe that PFI was chastened. Having grown this far, its activists are bound to regroup. Questions are asked whether the ban will be of any help or why ban only the PFI.

The PFI had originally fashioned itself in the style of the RSS but shifted gear to a more aggressive tone in recent times. It developed a uniformed force with regular parades, armed training etc. Alongside, it set up educational institutions and orphanages – through which it sought and got huge sums from abroad in the name of charity. Central agencies say PFI also contributed fighters for global terrorist groups like the ISIS. Several murders in recent years were attributed to it; the main victims being Hindu-Muslim activists. A recent rally it held in Kerala heard slogans warning Hindus and Christians that "our killer squads are on the way." What it failed to fathom was the central intelligence agencies were keeping a close watch.

Clearly, the belligerence on the part of the PFI had largely to do with the generous flow of funds to it from donors in the Gulf countries. The Enforcement Directorate is perusing PFI bank records while several of the arrested men as also the seized documents, pen drives and computer systems are facing detailed investigation. Massive arrests from several states are continuing. Yet, sleeper cells of the closely-knit PFI and its allied outfits are said to be functional. Many have evaded arrest and have gone underground. A possibility is they could regroup and create mayhem. The system of democracy gives sufficient scope to one and all to air their grievances and highlight violation of rights by governmental and other agencies. Courts are meant to offer a level playing field. But, those who opt to go berserk are bound to face the consequences sooner than later.

# You are off the mark, Mr Mohan Bhagwat

By Albert Thyriang

For the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) boss, Mohan Bhagwat everyone is already a Hindu and a devotee of Hindutva, by default. Arguing from the Khasi creation mythology of Sohpet-Bneng and folklores like U Manik Raitong, Bhogtoram Mawroh turns the tide by insisting that Khasis are not Hindu but Hindus are in fact Khasis. He claims all the non-Khasis, including Hindus, belong to the lost Khasi sub-tribe, the Dikos. Bhagwat will certainly laugh off such a suggestion but his fundamentalist statement on September 25, which by coincidence or design, happened to be a Sunday must be condemned and resisted by all.

The declaration of the RSS chief is, of course, nothing new. Reports of the carbon copy statement appear regularly in the press. On September 19, 2018 Bhagwat claimed that everyone who lives in India is Hindu by identity. On 26 December 2019 he even dared to pronounce that all the 130 crore Indians belong to the Hindu society irrespective of their religion and culture. In February this year the head of the right-wing organisation contended that there are no more 'Ahindus' (non-Hindus) but the 4 types of Hindus – 'proud, reluctant, unfriendly, ignorant.' So, wherever the supremacy of the progenitor of the Sangh Parivar goes and speaks he only repeats his conviction to turn India into 'one nation, one religion, one culture' country. The significance of his statement is because he made in Meghalaya, a state with a predominantly Christian population. He has now branded all Meghalayans - traditional religious practitioners, Christians, Muslims and others - 'Hindus'.

It is understood that the leader of the outfit with a 5-6 million membership, is 'trickily persuading people to believe that what he refers to is a geographical area and not a religion. Under the guise that Hindus are referred to as the people who live between the Himalayan mountain range and the Indian Ocean, work is on to club all others under the Hindu fold. The RSS and others are the first to acknowledge that Hindus are not just inhabitants of the above geographical territory. They openly propagate that Hindus are those who follow

a certain way of life. This is crucially problematic. 'Way of life' is intertwined also with religion. So a Hindu is someone who practices the Hindu religion. Hinduism is not just a way of life. It is a religion. It is, in fact, the world's oldest religion and the third-largest in the world behind Christianity and Islam. So to say that Hindus are just inhabitants of the subcontinent from time immemorial is incorrect.

The attempt of the RSS and other affiliates in clubbing everyone under the Hinduism umbrella is to play down the existence of the unique history of indigenous tribal communities, their ancestry, culture and religion. The ancestors of the Khasis were never Hindus. The Khasis have a different religion and way of life. The Khasis (the adherents of Ka Niam Khasi) do not worship idols. They do not have temples. They do not consider cows as deities. There has never been a caste system here. The same is true of the Jaintias, the Garos, the Nagas, the Mizos, the Bodos and the numerous Adivasi tribes and sub-tribes all over India. They are basically animists with their own concept of God. They have no similarities with Hinduism. In case of the Khasis their definition of God is 'U Blei, U Nongbuh-Nongthaw (God, the creator). It is a different matter that many tribal groups in the North East and in other parts of India have been influenced by Hinduism and have added the idol and the temple concept in their religious practices. But originally idols and the temples were alien to the tribal mind. I have seen the symbol 'OM' (ॐ) displayed in frames at the entrance of some houses of tribes. Certainly 'OM' (ॐ) was not part of their religion. By and by these indigenous believers would forget their original practices and remember only the idol, temple and 'OM' (ॐ) elements. Ultimately they will identify themselves with Hinduism. The objective has already been achieved to some extent in many tribal settings. That's the reason the Adivasis in Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam and other states have vehemently rejected that they are Hindus and are persistent in their demand that the Centre recognise their religion as 'Sarna'. In Meghalaya, a

section of the Khasi society, it looks, is ready to embrace 'Hinduism' and more dangerously 'Hindutva' of the RSS.

To the point that we are all citizens of 'Bharat' the tribes of Meghalaya and the whole of North East was never a part of it. Pre-British rule, chieftains and kings were independent rulers. The Ahom kings, the kings in Manipur and Tripura, the Naga, Mizo, Khasi chiefs, the Nokmas in Garo Hills were independent outside the so-called 'Bharat'. The British annexed these highlands in the 19th century and when they left in 1947 the different princely states and territories became part of India under different circumstances. In this state, the 25 Khasi states signed the Instrument of Accession and Annexed Agreement on December 15, 1947 and March 19, 1948, respectively to be part of the Indian Union. So, reacting to Bhagwat people in social media assert that their ancestors and ancestors were never Hindus. Their land is the 'Hynniew Trep' (Land of seven Huts) which was never a part of 'Bharat' before the British conquered it in 1826. Today, they affirm they are Khasi/Jaintia and Indians and not Hindus by any stretch of imagination.

The RSS is a twofold organisation. It is a political parent and mentor of the BJP. The BJP is only its political wing. Its members actively campaign for the BJP. Without its support the BJP will struggle to win any election. The RSS is not a neutral social organisation. Meghalaya is not an exception. The objective of the RSS unit is to enable the BJP to rule the state. Secondly RSS is a pro-Hindu organisation. It is quite anti-Christian and anti-Muslim in its outlook.

It is defined as a Hindu Nationalist group. So, for the Bhagwat events only BJP leaders and members of different Hindu organisations were invitees. In 2023 you will see the RSS crusade for the BJP vigorously. If the RSS which claims to be a social organisation is permitted to openly work for the BJP why not other pressure groups and church associations? Why should not church bodies support the Congress or the TMC or the NPP or the UDP, etc? Why should not the Church take a public

stand against the BJP since the RSS effectively rejects all other political parties?

The link between the Seng Khasi and the RSS is now beyond doubt. The Seng Khasi has steadily grown over the years. So also the influence of the RSS is fast taking roots in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The clout of the Sangh on the Seng Khasi is also more and more visible. There is a possibility that the Seng Khasi will be completely 'sanguised' and saffronised (probably the process is already on). The RSS chief prayed with the leaders of the Seng Khasi (indigenous tribal faith) at the sanctum sanctorum of U Lum Sohpetbneng (Navel of the Universe). The Seng Khasi is a socio-cultural and religious organisation. But, inspired by the RSS, the organisation might transform into a political force in this part of the state. Either it will lend its support to the BJP or start its own political party.

Dismissing Mohan Bhagwat's statement as a personal opinion is at our own peril. Wishing away his view saying the Constitution is secular is a complicit act. The ultimate dream of the RSS is to change the Constitution. If the BJP gets the required majority in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha 'secularism' will be removed from the rule book and India will be declared a 'Hindu Rashtra'. There are already noises to this effect from the Sangh family.

The Seng Khasi is soliciting the support of the RSS because of the perceived threat of Christianity. The traditional body has genuine concerns as a vast majority of the folks in these hills have turned their back on the Khasi religion and has embraced Christianity. The Seng Khasi is facing an existential crisis while the number of Christians swells. It is for this reason that the Seng Khasi have teamed up with the RSS. It is their wisdom but allying with another anti-Christian organisation to preserve itself is quite questionable.

Alleged to be inspired by Nazism of Germany and Fascism of Italy, the latest clubbing is the affirmation of the RSS ideology of the supremacy of the Hindu race (religion) and the subservient existence of all others under it. This supremacist dogma could even lead to suppression and 'second class citizen treatment' of others. At the end, I too assert emphatically that I am a Khasi (Maram) and an Indian but not a Hindu. No one can force me to identify myself as a Hindu.

**Congress presidential race turns bizarre with Gehlot on the docks**

## Shashi Tharoor now the only candidate looking for a competitor

By Sushil Kutty

Rahul Gandhi and the Bharat Jodo Yatra were in the Muslim-majority Kerala district of Malappuram the day on September 27. Then, September 28, the 'Yatra' made its triumphant entry into Wayanad, Rahul Gandhi's parliamentary constituency. Another day, and Bharat Jodo Yatra would be clean out of Kerala, into Tamil Nadu and next breathing Karnataka air.

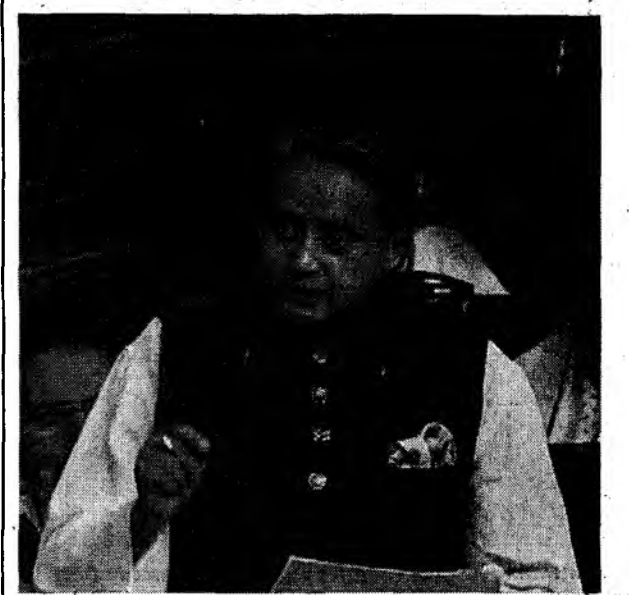
But carry out a straw poll in Malappuram, and Wayanad, and Rahul Gandhi will be crowned 'Emir' or 'Sultan' of all he surveys, his popularity in the Muslim-majority areas of Kerala is unparalleled. However, Malappuram and Wayanad are not the only 'Bharat' the Yatra will have to cover. There's a whole distance of the country it will have to traverse before it can claim to be Bharat Jodo Yatra, even then.

That said, every step forward is one step closer to

be the only Congress leader thrilled at the prospect of becoming Congress President. Shashi Tharoor is one foot in the BJI, and the other in Delhi's Congress circles, where the buzz remains "Rajasthan" is overshadowing the Congress presidency dilemma. The sure-shot candidate Ashok Gehlot hasn't been able to pull himself out of the Rajasthan hole he dug for himself.

And while he did that, "Shashi Tharoor for Congress President" went clear out of the mind of everybody except Shashi Tharoor. People spoke of Digvijaya Singh's hat also in the ring. But communications head Jairam Ramesh wouldn't confirm or deny.

The Congress right now is the "closed corporation", the term BR Ambedkar used to use to give an acceptable impression of Islam. Jairam Ramesh, for all his erudition cannot express himself like Ambedkar, which is a pity



Kashmir, the final destination. That is, if Congress communications head Jairam Ramesh didn't deviate with inane comments like the "Cheetahs were released to divert attention from Bharat Jodo Yatra", when he himself was the one raising and bringing cheetahs into the discourse.

Jairam Ramesh has nothing to contribute or say about the dilemma in the Congress presidency race. What will happen when the 'BJY' enters Karnataka,

because at this juncture in Congress history, when there is so much momentous happening, there is a need for presenting clarity on who should become Congress President and why, what sets one man apart from the rest in the race?

"Shashi Tharoor for Congress President" is not a bad thought. The clean-shaven MP has the "personality", but what does the Gandhi Family think of "Shashi Tharoor for Congress President"? What does Sonia Gandhi think of

*For now, the UN-returned and Thiruvananthapuram-anointed Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor appears to be the only Congress leader thrilled at the prospect of becoming Congress President. Shashi Tharoor is one foot in the BJI, and the other in Delhi's Congress circles, where the buzz remains "Rajasthan" is overshadowing the Congress presidency dilemma. The sure-shot candidate Ashok Gehlot hasn't been able to pull himself out of the Rajasthan hole he dug for himself.*

which is Jairam Ramesh's home-state? For sure, he will throw himself into the 'Yatra' like there was no Tipu Sultan! Jairam Ramesh is neglecting his primary duties. The other day he tweeted a picture of him raising the tricolour at the "container camp" of the BJI for that day.

Like Anand Ranganathan, a chemistry professor of JNU will complain, "Navika, this is too much, Jairam Ramesh should tell us the latest on the Congress presidency; after all, he is the communication chief of the Congress!" Right, who will be Congress President now that Rajasthan Chief Minister, and that likely not-for-long, Ashok Gehlot has screwed up his chances and laid the door split wide open for whoever has the guts to lay claim to this crown of thorns?

For now, the UN-returned and Thiruvananthapuram-anointed Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor appears

"Shashi Tharoor for Congress President"? How does Rahul Gandhi rate "Shashi Tharoor for Congress President"? These are the questions roiling Congress-watchers.

However, to be honest, one will get more from bird-watching than from Congress-watching these days of the Congress discovering and rediscovering itself. Like the man said about two religions, one should come clean on what it thinks of the other to come to a conclusion. Till then, there will be no end to the battle of civilizations. The dilemma in the race for Congress presidency will only end if the Gandhi family designs to end the dilemma, and communication head Jairam Ramesh communicates the conclusion, which is what is his designated job, and not raising the tricolour at BJI container camps! (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**On Mohan Bhagwat's statement**

The recent statement by Mr. Mohan Bhagwat (RSS chief) -- that all Indians are Hindus -- not only makes no sense, but goes against the heart and essence of higher Hinduism. According to the Indian Constitution, India is a secular pluralistic democratic state with a parliamentary system of government. To subsume all Indians under the Hindu identity militates against this generous definition of India. Moreover, it goes against higher Hindu ecumenism, which teaches the plurality and validity of multiple religions, all leading to the same truth. Like Mr. Putin's statement, that the Russians and Ukrainians were one people, Mr. Bhagwat's statement reeks of the egotism, delusion, and subjectivity inherent in both revanchism and identity politics. This ominous oneness is the opposite of the oneness forged by love, empathy, and compassion.

But I would say the same of Dr. Bhogtoram Mawroh's article, "Khasis are not Hindus, Hindus are Khasis" (ST, Sep 27, 2022) -- that it too runs the risk of revanchist ideologies.

All this proves how lost we are when we deny inwardness, unselfish forms of individuality, and objectivity. The individual should never be sacrificed in the abyss of identity politics.

Everyone in the world is first and foremost a human

being -- neither a Hindu, nor a Khasi. The universality that threads us together, despite our differences, is our capacity for empathy -- that is, the inner divinity that threads all beings together. At this highest level, we feel oneness with the cosmos. But this is the oneness of empathy -- not the dubious oneness that results from forcibly removing meaningful forms of otherness.

Yours etc.,  
Deepa Majumdar,  
Via email

**Split of the Reservation Policy and Roster System**

Editor,  
With reference to the article "The Slip between the Reservation Policy and Roster System" by Adelbert Nongrum (ST September 22, 2022), I being the first time voter and qualified job seeker, have observed that the job reservation policy and seat reservation in the various institutions implemented in the state of Meghalaya vide Resolution no. PER 222/71/138 dated January 12, 1972 is irregular and controversial as the same was not then placed and discussed in the State Assembly but was probably hurriedly implemented without the decision and resolution of the house of 60 MLAs nor is it a cabinet resolution. It is perhaps a mere notification or an executive order. Hence, the Reservation Policy grossly violates the basic democratic process and the

methodical procedure which should actually be followed as it is a major policy matter which determines the future of students and job seekers belonging to the backward classes like ST, SC, OBC including the General Category. Even after 50 years of statehood this reservation policy has not even once been discussed and deliberated in the Assembly and it is going on till date. Actually it is high time to revisit and review it.

Secondly, the Reservation Policy especially the ST category was badly disturbed by splitting and dividing the reserved quota. Actually, the reserved quota of either ST, SC, OBC or General Category cannot under any circumstances be split or divided as each respective reserved class is unique and indivisible. The question is why is the ST quota split only between the Garo Hills & Khasi Jaintia Hills? What about other districts and other people of Meghalaya who are more economically backward and belong to the weaker section of society among the ST category. If the government splits and fragments any of these reserved categories be it OBC, ST, SC or GC into two or three parts or more means it not only violates the basic concept and character of the reservation but also damages the structure of the Constitution of India.

Therefore, the split in the Reservation Policy and the Roster System effective from the year 1972 is a threat to the future of the Khasi & Jaintia or Hynniewtrep students who are still undergoing their studies in different

institutions and those job seekers who have completed their studies and are qualified to apply against the respective vacancies.

In my opinion instead of splitting or dividing the reservation earmarked for the ST category on the plea that they are poverty stricken or more economically backward, financial support like free education, special scholarship or financial help may be extended to them in order to elevate and encourage in their struggle to achieve their goal without disturbing or violating the percentage available to the above reserved quota. Otherwise, the split may destroy the basic structure of the Constitution. This principle is followed and practiced by the central government for recruitment of All Indian Service (AIS). It may be pointed out that no special concession for a higher percentage is considered for the STs of Meghalaya in view of their backwardness vis-a-vis the ST of plain areas who are no doubt more advanced than us in all respects.

In its 50th year Meghalaya is still indulging in the split system of the reserved quota.  
At a time when the voice of the Hynniewtrep people asked for a review of the Reservation Policy and to undo the split policy, our counterpart approached the high court which resulted in the Court telling the Government to come up with the Roster System which is like a spit in the face of those who cried for a review and revisiting of the present defective Reservation Policy

implemented in the state of Meghalaya by the above notification.

It is high time now to take this issue to the people's court for a remedy by the State Legislators who are the law makers in the Assembly. If we remain silent and are complacent on this issue there will be no hope for the future of the students and job seekers among the Hynniewtrep people otherwise we will perish.

Yours etc.,  
Svetlana Wankhar,  
Via email

**Pedestrians at risk: Will Govt respond?**

Editor,  
Through your esteemed daily I would like to bring to the attention of all concerned especially the authorities regarding the plight of pedestrians which includes school children who have to walk through the stretch between Don Bosco Point to Shillong College, known as Boyce Road. As one who commutes through this stretch especially during peak school hours, I have noticed the dangers for pedestrians' safety.

It may be noted that this stretch of the road is not only narrow but also has no footpaths on either side of the road. This forces us pedestrians to use the road to walk on. Further, it may be pointed out here that during the peak timings - that is before and after school hours, this road on one side is used as a parking spot for vehicles and in most cases there is also double parking of vehicles which not

only restricts movement of vehicles passing through but puts the pedestrians especially the young school and college students who use this route in grave danger, for they have to navigate between the parked and moving vehicles.

To add to our woes as pedestrians are the two wheelers which are a menace. These two wheelers not only bypass the vehicles caught in the traffic jam from the driver's side but also at times bypass from the wrong side thereby further restricting movement on this narrow road. To add to our misery as pedestrians these two wheelers that are in a mad rush, honk at pedestrians to make way for them thereby forcing many of us who consider our lives dear, to make way for them and then stand still, trapped between the vehicles and two wheelers.

I would like to point out here that the absence of a much-required footpath and the parking permission on the side of this narrow road is inviting danger. Someday I fear that some young school or college student will meet with a serious accident. I therefore urge the authorities concerned to kindly address this issue which affects many because we too as equal citizens have a right to use the road to walk on, in the absence of a footpath.

Yours etc.,  
A. Basaiwmoit,  
Via email

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