

"The new year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written.

We can help write that story by setting goals."

--- Melody Beattie

## The Shillong Times

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### Disaster response inadequate

AS each day passes, hopes of the miners trapped inside the Ksan mine at Lumthari being rescued alive are fading. Nineteen days have passed since news came in on December 13, last that 13 miners were trapped inside the mine after it suddenly flooded. The numbers then went up to fifteen but even that is a conjecture. No one really knows how many miners actually went in. The mine owner, Krip Chullet first absconded and was later arrested. It would be interesting to see how the case against him proceeds if all the 15 miners are dead. When mining operations are carried out illegally then there are simply no records of anything. All transactions are in cash and there's no paper trail. However, this is not the first mining disaster. The real tragedy is that there has been no corrective action and rat hole mining continues as usual. Till date no one has been held accountable for the many deaths that have occurred inside the mines in South Garo Hills in 2012. The locals who know the modus operandi of rat hole mining opine that miners are regularly trapped inside the mines when it caves or is flooded because of a breach which occurs when miners accidentally hit an abandoned mine.

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) have done their bit but they expect the District Administration to organise the necessary equipment to pump water out of the mine. Unfortunately, the response from the Administration was tardy and tentative. The impression is that they did not know how to proceed with the rescue measures. This was bound to happen as this is also the first instance when news of the mine disaster hit the national and international media headlines. This disaster is compared to the Thailand rescue mission in June this year when 13 young boys who were trapped in a flooded cave were successfully rescued by British divers. The world watched the rescue operation with bated breath. India too had lent its high-powered pumps manufactured by the Kirloskar Brothers to suction out the water. The Kirloskar Brothers have volunteered to assist the Meghalaya Government but not before much time has passed as the request for assistance suffered from a bureaucratic time lag.

If nothing else, this tragedy should result in immediate corrective measures. Rat hole mining may be viable for the mine owners but is a deadly labour for the miners whose lives hang precariously every single day they descend into the dark abyss called the rat hole mines. Hence rat hole mining cannot be regularized and coal mining in its present form cannot be legalized. The Government of Meghalaya has to come up with a robust, transparent and comprehensive Mining Policy at the earliest.

# KHADC: Much to ponder about its functioning

By Febrianna Syiemlieh

levying any kind of fee/tax/tolls on the land whether it be Ri Kynti or Ri Raid.

JJM Nichols Roy, the father of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution fought tirelessly with his demand to create District Councils for the indigenous people with the sole aim of protecting the traditional land tenure system of our people. Therefore, if the present KHADC fails

morial because it has never been a part of our culture and tradition. Then, why is it that now "usually below 10% of the land value is allowed"? Which Act / Rules and Regulations of the KHADC validate such collection of money when the State Government already charges about 5% for a Sale Deed? Also, how many times are we going to pay fees for buying a plot of

*He is, as I have said before, a democratic ruler and as such his power extends to the subject and not to the soil. A land tax is an unknown thing amongst the democratic subjects of the Khasi Hills State."*

to function in the same spirit and fails to understand the importance of the protection to be rendered to the indigenous people and their land by the KHADC, then we have no more need of the Autonomous District Council, because then, the Council will be functioning as an unnecessary layer of political office with no justification to carry out functions for which relevant Government office already exists.

Are the present KHADC members, sitting in the chairs of the protectors of our indigenous people and their land, ignorant of our customary laws? Or is this a ploy to initiate the practice of payment of money for signatures/NOC to the Rangbah Shnongs and village elders as customary?

The news item, "KHADC to take action on high fee for Land Deeds" (ST Dec 7, 2018) is a dangerously motivated, premeditated, sly move attempted by some unscrupulous politicians to initiate the practice of payment for obtaining signatures from Rangbah Shnongs/village elders. Nowhere in the history of our land has there ever been such a customary practice. Khasi customary law does not allow collection of tax/money over any indigenous land. We have never paid land tax/fees since time im-

land?

In the case of Archie Siangshai and others vs. the State of Meghalaya (WPC) No.363 of 2014, the Hon'ble Court ruled that, "Headman of a locality did not derive any right from law, and rule or from the Constitution of India to issue NOC. Therefore, I am of the considered view that, in a State 2(two) parallel Governments cannot run simultaneously.... They have no power to issue any kind of certificate unless empowered by rule or laws. For example, if a person approaches for a sale deed, his case is to be considered under Registration Act."

In the case of Matilda Lyngdoh Vs State of Meghalaya and others (WPNo.7(SH) of 2008, the Court passed a judgment saying that the signature of the Headman was not required for registering Sale Deeds terming the Rangbah Shnong as an "unauthorized" person. Thus, this so called "fee" for signature of the Rangbah Shnong is illegal. In layman's term it is called extortion or "salami". The State of Meghalaya Acts and Ordinances reads, "Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any contract, custom, usage or practice, realisation of any 'Salami' in any form, shall be illegal. Whoever, willfully fails or neglects to comply with any requirement made of him under this Act, or vio-

lates any provision of this Act shall, on conviction before a Magistrate, be punishable with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees.

Latiplang Kharkongor (MDC) says that the KHADC did receive several complaints from citizens over charging of exorbitant fees for Sale Deed of land. What "fee" might that be? Is it legal or illegal? If it is legal, then why will KHADC take action upon such persons? But if it is illegal, why are they not penalized? Why is MDC Latiplang Kharkongor not sure of what he is talking about? How can he ask Rangbah Shnongs/village elders to charge only 10% and below and not more than that? It's as good as asking a thief to steal only a small amount.

The fight of U Kiang Nongbah against the British to preserve the custom and tradition of our indigenous people where land belongs to the people has been recognized by the Government of India and a postage stamp was also issued in 2001 to commemorate him. He will go down in the annals of Indian history as a great personality who inspired the country and inspired the course of India's National Movement.

Till today, we, the indigenous people and our land have never been alienated with wars fought and lives lost in protecting them and drafts made and arguments galore to make special provisions for this peculiar land holding system within the framework of the Indian Constitution.

We live and celebrate it every day of our lives. Hence, isn't it shocking and shameful for a member of the KHADC to even suggest charging a small fee of 10% and below from us for our own land? Are the politicians today attempting to retain the very institution that was once initiated by the colonial rulers for oppressing the indigenous people, destroying their customs and traditions in their attempt to steal their land and fill their coffers and have complete monopoly over the land which otherwise they could have never been able to lay their hands upon?

Food for thought as we approach the District Council elections in the beginning of 2019.

## Right political ideology Can Cong turn the tide?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Ideology is highly important for the functioning of a political party. Though some or most parts of that ideology may not be adhered to, the very fact that a proper ideology and/or action programme has been formulated shows that the party hierarchy is wedded to what has been enumerated. Moreover, political parties with long years of struggle have better and wider experience of nation building though the leadership may not have the required experience of what needs to be done for the masses, i.e. the right strategy for development.

The right priorities for ensuring development for the major section of the population is obviously the key and not just calculating GDP growth on wrong assumptions and data. The crisis plaguing the Government on the economic front lies in lack of infrastructure development and investment in the farm sector. This is being echoed again and again by economists of all shades and more so after the results of the recent elections.

On the social front, the country cannot be allowed to be divided on communal or religious lines. We are a secular country and population belonging to whatever religion, sect, caste or class should enjoy same benefits and allowed to stay without any fear on their rights and privileges. In a functional democracy, every individual should have rights to voice their opinion, which may be critical to the policies advocated by the party in power.

It is a well known fact that the poor and impoverished are at the receiving end and the present situation has accentuated the crisis. Lack of proper governance and wanton corruption is manifest all around to aid the rich and the powerful in all matters.

In this connection, it may be pertinent to refer to the poor social infrastructure in the rural countryside on India considered an emerging economy. This is manifest from a recent report of Niti Aayog titled Strategy for New India@75, it has rightly been pointed out that expenditure in education has to be increased to six per cent of GDP which has been echoed by educationists for quite some time. The report suggested testing teachers tri-annually on the same test designed for their students and putting greater emphasis on continuous and comprehensive evaluation to boost education outcomes.

In the health sector, the report highlighted shortage of doctors, nurses and paramedics and called for reforms and regulation of medical education to raise number of doctors and specialists. The document rightly suggested achieving a doctor-population ratio of at least 1:1400 against the WHO norm of 1:1000 and nurse population ratio of at least 1:500 by 2022-23. It also proposed generating at least 1.5 million jobs in the public health sector by 2022-23, a large number of which may employ women.

The pitiable condition of health centres in most villages, specially in the North and Central India is also there not to speak of sub-divisional hospitals. These are places where the poor and the economically weaker sections and also the low income groups go for treatment but are frustrated at the state of affairs there. It is imperative for the policy makers to ponder over the matter before thinking of bullet trains and modernising airports which are all aimed at the upper echelons of society. In this connection, the Niti Aayog document has suggested incentivising State govern-

ments to invest in creating a dedicated cadre for public health at the State, district and block levels and including Ayush into the mainstream.

Coming to the political parties, the BJP has performed in a rather poor manner, both in the social and economic front. Primarily it has antagonised the minorities, specially the Muslims and encroached on their lifestyles and food habits. Moreover, the dalits, the scheduled castes and tribes have felt betrayed due to lack of concern for these backward castes. In fact, there is social chaos all around but more distressing is that there are apprehensions of the intrinsic unity being eroded.

The scenario all around is one of mistrust and hatred coupled with lack of freedom of expression. Dissent is not tolerated by most political parties with BJP leading the way. Unfortunately, this has never happened in the country before and most intellectuals are frustrated with the attitude of the ruling party at the Centre.

The Congress with its glorious past may be the only national alternative in the present state of affairs. With its right ideological moorings - most of which it may not have been followed - is well geared to take the country in the right track and save it from being divided on religious, caste and class lines. There may have been failures in the past but learning from its past experience it appears that the party may follow the right approach in future. However, one needs to mention here that the Left parties have also consistently followed an ideological path but their influence and acceptance has all along been concentrated to three States, namely West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura.

However, it needs to be pointed out that the Congress has to invent a new imagination, a new India of ideas which is civilisational and relevant to present day needs. It cannot be just another opposition but a dream of an alternative India. This demands a ground-level approach and a hard amount of radical intellectual thinking going beyond the unnecessary of Right and Left. The party has to aggregate new pluralism of various segments -- peasant, farmers, tribe, elderly, youth, unemployed and the exploited teacher, the obsolescent technologist -- into a coherent holism, not into a mechanical grid of patriotism and nationalism that is being evident presently.

The most important aspect in this regard is adhering to decentralisation, which was advocated by none other than Mahatma Gandhi long ago. It was the Congress which brought the 73rd and 74th amendments empowering the panchayats and it is now time to give more power to these and ensure proper economic decentralisation. Moreover, there is need to involve the masses in the decision-making process at the grass root levels so that their requirements are not dictated from above. The Congress, in keeping with Gandhi's philosophy, needs to come up with ideas and values of the ashram which complements the policy thinking of think tanks and use it for formulating the right developmental strategy.

If proper emphasis is given to the rural sector - specially to agricultural development and promotion of cottage and small industries at the block levels, then the face of the villages may improve, providing employment opportunities to the rural youth. ---INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

## Whither MDA and Governance

Editor,

The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) came to power in Meghalaya in March, 2018 and in the last ten months it has not shown its craftsmanship of governance. It is aimless and directionless. In fact it has not displayed statesmanship because it has none. Ten months is sufficient time to judge a government. The government has no direction because it has not spelt out its priorities. Hence the MDA government has landed itself up with piecemeal governance and knee jerk reactions. The reason for this is a leadership vacuum. When a ship is rudderless it goes haywire and directionless and will either clash with other ships, hit an iceberg and sink or it reaches nowhere.

Conrad Sangma has many advisers but we really don't know what they are advising him. What he has displayed so far is that he does not have the caliber to

lead and to govern. This Government is weak and floundering. What is required urgently is for the CM to confer with his team of ministers; tighten up the screws to bring in more discipline and work culture and also to handle the Finance bit which seems to be falling apart. Except for Prestone Tynsong, the performance of the rest of the ministers is woefully wanting in all respects. Even the former ministers are lagging behind. The government cannot carry on like this otherwise it spells doom for the State. There is urgent need for a re-look, review and reshuffle by allocating the right portfolio to the right man.

The Home Portfolio should be relieved from the present incumbent because he has proved to be a failure at it. Other portfolios that need to be reshuffled are Health, Agriculture, and Horticulture etc. The present Health Minister has been handling the health portfolio for too long; he was holding it even during previous Ministries. Now, what has this government achieved? Except for bringing out the

Education Policy which was the offshoot of a long preparation, right from the MPA government, this MDA government has brought nothing to the table. It has failed miserably in mining and environmental issues and it has also failed to resolve the Sweepers' Colony issue. Luckily militancy is on the wane and there was no serious law and order problem facing the government, except the one which took place on May 31, 2018, which was calmed down, though the issue is still unresolved.

Conrad Sangma, the CM, has to decide what he should do, whether to remain as CM for the rest of the term or bequeath his throne to someone else. If he decides to remain the CM then he better pull up his socks; put the debris of faults in the dumper and get rid of the superfluous lot or else they will pull him down. He has to decide to take the bull by the horns. Meghalaya needs his quick and wise decision at this juncture because the stakes are very high.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email

## Why the Lineage Bill?

Editor

I am proud to be a Meghalayan, practicing the matrilineal system and proudly declaring to the other communities, the positive points of the system. However, I agree with the views of our fellow citizen, BL Lyngdoh (ST Dec 15, 2018), regarding amendments to Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill. Due to personal reasons, there are some Garos, Jaintias and Khasis, who have been practicing the patrilineal system, even though both the parents belong to same tribe. Some of the reasons being: (1) out of respect for or emotional attachment with their father (2) some families have only sons and don't have daughters, and those families bring the daughter-in-law to their house and give all inheritance to their son. Children born to these families practice patrilineal system (3) in cases when the mother abandons her children and goes off with another man, the children change their

surname to their father's. In few such cases when they are truly purely tribals, why do we, as a community/GHADC/ KHADC want to question their Garo/Khasi tribal status? We cannot be narrow minded, stiff necked, inflexible all the time. A few members of the District Council trying to aggressively pass a lineage bill, without consulting the community/various learned/experienced individuals who have knowledge or insight about the advantages/disadvantages of various customs/lineage would be a grave error.

It is a well known, well practiced custom, that a non tribal woman adopts her husband's surname. Though this is a well known fact, our community still tries to create a problem for such families when a non tribal woman marries a Garo/Khasi man. I can understand the concerns of our community regarding some non-tribals trying to take advantage by adopting tribal surnames. There were some cases, wherein the individuals adopt tribal surnames just to receive the benefits, when their whole customs/religious practices don't

conform to the local tribal practices. In the case of Garos, there were reports of Muslims who have adopted Garo surnames and got their EPIC card made. In such cases, village head plays a great role, and they should be held accountable for issuing favorable/fake no objection or residency certificates. If found guilty those issuing fake certificates, should be penalized according to law. Among Garos, there are no Garo Muslims or Hindus; it's just Christians and local religion or Songsareks. If anyone is found falsely adopting a tribal name, then as a concerned individuals and community, we need to report it to the concerned authorities and not give them any chance to take advantage, and later create problems. This is the best way to resolve such social (mal) practices

Yours etc.,  
TK Sangma,  
Tura

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.

“ HIV does not make people dangerous to know, so you can shake their hands and give them a hug: Heaven knows they need it. ”

--- Princess Diana

## The Shillong Times

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### Too Little, Too Late

CHRISTIAN Michel is not singing like a bird, but he's seen to be dropping hints, all of which might ultimately not mean much. The BJP might have some glee when the Enforcement Directorate reported to the trial court this weekend that Michel has referred to the names of "Mrs Gandhi" and "son of the Italian lady." But, problem is, such small twists in the case will alone not suffice for the Modi government to fix anyone in the in the run-up to the next parliament polls. Simply put, what has come so far is too little after a long period of investigations after the Modi government took power in 2014. The government itself is now in its twilight years.

Fact is, there are so many loose ends to the story crafted by the investigating agencies including the ED and the CBI so far about the Agusta Westland VVIP chopper purchase during the UPA II period. It could take years and years of hair-splitting case study and presentations, as had happened in the case of Bofors before anyone can make sense of the deal. The CBI laying its hands on deal agent Michel finally, hauling him in from the UAE weeks ago, is simply another phase in the case.

The allegations against the Bofors guns deal during the Rajiv Gandhi period, in which too a prominent Italian connection had been alleged, worked against the Gandhi family. The suspected commission payment thereof was huge - Rs 60 crore to "Indian politicians", Congress leadership and the defence top brass, as the Swedish Radio had stated in the mid 1980s. Nothing came of the decades of investigations, and the accused went scot free. The role of one individual has been validated by the Italian court; namely, former IAF chief SP Tyagi. The VVIP helicopter deal was signed in 2010, bribery charges came up three years later, and the deal was subsequently cancelled by the UPA government in 2014 before it stepped down from office. The Italian court had found, however, that millions of dollars had been paid by the company as bribes to Indians.

With the Lok Sabha polls approaching, it is quite likely that Michel would be made to speak up more in ways that would cause serious damage to the Congress party. Chances are also that it is by now too late for too much adverse impact to be made on the principal opposition. Perceptions are bound to strengthen that this is nothing more than a pre-election stunt. Whether any good would come out of this case is anybody's guess.

Transfusion of HIV-affected blood to a pregnant woman causing her to contract the disease is shocking news showing medical error as well as negligence in a government hospital a few days ago. The lapses have occurred in receiving blood donation of a person with the disease and in testing the blood before administering it to the patient. Irreversible consequence of these lapses is spread of the disease to the woman and her baby.

This incident is immediately followed by another complaint of transfusion of HIV-affected blood to a pregnant woman against a hospital and its staff.

In another incident, overdose of anesthesia administered before a caesarian section crippled a woman and confined her to bed from which she has not recovered even after nine years. Reasonable care and caution were obviously not taken before and after the surgery like monitoring oxygen levels.

In the first case, two government hospitals in Tamil Nadu -- one that supplied the blood and the other that treated the patient were concerned. The second occurred in the heart of Chennai -- supposed to be a coveted destination for medical tourism from neighbouring countries. The hospital denies any possibility of contaminated blood in their possession, and refuses to accept any responsibility in the matter. The third happened in Ahmedabad in a hospital which lacks basic life supporting facilities for undertaking surgeries.

Many such incidents are happening in the country, but not all are reported or pursued by the affected to book the culprits. In 2016, the Supreme Court issued an order directing the Centre to ask States to take steps to end the oppressive practice of sterilizing women in large camps -- a practice emanating from the absence of rights-based approach and open encouragement to malpractices.

Is the common defence that doctors are not Gods, but do their best to cure the patients applicable to cases of errors and negligence? Errors in judgement may happen as reaction of

kind of utterance in the House is not going to do him any good especially since rat hole mining has caused several deaths due to mine flooding etc. Having won the Lok Sabha seat twice what has Pala brought to the State of Meghalaya in the last ten years? Nothing! As for the MP schemes, even a fool can distribute those. It needs no extra brains for that.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email

### Our children will look back in anger

Editor,  
When we carefully analyze at how aggressively people want to mine coal in Meghalaya, we can see that greed for money can literally blind a human being. We don't see our own "dark future". We don't see the sufferings from potential disaster any longer. We do not realize that our wrong ambition is going to plunge our own children into the black hole of miseries and distress. Even the recent tragedy where 15 miners are trapped inside a mine in East Jaintia Hills is not enough to jolt us. Now we,

instead, discreetly murmur and pressure the center to legalize the rate hole mining. We have enough pretexts and pretensions to defend our ventures, nay our indulgences. We are quick to line up the hungry faces that we have used all along. We do not want to "listen" to the "warning" from the ecologists about the dangers of unscientific coal mining.

True, Jaintia Hills is still surviving; Meghalaya is still breathing, the air of freshness and its beauty is still attracting tourists to this state. The credit for this goes directly, apart from the Creator, to a handful of intellectuals and media. It is those very conscious people who relentlessly struggled to teach people about the potential dangers and ecological damages due to the indiscriminate rate-hole mining. Their scream finally drew the attention of NGT.

Just imagine what would have happened if those concerned activists were "silent" and we all continued to dig pits after pits! For instance, if NGT lifts the ban what would probably happen? We would mine the coal more aggressively and more randomly? What would be the consequence after 30 to 50 years then? We would definitely witness endless environmental disaster. Thank God this state has produced right-thinking and courageous people too!

# Medical negligence A crisis of trust & values

By Dr S Saraswathi

patients cannot be exactly assessed, but error in conducting the treatment is avoidable.

Medical negligence is commonly understood as breach of duty owed by a doctor to his patient to exercise reasonable care and skill which results in some physical, mental, or financial loss. It is concerned with the duty to care, breach of the duty, cause of the breach, the damage caused, and possible remedy including financial compensation to the victim. The Supreme Court defined the term in a case in 1992 as "want of reasonable degree of care and skill or wilful negligence on the part of medical practitioners in the treatment of a patient with whom a relationship of professional attendant is established, so as to lead to his body injury or permanent disability or loss of life".

Medical errors may occur in diagnosis, prescription of drugs and dosage, and procedures followed in administering the drugs and handling the patient. The Supreme Court took medical negligence as a serious offence in the famous Saha case in 1998 and levied a heavy amount of Rs. 5.96 crore as compensation to be paid by the offenders. The judgement was termed by the court itself as a "deterrent and a reminder to those doctors, hospitals, and nursing homes who do not take their responsibility seriously". The penalty, which was higher than what the Consumer Court earlier awarded, signified the enormity of the offence of medical negligence at times.

The Medical Standard of Care used to measure negligence is defined as the "level and type of care that a reasonably competent and skilled health care professional with a similar background and in the same medical community would have provided under the circumstances". Conformity and deviation from the Standard shows the negligence.

Medical negligence and its extreme form of ill-

treatment of patients are reported more in treatment of mental disorders than physical. It needs to be dealt with as an independent issue.

Medical negligence is a problem known even in ancient times. The concept of medical responsibility is traced by researchers to ancient Mesopotamia in their Code of Hammurabi, which introduced the concept of holding medical professionals accountable for deaths and injuries that could have reasonably been prevented. Ancient Greece and Rome were said to have treated medical negligence with severe punishment. The Roman law provided for compensation for injuries during treatment. Many European countries adopted varied versions of the Roman law. In the old German Empire, it is said that if a patient died, the doctor was handed to the family of the deceased to be treated as they decided.

Ancient India was not behind others in this matter as concepts of professional ethics, duties, and liabilities of doctors were specified in ancient documents. Manusmriti provided penalties for lapses in medical treatment according to their severity and intensity of the damages caused to the patients. Kautilya's Arthashastra prescribes legal duties and liabilities of doctors who should inform administrative authority regarding the treatment. Such ideas of protecting helpless patients from irresponsible doctors continued throughout history.

In the modern era, cases of medical malpractices began to appear before courts in the US in the beginning of the 19th century and became common by 1960. Today, with the advancement of the concept of consumer rights and practice of Tort Law, medical negligence is considered a serious offence. An article in a medical journal even suggested that medical negligence was the third cause of death in the US after heart disease and cancer.

In Britain, under the Medical Act passed in

1858 medical practice was limited to those enrolled on the Medical Register so as to reduce irresponsible medical practice. On the other hand, China has a lenient law which punishes only serious cases of medical malpractice.

The Supreme Court of India, in a historic judgement delivered in 1995, made doctors accountable for any act of "medical negligence" and ruled that they could be sued for compensation under the Consumer protection Act, 1986. Doctors and hospitals which render free service are exempt from the purview of this Act.

The National Health Policy of India adopted in 2017 shifted emphasis in health care from "sick care" to "wellness". Its principles are centred on professionalism, integrity and ethics, equity, affordability, universality, patient-centred and quality care, accountability, and pluralism. If these are followed earnestly, medical negligence and errors can be effectively checked. Unfortunately, medical profession is fast becoming a business with declining service values helping promotion of negligence and unethical practices. The latter is invisible, but pervasive operating in numerous ways.

Hospitals are part of our social system in which human inter-relationship is important in a situation where a patient depends on the doctor and the hospital for his life and well-being.

Health care all over the world is going through a crisis of trust. Unless trust is built up among medical professionals, patients and their families, and medical institutions, blame games will go on and court cases multiply with growing awareness of their rights by citizens. Trust cannot be thrust on anybody or anything. It has to be earned. Medical fraternity has to look inwards and restore the service values of the profession.--INFA

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

### Who cares for hungry souls?

Editor,

We know that many among us have been sleeping on streets every night, out in the cold. We know that 48.2 million of our children have been crying for food everyday in India. We seldom, if ever, talk about it. But some of us sometimes say a few words about our indifference to the needs of others. Sometimes, those words hit us hard. Poet Nirendranath Chakravorty uttered such words in some of his poems.

When we were celebrating this year's Christmas, he breathed his last in Kolkata. After learning that, the first thing that came to my mind was his poem Kolkata Jishu (Jesus of Kolkata). Chakravorty was a famous Bengali poet who won the Sahitya Academy award in 1974 and had been associated with leading Bengali magazine Dosh and Anandamela for children. But for me he will remain associated only with that poem. Now, let us revisit it through its translation into English by Bappa Datta.

"No red signal for that matter/ Yet the whirlwind pace of Kolkata/ Come to an abrupt stop/ Shook violently to a grinding halt/ Taxis, private cars, three-

wheelers./ Tiger stamped double-deckers/ Those who ran in from the sides/ Porters, hawkers, shopkeepers, customers - //

All seemed like an inert image on an/ artist's easel/ To silently witness./ In wobbly steps/ Crossing the road from one to the other/ side/ A naked child./

It had rained a while ago in Chowringhee./ Now the sunlight like tall spears/ Pierced the hearts of the clouds/ To come down/ And cloak Kolkata in a magical light./

Resting my chin on a state bus window/ I see the sky, and I see you/ Child of a beggar mother,/ Jesus of Kolkata/ You stopped the entire traffic by some magical power/ The public cry, the impatient bus driver/ Clenching his teeth/ You care none of it/ With death looming close on both sides/ You walk through in unstable strides/ As if humanity embodied/ With the joy of learning the first steps/ You want the whole wide world/ In your grip. And that is why/ With shaky feet you go/ From the edge of the world to another/

It is a meaningful coincidence that Nirendranath Chakravorty, the writer of Jesus of Kolkata passed away on Christmas Day in Kolkata!

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

# Prime ministership can be decided after 2019 poll results

By Nitya Chakraborty

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has broken his mounabrata by giving an extensive interview on New Year's Day to ANI which elaborates in a big way his strategy to fight the Lok Sabha polls in April/May 2019. Three things are clear. First, the Prime Minister will keep the pot boiling for the BJP and its allies on the Ram Mandir issue till the elections. Expectations will be roused to rally the Sangh Parivar activists, but the PM may not take the final plunge before the Poll as is being demanded by the VHP and the RSS as also Shiv Sena. He will try to keep his appeal to the moderates who think that India needs a strong political leader and Modi has those elements.

Second, he will target the Congress and Rahul Gandhi and try to create a big division in the opposition ranks. PM might use all the powers of the Government to delink Mayawati, K Chhadrasekhar Rao, Navin Patnaik and AIDMK factions from any approach by the opposition, especially the Congress. Third, the PM has taken his lessons from the results of the recent state elections He has identified the farmers distress and the disenchantment of the jobless youth with the BJP government. He will take immediate remedial measures to improve the stock of his government and the BJP through the interim budget to be presented on February 1.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is certainly authoritarian but the authoritarians are also go getters and that way, the PM fully aided by the BJP president Amit Shah will make desperate efforts to ensure that the BJP retains its power for the second time at the centre. So the Congress president Rahul Gandhi is facing a Prime Minister who knows his job and is determined to take corrective measures. The PM is slightly down but he has the capacity to make a turnaround before the elections. This scenario gives the Congress and the opposition little scope to make any mistake that will be taken advantage of by the PM and the BJP leadership. Rahul has emerged as the natural leader of the opposition after the success in the three BJP ruled states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh but that does not lead to a situation where he can be projected as the Prime Minister candidate of the opposition before the poll.

So far the Congress President has shown maturity in dealing with the PM issue. He has said a number of times that the PM ship is not the issue now, but he should not also allow others, belonging both to his own Party or to the opposition like DMK and Telugu Desam to publicly mention him as the potential PM candidate. This official declaration by the Congress President is very important at this stage to forge opposition unity on solid basis and frame fool-proof strategy for defeating the BJP led NDA in the elections. As both the Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee and the CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury have said " let the opposition fight the poll unitedly to the extent possible, the leadership issue will be decided only on the basis of the poll results". So just three months before the Lok Sabha elections, it is imperative that the Congress and the opposition decide officially that the issue of the Prime Ministership will be decided in the light of the poll results. This should be the starting point of the opposition unity efforts and the first point of the proposed three point programme.

The second point of the programme should be not to be too ambitious and make all efforts to make national

alliance. The alliance of anti-BJP parties should be best tried at the state level. It will vary from state to state. For instance, if for any reason, the BSP and the SP are not able to bring Congress in its fold, it should not disturb the alliance efforts in other states. In Lok Sabha, in marginal seats, even small support base of the smaller parties should matter for the Congress as the main party challenging the BJP in that particular state. The objective should be to prevent the division of the anti-BJP votes. The regional parties have their own state compulsions and the pressure from their respective support bases. The Congress has to be prepared to recognize this ground reality and adjust the seat sharing process to the maximum benefit of the opposition.

The most pragmatic course for the anti-BJP parties will be to follow a two track approach in respect of alliances. Under this, The Congress will be the leader in the states where it is fighting the BJP as the major party. It will be having adjustments with the smaller parties but finally the responsibility will be with the Congress as the leader. But in the states, where the regional parties are the rulers like West Bengal, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, the regional parties naturally will not leave space to the Congress in the name of anti-BJP alliance and there the fights between the regional ruling party and the Congress can take place in Lok Sabha poll, but the understanding will be to be a part of anti-BJP alliance in post poll situation.

Even under this two track approach, there is a possibility of a common opposition candidate in about 400 plus seats leaving about 143 seats out of the total of 543 seats. If a total unity of the opposition parties is made possible against the BJP in 400 seats, there is every reason to believe that the opposition should be able to gain more than 272 seats from this 400 figure and the seats from the other 140 seats where triangular fights might take place, will be additional. The opposition need to remember that 31 per cent was the vote share Modi polled at the height of his popularity in 2014 and he is today much less popular and the opposition's starting percentage is 69 per cent if they have one common candidate against the BJP.

The third point of the opposition programme should be to prepare a real pro-people minimum common programme. As the leading party of the opposition, the Congress has to offer a real alternative to deal with the present farmer's distress and the joblessness. The Congress manifestoes for the state assembly elections, especially of Chhattisgarh, contain a number of welcome features. The national manifesto must have the imprint of the new economic approach of Rahul Gandhi. It should demarcate the Congress from the era of Manmohan Singh-Chidambaram. Rahul has talked of fighting crony capitalists. He should reorient the Congress manifesto by incorporating fresh ideas. Rahul Gandhi must convey how socio political rifts translate into economic barriers and how the economics of tolerance builds new social and cultural bridges. The Congress manifesto has to be the anchor of the secular economic alternative of the opposition which will challenge the Modi way of development through crony capitalism and economic bigotry.

For Rahul, his time has come. The country is watching closely whether he can be a game changer in 2019 India. (IPA Service)

*“Confidence doesn't come out of nowhere. It's a result of something... hours and days and weeks and years of constant work and dedication.”*

--- William Pitt

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.143

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 2019

### SC questions tardy rescue mission

Some public spirited advocates concerned about the coal mine disaster and the manner it was handled approached the Supreme Court on Wednesday and the case was listed for hearing on Thursday in the two-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi. The apex court has taken a grim view of the situation and held the state government solely accountable for failing to rescue the miners trapped inside the Ksan mine in Lumthari, East Jaintia Hills since December 13. The Court might have also taken cognizance of the fact that the mining inside the Ksan Mine was illegal. The apex court had in fact very recently allowed transportation of coal already mined before the NGT ban of April 2014. It did this after hearing a plea from the state government that fresh coal is not being mined - which actually should have amounted to perjury since illegal mining is carrying on in broad daylight.

On Thursday the Court took a humanitarian view of the mine disaster and ordered the state government to rescue the miners dead or alive. Onlookers from across the country fail to understand why the state government has been so tardy in this rescue mission. It is true that several NDRF personnel, Navy divers and Coal India personnel are present at the spot but what is needed is appropriate technology to dewater the mines. That appropriate technology is not available and the rescue team is rendered helpless because visibility is a problem and the water level too is an impediment. It is now 23 days since the miners were trapped inside the flooded coal pit. Mining expert Jaswant Singh Gill has repeatedly maintained that the rescue operations suffer from lack of expertise about the mine and the nature of the flooding. Instead of working like clockwork by following standard operating procedures the rescue team is in an exploratory, hit and miss sort of mission. The Supreme Court alone can bring in salutary effect in a situation where those with vested interests in rat hole mining are trying to use all legal and constitutional instruments to buttress their arguments. While mining is an extractive industry and leaves behind a trail of death and destruction, rat-hole mining is even more disastrous as there are no rules to regulate the coal mine owners. The absence of a mining policy in Meghalaya is the result of collusion between the market, politics and the state. Rat-hole mining with its catastrophic consequences cannot be allowed to operate in a modern state where the human rights of labourers have to be respected too.

### LOOKING BACK

June 12, 1989

### Hectic politicking in Assam for Rajya Sabha Election

With only a day left for Tuesday's election the two Rajya Sabha seats from Assam, brisk activities are the witnessed involving the ruling Asom Gana Parishad Congress(I) and the Congress(S). Union Minister of State for Home Mr Santosh Mohan Dev and AICC(I) general secretary Mr A R Mallu have already arrived here as party observers during the election.

Though almost all the parties have decided to support their own candidates, the Congress(I) and the Congress(S) are still trying to get the support of other members. The ruling AGP which is contesting only one seat, is sure of getting its candidate Mr David Ledger elected. The AGP has a strength of 72 in a house of 126 members. Two seats are vacant. The AGP has also

extended its support to Congress(S) candidate Mr Amritlal Basumatary, a sitting MLA, as the consensus non-Congress(I) candidate for the second seat. The Congress(S) has only four members in the house, but apart from the AGP, the two-member CPI(M) group, led by Mr Golam Osmani, have also extended their support to the Congress(S) candidate.

The Congress(I) which has a strength of 23 members fielded former Chief Minister Mr Hiteswar Saikia as its candidate. The 11 member (Dasgupta Group) United Minorities Front (UMF) has also extended its support to Mr Saikia. However, the three-member PTCA group in the house has not yet extended its support to anyone.

# Crisis of Democracy, Politics and Governance

Crisis of democracy arises when the political objectives clash with the principles of good governance. Elections are meant to elect a group of public representatives who will then take on the task of policy making and implementation through the bureaucracy. Today elections have become an end in themselves. After people are elected they no longer feel they can be held accountable for anything. The reason for this debasement of democracy is because elections have become very expensive and votes have to be bought. It's a fact that cannot be denied so people should not even flinch at hearing this. Ask each MLA how much he/she spent in the 2018 elections. You will be shocked. Now people no longer elect MLAs/MDCs because of the person's merits. If merit was the yardstick then those using politics for business would have been rejected outright. The use of euphemisms to define money that is used to buy votes does not take away from the ignobility of the act. In fact, elections in India today are all about using money power to the hilt, irrespective of the political party. Meghalaya being part of that stinking electoral system, which has all but throttled the idea of governance, cannot but follow the same trajectory. And we are seeing the viciousness of bad governance playing out before our eyes.

One of the hallmarks of good governance is the rule of law. When the rule of law operates without distinction then the citizenry feel safe. But the rule of law in Meghalaya has been compromised a long time ago. It has eroded our faith in the system. If there was rule of law, then illegal coal mining and transportation would not have happened after the NGT ban of 2014. The fact is that some Deputy Commissioners tried their best to prevent both illegal mining and transportation of coal from the various districts of Meghalaya. Some of them were transferred out at the behest of the coal lobby, and, more pliable civil servants intended to serve

the interests of the coal barons were posted in strategic coal mining districts. East Jaintia Hills is a shining example of how this was done. The coal barons have for a long time wielded power over the government. And governments past and present have prostrated before them.

This time after the mining tragedy happened in East Jaintia Hills under the watch of the DC, Frederick Doph and the SP, S Nongtynger, any government with some ethical grounding would have transferred them immediately or even suspended them from service for failing to check illegal coal mining or for allowing it to carry on under their very noses. Both have failed in their duties. However, if they have been instructed by politicians to allow this illegal mining to happen, then they should have had the spine to call out those politicians. After all, the bureaucracy is created to serve the public, not the political class. But here one sees too many spineless individuals as civil servants and police officials. They have entered the service not for serving the public but to serve themselves and their political masters. Add to this nexus the so-called pressure groups that have never raised as much as a sigh against illegal coal mining and transportation, and you have a potent cocktail and a recipe for killing the state by degrees.

The DC, East Jaintia Hills does not even have a modicum of decency in how he addresses this present issue. He directs the family members of those trapped inside the mines to come and receive the interim relief of Rs one lakh. Perhaps he believes that if those relatives receive the money they would not then dare to raise a stink at the utter incompetence of the district administration in handling the whole rescue operations. Those relatives have not lost hope and it is the duty of the administration to disburse the contingency money to them with dignity and respect for their feelings;

### TO THE EDITOR

### Grappling for solution in the midst of disaster

Editor,

It is very unfortunate that till midday of January 3, 2019) none of the fifteen coal miners trapped under the illegal coal mines at Ksan near Lumthari village of East Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya, have been traced and recovered by the NDRF and SDRF despite the help of sea divers from the Indian Navy; the use of high powered water pumps and other expertise available in India so far. This shows that our country is still lagging behind even in matters like rescuing miners trapped under the earth of coal pits. When will our country manage to get the expertise for such rescue missions. This also shows that we are ill prepared and ill-equipped to deal with human tragedies like the one in East Jaintia Hills. We are only good at knee-jerk reactions. This is very sad and a tragedy indeed that we cannot rescue the miners after 22 days of being trapped inside the earth. It takes so much time to respond to the disaster that

even after so many days we are grappling for answers which do not seem to be found anywhere. India is still far behind and the less said about Meghalaya the better. Hence while we are grappling for answers and solutions the fate of the trapped miners looks bleak. Perhaps what is left to be rescued are only dead bodies. Will this incident teach any lessons to the powers that be so that such eventualities are not repeated in future whether in rescuing trapped miners or victims trapped under the debris of an earthquake or any natural calamity.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email

### Vicious cycle of polls and loan waivers

Editor,

Recently, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, commented that the vicious cycle of polls/elections, and loan waivers must come to an end. This is very welcome, especially coming from the Prime Minister himself. However, we should restrain ourselves, and be cautious. It is a truth that India is

not by making them feel he is their benefactor (Mai-baap). The utter lack of empathy is galling. And the DC had the audacity to proceed on leave during the course of the rescue mission when he should have been supervising the whole mission 24x7. What kind of rescue operation is it that is abandoned for want of equipment? For that alone the DC should have been hung out to dry. Alas! The Chief Secretary is too kind a man to sanction his leave and also to watch the whole rescue mission going awry.

The less we speak about the political class the better. Look at the Shillong MP Vincent Pala. When he got the rare opportunity to raise the issue of the mining disaster and the trapped miners in Parliament vide a zero hour motion so as to kindle the conscience of the entire House and get all the support he could to fast track the rescue mission, the man sunk to the lowest depths by pushing his own agenda. He wanted rat hole mining to be legalised. This surely must be the worst instance of personal aggrandisement trumping public service. And the irony is that the people of 1 Shillong Parliamentary constituency might still elect this man because he will buy the votes of the poor and he will promise the mining barons to lift the ban on rat hole mining. Both these tactics are designed to win votes.

Let's not forget that it's the poor (the Khasis call them kup shiliang, sem-shiliang) who have the energy and enthusiasm to indulge in the five yearly dance of democracy. That's the time freebies come their way and free meals too. And the numbers of such people are growing in our state. I was appalled to learn that quite a number of Khasi people today can't even afford a meal and have to queue up for a free meal from some do-gooders. Such is the plight of a people who once were proud and dignified and would not succumb to freebies out of a sense of

shame. That's all in the past now. And then what about the political parties in Meghalaya and their reactions to the mining tragedy? What does the NPP as a party have to say? Have they lost their voices? Are they shocked? Or embarrassed to have been caught lying about illegal coal mining? What about the raucous BJP? Does this Party find its voice only during elections? And have any of the regional parties even expressed their views on this issue? Why not? Is it because most of those trapped are non-Khasi/Jaintia and in fact nearly all of them are Muslims who we have learnt to hate if not to fear? Clearly we have exposed our deep communal biases in this tragic incident. But we still celebrated Christmas as if Christ promised to come and save only those who go to church and call themselves Christians but will not balk from stealing public money the rest of the week. How shallow is our understanding of the Christ of the Bible. So much so we have reduced Christ to the level of our own pettiness.

Christians in the Government and in politics have been lying through their teeth about the existence of illegal coal mining. This was also the story told in the Supreme Court after which the Court ruled that 1.76 lakh MT of coal extracted before April 2014 can be transported up to January 31 this year. When people lie in a court is that not perjury? And by the way which part of Meghalaya is this coal going to be transported from? Who has inventorised it? How much coal is lying in which part of Meghalaya? How is the break-up done? Isn't this whole thing a big scam?

The less said about the Sangma brothers the better. They hold the two top departments which are the fulcrum of governance but both seem rather clueless on what sort of emergency measures to deploy in the mine rescue operations. This was one opportunity they had to show their capability to handle a disaster. Alas the Government itself is a disaster.

Yours etc.,  
A Bhuyan  
Nagaon  
Assam

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### Anything is possible in Meghalaya!

Editor,

Is it ever possible for Paul Krugman to be appointed Chief Economic adviser to the Trump administration? Or for Subramanian Swamy to be appointed Chief Economic Adviser to the newly formed Congress Government in Rajasthan? Or Steve Bannon being appointed Chief Strategist to the Maduro regime in Venezuela? Never in a million years, right? But DD Lapang is being appointed Chief Adviser to the MDA government in Meghalaya and subsequently also joined a new party. The old political warhorse has defied convention by choosing to start a new political innings. In the meantime, with utmost sorrow in her heart, the phrase, "Never the twain shall meet," has fled away to a foreign land never to return to the State of Meghalaya, ever.

Yours etc;  
Gary Marbaniang,  
Via email

## India-Bhutan Talks Tshering reinforces ties

By Dr DK Giri

Bhutan's newly-elected Prime Minister Lyonchen Lotay Tshering made his maiden foreign visit to India to reinforce a time-tested, enduring friendship and also to complete the commemoration of golden jubilee of India-Bhutan diplomatic relations. Having taken over office in November 2018, Tshering declared he was here to take the bilateral relations to new heights. Remember, our Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made Bhutan his first foreign trip when he took office in 2014.

Tshering gratefully acknowledged that Modi was the first and the only head of government to call and congratulate him on his electoral victory. These diplomatic gestures reflect the unique and special relationship both countries have had since the Punakha Treaty 1910, signed between British India and Bhutan which guided the bilateralism. In addition to political relationship, the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan shares deep religio-cultural ties with India.

Tshering had formal exchanges with his Indian counterpart covering trade, hydro-power, the bedrock of India-Bhutan development cooperation, external affairs, military and strategic issues. The new agreements and understandings were preceded by review of the on-going projects and agreements where both, New Delhi and Thimphu concurred in the satisfactory progress of bilateralism.

On strategic front, New Delhi and Thimphu have a close relationship. Tshering said they discussed bilateral and regional issues of mutual interest. The bilateral strategic relations were guided by the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in Darjeeling in 1949. Article 2 of the Agreement was quite significant, which said: "The Government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part, the Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of Government of India in regard to its external relations".

However, in 2007, the article was revised to say "both the countries shall cooperate with each other on issues relating to their national interests". The spirit of Article 2 still persists as Thimphu leans on New Delhi in its external relation. The formal diplomatic relations were set-up in 1968.

Arguably, of late, the China factor influences India-Bhutan relations. Since Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1950, both New Delhi and Thimphu regard Beijing as a common threat. Bhutan shares 470 km border with China, and experiences sporadic tension at the border. Since, 1990, Bhutan has been rejecting Chinese 'package deal' to exchange Doklam for territorial concessions. Doklam is of great strategic importance to India as was recently experienced in the stand-off with China. Bhutan has not joined BRI project of China.

Unlike Nepal, Bhutan does not play the China card against India. Beijing has unsuccessfully been trying to woo Thimphu with its soft-diplomacy like encouraging tourism etc.

Both countries support each other in international forums. India supported Bhutan's membership of UN. The latter supported India on its stand on Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. India was opposed to both as these were exclusive. Bhutan is a founding member of SAARC, and a member of BIMSTEC. Thimphu took strong steps in flushing out anti-India militants from its territory in an exercise called "Operation All Clear". Indeed, Bhutan is a top priority for India in its 'neighbourhood first' policy. Prime Minister Modi coined a new strategy called B2B - Bharat to Bhutan to deepen the sacred bond between the two.

On the economic front, New Delhi promised an

assistance of Rs 4500 crore to Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan running from 2018 to 2023. Another Rs 400 crore was promised as a transitional trade support facility for a period of five years in order to strengthen bilateral trade and economic linkages. New Delhi has been extending support to Bhutan's five year plans which started in 1961.

India is the biggest trading partner of Bhutan accounting for 90% of its imports and 98% of exports. The trade is guided by the Trade and Transit Agreement signed in 1972 between New Delhi and Thimphu. In 2016, the bilateral trade touched Rs. 8,273 crore. The Indian side commended the new developments like introduction of Rupay Card - an Indian debit and credit card in Bhutan.

On the crucial hydro power sector, New Delhi is heavily backing Thimphu to generate electricity. In 2006, both countries signed a Co-operation Agreement to generate 10,000-mw electricity in Bhutan and to supply the surplus power to India. Two latest hydro-projects, Sankosh hydro project and Mangdechhu project were discussed. Bhutan has huge hydropower potential with its five rivers, the estimated capacity is 23,760 mw, the current capacity is about 1606 mw out of which 1416 mw (three projects) has been installed; three more projects of 2,129 mw are to be developed with Indian technical and financial assistance.

The other areas of cooperation included space cooperation, education, and infrastructure etc. India's space programme South-Asia satellite covers Bhutan where ISRO is preparing the ground station. This will help Bhutan to send out weather-messages to its far-flung areas, help in tele-medicines and disaster relief operation. New Delhi has helped Thimphu in setting up its democratic infrastructures, building up the Supreme Court etc. Government of India extends scholarship for Bhutanese students in India, which stands at Rs. 2 crore and is likely to continue.

As a word of caution, New Delhi needs to be a bit careful in not putting-off Thimphu with its big brother attitude. Thimphu has been discomfited by New Delhi's occasional paternalism. For instance, when Bhutan was apparently getting close to China, New Delhi suddenly withdrew its subsidies on kerosene and cooking gas. Such knee-jerk reaction could be avoided. In December, 2014, Bhutan's total debt was 112 per cent of its GDP; 75 per cent of it was to India. Furthermore, most of what Bhutan borrows from India allegedly finds its way back to India.

On the flip side, the much-vaunted hydro projects are not creating jobs in Bhutan, the revenue supposed to be generated by the hydro electricity suffers from low demand in India, low industrial requirement etc. Also, much of the electricity is lost in transmission. In order to make hydro power in Bhutan mutually beneficial, New Delhi has to review its output and the right rewards for Bhutan.

Finally, to maintain the historic and enduring relationship, New Delhi should help Bhutan become self-reliant, guide Thimphu in strengthening its democratic set-ups and political establishment. Let us note that Bhutan is a unique country, fully organic without chemicals or pesticides, talks of GNH - Gross National Happiness, as against GDP. Around 60 countries and the UN recognise this unique Bhutanese practice. New Delhi should help preserve this uniqueness as it should recognise and reinforce Bhutan's assertion of democracy and self-reliance. As the biggest democracy in the world, India owes this to its 'closest and friendliest' neighbour.---INFA

(The writer is Prof International Politics, JMI)

*“Besides pride, loyalty, discipline, heart, and mind, confidence is the key to all the locks.”*

--- Johnny Unitas

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.144 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JANUARY 5, 2019

### NGT needs to ensure strict compliance

On Friday the Supreme Court of India said it wanted a briefing on the rescue operations in the Ksan mine, East Jaintia Hills on Monday. The Court does not seem satisfied at the progress of the rescue operation and rightly so since it is now the 23rd day since the mining accident on December 13 where 15 miners are trapped inside a flooded mine. That the rescue operation is poorly managed requires no further evidence. The rescue mission is a case of delayed reaction from the state and central government. And whether any lessons are learnt from this incident also remains a question mark.

On the same day the National Green Tribunal (NGT) too levied an environmental cost of Rs 100 crore from the state government for violating its orders passed in April 2014 which banned rat hole mining. The NGT says that this money will be realised from mine owners and errant officials. The money would be in the custody of the Central Pollution Control Board and will be used to restore the environment, such as filling up and closing the abandoned mines. The order is salutary, except that like all orders of the NGT, compliance remains a problem. The NGT banned coal mining in April 2014. It then appointed a Committee to assess the quantum of coal already extracted and allowed that coal to be transported. But up until 2018, the coal seems to have magically multiplied itself and its presence as ubiquitous as the landscape. The reason is simple. Coal was being mined despite the ban and the coal mine owners repeatedly petitioned the NGT and later the Supreme Court asking for transportation of coal extracted before the ban. There have been 10 such lifts on the ban. The problem with NGT is that it does not have the wherewithal to enforce the ban. To rely on the State Government to do so is an exercise in futility since those in Government are complicit in facilitating the illegal mining and transportation of coal. This was proven after the mine tragedy of December 13, 2018.

The NGT hopes that its order would be complied with but what happens if the illegality is repeated as it was post April 2014. Does the NGT have punitive powers? If it had, then all those who have violated the mining ban and also those who have facilitated it would also have been held accountable after the December 13 mining disaster. The NGT will have to do better than just issue orders. Compliance has to be strictly enforced and the Rs 100 crore has to be recovered within a definite timeline.

The Indian economy is poised to grow to over 7 per cent in 2019 – a momentum it has established during the past few years despite slowdown in 2016-17. The growth at macro level is not the country's problem. It's the micro-economic managements which are creating inequalities, stymieing job growth and crisis in the banking sector. Even people with good qualifications have not been able to manage properly paid jobs.

The private sector from education to industry is sustaining by offering low-paid jobs to teachers, engineers, management experts or any other. While the problem is there in the major metros, where salaries are paid at 30 per cent of the government stipulated norms, a little away even jobs in higher education or any level of private employment hovers around less than Rs 5,000 to Rs 30,000.

The managements of private sector admit the fact. They also say that their earnings too are low. The enterprises are struggling to stay afloat by slashing their charges, fees or cut on expenses. In such a scenario, they find that provisions and penalties of the GST impact their activities.

Both the Central and State governments' operations are becoming expensive. They go on increasing taxes despite GST. Since new levies could not be called tax, they name it as cess. The latest to be added to the list is the "cow cess" in Uttar Pradesh. It was already there in Punjab and Rajasthan. While technically indirect tax after GST is coming down, with the highest slab being 28 per cent, various levies are adding to the problem.

Even income tax has about 3 per cent cess. On the part of the States,

# Boosting Economic Confidence Bank mergers, cess no solution

By Shivaji Sarkar

various cesses, profession tax and increasing tolls remain as unseen and less discussed taxes. Even municipal levies are rising. So the inequality is growing. The poor loses more of their income to such levies further impoverishing them.

Oxfam in its 2018 reports says, "In the context of the acceleration of growth rate of Indian economy, the rise in inequality raises issues of the distribution of gains from the growth." Its report concludes that since 2010 till now, more and more of the country's income is going "to the top 10 per cent and top 1 per cent of the population."

The Credit Suisse's Global Wealth Report Gini co-efficient for wealth points to an overall inequality. It has risen to 0.854 in 2018 from 0.804 in 2011 and 0.83 in 2017. The closer the Gini value gets to 1.0, the more unequally distributed is an economy.

It is a public perception that inequality is a political choice. It acts through the hold of powerful lobbies over government policy. They do no miss an opportunity to increase levies in any name and the latest is the environment. In the name of environment, car lobbies acting through government organisations are forcing people to abandon their working vehicles and increasing various charges on industry and for parking as in Delhi. The citizen loses on their income and lobbies maximise profits.

Even the 2016 demonetisation for mopping up black money turned into a nightmare for the poor and small businesses. India remains even now a cash-based economy. Digital transfers are not accepted even at government-run highway

toll booths. This apart the rationale of toll, leading to more corrupt practices, is being questioned as every Indian is paying a fuel cess for road construction amounting to Rs 1.13 lakh crore a year.

In an election year, when the government traditionally, not constitutionally, is supposed to present an interim Budget, no new proposals should normally be there. But the government has the opportunity to avail of the window to reduce many levies and abolish atrocious cess and tolls. It would be a great relief to the people, increase their income and also pave the way for growth. Lower levies also could be an incentive for the enterprises to employ more.

The 2008 to 2010 loan bonanza to the industry, flight of defaulters like Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi, led to the severe NPA crisis of over Rs 12 lakh crore. A mere Rs 50,000 crore has been realised. The recent mergers of five SBI subsidiaries and now Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank into Bank of Baroda (BoB) are not being seen as a solution. The SBI merger led to depressed operating performance and its bad loans surged. It is found that the mergers increase costs.

The latest mergers into BoB have shaken the stock market. It saddles BoB with Dena Bank's Rs 16,140 crore stock pile of bad loan. The merger of Air India and Indian Airlines has led to the virtual collapse of the public sector entity. Though bank mergers were done for good, finally it may cause many hiccups for the economy in 2019. More job losses in the

banking sector are also predicted. Dena Bank alone has 13,440 strong work-force. The mergers are now being touted as unwise. Saddling one's losses on another is not wise. One reason for high banking cost is stated to be over 30 crore Jandhan Accounts. Though conceptually they are fine, compulsion has added to the cost for the banking system and problems for those who were forced to open accounts.

Around 7.5 million youth join India's job market each year. As government not comprising all activities, even providing jobs or remunerative prices to the farmers is seen as problem of the government.

It is leading to the waning of business confidence.

The October 2018 Global Business Outlook survey of 12,000 manufacturers and services by HIS Markit spells concerns of political issues, cost pressures and currency stability. In fact, business sentiment in the country was weaker than the average in emerging markets as well as globally.

Despite this India is poised to grow. Its exports increase over 20 per cent to \$221 billion till August 2018, PMI at 51.7 shows expansion, I-T collection touches Rs 10.03 lakh crore, companies raise Rs 21,000 crore IPOs, FDI equity inflows reach \$389.6 billion, IIP output rises by 7.1 per cent, primary goods production rise by 3.7 per cent and capital goods by 16.4 per cent.

But the country has to rethink on bringing all activities under the government. This is against the concept of "less government". It is adding to administrative, financial, economic and functional problems. If this is solved many inequities could be addressed.--- INFA

## Emancipated in bondage again Sneaking in using cover of dark is no achievement

By Aditya Aamir

After menstrual age women Kanaka Durga and Bindu Ammini's wee-hour intrusion into the Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple, there's need for a reckoning. One leading newspaper termed the accomplishment, "red-letter day" and "emancipation of women". The two women broke a "long-standing taboo", the paper declared. Hardly. The taboo was broken time and again in the years before 1991. Then, too, they were dismissed with "purification" rites. And even after Kanaka Durga and Bindu, women of 10-50 age continue to be barred by cops and devotees.

So, Kanaka Durga and Bindu can stop applying the kohl to their triumphant eyes. Emancipation of women is a whole big different elephant. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's plan to emancipate Sabarimala, turn it into a pilgrim tourism hub, sucks. He should procure a panda from Sichuan, China. Build a Sabarinagari – 'Never-Never Land' – in the vicinity of the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple. Neon-lit 'Sabarinagari' with Russian and Chinese attractions will tempt 41-day fasting Ayyappa celibates to break vow, leaving free the

impression that he is too hard at work to bother over such mundane things.

Wily! Modi and Pinarayi share that trait. The atheist and the theist. Materialists at the core. It will leave both of them in the red. Pinarayi, definitely, is in the red. The 10-50 age restriction was the Kerala High Court's doing after women entered before 1991 and were reported. The SC jettisoned the HC ruling on September 28, 2018. But neither "long-standing taboo" nor "red-letter day" holds for Ayyappa devotees. Meaning, Pinarayi Vijayan is no great sheikh, shakes!

Sneaking two women into the temple in the wee hours makes no "red-letter day", and cannot be "emancipation of women." In current terminology, it is "surgical strike" negated Pakistani-style! Besides, the definition of "woman Ayyappa devotee" is restricted: 10-50 age bracket; respects Ayyappa's celibate status and is 'ready to wait' till after age 50/55. The clandestine foray of January 2, 2019 does not qualify on any of these aspects.

The secrecy of the visit and the "purification" of the temple take away from the

**Kanaka Durga and Bindu Ammini were 'programmed' to buck tradition. Chosen because no classified woman Ayyappa devotee would undertake the journey. For Bindu and Kanaka Durga, Ayyappa traditions do not count. There is no belief, there is no devotion, there is no sense of guilt. The duo's entry was planned. December 24, 2018 they did a "recede". Thereafter, they vanished.**

hill for women devotees of all age to climb.

That is not what is happening. Since so-called "red-letter day", one menstrual-age woman and a transgender have been barred entry. A 47-year-old Sri Lankan 'yuvati' left, cursing the Kerala Police for halting her, pissed off that husband and teenage son made it, but not she. The transgender from Tamil Nadu found a wall of Ayyappa devotees blocking her route. So, it is an either-or situation prevailing in Sabarimala. Police or devotee stand between women's emancipation and bondage. The police, if they are not in mufti, will not assist. The devotees, if they are not asleep, will resist.

By all reckoning, the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple continues to remain out of bounds for 'yuvati'. The police cannot be always at beck and call. And Pinarayi Vijayan cannot be CM forever. The January 22 Supreme Court hearing of review petitions may go either way. Kanaka Durga and Bindu made a difference to an extent, but there is the ordinance way. Congress MPs are talking of taking that way. Congress has sort of lagged in Ayyappa stakes and wants to make amends.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected in Pathanamthitta "in three days" and the Congress will bring up 'ordinance'. If Modi delivers, good for him. If he doesn't, good for the Congress. It will have something to cradle, crow about. Beat the BJP with. Most probably, Modi will not bite, not after he refused to take the ordinance route to Ram Mandir. Even, otherwise, 'kaandar' Modi likes to keep up the

triumph. The "purification ploy" is built into the Ayyappa-tradition system to deny such claims. If a pair of commie women activists sneak into a Malappuram mosque and offer Friday prayers, will that amount to "emancipation of woman"? The Muslim clergy will react most indignantly and there would be consequences. Similarly, a breach of Christian church customs.

Kanaka Durga and Bindu Ammini were 'programmed' to buck tradition. Chosen because no classified woman Ayyappa devotee would undertake the journey. For Bindu and Kanaka Durga, Ayyappa traditions do not count. There is no belief, there is no devotion, there is no sense of guilt. The duo's entry was planned. December 24, 2018 they did a "recede". Thereafter, they vanished. To surface in a Kadagu lodge. January 1, 2019 they took part in the Women's Wall. January 2, 2019 they "made history." Women's emancipation was never the goal.

The five Kerala cops, who escorted them to Sabarimala, into the temple, were Vijayan handpicks. All five hail from his village Pinarayi. Only nine people knew of 'Operation Breach': Kanaka Durga, Bindu Ammini, Pinarayi Vijayan, Kottayam police superintendent Harishankar and the five Pinarayi cops. It helped that 'Chief Minister' Pinarayi is also 'Home Minister' Pinarayi. The Devaswom Board was kept in the dark. So was DGP Loknath Behera. And what do we have? A Tamil Sri Lankan yuvati cursing cops, and a Tamil Nadu transgender shying away from bare-chested Ayyappans. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

## Govt must create alternative livelihoods

Editor,

I have been following your reports on the mining tragedy at Ksan, East Jaintia Hills. I congratulate you, and your paper, for being the only one to have attempted to prick the societal conscience about the inhuman magnitude of the catastrophe. I only wish it had been able to alert everybody from the earlier days itself.

To say that the mining disaster was followed by an administrative disaster would be an understatement. The days following the mining accident clearly show how inhuman the stakeholders in this illegal industry have become. First, the lack of response from the mine owners shocks me to the core. After all they are the ones who have accumulated so much wealth through this trade, both before the NGT ban and subsequent to it.

After the poor miners got trapped, instead of immediately swinging into action to rescue them, they withdrew into their shells and feigned ignorance. The poor miners went down into the mines to raise money to meet their needs. It has been reported that the three young men from Lumthari near where the mine is located had gone down to the mines to help meet the Christmas expenses of the local church there. But, the mine owners, who employed them, have now deserted them instead of rushing to their aid. I feel that the Government, and civil society, should not let them get away scot free. They should be made to pool in and

meet all the expenses of the rescue operations as well as the compensation to, and the rehabilitation of, the families of the trapped miners.

The District Administration too was in a state of denial for too long after the accident was reported to them. There are allegations of a nexus between key people in the administration and the mine owners. Following the assault on the CSWO team, the administration feigned ignorance of the illegal mining activities. However, once the accident that trapped the miners had been reported, they should have swung into action immediately to save the miners. But, they failed to do so for reasons best known to them. As public servants, they have failed to do their duty and stringent action should be taken against those at fault, and a black remark placed in their service records.

Illegal mining did not suddenly take place after the MDA government took over the reins of governance in the State. The State Government should have recognised this and moved all sources immediately to organise a massive rescue operation to save the miners. However, the Government chose to shy away from the incident and instead began a political attempt to wash their hands off the matter much like Pontius Pilate of Biblical fame. The Government, as well as the political representatives of the area, should also be blamed for deserting the miners at their time of need. Civil society should deal with them at the appropriate time. In fact,

even the Opposition failed to wake up to the disaster in time, and they have no moral right to play political upmanship on this issue.

At the end, I would just say, that there is a huge learning for all of us from this disaster. The labourers from the area are willing to enter the mines because of the lucrative earnings they can get. If they are to be weaned away from this livelihood, organisations like the MBDA, IFAD, etc., should swing into action to train them in other less dangerous means of earning a livelihood in that area. If rat-hole mining is to be allowed then minimum safety precautions should be prescribed by the authorities to ensure such accidents do not recur in the future. And a standard operating protocol should be put in place for our State Disaster Management Team, as well as District Administrative Units, to follow in case of disasters in the future.

I pray for a miracle that will keep the trapped miners alive. But, in case they do not survive, let us not allow their death to be in vain. Let us learn from this calamity or history will repeat itself.

Yours etc,  
RG Lyngdoh,  
Via email

## PN Syiem's changing political loyalties

Editor,

The media has given wide publicity to former CEM, KHADC, Mr PN

Syiem, during the last three years or more. Indeed it is a privilege for public figures like him to get a lot of attention in the media. However, the general public might wonder why media gives undue publicity to them. The reason is because they are public figures and whatever they say or do is being closely watched and monitored by the media in particular and the public in general, mainly through the media. Some members of the public may complain about this needless publicity but that's how it is. Of course some of the publicity is for the right reasons but not all is.

Again during last few days and weeks Syiem got quite a good share of media coverage especially on his exit from a political party he helped birthed and which is his brainchild - the People's Democratic Front (PDF). Syiem has cited his own reasons for leaving the PDF to join the National Peoples' Party (NPP) and to contest the District Council Polls from Mawkharpynthorukhrak. We, the public, have nothing to say about his joining this or that party and about his intention to contest the polls from any party he chooses. What we find disturbing is his lack of steadfastness and loyalty to any political party. This might finally destroy him and his political career. We have seen enough of his shenanigans as the CEM, KHADC during the last six years. He fell from grace when he rebelled against Dr Mukul Sangma. For a while he was hailed as the saviour of Meghalaya by certain sections who dared

Dr Mukul Sangma and nicknamed him, "The Dictator Ruler" then. But that did not last long. Again Syiem fell from grace when he lost the general election in

Mawsynram constituency where he contested from his new found party, the PDF. He sunk even further when he lost the bye-election to Ranikor Assembly constituency. This time round he wanted to recover lost ground and resurrect himself by advancing eastward to contest from a new constituency and new party. We do not know what's in store for him. I don't know how much he will be able to contribute to the NPP. The way things are at the moment PN Syiem's fate hangs in the balance. In politics we cannot underestimate anyone for every person has his political ups and downs. However, on close scrutiny we find that PN Syiem could not deliver much during his tenure as CEM, KHADC. In fact the much touted Monolith Festival turned into a scam. Hence there is nothing that PN Syiem can be proud of.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email

## Conrad Govt caught out

Editor,

The MDA coalition government looks like an alliance of convenience. Till date there is no clarity on what the priorities of the government are. It has been moving from crisis to crisis and responded with knee-jerk reactions. The regional parties seem to be going

Yours etc.,  
JW Nongrum,  
Via email

# 'State scheme for PwDs should be consistent'

Elkin Rynniaw is 31 years old. He is blind in one eye and has only 40 per cent vision in the other. A boarder of Bethany Society in the city, Rynniaw did not have a childhood that one is expected to have. However, torture and humiliation have only made him stronger to fight for the cause of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). He is now the president of Meghalaya Liberation Association of Visually Impaired, or MLAVI.

Rynniaw was born in the remote village of Porla in West Khasi Hills. When he was only six, his mother died and father left the five siblings to marry again. With no adult earning member in the family, the children lived in penury and "at times we had to go hungry the whole day". Rynniaw's elder brothers did petty jobs to run the family. But none of the siblings was friendly with Rynniaw and often hit him. "Once they poked my eye with a twig and it started bleeding."

"The villagers knew about this and one day, a lady from the local Presbyterian church came to our house and took me along," said Rynniaw who works at Bethany Society.

An expert farmer now, Rynniaw's travails did not end. Though he got a house to stay in and started going to school, his eyes continued to give trouble. One day, while in school Rynniaw's eyes got swollen and "it felt like someone has put chilly powder into my eyes". He went to Bansara Eye Clinic for check-up and came to know about Bethany Society. Rynniaw was around 14 years old when he came to stay in the society boarding house. "I was already old then and found it difficult to get admission in the inclusive school here as I was told that I would not be able to catch up with the Braille class. But I was determined to finish my education and I told the authority here that if I cannot study I would not stay here," Rynniaw recalled.

With much difficulty but determination Rynniaw finished Class IV with first division marks. Rynniaw studies Philosophy at St Anthony's College. Rynniaw has his own working space at Bethany. He grows vegetables, makes vermicompost and experiments with various farming techniques. The farm produce and the manure are sold.

In an interview with **The Shillong Times**, the gritty young man talks about his past and present and what he wants to



## TALKING POINT

## ELKIN RYNNIAW

achieve. Excerpts:

### Is there any cure for your eyes?

When I was in Class V, a philanthropist from Spain had visited Bethany with the intention to help poor children. It was 2002. He had taken me to a hospital in Guwahati where my right eye was operated. Thank god for him that I have some vision left in this eye. For the other eye, I went to Civil Hospital and now it is completely gone. I go for check-ups but I do not think there is proper treatment here.

### What are you studying now? What do you wish to do after this?

After completing my matriculation in 2007, I had joined Shillong College with Economics, Statistics, Elective Khasi and English. However, due to acute financial problem I could not continue and I had to quit studies for five to six years. Now I am a student of fourth semester at St Anthony's College. I want to finish my studies so that I have an independent life.

### For how long have you been the member of MLAVI? What

### prompted you to join/form the group?

MLAVI is the rechristened version of Association of Challenged people. It was formed in 2014 and currently has 15 mem-

**'For two and a half years, no money is coming from the CM's Scheme... the new CM should prove himself better than his predecessor by ensuring proper implementation of the scheme. Also, Rs 500 is meagre and for the last 15 years, the amount has remained the same'**

bers. I wanted to be a part of the organisation so that I can give voice to the problems of PwDs. I resigned from MLAVI in 2014 but rejoined two years later. Now I am the state president and have many responsibilities.

### What are the objectives of MLAVI?

As the president (Rynniaw is also the state-level president of the All Meghalaya Association of People with Disabilities), I want to first build the financial structure of the organisation. We did not have funds but I, along with my team, am working towards making it sustainable.

I work with rural technology and I am an expert in organic farming using innovative ways which may help PwDs. I am also a livelihood trainer. So I am trying to use these skills to bring about a change. Recently, I trained a group at Nongrah village in raised bed gardening. Raised bed gardening or farming is my brainchild and this will help even a person on wheelchair to farm without any physical trouble.

But you have to understand that only training will not help if it is not implemented. So I follow up after every training session and encourage trainees to continue with the work. This way, one day a cycle will be formed and sustainability will be achieved. As the main resource person, I have written down the action plan for this programme.

We all have access to internet. So my first aim is to contact PwD friends on social network and find out their problems. Then the focus will be on livelihood, which is the bigger plan.

### What do you think is lacking in the state for PwDs?

Well, many things. For two and a half years, no money is coming from the Chief Minister's Scheme. The government has changed but that does not mean that the scheme will be discontinued. In fact, the new chief minister should prove himself better than his predecessor by ensuring proper implementation of the scheme. Also, the money paid (Rs 500) is meagre. For the last 15 years, the amount has remained the same when everything else around us has changed. So the government should consider raising the amount.

There are other problems too that PwDs face in Meghalaya. There is social discrimination and verbal abuse. The word *anna* in Khasi is a derogatory word used for PwDs.

You see, all PwDs need some mental support and such treatment by the society often breaks our confidence for life. So this mindset has to change and we are working towards that by spreading awareness.

There are other problems like sexual harassment of the mentally and the physically challenged and justice often eludes such victims because they cannot speak out.

The biggest problem, I feel, is poverty. That too needs to be eradicated.

### What are your demands?

We want our rights, which include right to live with dignity. The government has rules and laws in paper but they need to be implemented in letter and spirit.

Also, as I said earlier, the CM scheme should be consistent and the amount should be increased. The world is dynamic and prices are increasing. Do you think Rs 500 a month, that too irregularly, is enough?

### What are your other interests?

I am very much interested in farming. Nature has been my teacher and from childhood I have been doing farming. So I know everything about soil and seeds and crops. I cannot study for long and definitely not after dark. So I cannot read much beyond the books in syllabus.

# Overcome exam fear, be confident

By Prakash Sharma

It was December 2017 and 18-year-old Devyani, a Class XII student of science stream in a private school, was nervous about her pre-board examination a week later. She was nervous and afraid of what we may call the ordeal of the examination. Her parents too were anxious about the stress that their daughter was going through.

However, she kept preparing for the examination with guidance from none and wrote the papers which seemed to be nothing less than a nightmare. The result day for Devyani proved to be embarrassing and menacing as she had even failed to score pass marks in more than half of the subjects.

She kept crying for the entire day and tried her best to find out what actually had gone wrong. The reason for her abysmal result was not surprising. She confessed to those mistakes and repented.

She failed to plan and prepare strategically for the pre-board examination. Also, she confessed to not taking the pre-board examination very seriously.

Devyani is not the only student who has faced similar fate due to sheer indifferent attitude and haphazard way of studying.

There is no denying the fact that preparation and performance in the pre-board examination play a vital role in the making of results of the final board examination. So this examination is considered as the full dress-rehearsal of the ensuing board examination.

So from this perspective, students need to take the pre-board examination very seriously and plan meticulously in keeping with the following flawless strategies in mind.

### Brush up on the syllabi thoroughly

Before the commencement of the pre-board examination, syllabi of all the subjects of the course get completed in schools. Now what remains is revising them seriously so that lessons learnt in classroom and self-study get reinforced and permanent.

Moreover, students must have the perfect knowledge of syllabus of each subject which helps in fixing the road map of responsibilities and setting the mood for serious and focused study. While revising, students must have the exact knowledge of the following points —



1. Details of marks allotted to each chapter of the subject

2. Chapters with high and low weightage of marks and types of questions asked from those chapters in the examination. Each chapter must be thoroughly studied to find out the

number of objective or multiple-choice, short and long-answer type questions and, most importantly, numerical questions. 3. Choose long-answer type questions in each chapter very carefully and prepare the answers rationally. The long-answer type questions are usually 6-8 mark questions and from this point of view they do play crucial role in scoring good marks.

4. Make ready-reckoner like notes of important facts, figures and formulae in each chapter and paste them at a vantage point in your study room.

### Be clear about objective & multiple choice questions

These questions are of one-mark each but they are asked in a sizeable number in the pre-board examinations. To prepare for the answers of these types of questions, you must study each chapter intensively. Keep on jotting down important concepts, theories, inventions, rules, laws, formulae, equations, and step-wise methods of measurement or calculation, units, year, date and a lot of other facts and figures while going through the chapters.

### Prepare plan on day-to-day basis

Since the time period for the pre-board examination is very meagre so you need to make a plan on day-to-day basis. Identify the various chapters which you find hard and spend time on them. You may even take a few chapters altogether for the preparation over the period of a particular day. This will accelerate the process of preparation. But we must mind to make all these plans very realistic with the resources and time available. Avoid burdening your day with the tasks which you cannot accomplish and handle. This sort of plan is tantamount to wastage of time and efforts.

### Do not fear or panic

When time runs so fast and the tasks to be mastered are so immense, students start panicking and finally succumb to mental disturbance and depression. Stop worrying for the examination because it is only the assessment at the school level and not at the board level. Despite poor performance in this examination, you must understand that you still have another big chance to prove your mettle. So there is no use worrying for what has already gone. So it is essential to keep patience and maintain the confidence level high.

### Manage time rationally

Keeping the key role of time management in the success of all endeavours of life in mind, it has now become a proven fact that rational time management is also a prerequisite for success in examinations. Every student has a favourite subject which he or she loves to study and finds easier to prepare than others. On the contrary, some of the subjects seem to be tough. For such subjects you need to allot relatively more time and resources.

### Always be positive

It is said having a positive attitude means asking how something can be done rather than saying it can't be done. Always believe in your ability and stop underestimating yourself. Academicians and subject experts have come to the conclusion that the final board examination results are only plus and minus 10 percent of the pre-board examination results. It means how much you get in the final board examination is either 10 percent more or less than what you have achieved in your pre-board examination. So labour hard and stay passionately confident.

(The author is principal, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Dintar Veng in Mamit district, Mizoram)

# An evening to remember



By Monica Chanda

A 5-day festival organised by Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), Ministry of Culture, celebrating lifetimes of learning, artistic experiences, realisations and Saadhna, was held at Kalkshetra, Guwahati from December 26-30. It is an honour to even be a witness to this grand audience where scholars and artistes, legends in their own lifetimes brought before the audience the peak of their artistic journeys.

What I appreciate heartily is the thoughtfulness with which the festival was designed and curated. The mornings were lit by seminar sessions ranging across drama, music, folk art, dance, puppetry and allied traditions, united by an overarching concern of what are we losing with the rapid change that is happening to our art forms across traditions.

Against talks of including the art forms into formal curriculum, the legendary singer Krishna Bishit reminded of the Guru-Shishya Paramapara that was devoted to the holistic growth of the Shishya, the student, enhanced through the stages of Diksha (initiation), Shiksha (training) and Pariksha (test), rendered wholesome through an oral transfer and a lengthy amount of time devoted to nourishing the practice.

When the Guru would start feeling that the disciple was slowly blossoming in artistic perfection, they would arrange for a close Sabha of formal performance of the students, inviting several experienced artistes to witness the same. Unlike the distance of the proscenium stage, the esteemed audience within the close-knit Sabhawould thereafter deliver their critical appraisal that would help the artiste to grow most dynamically. Alas! Here we are in a world of instant coffee and instant messages; can we bring ourselves back to appreciating the slow, the understated, the time meant for learning, for blossoming instead of accumulating achievements, be it in any field?

Our different performing traditions are marked by an intimate exchange with the audience. Parwati Dutta, founder of Mahagami, reminded us of the enchanting meditativeness of the Dhrupad tradition and Nandini Ramani, the disciple of the greatest T. Balasaraswati, recaptured the highly imaginative spontaneity of Manodharma in Bharatanatyam.

On the other hand, folk performing traditions being intimately connected with the economy and life

of the people have been, through various religious and social sanctions, protected through ages. But how do they remain as pure when the basic economy and livelihood of people have changed? Addressing the question, Dr Prakash Khandge and Prashanna Gogoi urged for intensive and creative initiatives that would preserve the folk art forms. If our own indigenous instruments like *tangmuri* of Meghalaya could be lent to various artistic initiatives, our state's beautiful musical tradition growing out of a millennia of human consciousness combined would not have to suffer the fate of anonymity before our future generations.

Utpal Banerjee enlightened us of the history of puppetry and its present innovations in our country while Pradiptyoti Mahanta, through his deep research, explained the classical tradition of Bhaona in Assam.

True to its name, the evenings saw the "Sreshtha", the best, the excellent of artists illuminating the stage through their performances. We had *Agra Bazar* staged with a crisp brilliance by Naya Theatre; the first time to be staged after its director, Padma Bhushan Habib Tanvir's death and thus historically significant.

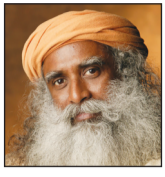
We had great musical renditions of Hindustani Classical (Pandit Ajay Chakrabarty) and Percussion ballet (Yella Venkateshwar Rao), contrasted with the earthly folk melodies of Yogesh Gadhvi. While Anita Sharma and Ramakanta Talukdar rendered a beautifully powerful Kshatriya performance, Padma Shri Bharati Shivaji took us to the greatest depths of human emotions through her expressive gestures. But the same stage also showed us a puppet show on Tagore's play, "Chandalika" (Prabhatangshu). One of the oldest performing traditions of Assam, the Deodhwani, one revering the Serpent-Goddess Manasa and the other narrating a Mahabharata episode, was performed by octogenarian Dharmeshwar Nath Ojha. A Bodo dance, Bihu (Panjit Changmai) and an enchanting Ghazal rendition by Ahmed and Mohammed Husain brought a beautiful conclusion to the festival.

The meaningful end was only the beginning of contemplating over how varied our artistic traditions truly are. Kudos to Shekhar Sen, chairman of SNA, and his entire team for bringing alive our artistic heritage in all its plurality. It is plurality that forms the truest psyche and essence of our country.

(The author is artistic director, Gitanjali Dance Academy)

# Five states of mind

**Sadhguru, Isha Foundation**



The most miraculous thing, if only you could use it consciously.

Your mind can be in five different states. It can be inert. That means it is not activated at all, it is in a rudimentary state. Inert minds are not a problem. Someone who is very simple-minded and whose intellect is still not effervescent has no trouble. He eats well, he sleeps well. It is only the people who think who have trouble sleeping. Simple-minded people perform all the activities of the body far better than the so-called intellectual people because it needs some intelligence to cause disturbance and chaos. But an inert mind is closer to animal nature than the possibility of what it means to be human.

The moment you pump some energy into an inert mind, it becomes active, but it could be scattered. If you energize the mind further, the mind comes to a place where the mind is not so scattered, but it is oscillating – one day it is this way, another day that way. This is a huge improvement over being scattered moment to moment. If you energize it further, it slowly becomes one-pointed – that is far better. But the most important thing is the mind should become a conscious process.

The reason why success comes so easy and naturally for one person and is a struggle for another is because one person thinks the way he wants to think and another person thinks against himself. There is a beautiful story in the yogic lore.

A man went for a walk and accidentally walked into paradise. After the long walk he felt a little tired and thought, "I wish I could rest some-

where." He saw a beautiful tree beneath which was wonderful, soft grass. So he went and slept on the grass. After a few hours, he woke up well-rested. Then he thought, "Oh! I am hungry. I wish I had something to eat." He thought of all the nice things he wanted to eat and all of them just appeared in front of him.

After he had the sumptuous food, the man thought, "Oh! I wish I had something to drink." He thought of all the drinks he wanted and all of them appeared in front of him. In yoga, the human mind is referred to as markata, or monkey, because of its nature. The word "monkey" has also become synonymous with imitation. If you say you are monkeying someone, it means you are imitating someone – this is the full-time job of your mind. So, an un-established mind is referred to as a monkey.

**The reason why success comes so easy and naturally for one person and is a struggle for another is because one person thinks the way he wants to think and another person thinks against himself. There is a beautiful story in the yogic lore**

When this "monkey" became active in the man who went to paradise, he thought, "What the hell is happening here? I asked for food, food came. I asked for drink, drink came. Maybe there are ghosts around." He looked and there were ghosts. The moment he saw them he got terrified, he said, "Oh there are ghosts around here, maybe they will torture me." And the ghosts started torturing him, and he started screaming and yelling in pain. He said, "Oh these ghosts are torturing me, they are going to kill me." And he died.

The problem was, he was sitting under a wishing tree, or a Kalpavriksha. Whatever he asked for became a reality. A well-established human mind is referred to as a "Kalpavriksha." In this mind, whatever you ask for becomes a reality. In life, you are also constantly sitting under a Kalpavriksha, so you need to develop the mind to a point where it becomes a Kalpavriksha, not a source of madness.

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

# Speaking avian language

**By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi**

A friend of mine feeds the crows in Mumbai. He calls them by name and they come to feed. But while the birds listen to him, he, of course, can't understand a single word they say. That is the siddhi I wish I had.

In mythology and medieval literature the language of the birds is considered divine, a language used by the birds to communicate with only the initiated.

Birds communicate with animals — ravens lead wolves to prey and then feed off the remains. The Greater Honeyguide bird leads bears to forest beehives and eats the leftovers.

In Norse mythology, the power to understand bird language was considered the ultimate wisdom. The god Odin had two ravens, called Huginn and Muninn, who flew around the world and told Odin what happened among mortal men. The legendary king of Sweden, Dag the Wise, had a sparrow which flew around and brought back news to him. According to the Poetic Edda and the Völunga saga, the ninth century Viking hero Sigurd was given this gift of understanding, and his life was saved as he listened to birds discussing an enemy's plans to kill him.

Jason was an ancient Greek mythological hero, a descendent of the messenger god Hermes. His quest for the Golden Fleece features in Greek literature. He assembled a band of heroes whose tales have been recounted for 3000 years now. They sailed in the ship Argo and were collectively called the Argonauts. The figurehead of Argo, Jason's ship, was built of oak from the sacred grove at Dodona and could speak the language of birds.

In the Talmud of the Jews, King Solomon's proverbial wisdom was due to his being granted the understanding of the language of birds by God. This carries over into the Quran where Suleiman (Solomon) and David both knew the language of birds.

The Conference of the Birds is a beautiful Sufi poem written by the 12th Century Persian poet Attar of Nishapur. The story begins with a meeting of all of the world's birds to decide who will be their sovereign. The hoopoe, the wisest of all, proposes finding the simurgh (a mythical, benevolent bird related to the



► Ravens (picture left) lead wolves to prey and then feed off the remains

► The Greater Honeyguide (picture right) leads bears to forest beehives and eats the leftovers

► In Norse mythology, the god Odin had two ravens, called Huginn and Muninn, who flew around the world and told Odin what happened among mortal men

► In the Jewish Kabbalah astrology & alchemy, the language of birds, also called Green Language, is considered a secret & perfect language

Phoenix) to resolve the dilemma. The poem describes their journey and the moral learning they encounter along their way.

The concept of the hero being given the gift of understanding bird language either by some magical transformation, or as a reward for a good deed in folk tales, extends across the world - including Welsh, Russian, German, Estonian, Greek and Roman.

In the Jewish Kabbalah astrology and alchemy, the language of the birds, also called the Green Language, is considered a secret and perfect language and the key to perfect knowledge. The language was supposed to have been scripted by the Egyptian bird headed god Thoth. The Egyptians considered hieroglyphic writing "the alphabet of the birds."

The Raven in Native American Indian lore is the bearer of magic, and a harbinger of messages from the cosmos. Messages that are beyond

space and time are nestled in the black wings of the raven and come to only those in the tribe who are worthy of the knowledge.

This ability to use grammar is the essence of language. It is not enough to know the meanings of words, the structures and rules by which words are put together have to be understood. The view has been that humans are unique in this ability. Now scientists have found that songbirds have the same ability. Like us they learn the language by imitating their elders. But as they practice to develop their ability, they improvise and string together new songs and, over generations, these modified songs turn into new dialects. And, like us, they come hard-wired with 'speech-centers' in their brain that are dedicated to language processing.

An experiment from 2009, by Fehér and colleagues, took newly hatched songbirds of the zebra finch species and raised them in sound

proof chambers. They did this during their critical period of language development. These birds were raised in a world without song. But when they got together these isolated birds began to develop their own songs. These songs were less musical than typical songbird song - they had irregular rhythms, the notes stuttered and sounded noisier. But, in time, the songs became more like the songs of the wild songbirds, even though none of these birds had ever heard wild songs. Which means they had an innate understanding of the structures/grammar of their language. That is that finches who have never heard the birdsong of their elders still absorb many of these grammatical rules.

A study by Kentaro Abe and Dai Watanabe, published in Nature magazine, focused on a species of songbird called Bengalese finches. A song bird responds to a song with its own song (we call it song but it is normal conversation).

The researchers kept playing the same song and the bird lost interest after a while and did not respond. Then they altered it slightly and got a response ('who are you' became 'why are you', for instance.)

The researchers taught grammar to the birds by inventing a set of grammatical rules, and generating 50 songs that obeyed these rules. They repeated these songs to the birds for an hour, like a schoolteacher drilling 50 sentences into a new pupil. They then waited 5 minutes, and played the birds a new song that either fit this grammatical rule or broke the rule. The birds responded to the correct grammatical sentences, whereas the ungrammatical sentences ruffled their feathers. The birds were able to assimilate the rules of this new grammar!

What is the biological driving force behind this talent for grammar? Our brains have specific regions that 'light up' when we listen to a grammatically invalid construction. A specific area of the brain known as Broca's region has the ability to understand and produce grammatical speech. Scientists claim to have identified regions in the finches' brains that do the same.

So, birds have a proper language. Alas, I have not received the gift of being able to understand it.

*(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)*

## 'Star - Gazing'

**By Pt. Ajai Bhambi**

**Sunday, JANUARY 6 2019**

An excellent year is foretold and dream projects take off as Moon conjunct Sun on your solar return chart. You enjoy collaboration and participation at work and at home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you. This is an especially spiritual time; when you renew your energy and consider what things are important. It's a good phase for long term investments and finances but these need to be tackled intelligently. Overseas activities thrive as your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle things with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. Your image will enhance. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections to different people are indicated.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

This phase brings glory, gains and success in professional and personal relations. You would express yourself with charm and grace as you are exceptionally articulate and your writing takes on a poetic quality about it. You are emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You manage to communicate with moody and angry people with a sensitive approach and gentle manner. Looking within at your values and beliefs gives you insight and direction. You are physically energetic and enjoy the feeling of well being and confidence. Beware of over indulgence of any kind by maintaining a balance in all areas of life.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

Commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted successfully. You are unlikely to display a whole lot of self-discipline. It's a great time to exert your personal influence, as you come across as especially cooperative. There is perfection and beauty in emotional relationships as you come from a deep and spiritual space within to relate in a new way with your loved one. You are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. Money matters take priority as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. Avoid being lazy and laid back as temporary gain or success in business needs to be followed up with hard work and dedication.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

You would improve your professional and personal relations, as you express yourself in a gracious and exalted manner. There could be alterations in ideas or plans, increase and decrease in finances and fluctuation in business. You can be lead away by enthusiasm unless careful inner balance is maintained. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration are strengthened through understanding and commitment. You are just, fair and generous in family and professional situations. Your sense of humor helps you out of difficult situations. Beware of a covetous and suspicious person around you who could cause misunderstanding in your personal relationships.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation with overseas contacts. You are likely to get business and work opportunities from overseas and engage in a variety of activities and meet new people. Financial benefits also may come your way through investments and insurance. The ability to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you. At this time your heart is where the home is. You may be tempted to spend lavishly on things that make your life more comfortable and pleasant. You are physically energetic and enjoy the feeling of well being and confidence. Beware of over indulgence of any kind by maintaining balance in all areas of life.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

You are frank, outspoken and can be diplomatic on occasions. Political correctness and diplomacy are the call of the hour. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations this week. You put in a lot of efforts and then find that this has established a strong professional base and this brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is good time to organize your workplace. This would help you to get a better perspective to achieve goals. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Romantic notions start to take on a realistic shape.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

It's a great time to exert your personal influence where it can prove to be beneficial with the larger picture in view. You exhibit individualism and brilliance in handling business ventures and

collaborations. This helps you build your self-confidence and strengthen your financial position. You may take up assignments and projects and this would end on a winning note for you during the week. Your efforts to reach out to new people will be accepted and welcomed as you get success in foreign matters too. You extend your hospitality to family and expenses rise this week on purchase of luxurious household items. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at work.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

This phase brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relations. You wield power and authority most effectively as you bring perspective and order in chaotic situations at work and home. You gain money and influence through business ventures. Success brings rank and respect as you dominate the professional scene. You win appreciation of people in senior position and this opens the doors of new opportunities. You carry yourself with confidence and style that attracts much attention and draw attention of interesting people around you. You would express yourself with charm and grace in professional life and this brings financial gains and new contracts. You feel full of energy and indulge in sports, physical activities and a structured exercise routine.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

This brings success, glory and cordial relations with family and loved ones. Cooperation and focus on harmony and understanding benefits you professionally and enhances your reputation and public relations. You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity this week. You are more rational when it comes to financial matters. You need to drop comparisons and rivalry in personal relations and competition in professional aspects as they lead to a feeling of inadequacy and stress. You would regroup your energy and thoughts and focus on the basics.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

You extend hospitality to family and friends as you entertain and organize meetings and get-togethers. You would perform tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation and favor from seniors. Financial benefits also may come your way through investments and insurance. You would have a positive feel towards spiritualism. You are passionate in what you do, although you display self-discipline with people around you. It's also a good time to break bad habits, hers, salespersons and those in related fields of communication.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

Confidence, pleasure, and a deeper involvement in personal and professional relations comes to the fore. This enhances work opportunities for people in the creative line, marketing, arts, show business and related fields. A romantic affair would give a big boost of confidence and personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated and admired. This is a time where you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships in family and loved ones. Socializing and making new contacts could help to boost your career. A healthy lifestyle and fitness remain on your agenda.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

You would face new circumstances, changes and unfamiliar situations. A positive approach and well chosen words would benefit. You may take up new assignments and projects that would incorporate and utilize your ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. You incorporate and utilize your ideas. You would be loving and appreciative of the love you receive especially from children. Romance heightens your personal magnetism.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

You feel the fragile bond of friendship, romance and love in personal relations. You curb your natural reaction to situation and focus and gather information and take care not to hurt any relationship. You will be needed to provide inputs and your presence may also be required at home and work and you will have to divide your attention according to priorities. You may also display more responsibility towards your family and take them for outings. Your thoughts turn to philosophy and worship during this time. The fine arts are inviting and involving as you channel your creative energy into it. This is a good time to organize yourself and your thoughts and attend your health and well-being.

# Know your inventory

**By Ranjan K Baruah**

Purchase is a common word for all of us. We purchase different goods or items on different occasions. We purchase for basic needs as well as luxury. It refers to a business or organisation attempting to acquire goods or services to accomplish its goals. Although there are several organisations which attempt to set standards in the purchasing process, processes can vary greatly between organisations. Typically the word "purchasing" is not used interchangeably with the word "procurement" since procurement typically includes expediting, supplier quality and transportation and logistics, in addition to purchasing.

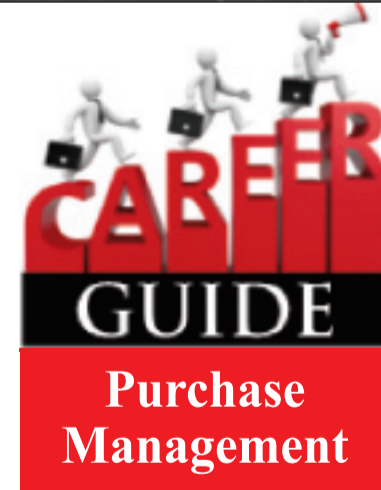
Traditionally, the purchasing section issued purchase for supplies, services, equipment and raw materials. Then, in an effort to decrease the administrative costs associated with the repetitive ordering of basic consumable items, 'blanket' or 'master' agreements were put into place. These types of agreements typically have a longer duration and increased scope to maximise the quantities of scale concept.

When additional supplies were required, a simple release would be issued to the supplier to provide the goods or services.

Now, when it comes to career opening then we see options in purchasing management. Purchase or purchasing management is the management of the purchasing process and related aspects in an organisation.

A purchasing management department can be formed and operated by one or more employees to ensure that all goods, supplies and inventory needed for the organisation to operate are ordered and kept in stock, as well as control inventory levels and costs associated with purchasing the items. It is also called material management and hence aspirants should not be confused with the term.

Materials management is a core supply chain function and includes supply chain planning and supply chain execution capabilities. Specifically, materials management is the capability firms use to plan total material requirements. The material requirements are communicated to procurement and other functions for



excel in career. They have wide spectrum of employment opportunities in public as well as the private sector.

Graduates may enter this field easily who have management degree. Without management degree it may not possible to get entry level jobs but some time references might work for which one needs to be skilled and little experienced.

Some of the courses related to this field are: Advanced Diploma in Material Management, Diploma in Material Management, MBA in Material Management, MBA in Production and Materials Management, Post Graduate Diploma in Materials and Logistics Management, Post Graduate Diploma in Materials Management, Post Graduate Diploma in Materials Management, Certificate in Purchase Management, etc.

Apart from regular courses there are courses through distance mode too. These professionals seek employment in government departments like public sector undertakings; industries like manufacturing, pharmaceuticals or logistics; banks and other financial houses; media, entertainment and fashion industries; tourism, travel and hospitality industries, telecom etc.

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

*“All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure.”*

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

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### Setback for Congress

POLITICAL developments in Uttar Pradesh this past weekend might have come as a dampener for the Congress party which had only weeks ago seen a change in the party's fortunes - from one of repeated disasters to a rosy scenario of winning three big assembly election and grabbing power in as many states in the electorally important Hindi-belt. Uttar Pradesh with the largest basket of 80 Lok Sabha seats is crucial in electoral terms. In the emerging scenario, the Congress party has little chance of winning more than a handful of seats in this state, thanks to its exclusion in the alliance cobbled by former chief ministers Mayawati of the BSP and Akhilesh Yadav of the SP, after spurning an alliance plea from the Grand Old Party.

This is not to jump to a conclusion that the present scenario will remain so until the time of the Lok Sabha polls. As the nation heads towards the Lok Sabha elections, the coming weeks are crucial. There is rising confidence among the Opposition parties that the BJP and PM Modi can be humbled in the coming hustings. Rafale is only one issue that could turn the tide against the ruling party at the Centre, while the other matters like the disappearance of the Modi Magic of 2014, the failures of the NDA government to rev up the economy, the downside of the manufacturing sector that is among the biggest job creators, the farm distress, and cash crunch in markets should be matters of worry for the BJP. The days of big talks saving a party or a leader are gone. So, when the LS poll fight gets closer, the BSP and SP could likely draw in the Congress too to fight the BJP to the finish in UP. Winning UP is most important for either side to grab power in Delhi because of the huge size of its LS basket. Akhilesh Yadav's grouse now is that despite the support his party extended to the Congress in Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath has not given representation to the one-member SP in the new ministry. Such matters could still be sorted out. Reason why all hope is not lost on a united Opposition fight against the ruling BJP in UP! The Dalits are more against the BJP now due to the Sangh Parivar onslaughts on them; Muslims are always set against the BJP, almost in toto. They would look around for the best bet. Together, this could be advantage BSP-SP in UP.

# Will Meghalaya ever learn any lessons?

By HH Mohrmen

It is very unfortunate that in Meghalaya we ended the year with sadness. Similarly, we began the year with a sense of grief over what had happened at Ksan. The incident in which water inundated a rat hole mine, has affected most of us immensely, so much so that the arrival of the New Year was a sombre affair and it slipped away without one realizing it had come and gone. How can one even wish relatives and friends happy new year when a pall of gloom envelopes the horizon?

The tragedy is not only that we have people trapped in an illegal mine which was inundated by water, but sadly we are not even sure how many people are trapped in the mine. This is something that should make the state government ashamed of. In all likelihood the sordar or the manager would have the numbers of miners engaged in the mine on that fateful day. Alas till date no has one come forward to claim that he is the manager or perhaps the manager himself is also trapped in the mine. So we would be able to get the exact numbers of miners trapped only after the dewatering of the mine is completed.

Then there is also a faint idea of how deep the vertical shaft is. Let's say that the depth of the vertical shaft is 350 feet. Considering that the average height of a one-storey building in Meghalaya is 10 feet, the shaft in the mine at Ksan is so deep that we can easily fit a 35 storey building inside the shaft. This is the sheer size of the vertical shaft where the miners are trapped which is equivalent to the height of a 35 storey building, but this again is not at all an issue; the problem is the horizontal tunnels inside this mine.

For those who are not familiar with the mining in Meghalaya, mining in the state was earlier done by miners digging a horizontal tunnel on the side of a hillock. A tunnel the size of the coal seams was dug horizontally and they continued digging on the

tunnel as long as there is coal and stopped when the coal is exhausted. This is also how the mining system in the area derived its name as rat hole mining, because the tunnel is similar to a hole burrowed by a rat.

As the miners continue digging and move on along the tunnel, they also leave part of the coal at equal intervals to serve as a column to support the roof. But after the coal is exhausted at the far end of the tunnel, the miners were then asked to remove the columns in a process known in local dialect as 'bam paia,' or eating or removing the columns. Many accidents happened in the process when even the columns which were meant to support the roof of the mine were removed and there were many cases of mine roofs collapsing and burying alive the miners body but the incidents went unreported since other than the mine owner and manager no one actually knew who went in and who came out. If the miners are illegal migrants then even their family members don't dare raise a stink.

This is the mining method they used earlier, but now the mining process used is known to the coal miners as box cutting. However box cutting system is no different from the previous rat hole mining except for the vertical shaft which goes to more than 300 feet deep, depending on the location of the coal seams. The vertical cutting of earth in the shape of a box is also why this type of mining is called box cutting. The vertical shaft is dug till it locates coal seams and once the seams are located a horizontal tunnel is dug and the extraction of coal begin. The horizontal tunnel is so narrow that a miner has to crawl to do his job. The horizontal tunnel is no different from the rat hole in the earlier method of mining. The only difference is that the box cutting has replaced the earlier method of mining with the vertical shaft. Hence we continue to call it rat hole

mining. Even in box cutting the miners continue digging the horizontal tunnel till the coal is exhausted and then as they move towards the entry or the vertical shaft, they also remove the columns in a process which is very dangerous.

Coming to the case in Ksan, in all probability the miners are trapped inside the horizontal tunnel which goes sideways while they were digging coal. The other problem is no one knows how long the tunnels are. We have the size of the vertical shaft, but not the horizontal tunnels from where the coal is extracted. And sadly, no one knows how many of these horizontal tunnels are there in this particular mine. This is the major problem which makes the rescue operation very difficult and the only option for the rescuers is to dewater the mine.

Because the extraction of coal is done illegally and there is no monitoring from the government, the miners can go as deep as they want and can dig as many horizontal tunnels as there are mine seams inside the mines. Because the mining is done without any government monitoring, there is no map or inventory which could otherwise be of help to the rescuer. This is just with respect to the shape or the design of the mine, but the nature of the water, the turbidity of the water is also a major challenge for the diver. This is an attempt just to help readers understand the complex nature of the rescue operations. Of course reaching the bottom of the vertical shaft can be easy, but the challenge is when it comes to entering the horizontal tunnels, the size of which can be less than five feet.

The government is aware of the system of mining that was employed by the miners and is also well briefed about the hazards that the miners have to endure, but it is not willing to take action to monitor or regulate the

activity. In spite of the treacherous nature of these mines the government has allowed a laissez-faire mining reminiscent of the days of David Copperfield and the working environment of industrial workers then in England. As a matter of fact, all attempts were made by all governments past and present to allow this dangerous activity to continue. Much of the efforts of the government both under the leadership of the Congress and the NPP were to find out ways and means to convince the Central government to allow this activity to continue without any regulation. And this is the price that we have to pay for that go as you please policy.

In the name of tradition and on the pretext of the unique land tenure system in the state which is guaranteed by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, we were befooled by our leaders. Political leaders in the state irrespective of their political affiliations have moved from pillar to post to convince the central government to allow mining in the state to continue without regulation. In the past every government sought to avoid and skirt Central Acts which regulate mining and guarantee protection of the environment. Absolutely no thought was given to the safety of the miners and the government always tried to avoid Rules & Regulation framed by the Director General of Mines and Safety (DGMS) Government of India.

The question is why do we continue to take shelter in the special category status that was guaranteed to us under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution? The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution does not give us license to destroy our environment neither does it give us a free hand to engage in a business activity without taking care of the safety of the people we employ. But when will we ever learn?

## Modi Government's Pakistan Policy Lacks Consistency

By Brig. Arun Bajpai

Recently Prime Minister Modi gave an interview in which he spoke on almost all subjects including Pakistan. When asked as to why cross border terror has not stopped despite surgical strikes two years back, he said that it will take more time for Pakistan to mend its ways. The problem with Indian political masters is that for reasons best known to them they keep either a bureaucrat or a policeman as their National Security Advisor. In the current case it is NSA Ajit Doval a policeman who is all in all. He even heads the Strategic Planning Group where the three Services Chiefs are members along with the Defence Secretary. Needless to say in a country where instead of a military man planning strategy based on external threats, a policeman is planning strategies resulting in these flip-flops in foreign policies which are now quite common. But then they will definitely hurt future of the country.

Prime Minister Modi took over the command as PM of India in May 2014. From 2014 to 2016 PM Modi's approach to Pakistan veered from warm embraces to sudden put downs. He suddenly decided, while returning from Afghanistan to land at Lahore to wish the then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif a

in order to curb cross border violence, India agreed to re-implement with Pakistan the 2003 ceasefire accord, which Pakistani Army keeps on breaking every second day and we keep on launching protests with Pakistan. After the new Pakistani PM, Imran Khan took over the reins of Pakistan in 2018, India even agreed to a dialogue with the country but then later called it off.

On surgical strikes, a minor military operation which Indian Army is capable of launching daily, whatever PM Modi might say, it was his party which politicised this operation. It was BJP which disclosed it, eulogised it and then used it as an election agenda in the UP elections. This surgical strike was celebrated in the entire length and breadth of the country in all schools and universities as Surgical Strike Day. Needless to say Modi's Pakistan policy lacks consistency. God knows what advice he is getting and from whom, but whatever advice he is getting lacks coherence. Things happen and experiments take place as if decided on a daily basis. There is nothing long term that can be called a policy. Compare this with Pakistan. In 1971 after loss of half of Pakistan as Bangladesh, thanks to Indian Armed Forces, the then PM of Pakistan, Bhutto said, "We will eat grass but we will

**The time has come in India also for our political masters to realise that they also must now appoint the right people in the right place. NSA must be from the Armed Forces. The Chief of Defence Staff system which was sanctioned since 2003 must be put in place. One surgical strike is no deterrent to dissuade Pakistan from cross-border terror. Every cross-border activity of Pakistani jihadis must be retaliated by a surgical strike by India which must kill Pakistani soldiers because killing jihadis has no meaning.**

happy birthday on December 25, 2015. Pakistan (read Pakistani army), replied this good gesture by launching a jihadi attack by its sponsored jihadis on Pathankot Air Base in the first week of January of 2016. This started the hot cross-border exchange of fire. The entire 2016 to 2017 was consumed in cross-border firings, physical attacks and a surgical strike. During this period Modi rightly said that terrorism and dialogue cannot go together. There is no doubt that Indian foreign policy success has been in isolating Pakistan on terror. Nevertheless these efforts did not work out in terms of foreign policy with Pakistan. The case in point is that the surgical strike was meant to deter Pakistan from cross-border jihadi attacks, but that did not happen. Just two months after the surgical strike, a far more serious jihadi attack was launched by Pakistani Army in Nagrota. This was a much more serious attack than the one at Uri whose counter was the surgical strike. However instead of launching another surgical strike India did not retaliate. Similarly there was no response to Pakistani Army sponsored Jaish Mohammed jihadi attack in 2018 in Sunjuwan.

Hence the message that has gone across is that Indians are afraid and not capable of launching more surgical strikes! Meanwhile Pakistani Army BAT teams are functioning as usual; the latest being their failed attempt on December 30, 2018. For a strange reason the Indian ardour for surgical strikes cooled down after one such strike in 2016 and

make a nuclear bomb," which they did by the late eighties. In 1988 Pakistan started the proxy war on India with the specific aim of bleeding India with a thousand cuts. After 30 years they are unflinchingly carrying on with that agenda while we keep on changing our Pakistan policy at the drop of a hat.

The time has come in India also for our political masters to realise that they also must now appoint the right people in the right place. NSA must be from the Armed Forces. The Chief of Defence Staff system which was sanctioned since 2003 must be put in place. One surgical strike is no deterrent to dissuade Pakistan from cross-border terror. Every cross-border activity of Pakistani jihadis must be retaliated by a surgical strike by India which must kill Pakistani soldiers because killing jihadis has no meaning. These jihadis are canon fodder for Pakistan. India must understand that Pakistan (read Pakistani Army) will never be our friends. Hence all this talk of friendship must be dumped. Agreed that all our surgical strikes will not always be successful but then that is part of the game. At times we will have to suffer casualties and attrition. In their hatred for India, Pakistan has already become a colony of China especially after CPEC. So let us be practical. Pakistan must be broken into four independent states starting from Baluchistan and Sind. The earlier our political masters understand this the better it is for India. (The author is a retired Brigadier of the Indian army and can be reached at brigaranbajpai@yahoo.co.in).

### TO THE EDITOR

### Lineage Bill: Case of Khasi man marrying a non-Khasi woman

Editor,  
Mr HS Shylla, the CEM of KHADC has in no uncertain terms created a flutter of sorts in the social milieu of the Khasi tribe, thereby giving a wake-up call to the hitherto slumbering populace by way of his endorsing the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill 2018 in the KHADC. The purported Bill has, inter-alia, envisaged that any Khasi woman marrying a non-Khasi male shall predictably stand to lose her social benefits as entitled to her vide the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and along with her, her off-springs too would lose their tribal status. Additionally, Mr Shylla has given an express statement that any Khasi progeny, who adopts a Khasi father's surname will just as well be bracketed with those Khasi ladies having non-Khasi spouses, fortuitously giving a debilitating blow to the SRT (Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai) who have advocated - a patrilineal lineage in the entire Hynniewtrep society. Such a community make-over, Shylla avers, is fraught with unethical consequences resulting in wedlock between

close-blood relations sometime in the future and this can constitute a taboo/curse or 'ka Sang' as per the Khasi moral concept.

Seemingly, Mr. Shylla's good intentioned aim in trying to safeguard the Khasi fraternity through the said Bill could unleash wide-spread appreciation or unsparing denunciation, but come what may, Mr Shylla is resolutely determined to ensure that this Bill sees through all conceivable hurdles that may be contrived by those averse to the historic social transition in Khasi society. However, I, for one, have somewhat a qualm on the Bill in question when we take up the issue of a Khasi male member who weds a non-Khasi lady which the Lineage Bill is reportedly opposed to. This implies that children born out of such nuptial unions have to take their mother's title. But the moot point is how can off-springs of such non-Khasi mother ever take the father's surname? Markedly, children, other than Khasi, Jaintia and Garo communities inherently inherit their father's title. Perhaps, Mr. Shylla ought to discreetly introspect over this critical issue. Either ways, it can be fairly assumed that such subsequent falling into the aforesaid curse or ka sang in case of a marriage of a Khasi to a non-Khasi lady

is arguably inconceivable!

Yours etc  
Jerome K. Diengdoh,  
Shillong- 2

### Competence and academic qualification

Editor,  
Apropos the letter written by Salil Gewali captioned, "Does competence depend on academic qualification?" (ST Dec 28, 2018) my answer would be 'Yes, it does' barring a few cases which Mr Gewali has mentioned in his letter. These exceptional cases, according to me, should not be construed as a general rule. We have seen almost in every case that a person who has excelled academically has always shone in his/her career. Take the example of toppers, in this competitive world. If we dig into their backgrounds, we shall find that they have always done better than their peers during their academic period. I don't think that it would be a mistake to measure one's competence with a yardstick of one's academic qualification.

However, I agree with Mr Gewali that a person's competence is his/her inherent calibre. Therefore, keeping aside technical

career/profession, where technical academic qualification is a must, selected career/ profession can be de-linked from educational qualification. We have seen some engineers or doctors performing well as the administrative head of an organization. Similarly, an editor of a newspaper need not possess a prescribed degree compulsorily. A person can be an excellent editor if such person has acquired a good command over the language of the newspaper edited by him/her. Of course, an editor has to be courageous, independent and logical in thinking, besides possessing other inherent qualities. This will provide some scope to an adult, mature person to change his career/profession later in his life. One need not be always bonded to a career/profession chosen by his parents or chosen by him, during the earlier phase of life.

Your etc.  
Krishna Chettri  
Shillong- 2

### Unbecoming comments by BJP MP on RBI

Editor,  
BJP MP Anurag Thakur's recent comments on the RBI keeping a

reserve of 32%, that, "it is not a raid on RBI, but it is the RBI's raid on the economy", is most unfortunate. Mr Thakur is a prominent political leader from among the younger generation, and was also a President of BCCI. One would have thought that a personality like him would use better language to put forward his views. Such attacks on the leading financial institution of the country not only hurts the institution, but also the people associated with it and the nation as a whole. It is expected that political leaders would understand the subject well and refrain from making such derogatory remarks.

Yours etc.,  
A Bhuyan,  
Via email

### Environment is important!

Editor  
Unfortunately, ecology and environment appear to be of least concern for international media when it comes to news coverage with politics taking the top order. However, mass environmental education and awareness is extremely important for keeping the public aware of significant environmental issues directly or indirectly impacting their lives and a shared future. My sincere gratitude to the entire

editorial team and the dedicated reporters and staff members of a section of Indian newspapers for being pro-environment and for providing enough space to ecology and environment through regular publication in the form of environment related news, op-ed, columns, feature stories, letters to editors and stunning nature based images on their front pages. They deserve gratitude for their dedication and monumental service in public education and awareness. Our future destiny is now regulated by negative anthropogenic impacts on our highly fragile ecosystems and environment. Some newspapers have taken great initiative in supporting the conservation of local forests, wildlife and biodiversity and been extremely successful in dissemination of conservation related initiatives. Keep up the good work!

Yours etc.,  
Saikat Kumar Basu  
Lethbridge AB Canada

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“Fighting corruption is not just good governance. It's self-defense. It's patriotism.”

--- Joe Biden

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.148 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2019

### Ayodhya Again

AYODHYA, in sum, is a clear example of the indecisiveness of the Indian judiciary that allows cases to go on for ages, and of the vacillation and incompetence of the successive political establishments. The litigation relating to the Ayodhya Babri Masjid - Ram Janam Bhoomi dispute has remained static with courts for about seven decades - or a stretch of two generations. This despite the off-and-on belligerence on the part of one side in the dispute - the Hindutva forces - in the past nearly three decades. To expect that a last word could emerge from the court in the foreseeable future is to be foolish; and by all reckoning, an amicable settlement to the dispute is a mirage, given the present state of affairs. The fixing of a date for the hearing by the Supreme Court, in itself does not mean much. The case can still go on and on.

On the other hand, the RSS has begun building pressure on the government yet again to take matters forward. If the RSS has no faith in the judicial system showing the way forward, that is understandable because past experience has been such. Chances are that even if the apex court comes up with a clear ruling, the dust will not settle on the issue. As in the case of the Sabarimala temple issue now, it could lead to a mass upsurge from one side or the other, depending on the sum and substance of the order.

Political establishments, past and present, did not demonstrate their strength to settle the issue through the route of consensus-building. Neither the Congress-led governments nor the BJP-led dispensations took interest to build that consensus since each group wanted to make political capital out of the issue. The clever ploy on the part of successive governments was to buy time, postpone the matter to the extent possible, and allow the files to rest in the cold storages of courts. The Modi government is no exception despite the fact that its ideological powerhouse, the RSS, as also the other Hindutva outfits, were behind the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and carried forward the push for building a Ram temple in the same place.

The RSS now wants work for the Ram temple to start at the disputed site before the parliament elections are called. The idea appears to be to polarise the society further before the elections so that the BJP can take advantage. This is why Congress president Rahul Gandhi says the elections would not be fought by his party on this issue.

# Judicial democracy, good governance are milestones of democracy

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

The New Year always begins with some expectations and one may ask plenty of questions on how governance will meet or fulfill the promises made during election campaigns. While we are expecting more elections this year, for the educated ones, it is the kind of governance that delivers effectively at every change of guard whether at the state or the centre that matters. I would like to draw the attention of readers on two aspects which seem at odds with each other but indeed have some element of connection and of which the Supreme Court is the architect and which goes beyond human imagination. We have just celebrated Christmas along with the rest of the world. In India our Governments too have celebrated Governance day in their own premises. Even though the December 25 is not the exact date of birth of Jesus Christ, but as a tradition the early church has celebrated it so and thus it has been accepted just as such, to denote the day of His incarnation to human form.

The declaration of Good Governance Day on the December 25 by the Narendra Modi Government is no coincidence. Things are working in the direction of fulfilling what has been promised and foretold in the Bible by many prophets who are also God's spokespersons on earth. And be it any day of the year, I am sure that this same Government will do the same. This has happened and will happen in order to align with that eternal promise. The promise was that God in His time will send forth His Son (Messiah or Saviour, The Christ, and Son here means not a biological son but a relationship that exists in the triune Godship). The purpose of this mission was to redeem mankind from the onslaught of injustice. No force on earth can do that but only through supreme intervention by God himself. Therefore, Isaiah one of the Jewish prophets who lived 700 years before Jesus Christ, in his book Isaiah 9:6 said, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlast-

ing father and the Prince of Peace. So thank you Prime Minister Modi for reminding the whole world and endorsing the fact that there is no good governance beyond the purview of the divine principles.

From time to time the pursuit for good governance is being challenged and at times obstructed by excessive human greed and lack of political will. So what does good governance mean? Good governance on one hand conveys the situation where there is optimum satisfaction from the general public or common citizens on how government is functioning. And this is achieved by the state where anomalies and loopholes of governance that hatch corrupt practices and injustice are eradicated from the system. These three arms of governance (Legislative, Executive & Judiciary) as enunciated by modern democracy have successfully rectified the wrong patent and intention prescribed by a dictatorship or the emperorship that confines governance to a single individual, because the administration of justice in such system is strictly under control. In fact the system itself is excellent but the functionaries of these institutions need to be watched and criticized for any wrong action. Is that not the way that democracy should work?

The World Bank definition of good governance entails sound public sector management (efficiency, effectiveness), accountability, exchange and free flow of information (transparency) and a legal framework for development (justice, respect for human rights and liberties). Good governance is accountable, consensus oriented, responsive, inclusive, participatory, and transparent and follows the rule of law. In other words good governance expedites justice effectively, whereas in most cases justice is achieved only by the intervention of the judiciary. Governments have from time to time enacted various laws and constituted tribunals to counter vari-

ous form of injustices perpetrated on the people in society. But the situation at large has not improved but struggling under the realm of bad and unsatisfactory forms of governance.

The concept of justice is becoming more significant due to the fact that various forms of injustices are being committed in some way or the other by many. Injustice on the other hand is the result of cruelty of human behaviour due to our evil nature. Ever since the fall of man, sin too has entered the world and bred various forms of evil on mankind. And in this context, only good governance can only thwart and counter such situations in order to deliver justice. Blaise Pascal a French philosopher, Mathematician and inventor of the 17th century said, "Justice without power or force is meaningless and power without justice is tyrannical." Therefore, the enforcement of justice somehow accomplishes the purpose of good governance and it is here that organs of governance should be firmly grounded in the true spirit of democracy. Because the spirit of democracy also implies beside equality, respect to all citizens. Thus, we can also say that good governance is another synonym for justice or just governance.

The beginning of the previous year had witnessed the unusual revolt within the functionaries of the Judiciary where four judges expressed dissatisfaction on the style of functioning of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India. This is a worrisome trend

that reflects the nature of undemocratic elements within the judiciary. No matter how small and insignificant is the arbitrary behavior of any Judge, it will infuse fear and doubt on the integrity and sovereignty of the judiciary because it endangers the environment of democratic adjudication. Therefore, for a strong, healthy and vibrant democracy, functionaries of the judiciary especially judges should not suppress petty criticism by exercising their constitutional authority. But

in fact they should face it with true dignity and undisputed integrity. A common definition of democracy is a system of governance by the people, of the people and for the people or in other words it is not a rule by the few or by one. Justice in this context can be delivered when there is involvement of each and every citizen in the process of governance. And the involvement of citizens in matters of governance is not only through election of public representatives but also through expression of thoughts and criticism in a proper manner and in appropriate forum. In advanced democracies like the US, judges are not immune from criticism. In June last year, Californians voted in a special election to unseat a state judge who drew worldwide condemnation for giving a six-month sentence to a swimmer convicted of sexually assaulting an unconscious woman. This is how enlightened citizens of the state or country should exercise their power.

For instance, the recent coal mine mishap in the state is not only an outcome of illegal mining despite the NGT ban since 2014, but it is also part of the failure of this quasi-judicial institution. Had the Supreme Court completely banned dangerous and hazardous mining as it did in 1996 with timber business and rampant felling of trees from the region, I am sure that such accidents would have never occurred. Our state is now under the realm of uncertainty of governance because our ministers are always on a travelling spree leaving decision making powers at the hands of their subordinates. It seems that travelling abroad along with family members is now their mission and vision as public representatives. And the reason that compels them to leave the state and country frequently perhaps is their inefficiency to handle and confront the issues of governance that arise from day today. This is another challenge of good governance and the people of the state hold the key in electing the right people to govern. Only until such time when our people understand these issues can we cover one milestone and move to another in a democracy with dignity.

## Bangladesh's economic success under Sheikh Hasina Per capita GDP has overtaken Pakistan's, nearing India's

By Nantoo Banerjee

The biggest attribute to the latest thumping election victory of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed's Awami League and its alliance may be her government's contribution to the South Asian country's most impressive economic growth over the last 10 years. In 2018, the Bangladesh economy has grown roughly at the of rate eight percent. With the global oil prices down and average inflation rate ruling below six percent, the country's GDP may continue to grow at eight percent during the current year, as well. The government's bold decision to temporarily shelter some 700,000 Rohingya refugees from neighbouring Myanmar and its remarkable management of the social, economic and diplomatic consequences of the act are receiving admiration across the world. It is to the credit of the Sheikh Hasina government that the refugees from Rohingya province in Myanmar found the country more safe and acceptable. Thanks to Bangladesh, forcibly uprooted Rohingyas did not have to take the recourse of those millions of refugees from some of the war-torn west Asian and west African countries who took big risks of traveling to distant EU countries for safety instead of barging into rich unwilling Arab countries in the neighbourhood. Democracy does not need to be always about the change, political and government. The people will vote for stability if that meets their social and economic expectations. The latest Bangladesh election result expounded the people's choice for economic and social stability.

Less than 50-year-old democratic Bangladesh had witnessed many political upheavals. It had as many as nine prime ministers before Sheikh Hasina was re-installed as the country's head of the government since January 2009. The political career of Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Bangladesh's first President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has spanned more than four decades. Highly populous Bangladesh had wasted a lot of years on hopeless politics, giving little attention to the development of its economic infrastructure. The government's focus started to shift rapidly since 2009. This has come under the lenses of such multi-lateral organisations as the Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The IMF stats put Bangladesh GDP at 42nd position (nominal) and 31st (under purchasing power parity), per capita GDP at \$1,751 (Nominal) and \$4,561.66 (PPP). In its annual assessment of the Bangladesh economy, IMF said the country will need to boost productive investment by addressing infrastructure bottlenecks and strengthening the banking sector to keep the momentum going. Growth in Bangladesh has averaged more than 6 percent over the last decade, significantly lifting per capita income. Poverty has declined steadily and other social indicators, like gender disparity in education and maternal mortality, have also improved. The country has diversified away from being principally agrarian to a more manufacturing-based economy. The ADB had forecast that Developing Asia, including Bangladesh, would expand by 6.0 percent in 2018, and by 5.9 percent in 2019. Bangladesh is far ahead of ADB's 'Developing Asia' average.

Clearly, Bangladesh, under Sheikh Hasina, is undergoing a transformation from a low-income to a middle-income economy. Driven by increasing consumer spending and investment, the country continues to generate strong growth. Much of the country's future development will depend on the progress and success of its infrastructure and manufacturing sectors, choice of technology and foreign partners. The country should steer clear of the latest geopolitical buildups in the region and heavy borrowing from any individual country to ensure that its political, economic and diplomatic policies do not get mortgaged, in the process, to any strong donor country in the neighbourhood. Banks are the main source of funds for companies and their ability to extend credit at reasonable terms is important to keep the growth trend going. However, this will require strong bank balance sheets and efficient operations. There is significant room for improvement, given that non-performing loans continue to increase, particularly in the state-owned commercial banks as in next-door India.

The IMF report recommends higher public investment to upgrade infrastructure such as roads and electricity coverage, spur more private sector activity, and ultimately create more jobs. Tax revenues in Bangladesh are currently low at 9 percent of GDP. The country needs more revenues to finance infrastructure investment and social spending. The average tax revenue to GDP ratio for non-resource rich, low-income countries is around 15 percent. Therefore, the priority is to implement the delayed value-added tax, preferably with a single rate, reaching a broad base to help raise much-needed revenue. Any tax policy reform should also be supported by efforts to strengthen tax administration and improve tax compliance. The Sheikh Hasina government should seriously try to address these issues. There is no doubt that Bangladesh has revealed a remarkable turnaround. The country's per capita GDP is now higher than Pakistan's. It has been able to achieve well in the area of population control as the economic successes of Bangladesh is gradually gaining momentum.

When Bangladesh was first reported to have grown at a faster rate than Pakistan in 2006, it was considered by many as a temporary blip. Now, Bangladesh even has a lower population growth rate than Pakistan's. This explains why the per capita income of an average Bangladeshi is growing at an even faster rate. The country now regularly feature in the top 10 fastest-growing economies around the world. Its per capita GDP is forecast to exceed India's by 2022. Sheikh Hasina's new team should take forward the government's well-trusted and executed socio-economic policies and expand their reach to benefit more of the country's grass-root population. The new challenges before the government include better quality education, encouraging innovation and improvement of healthcare facilities. In the social sector, the government would do well to encourage learned criticism and debate within and outside the party and strongly fight fundamentalist forces having strong potential to divide the people and disrupt the momentum. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Dawki turns unruly and ugly

Editor,  
This letter intends to draw the attention of the Government to the plight of commuters on the Dawki Road due to the growing instances of traffic jams. We are aware that the number of tourists visiting Dawki is on the rise, but one cannot tolerate the behaviour of the boatmen in the Umsyiem stretch of road that stops tourist vehicles and ask them to park their vehicles in this narrow stretch, thereby leading to massive traffic jams. It stretches one's tolerance to the ultimate limit when a difficult situation is aggravated due to the irresponsible behaviour of a few individuals. These boatmen who are hunting for tourists on this busy road, to take them for boating, show an appalling disregard for any kind of traffic laws. Buses stop here and there, cars come and go in a haphazard manner. The chaos is unimaginable. Drivers get into ugly arguments in the middle of the road and cause havoc for the daily commuter. Secondly, there seems to be no time limit for coal and lime stone trucks as they are plying 24 hours on this narrow highway. Truck drivers are presumably above the law with the police personnel seemingly on their side. Moreover, the

Dawki suspension bridge which we assume has crossed its life span is bearing the brunt of the onslaught from the hundreds of trucks passing through it day in and day out. When will the Government and District Administration wake up? Or will the Government react only when a tragedy happens?

Yours etc  
Manuel Carey Lymba  
Shillong - 8

#### Poor state of school infrastructure

Editor,  
Schools are supposed to be the temples of learning, but the average primary educational institution in the state is likely to be a dingy, dilapidated place without access to electricity, toilets and with too few teachers. True, just having great school infrastructure is not sufficient to improve learning outcomes, but it is certainly a necessary condition. According to the District Information System for Education (DISE) data, almost all the north-eastern states are falling into the lower categories as far as availability of upper primary schools with water facility are concerned. Only 57% government schools and 66% private unaided schools in Meghalaya have such facilities. The state has 56%

private unaided schools that are functioning without any girls' toilet. Provisioning for boys' toilet facility has been much better as compared to girls' toilet at every level and irrespective of the management of schools. It is also noticeable that the proportion is much better in case of private aided schools. Despite this, the state requires to give attention to this aspect. Electricity facility is one of the important initiatives that require collective decision of at least two departments such as the Power and Education Departments in the state. It has been found that despite having electricity in the village many schools are still without electricity. Meghalaya has the lowest proportion of schools (26%) with electricity connection. However, it is heartening to see that the proportion of government as well as private schools with library facility is quite high at each level of education. Again it is the north-eastern states like Manipur and Meghalaya which are placed at the lowest rank with around 7 - 8% primary schools, whether private or government, that have been provided with a library. With regards to computer facility Meghalaya is the only state where the lowest proportions of private unaided schools (11%) were found with computer facility. The EDI for infrastructure at pri-

mary and upper primary levels of the country indicate that Karnataka is the state which has improved its infrastructure facilities substantially as it ranks first for both levels. Here too Meghalaya holds the lowest rank.

Therefore it is high time to upgrade the infrastructure facilities of schools in the state particularly in the rural areas. There are issues that need to be addressed in the new Education Policy.

Yours etc.,  
Phrangshai Hynniewta,  
Via email

#### Unending plight of Dalits

Editor,  
Anil Kumar was a 37 year old man of Dabri village in Dwaraka. He was the sole breadwinner for his family. He was asked to unplug a 20-foot-deep septic tank for some money. While doing that horrifying job without any helmet and safety gear, the poor man lost his life in September this year. He died of head injuries and left behind his wife and children. A couple of days before his death, 5 scavengers died of suffocation in a sewage plant in Delhi's Moti Nagar area. According to the NGO Safai Karmachari Andolan, a safai karmachari (scavenger) dies every third day in a gutter on an average in our country.

Our poor brothers and sisters have been forced or

lured by hard cash to completely dip themselves in sewer water without safety measures. Some of them die instantly after inhaling poisonous and nauseating gas. Others die a slow death after acquiring deadly infections. The Valmiki community's engagement as manual scavengers is a glaring example of caste barrier in our society. Dr. BR Ambedkar said, "In India, a man is not a scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not." Being a Dalit himself, Ambedkar had empathy with the socially challenged Dalit scavengers.

And now, we have among us a Dalit activist, Berzwada Wilson to take up the cause of the scavengers. Born in a community of manual scavengers in Kolar, Karnataka, he saw his own parents carrying human excreta as it was the only work they were supposed to do. The champions of meritocracy may argue that Wilson did not have the merit in him to choose his parents! And that, they may say, must have been the reason why he was born, as it were, with a broom in his hand instead of with a silver spoon in his mouth! Be that as it may, when he was a teenager, he first started working as a manual scavenger. But while

working, he had a death-like experience. This made him resolve to fight against the menace. Later, Wilson led a nationwide movement called "Safai Karmachari Andolan" and brought under it other Dalit activists. The movement was launched in 1993 after he filed a PIL in the Supreme Court of India listing nationwide violations of the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. This organisation is also trying to find better jobs for manual scavengers. He got Ramon Magsaysay award for his work in 2016.

Apart from strictly enforcing the 1993 Act, we need state-of-the-art technology for scavenging to stop such glaring human rights violations. The sanitation workers should immediately be provided with modern technology and tools so that they like their counterparts in developed countries, do not have an iota of direct exposure to sewage water, waste and poisonous gas. Moreover, Indian Railways must immediately replace all of their conventional train toilets by bio train toilets so that excreta of passengers may not fall along the tracks to be cleaned by our brothers and sisters. Indeed, we have to get out of the gutter.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

*“Conceit is bragging about yourself. Confidence means you believe you can get the job done.”*

--- Arnold Palmer

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.148 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2019

### Citizenship Bill 2019

THE Narendra Modi Government has pushed through the amended Citizenship Bill 2019 in the Lok Sabha. This Bill seeks to give Indian citizenship to non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The question that bothers political observers is why religion should be the basis on which citizenship is granted to a person. How Minister Rajnath Singh while moving the motions for the Bill said Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis from the above three countries will get Indian citizenship. The Trinamool Congress's Saugata Roy has called the Bill "divisive" and "insidious" and said that it goes against the basic tenets of the Constitution. The naked protest outside Parliament on Monday by members of the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) from Assam which is led by Akhil Gogoi shows the desperation of people who see the looming threat of their living space being invaded by people from across the border. It goes without saying that the maximum migration will be from Bangladesh and that the seven North Eastern states would bear the brunt of this migration. Clearly this is vote-bank politics which feeds on the Hindutva agenda of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) from which the BJP draws its ideological moorings.

While most developed countries provide sanctuary to citizens who are oppressed in their own country or are afflicted by wars and brutality and they do so purely on humanitarian grounds, no country has granted citizenship to any group on the basis of their religious affiliations. The seven North Eastern states, particularly those inhabited by tribal minorities are naturally very agitated at passage of the Citizenship Bill, 2019 because at the back of their minds is the dreaded prospect of becoming minorities in their homelands in the long run. And these fears are not misplaced. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are resisting the Bill because they see a growing number of Chakmas entering the state and seeking citizenship. Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Assam have always looked at Tripura as a classic example of a state that is now overrun by people of Bengali origin and where the tribals are reduced to a pathetic minority of 30%. In 1901 Tripura's population was 1.73 lakh, with tribals numbering nearly 52.89%. It's a different matter that history too had a role to play in the carving out of borders from hitherto borderless homelands, post 1947. Today those borders have hardened and people of one ethnic origin are citizens of two different nations. People usually migrate to safer zones with better economic prospects. And this migration has continued since the Partition in 1947.

Recent developments within Meghalaya be it the rise of Judicial activism and intrusion of the judiciary into the exclusive domain of the executive; the attitude of the administration vis a vis its lackadaisical response to the mining disaster at Ksan, East Jaintia Hills; the 100 crore NGT fine imposed on a delinquent State Govt for facilitating illegal mining, have to a very large extent laid bare and exposed the lack of leadership in our state. This shortage of leaders is confined not only to political leadership but cuts across all aspects of life in this state of ours, be it social, religious or traditional. If we are true to ourselves and if one were to introspect then can we today truly identify any social leader or any civil society organisation or NGO that commands respect and admiration across the board? There is none and even youth and student organisations which one would like to associate with the future of society fall well short of public expectations.

Of faith based organisations and their leaders, the behaviour is more akin to the three monkeys that hear nothing, see nothing and speak nothing. They refrain from speaking out freely and fearlessly on burning public issues and there is yet to emerge any denomination that can truly claim respect and esteem on a multiethnic basis. On the traditional front we have the village durbars, the traditional pool from where the Khasi Pnars or the Garos looked for and found leaders. Today due to neglect, Govt apathy and the intrusion of party politics and money into these traditional bodies, the emergence of leadership from this source is more of a rarity than an event to look forward to. One can therefore safely conclude that the pool of leadership within the state is as empty and bare as Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard.

While classifying the different types of leadership groups within the state one has to accept, perhaps with a great deal of reluctance and shame, that as a society we have more or less entrusted the entire notion of leadership in the hands of politicians and the political class. This is not surprising as this is the mechanism, identified and endorsed by the Constitution, on how the people of this country are to choose and elect those

# Leadership, a vanishing trend

By Toki Blah

they wish to lead and govern. Let me hasten to add that there is nothing wrong in having politicians as managers of society; nothing wrong in parties or individuals attempting to push ideas, ideologies or manifestoes as the answer to mankind's worries; nothing wrong with politics or political aspiration. The desire to lead, guide and direct one's society to a better future is often the noblest of all ambitions. Absolutely nothing wrong in that. The blemish begins when the wish to serve is missing. The flaw starts when the ambition is simply to come to power by any means foul or fair. The rot begins when power is then used for furthering one's own self interest. The tragedy for the state and its people commences the minute political power is not earned but instead, bought. And that Dear reader is what is sadly happening in the state of Meghalaya. We have political leaders who buy their way to power, few who deserve the right to be called a leader.

In defence of the deficiencies mentioned above, supporters and sponsors of purchased leadership, and there are many especially in Meghalaya, have in turn put the blame on the voter and the electorate. What can the poor politician do when the electorate is poor, illiterate and basically unemployed and when it is the voter himself who demands cash for votes? Under the circumstances what is wrong if the poor politician, desperately contesting to win an election, yields to the demands of a greedy insistent electorate? (Hap sngap ia ka Sur u paidbah!!) Well if electoral polling is simply to win an election and to seize power then, nothing wrong. If however the electoral process is a mechanism to serve the people then the above arguments for 'purchased leadership' falls flat on its face.

The electoral process is simply a bidding process and the amount involved an investment for future economic benefits to the highest bidder. Politicians and their supporters will condemn the above statement as malicious, misleading and spiteful. In defence allow me to plead that the abnormal rise in the useless, ambiguous and

arrives.

So who is a Leader and what do we mean by leadership in contemporary Khasi society? In Khasi we call a leader -U Nongialam. As per the Whitehall type of Parliamentary system that we follow, an elected leader is called a Representative. In Khasi a representative is a Nongmihkmat and it literally means one whose mandate is simply to show his face on behalf of the clan. To mihkmat is simply to perform a social obligation. A nongmihkmat is simply there for formality's sake and he is not expected to say or speak on any important issue. U Nongialam on the other hand is a Rangdajied of the clan, a person especially identified for his leadership qualities be they courage, wit, eloquence or wisdom. He speaks on behalf of the clan and the community. He is chosen because a Nongialam is a person who dares to dream, have a vision and translate that vision to reality. One prime quality is to convince others of his dream.

Within documented Khasi Pnar history we only have U Kiang Nangbah, U Tiro Singh Syiem, U Soso Tham and perhaps Rev JIM Nichols Roy to qualify as Ki Nongialam. Within recent contemporary history we have opted for representatives (Nongmihkmat) and true to form most of our representatives prefer only to be seen and not heard in the Assembly. Leadership however should not end in the mere act of getting elected and occupying a seat in the State Assembly. Leadership must have a dream and the dream must have some sort of promise for the led. As of today our interpretation of leadership is - one who can give assurance that there shall be no change from the past. That tradition is rigid and we shall survive only if we do not change tradition. That the past will always remain supreme as it is the only promise for our survival. The future is always full of doubt, fear and apprehension. It holds neither promise nor Hope. Those who revere the past become Ki Nongmihkmat. Problem is we have 36 Nongmihkmat but no Nongialam! Question therefore is - Can we still continue to vote for people with no vision for the future to become our leaders? Something to think about in 2019.

picnickers and passers-by who without any conscience throw chips packets, plastic bottles and other wastes from their passing vehicles. This is what we can call a "roadside-throw culture" which demonstrates how uncivilized and how thoughtless we are. This is a dangerous culture which is rapidly creeping into our society and adopted by children as well as adults. The manner this culture is growing among us, leaves us with no doubt that sooner or later our whole state will become a garbage dump.

I believe this culture cannot be halted by force of law, for that would be an impossible task to do. Instead, our people must become more conscious about cleanliness and acquire more civic sense. Have we ever reflected that when we litter our roadsides we are destroying our own land and we are disfiguring it. At the same time, we project to the outside world a poor image of ourselves. Let us not forget that "people

## Flash go hartal and Verma removal BJP has egg-yello on its face

By Sushil Kutty

Bandh is closure of village, town, city and state - country. Nothing should be moving. But that's not how it happens. Rail roko, buses attacked and vandalized, markets forcibly closed, strikers marching through the streets, protesting against this or that issue and the top court quashes the midnight removal of CBI Director Alok Verma. All in a bandh's day!

It is victory for Director Alok Verma. But with a caveat: He cannot take policy decisions. The government stands guilty of taking a flash decision. The procedure is wrong. It should have let the selection committee take it. The flash move of the government is bad in law. As flash hartals are! The Kerala High Court ruled Monday that henceforth a seven-day notice ought to be given for a hartal.

So, flash is out of the pan, whether it is hartal or the removal of a CBI chief. But there is a difference. Alok Verma, though reinstated, loses total control of the CBI. In a manner of

'perception'. On that score, Alok Verma scores and the Modi government doesn't get full marks. Coming on the eve of general elections, the BJP has egg-yellow on its face and the Opposition gets another handle to maul Modi with. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is notorious for taking flash decisions - the midnight GST and the near-about midnight demonetization of high value currency, both with perception hangers that will not go till after GE 2019.

Mr. Modi, if he's given a superhero outfit, will be Flash Gordan. 'Flashy Mr. Modi in Gordian Knots In The Time Of Elections' the headline. He will be walking on eggs till after GE 2019, when he either gets to flash a 'V' sign or be designated in history as a flash in the pan! Monday, in another flash decision, the Modi government announced a 10% quota for upper castes earning less than Rs 8 lakh per annum, which works to around Rs 60,000 per month. Is it election sop?

Bottom-line, the country is fed up of flash hartals and

**The leash is also on Alok Verma. He is plucked chicken. The selection committee might take the same decision the government took. Most probably it will, because CJI Ranjan Gogoi is part of the 3-member panel and if the government is entirely wrong, then the CJI could have settled the case fully in favour of Alok Verma in the Supreme Court itself. He did not! The selection committee - Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and CJI - will meet shortly and Mr. Verma will be tense. No flash celebrations.**

speaking, the Supreme Court reinstated his insignificance! He can sit in his chair till he remits office. He might as well put in his papers and make an honourable exit. There is no use a diabetic hanging around the dinner table when barred from tasting the fruit chaat/ chocolate dessert. Verma is due to retire in February first week.

But if Verma is lame-duck, Modi is sitting duck. The Opposition is alleging that the SC decision is another Rafale-edge cut delivered to the Modi government jugular. Rahul Gandhi says Modi is running scared; that nothing can save Narendra Modi from Rafale. Similarly, the seven-day notice to hartal leaves the hartal without a fighting edge to stun for maximum effect. In both cases, no more "dead of the night" decisions. It's setback to Modi government and a leash on hartal-mongers.

The leash is also on Alok Verma. He is plucked chicken. The selection committee might take the same decision the government took. Most probably it will, because CJI Ranjan Gogoi is part of the 3-member panel and if the government is entirely wrong, then the CJI could have settled the case fully in favour of Alok Verma in the Supreme Court itself. He did not! The selection committee - Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and CJI - will meet shortly and Mr. Verma will be tense. No flash celebrations.

There is, of course,

flash policy decisions. The lame-duck "short-termism" that marks India-style democracy, especially just before elections! Kerala, where all the action is these days, wants long-term stability on the road to recovery from the devastation brought by the August flash floods. The Kerala High Court's Monday ruling on flash hartals comes in the wake of an informed decision by traders and shopkeepers to give hartals no mind.

Hartal and bandh are a subcontinent-construct, born during the colonial raj. Since then, they are crippling words in the Collins and Oxford dictionaries. Hartal and bandh convey 'confrontation', 'tension' and 'general discontent'. Mithai Street in Kozhikode doesn't care one wee whit for hartal. The day after Kanaka Durga and Bindu Ammini broke the Sabarimala glass ceiling, Hindu organizations called a flash hartal and Mithai Street refused to shut down.

The Supreme Court Tuesday decried "dead of night" flash decisions. Sack the thought, it said. The manner is wrong, bad in law. Public interest is paramount, the three-judge bench ruled. And it applies to both CBI and hartal. Stop feuding on the street and in the CBI. Both the CBI director and the government should be role models. Procedure is as important as merit. Don't be a flashy superhero on the rampage in the streets, and don't force government functionaries to go on leave. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

### NEIGRIHMS fails the people of North East

Editor,  
Anpropos the news report, 'Manpower crisis hits NEIGRIHMS Anaesthesiology Dept' (ST Jan 3, 2019) I was shocked to see that the NEIGRIHMS PRO so casually mentioning that it's a common problem of operation theatres being shut down due to the vacation of doctors. The PRO is quoted as saying, 'it is not new and every year half of the faculty members go on leave at this time and it is a "temporary" situation'.

While he has mentioned that this happens every year, one needs to recollect that the administration of NEIGRIHMS denied earlier that the vacation of doctors affected the operations and it was due to the lower inflow of patients during the winter that the number of operations were less. To quote this newspaper dated March 29, 2018, 'NEIGRIHMS denies docs' vacation affecting service, the same PRO says, "So where is the question of

non-availability of anesthesiologist in the Institute for running the emergency and operation theatres? In fact, patient load comes down in winter season and the numbers of operations to some extent come down"

It is appalling that the administration of a central government Institute can issue such false statements to cover its inadequacies. Why doesn't the Health Ministry/NEIGRIHMS Governing Council or the Honorable High Court take cognizance of such irrational administrative policies and blatant lies?

When will there be a respite for the patients of Northeast India?

Yours etc.,  
Megha B. Mahendra  
RTI Activist  
Via email

### Making news for wrong reasons

Editor,  
The clarification by the NEIGRIHMS PRO (ST Jan 3, 2019) reeks of arrogance

Governing Council of NEIGRIHMS is also to be held responsible for the downslide of this medical institute.

Yours etc.,  
N Sawkmie,  
Via email

### Menace of "roadside-throw culture"

Editor,  
It is appalling to witness how cleanliness is deteriorating from day to day in our lovely State. Shillong for one has become a dirty capital where garbage is seen in every nook and corner. But it is evident that the invasion of garbage has gone beyond the city to the outskirts and to other townships. While travelling from Shillong to Sohra, I was deeply depressed by the sight of litter on both sides of the road up to Sohra. It is evident that the garbage did not come there on its own nor are the residents of those villages responsible for this. The littering is done by tourists,

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“Nationalism is an infantile thing. It is the measles of mankind.”

--- Albert Einstein

## The Shillong Times

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### Bravado at twilight hour

BRAVADO at the dying hour is both pitiable and pathetic. The Narendra Modi government has come up with legislation to grant 10 per cent reservations in jobs and education to economically backward families among the forward communities. The idea, prima facie, is appreciable, and fulfilment of a long-standing demand. The Indian society has two salient characteristics - one of caste and the other of class. Those in the lower rungs of both these require extra help from governments. But, a question to the government is, why it waited for so long.

The Modi government has a life of no more than three months, by which time the Election Commission will call for fresh polls. Major decisions like this could have been taken long ago. The demand from forward castes was long-pending. The Constitution does not allow reservations of more than 50 per cent jobs. The present addition would take the existing 50 per cent total quotas to 60 per cent. Constitutional amendment is a pre-requisite. For this, the parliament must give a two-thirds support, followed by ratification of the new legislation by at least 50 per cent of the state assemblies. This, predictably, is a long haul. The Modi government clearly does not have the time to take this matter to its logical conclusion.

The obvious aim is thus to give an impression that it did something. The assembly polls to a set of five states recently showed the BJP fortunes being on the nosedive. Quick action to salvage the situation was necessary. All the same, the forward communities might be happy to an extent; after all, their long-pending demand won a favourable hearing at least at the theoretical level. Backward communities, on the other hand, note that more than 80 per cent of jobs are already with the forward castes.

It is not the Modi government alone that is showing bravado at the last hour. Take for instance the call for a two-day all-India trade and industry shut down called by various trade unions against the "wrong policies" of the Union Government. Even granted that the government had erred, the question is, why the unions waited for the last minute to show their bravado. This strike is bound to cause a huge loss to the national economy. Also, little time is left for this government to make amends. This protest is just another drama. It shows the steady fall in the quality of leadership of trade unions.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Thoughtless actions

Editor,  
The blue and green bins put up all over the city have as expected, turned out to be more of a nuisance than help to keep the city clean. Apart from litter, people have started dumping household waste and it has also become a convenient means for hawkers and vendors as well as government office staff to dump their waste in such litter bins at the end of the day. One can see every such bin is overflowing into the street, thereby creating small dump sites. This is a clear reflection of poor planning and lack of thinking behind the installation of these bins. Not only are these bins put up randomly but in every nook and corner and sometimes even in distances of less than 10 meters. It seems putting up these bins were more to meet targets and expenditure than to really be of any help towards keeping the city dean. With this, the very objective of segregating waste at household level and the process of door-to-door collection without any open dumping is completely lost.

Litter bins are normally put up in commercial and tourist spots where human footfall is more and there is a need to provide disposal spaces for tourists and shoppers. It is not meant for hawkers and vendors and fast food joints and households to dispose their daily

waste. Just walk along lady Hydari Park after dusk or government office areas in the evening or any other area in the evening or early morning for that matter and you will see the type of waste that is being disposed in the bins. There are milk cartons, tea cups, paper and plastic plates, baby's diapers to plastic carry bags filled with household garbage. Even if one looks at this from the angle of cleaning these bins daily, just see the amount of work for the road cleaner and sweepers and the operational difficulty they have to face.

Have some heart and perspective on city cleanliness and review this stupid decision of installing litter bins in every nook and corner of Shillong city.

Yours etc.,  
B. Mawlong  
Shillong-3

### Quo vadis NEIAH?

Editor,  
Through your esteemed daily, let me air the grievances of the job aspirants in the North Eastern Institute of Ayurveda and Homoeopathy, (NEIAH) Shillong. It is now more than two years since that reputed Institute advertised various vacant posts. However, it is very unfortunate that after the written test was conducted the result of that interview is yet to see the light of the day. In fact, the first one was conducted on July

2016 but only to be cancelled out for reasons best known to the authorities of the Institute where the fate of hundreds of job aspirants is hanging in the balance.

After withdrawing that interview, the same has been reconducted on August 2018. However, 5 months have elapsed but the result is yet to be published. The "Ache din" slogan of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi seems to have evaporated in thin air. How can one expect such dreams to happen when a central institute itself is lagging behind. People of this region seem to be neglected from all corners. Concerned parents have lost faith in the Institute. They even have the right to seek explanation from Prof. (Dr) Pradip Kumar Goswami its Director, as to why this dilly-dallying tactics. What happens candidates that cross the age barrier? Are the NEIAH authorities playing games with the life and future of our youths? We strongly urge the government to intervene so that successful candidates based on their merit can be appointed with out further ado. According to reliable sources, the Institute is handicapped by lack of proper equipments and human resource till date. So, for how long do people of this region have to wait that their medical treatment through Ayurveda to become a reality. NGOs should also intervene to find the truth

behind the delay.  
Yours etc.,  
Maximus Strongman  
Shadap,  
Via email

### Whither gender justice

Editor,  
Those who are saying that Sabarimala's ban on women between the ages of 10 to 50 from entering the temple is a matter of faith whereas criminalization of triple talaq is a matter of gender justice have indeed little faith in gender justice and more faith in the acrimonious religious discourse. This is more evident as the Supreme Court has discarded both Sabarimala ban and triple talaq as unconstitutional. If Sabarimala's ban has to be revered as faith then we have to accept practices like child marriage and dowry also as a faith of a community in certain customs.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

### Noise kills and blights lives

Editor,  
The New Year finally set off at dawn. For me it's another eve of the last year. I wished for peace, tweeted a couple of posts, chatted with few good friends and had a quiet dinner at home. Peace and quiet is undeniably a luxury for most people. But my city and the surrounding areas have chosen noise that

## US-Afpak India

# Trumping Modi-mock

By Dr D K Giri

The President of United States Donald Trump's 'mocking' remarks on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mention of India's contribution to building a library in Afghanistan has provoked retorts in India, Afghanistan and even America. The reactions were expected, as a head of a State, in this case, the biggest player in tragic Afghanistan episode, makes some uncharitable, undiplomatic comments on the head of government of another country. Independent, sovereign, self-respecting countries will react to such jibes; a vassal State may not.

I am not surprised and not much concerned at least for two reasons: one, Donald Trump is known for making abrupt and uncalled for remarks in public; his supporters call it straight talk, calling a spade-a-spade, but critics rile him for such diplomatic gaffes. Take for instance, the reaction of Michael Kugelman at the Wilson Centre in Washington, "Trump's mocking comments about New Delhi are tone-deaf at best and deeply insulting to a key US partner at worst."

The critics add Trump tries to make commercial sense of "strategic investment" and down plays the soft power of the foreign policy. Foreign affairs for him are more deals and dollars than astute diplomacy. Be these criticisms as they may, Trump's occasional remarks are not in alignment with his own government's policies. This brings me to the second reason for not being over reactive to Trump's remark.

If we scan through US policy towards Afghanistan formulated in 2017, we would detect his government's helpful and friendly intentions on India. Before we reflect on the remark and the reactions, it may be in order that we recall Trump's Afghanistan policy. Importantly, his policy towards Afghanistan was a radical departure from the previous government. His predecessor Obama equated Pakistan and India vis-a-vis his policy in South Asia. Obama Administration laded out billions of dollars to Pakistan, even sanctioned the transfer of F-16s but for the objection by American Congress and ignored India's role in Afghanistan.

In contrast, Donald Trump's policy had a paradigm shift, as suggested by Husain Haqqani, Pakistan Former Ambassador to US. Trump's approach converted their Af-Pak policy to Af-Pak-India. Second, it held out Pakistan as the enemy, providing safe haven to terrorists 'the agents of chaos, violence and terror' doing precious little to check terrorists in Afghanistan operating out of Pakistan soil, despite billions of dollars from US to do so. Third, it sought 'greater Indian involvement in Afghanistan', a nightmarish prospect for Pakistan.

Fourth, America's strategic partnership with India will deepen in South-Asia and India-Pacific, through their joint involvement in Afghanistan. Remember, it is Trump Administration that changed the nomenclature of the region from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific, lending greater geo-political importance to India. Fifth, the policy acknowledged India's role in stabilising Afghanistan with economic assistance, and development projects, but wants India to do more. It is this point of US nudging India to do more that has perhaps prompted Trump to make that remark, although it was made sardonically, and undiplomatically that left a bad taste in the mouth.

What did he say? Trump said, "The Indian leader Narendra Modi has been frequently telling me about the library he built in Afghanistan, you know what that is! That is like 5 hours of what we spend." He added, "and we are supposed to say, thank you for the library. I do not know who is using it in Afghani-

stan". Join the dots here. In another context, he said, "what are we doing 6000 miles away in Afghanistan? It is Russia, China and India, who should fight Taliban, not us". So what Trump was implying here, India should fight Taliban, instead of showing off on their support to the library etc.

Not much unexpectedly, leaders in Kabul and New Delhi have reacted to his statement. Afghanistan leaders have gratefully acknowledged India's support, "India has started many projects out of goodwill, these development projects are very important for our country in the long run." The Afghan President's office said, "India is contributing in development

projects like health, roads and education". Afghans believe these projects give more benefits and provide material basis to have peace and stability in the long run.

Predictably, Indian reactions came out of a sovereign, "non-aligned" country defending its self-respect and independent position in its foreign policy. Even the Congress leaders in opposition to NaMo said "US need not teach India how it should conduct its foreign affairs." Indian media and foreign policy observers reacted by defining our approach to Afghan policy and reeling out figures on our development assistance. India is fighting terrorism in Afghanistan by eliminating poverty. India plays a significant role as a development partner in Afghanistan with projects aimed at achieving a tangible improvement in the lives of the people. India is not a free

rider, a significant donor, in fact, the biggest South Asian donor to Afghanistan. It has contributed US\$3 billion with infrastructure projects, humanitarian assistance and economic development, even the projects on irrigation, training, construction of the parliament building, scholarship to 1000 Afghan students, about 116 High Impact community development projects in 31 provinces of Afghanistan and so on.

Interestingly, what was not highlighted in India's reactions was the huge difference of approach in US and India's foreign policies in world politics in general and towards Afghanistan in particular. Both US and India know the power asymmetry between them; one is a super power and the other a developing country, an emerging power. Both have their respective trajectories and determinants in foreign policy. US thrives politically and even grows in economic strength by playing its world power role, some call it international police man. For instance, US plunged into Iraq war to protect their oil interest, even bypassing the United Nations. There is no international hotspot where US is not engaged.

In stark contrast, India has been 'non-aligned' for much its independent policy since 1947. Whether it was a right approach for India, is a subject of another debate. India does not get involved bilaterally in any conflict unless it is under the UN mandate, or it is invited to do so like it does in its neighbourhood - Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan and Bangladesh and so on. So, to expect New Delhi to militarily jump head on into Afghanistan imbroglio is a figment of Trump's imagination.

On Afghanistan, India supports an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled peace and reconciliation process. So, it has to be a part of US-India-Afghan joint strategy for India to send its troops. Therefore, in sum, as Kugelman said, "India would need to shrug off incidents like these in service of a partnership that both Washington and New Delhi are keen to deepen". One should not find it hard to agree with him.---INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

has ruined our serenity. DJ Night had been embraced by most of the Hotels to cater to a select group of entertainment seekers on New Year's eve. The bars and restaurants were rolling out their seasonal cocktails. The rock and roll goers were thronging pubs and hotels. Music lovers went mad at concerts. Shortly after dinner, I realized that the tranquility of my surroundings had been totally shattered. Vehicles clogged the motorway, blowing ear-piercing horns. The road raging drivers blew their horns out of habit than necessity. The other day I left a movie theater with a fuzzy feeling in my ears. Even at my daughter's School Annual Day, the sound was unbearable and exceedingly loud. That loudness is definitely not OK. Thus singers suffer from tinnitus due to noise exposure for hours while touring night after night. Does anybody ever wonder if the noise could be damaging our hearing?

Under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Government of India came up with Noise Pollution (Control and Regulation) Rules in the year 2000 that were later amended. Section 5 lays down the restrictions on the use of public address (PA) systems. It shall not be used at night except in closed premises. The State Government may permit such noise up to midnight during festive occasions but not exceeding fifteen days in a calendar year. The maximum noise

## Plastic ban Better late than never

By Dr. S. Saraswathi

In 26 States/Union Territories in India, some form of plastic ban is imposed, but its implementation is lax. The latest to join the list is Tamil Nadu on 1st January. A global movement against plastic is going on, but only on a slow pace and that too with reluctance requiring penal provisions for violation in marked contrast to its quick adoption when it was introduced. The ban amounts practically to a radical change in lifestyle.

Way back in 2012, two judges of the Supreme Court said that "the next generation will be threatened with something more serious than the atom bomb... unless a total ban on plastic is put in place".

The word "plastic" is derived from the Greek "plastikos" meaning "capable of being shaped or molded". It denotes their malleability, or plasticity that allows them to be cast, pressed, or shaped into a variety of forms to manufacture literally thousands of products and parts of products. There are common plastics and also special purpose plastics.

Plastic wastes, major toxic pollutants, are generated in households as well as in public places. Plastic is a non-biodegradable substance containing poisonous chemicals. Its disposal is almost impossible by any means - recycling, burning, or land-filling. Plastic does not undergo bacterial decomposition.

The entire world is facing a crisis in plastic pollution. The EU Parliament approved ban on single-use plastic in October 2018. It is estimated that 18 trillion pounds of plastic waste enter the oceans from coastal regions. June 2018 issue of the National Geographic Magazine was devoted to special coverage on plastics.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Debris Act in the US fosters efforts to clean up plastic trash from the world's oceans and encourages federal trade negotiators to prod "leaders of nations responsible for the majority of marine debris to improve management of waste that ends in the ocean".

It is estimated that India roughly generates 5.6 million tonnes of plastic waste annually and the country accounts for 60 per cent of plastic waste dumped into oceans every year. Three of 10 rivers which carry 90 per cent plastic to world's oceans are in India - the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra.

Invented in 1870 by an American, John Wesley Hyatt, the first plastic products were made of a material called celluloid that looked like ivory. Known as Bakelite, it was used in household items. Fully synthetic plastic was invented in 1907 in New York, and the name "plastic" was also coined. Many chemists contributed to the research on plastics with the result that its use extended to several fields. Plastic manufacturing became a major part of the chemical industry. Environmental concerns began to rise when it was found that plastic materials would not decompose. This gave rise to vigorous recycling and reuse.

Most of the materials used in the manufacture of plastic are non-renewable fossil fuel-based materials. Through their extraction and production, greenhouse gases are created which contribute to climate change - the biggest threat to our future.

According to the Society of Plastics Engineers, over 200 million tons of plastic are manufactured annually around the world. Of these, 26 million are manufactured in the US. Its Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

has been expressing concern over little progress in recycling of plastic waste as it was mingled with organic wastes like food scraps, wet paper, and liquids, requiring elaborate and expensive cleaning and sanitizing procedures before undertaking recycling.

This situation has not changed in India despite constant instructions and directives for source segregation of wastes. Two decades ago, in 1997 the Delhi Government was urging the public to refrain from using plastic bags to dispose of domestic garbage as it caused immense harm to the cattle. Haryana, Goa, and Himachal Pradesh were first to ban the use of "killer" plastic bags.

A pollutant is a waste material that pollutes air, water, or soil. The severity of pollution is determined by its chemical nature, concentration and persistence. Some pollutants are biodegradable and will not persist in the environment for long time. It is found that even degradation of some pollutants themselves are polluting.

Plastic pollution involves accumulation of plastic products in the environment that adversely affects wildlife and their habitat as well as humans. Microplastics, mega and macro-plastics - all contribute to plastic pollution. Plastic debris is categorised into primary or secondary - the first found in their original form like bottle caps and cups, and the second is found in the degradation of primary plastics.

Plastic is malleable and can be moulded into solid objects of diverse shapes. The common property of all plastic materials is their ability to undergo irreversible deformation without breaking. Due to their common qualities of "relatively low cost, ease of manufacture, versatility, and imperviousness to water", plastics are used in a wide range of products from toys to space-ships. These have displaced many traditional materials such as wood, stone, leather, paper, metal, glass, and ceramic even in slow-changing societies. Little thought is bestowed on their nil resale value or the loss in exchanging old metal items with some permanent value to plastic products.

In developed countries, about one-third of plastic use is in packaging. Pipes used in plumbing are made of plastics. Its use is extensive in automobiles, furniture, household goods, and toys. Plastic has a role in building construction.

In India too, packaging is mostly done with plastic materials. Replacement of copper and bronze articles by plastic containers and plates in households has gone on so fast leaving no time to realise the great change that has taken place in the houses of all economic classes.

Plastic has many uses in the medical field. However, the name plastic surgery has come about to denote the quality of plasticity, i.e. pliant required in reshaping flesh and not the use of plastic.

Even a small amount of conventional plastics mixed with organic materials can contaminate and spoil prime quality compost humus. Composters, therefore, do not accept mixed organic waste streams unless they are completely free of non-degradable plastics. A significant waste disposal strategy is thus eliminated by the presence of plastics. On the other hand, certified bio-degradable plastics can completely bio-degrade in a compost facility and thus help recovery of large amount of wastes. ---INFA

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

“One of the critical issues that we have to confront is illegal immigration, because this is a multi-headed Hydra that affects our economy, our health care, our health care, our education systems, our national security, and also our local criminality.”

--- Allen West

## The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JANUARY 11, 2019

### NE and the CAB 2019

THE controversial and contentious Citizenship Amendment Bill has been passed in the Lok Sabha. Political and social groups in the North East called a Bandh in protest. It has triggered a process of social and political realignment in the region. What happens in the Rajya Sabha remains to be seen. Sub-national politics has resurfaced again which is a blow to the BJP which has swept over the North East since the 2014 General Election. It rules in Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. Allies are in office in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram. But the Citizenship Bill is alienating allies from the BJP. The Asom Gana Parishad has severed links with the BJP led Government in Assam and quit the NDA. Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma whose party is aligned to the NDA is opposed to the Bill. The Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), an ally of the BJP, supported the critics of the Act. The same line has been taken by Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga. Ethnic and linguistic identities have dominated politics in the North East for a long time. Religion has not played a decisive role. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh's commitment to preserve North Eastern identity has now taken a back seat.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill backs the claims of non-Muslim migrants. BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma says it will fuel Muslim separatism in Assam. In that state the minority community accounts for 34% of the population and therefore it rings alarm signals. Many Muslim groups support secular opposition to illegal migration. The Bill advances the cut-off date for non-Muslims seeking Indian citizenship to 2014 from 1971. It undoubtedly complicates the National Registration of Citizens (NRC) process which has troubled Assam in recent months. It may mean that a sizable section of 40 lakh people may become stateless. That will ignite sub-nationalism which is for long a threat to the integration of the North East with mainland India. The BJP has aggravated the crisis by proposing religious identity as a marker of citizenship. The ruling party at the Centre appears to be overplaying its hand. The fate of the BJP hangs in the balance with the Parliamentary Elections round the corner. It has not done well in major states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The situation in Uttar Pradesh is also uncertain. The BJP may be doing harm to itself by pushing the Citizenship legislation.

# Why the Citizenship Bill 2019 violates the Indian Constitution

By Patricia Mukhim

India at Partition chose not to define itself as a Hindu country, to be guided by Hindu law but by the tenets of a secular democracy where all religions have equal weightage and are given the freedom to propagate their faith. Although the word secular was not part of our preamble in 1950, it was inserted in 1976 (albeit for different reasons). Unlike East and West Pakistan, we are not governed by Islamic law. So to speak about giving citizenship to people from three countries on the basis of their religion, violates the secular nature of the Constitution. Of course for good measure, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists et al were also added to the list but essentially the Bill wants to consolidate Hindus and the Hindu vote bank.

Bangladesh has a Hindu population of 1.13 crore. That's a substantial vote bank. But where will this number settle? They obviously will choose the North East where they feel a sense of kinship of language and culture and because it is easier for them to revisit the country of their origin when they feel a sense of déjà vu. The Finance Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma has got his maths figured out and said that if Bengali Hindus vote BJP in 17 constituencies then Assam is sorted out for his Party. This is the limited vision of politicians who don't care about the future of their states or the country since they have the option of migrating to better, more developed countries.

Union Home Minister Raj Nath Singh has tried to assuage our feelings by stating that our concerns in the region about a demographic change will be taken care of. Mr Raj Nath Singh must come and live here to understand what influx from Bangladesh actually looks like and how it plays out in real life and how tribal communities such as those of Tripura are now a poor majority of just 30% of the population. In 1901 they numbered about 53% of the population. But the BJP could not care a hoot as long as they are able to capture power and with the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019 the Party has proved yet again that it does not care about the future of ethnic minorities. One only hopes that this Bill will not pass muster in the Rajya Sabha where the BJP does not yet have a majority.

The intent of the Citizenship Bill 2019 is of course clear to those who can read the signs of the times. The

BJP is desperate to return to power and will use all tactics including that of giving reservation to forward caste Hindus. But the Congress is no better. It has supported this populist move and ensured that the Reservation Bill got smooth passage. Now states like Assam are in greater turmoil than most with the Barak Valley and the Brahmaputra Valley at

a corner they retaliate in the most absurd manner. The naked protest outside Parliament on December 7 by members of the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) from Assam which is led by Akhil Gogoi shows the desperation of a people who see the looming threat of their living space being invaded by people from across the border. It goes without saying that the

*“That India should feel for Hindus persecuted elsewhere but fail to reinstate the Kashmiri Pandits who were ousted from their hearths and homes gives out the lie about the intent of the Citizenship Bill 2019.”*

daggers drawn over the Citizenship Bill. Those who support the Bill argue that if Assam has given sanctuary to Muslims for so long (including those that have come from across the border) and continues to do so even today then what's the problem in legitimising the citizenship of large numbers of Hindus from Bangladesh who are persecuted for their religious beliefs. Not enough studies have been done as to whether Hindus in Bangladesh are indeed persecuted. Going by the number of Durga Puja mandaps you would not think so but yes people cross over to India for economic reasons than for any other consideration.

Trinamool MP Saugata Roy has rightly termed the Citizenship Bill "divisive" and "insidious" and stated that it goes against the basic tenets of the Constitution. The Bill indeed violates the secular nature of the Indian Constitution and after the NDA Government came to power in 2014, there has been a systematic assault on beef eating communities some of whom have been lynched by the lunatic fringe. This does not bode well for a secular country. But the moot point is whether India under the NDA is still a secular nation. Perhaps this is because the Indian Constitution does not define the relationship between religion and state. This continues to be a grey area.

When people are put in

maximum migration will be from Bangladesh and that the seven North Eastern states would bear the brunt of this migration. This vote-bank politics is actually spawned by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which defines the BJP's ideological moorings.

That India should feel for Hindus persecuted elsewhere but fail to reinstate the Kashmiri Pandits who were ousted from their hearths and homes gives out the lie about the intent of the Citizenship Bill 2019. Most countries, including developed western nations, today believe in securing their borders and putting a stop to more refugees who seek sanctuary because of wars and violence in their home countries. They are increasingly adopting protectionist policies. The US is keen to seal its borders with Mexico. Whether that step is right or wrong is debatable but Donald Trump was voted to do that as a prime agenda because Americans are losing out jobs to migrant workers.

The situation is similar in the North Eastern states with small populations and very little job creation and virtually no industrial growth. Why do we forget that large sections of youth from the region are job seekers elsewhere because jobs closer home are no longer available. With the coming in of refugees there will be tremendous pressure on land and resources. Hence the resistance to the Bill! Let us not forget that the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are

agitated at the growing number of Chakmas entering the state and seeking citizenship. Mizoram has a problem with the Reangs/Brus and Burmese interlopers. Dimapur in Nagaland is being inundated by what they term as 'IBIs' (Illegal Bangladeshi Immigrants) Manipur, Meghalaya and Assam see the influx as a very real threat to their demography, culture, economy and social bonds.

In Meghalaya the bandh sponsored by the North East Students' Organisation came after a gap of four years. The Meghalaya High Court had in 2015 directed that newspapers should not carry news of a bandh, strike, hartal et al by any organisation. This time the people across the seven states seem to have converged on the need to show solidarity against the Citizenship Bill 2019 which threatens to derail turn their homeland into a Lebensraum and one over which they would not have any control.

In all of this, however is the role of history in the carving out of borders from hitherto borderless homelands, post 1947. Today those borders have hardened and people of one ethnic origin, culture and language are citizens of two different nations. Across the globe people have usually migrated to safer zones with better economic prospects. In this region too this migration has continued since the Partition in 1947. And it bears mention that prior to the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, the Hindus did suffer persecution in East Pakistan. Many of them in fact were granted safe sanctuary in India. But this continued migration has a bearing especially on finite resources like land. It deprives genuine Indian citizens of their due.

The crux of the matter is that the rest of India will talk and commiserate with their Hindu brethren from Bangladesh but will not share this population of religious migrants. At the end of the day it is the North Eastern states that will have to carry the load. And this is not a load that any of the seven states can carry or would wish to carry. And to burden a region that has just about come out of its battle with itself to chart out a new, more progressive course is a cruel joke. May the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019 languish in the Rajya Sabha in the same manner that the Women's Reservation Bill has done and which all political parties have conveniently forgotten.

## Society intellectualism Defined by political narratives

By Sagarneel Sinha

In the present era, slowly and gradually, intellectualism is being, more or less characterised by political narratives of left and right. The well-being society's most valuable asset is the intellectualism that it possesses and in its absence, the society starts to decay. Philosophically, intellectualism is identified with reasoning -- deriving knowledge through reasons -- the way an individual understands. Sometimes one may be wrong to derive the right knowledge but the unending urge of the human mind to sense the surroundings works out at the end. But unfortunately, when narratives of left and right-wing politics takes the form of intellectualism, the sun of wisdom sets in and ignorance of mind starts dominating the discourse of society.

This is the reason intellectualism is always identified as the enemy by those who want to dominate the society. Obviously, for the left-leaning activists, the right ones represent the dogmatic ideas and for the right wings, left ones are intolerant. Whom to believe -- the left or the right? Actually both are correct and incorrect too. When right wings accuse the left for being intolerant to other ideas, they are not wrong and when the left wings charge the right for being against intellectualism, left is correct. They are wrong when they foster themselves of being the true upholder of the flow of diverse ideas in a society.

It is a known fact that when there is a Left wing government, the intellectuals belonging to the Right are targeted and same is the case when there is a Right dispensation. When the crusade is executed by one ideology, the other creates the narrative of the society and the nation being in danger, because narratives are easily understood by the common people.

Intellectuals, after they become left or right, have new tasks for their ideologically close political parties -- creating emotional and appealing political chronicles for the masses to ensure votes for their close ideological political parties. This association of some with ideological propaganda politics distorts the spirit of intellectualism.

But the situation worsens more, when the dispensation tries to gain political mileage by exploiting the situation almost in its favour, if not totally. Intellectualism hardly matters then. This is when the moral values of a society start to decay. Political power, then, starts to call the shots to determine who is the holiest intellectual, and who is not. This orientation is common for both the ideologies.

It is not that all the intellectuals embrace either the left or the right side. There are voices in the society without any ideological baggage. But the problem is they are often not heard in the ideologically-charged society which favours definite identities -- nameless are not oft-encouraged. Even if they manage to break through, the nameless are labelled with certain ideological tags by both the left and right intellectuals.

In India, the left intellectuals always try to ignore the glorious Hindu past and only highlight the gloomy side of it. In case of Sultanate and Mughal rule, they always try their best to showcase the positive side of them -- ignoring the dark sides of those eras. On the other side, the right intellectuals do completely the opposite of their counterparts -- left intellectuals. This intellectual division of India, no doubt, has hampered the progressive development of the society. History needs an independent analysis

and some of the major issues of the country have their roots in the past and are continuing till today like the caste problem. The question is why caste problem still continues in India? One of the reasons, most probably, is due to improper analysis of the caste system. Truth is even the intellectuals continue to practise racism because when the right intellectuals give their opinions on caste they are rejected by the left ones and vice versa. Actually, this division instead of contributing to end the caste system has rather allowed it to flourish as these ideologically-sided intellectuals have a say on the policies of the elected governments, which also many times rely only on those who have ideological proximities. Intellectual development of a society is very essential if a country has to progress. However, in many countries there have been regulations by ruling regimes backed by politically-sided intellectuals to contain the flow of intellectual development. In the past, there have been instances of Socialist regimes like Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and Nazi-ruled Germany and Fascist regime of Italy. In these regimes, it's a known fact that those regimes had intellectuals to control the society.

Similarly, the present world is not so different with countries like North Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia and some other countries like Turkey, Venezuela et al, joining the list with elected governments turning autocratic, influenced by emerging far right and left movements, where the regimes backed intellectuals play a key role to suppress diverse views and propagate those views only which suit them and their masters. History has proved that such intellectualism only hindered and is still hindering the society to prosper where dissent was and is a punishable offense.

Intellectualism ensures an environment of discussions and debates, not loud debates as we often witness in TV studios, and guarantees the flow of diverse ideas in the society. In such a domain, existence of dissent is obvious. But when dissent is woven into a political agenda, it doesn't actually serve its useful purpose for an intellectual society. However, often, the analysis is on the problems of dissent and solutions are hardly worked out. When we highlight on the problem, it results only in the growth of it. Same goes in the case of dissent too.

In today's era, healthy discussions and debates between persons belonging to different ideas are very much required to contain the further growth of dissent into a violent storm. Of course, this is possible when intellectualism, free from right and left propaganda, is practised only for the purpose of the growth of a society and a nation because when an intellectual works for a political agenda, a false narrative is repeated many times only to make it a true fact.

This will be possible when both the left and right intellectuals stop calling the shots and allow the society to develop ideas on its own. Society has to be alerted as dissent is an essential feature of intellectualism but when it is politicised for wrong reasons, it is harmful too. That's why today's society needs intellectualism free from all these left and right agenda. Otherwise, dissent will continue to be misused merely as a political weapon for gain by both the ideologies through fostering of catchy political narratives, ultimately erasing the space for true intellectualism and pushing the society towards darkness. --JNFA

### TO THE EDITOR

#### MBOSE Textbook: Criminal Negligence

Editor,  
I happened to glance through the textbook for Social Science prescribed for Class X of MBOSE and was shocked by what I read. Written by three authors Arun Kumar, Manju Goel and Tinku Bhattacharjee and edited by Biana W. Momin, the book is full of inconsistencies, factual errors and atrocious English. For instance let us sample a verbatim reproduction of some sentences picked up at random.

“This gives rise to another problem- downfall in the employment in agriculture” page 189

“How does the Criminal Procedure could (1973) safeguard women rights?” page 359

“Write the purpose of women trafficking” page 359  
“The Meghalaya subtropical forest ecoregion encompasses the state” page 247

“...the British incorporated Meghalaya into Assam in 1935” page 248

“Meghalaya's Gross

State Domestic Product was estimated at US\$4.20 billion for 2014-15 and US\$ 4.17 billion for 2015-16” page 251

“The word democracy has its origin in two Greek words ‘demos’ and ‘krasis’. Demos means ‘the people’ and Krasis means ‘power to rule.’ Page 347

Contrast this to what the Britannica says. The term is derived from the Greek demokratia, which was coined from demos (“people”) and kratos (“rule”)

When I googled up the meaning of the word krasis that was used in place of kratos, the Merriam Webster dictionary had this to say: “Definition of krasis: the act or practice of mingling water with wine in the Eastern Orthodox Eucharist.”

This is just a small sample of the quality of the Social Science book in question. By providing such wrong information and giving students such sub standard books as the MBOSE text books, the state has engaged in criminal negligence that would mar the future of thousands of students of MBOSE. Is this sheer incompetence or a criminal conspiracy against the fu-

ture of our state?

Yours etc.,  
Prof Sanjeeb Kakoty  
IIM Shillong

#### Resistance to the CAB 2019

Editor,

It is a very unfortunate that the BJP led government has passed the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019 which seeks to provide Indian citizenship to non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Bill is contemptible as it violates the democratic ideals of India. Introduced in the Lok Sabha by the Minister of Home Affairs, Rajnath Singh, its primary objective is to amend the current Citizenship Act 1955 to provide for the acquisition and determination of Indian citizenship for a certain category of illegal immigrants and not for the benefit of Indian citizens. Additionally, this bill relaxes the citizenship criteria for such immigrants and merges the categories of Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI). This Bill is not acceptable to the people of the North East. When Prime Minister Modi said, “I want to assure the people of Assam and

North East that their rights will not be hurt after passage of the Citizenship Bill,” I wonder what rights he is talking about, when we are treated unjustly and undemocratically.

Rather than worry about citizens from other countries why doesn't the Government of India resolve the problems faced by people of the NE region some of which like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) are unconstitutional. Mr Modi and the BJP should not burden the people of this region by passing such an illogical Bill. The eight states of the North East constitute an area of 262,230 square kilometres which is only 8 percent of that of India. This region is like a different country because racially we are different. In fact there is nothing common with India other than being Indian. The food, life-style, cultures and traditions, environmental and geographical factors etc are all unique. This Bill will affect the indigenous people of this region and is a threat to the identity and cultures of the North East.

In fact, the North East should be better protected and safeguarded because only 4% of its borders are with India while 96% is with

foreign countries. It is a sad fact that we are living in a broken democracy with self-seeking leaders. If India cannot feel our sentiments and keeps on heaping injustice on the people of the region then sooner than later there will be repercussions.

Yours etc.,  
Chongtham Thangamba Meetei,  
Teacher, St. John Higher Secondary School & Advisor, Shillong Manipuri Students' Union

#### India not a garbage dump for foreigners

Editor,

The real objective of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019 of the BJP led NDA Government is crystal clear for every Indian to see. If passed by the Rajya Sabha this Act will make lakhs of foreigners, especially Hindus who settled in India even for a brief period of only six years, citizens of this country. Foreigners are foreigners; they cannot become citizens of India and they ought to be detected and deported forthwith to the countries from which they have come from. Moreover, how can there be special exception for any particular people such as

Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians? The population of India is now touching around 1.35 billion and by legalising the above categories of foreigners who settled in India the population will again shoot up by several lakhs and in no time India will be the leading country in terms of population. And we very well understand its impact on the country's socio-economic and socio-political scenario. Again, by legalising the foreigners of the above particular groups of people the majority of whom are in the North East, this region will become the dumping ground for foreigners. Apart from Tripura and Assam which house the maximum population of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, Meghalaya also is not far behind. It is estimated that the illegal foreigners settled in Meghalaya are approximately 9 lakhs out of 35 lakh, and almost all of them are Muslims and Hindus coming from Bangladesh and Nepal. Hence, this Bill is dangerous for India and disastrous for the North East in particular. Thankfully the Bill is yet to be passed by the Rajya Sabha.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email

*"Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy."*

--- Joe Paterno

## The Shillong Times

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### BCCI show cause

WORDS are like arrows. Once shot, they cannot be taken back; more so when one faces television cameras. Landing in trouble in recent days are two cricketers - KL Rahul and Hardik Pandya - and Congress party's very own president Rahul Gandhi. What they said are obviously not in good taste, but it is a debatable point whether so much hullabaloo over such comments is warranted. The two cricketers are accused of "misogynistic" and other condemnable offences after their appearance in a chat show Koffee With Karan Season 6. Incensed at the flurry of criticism from social media warriors that are aware of their gender rights and who will not take such flighty comments in their stride - the Committee of Administrators (CoA) of BCCI has issued two show cause notices as to why action should not be taken against them for their "irresponsible" remarks. Notably, Pandya drew more fury as he openly boasted about womanizing. Prima facie, it would look like he was being frank, and hoped to make an impact at the talk show. Viewer ratings are what take a show up or down. But Pandya's remarks are counter to the new language of discourse following the #MeToo movement. He is accused of insulting womanhood. The BCCI was left with no option but to step in. Several TV programmes are now known to border on vulgarity with each one trying to beat their next competitor. Most of them follow a familiar pattern, and producers lack the creativity and genius to re-invent the shows. Vulgarity in visuals is scoffed at as families watch TV together. Hence social media users vent their grouse on their respective platforms. But whether BCCI should have gone this far to fix the two cricketers is the moot point.

In a world where women are increasingly claiming their rights after a long struggle, flighty comments such as those from Pandya and Rahul demean not only womanhood but also the struggle of feminists in this country and the world. Congress President Rahul Gandhi's remark that Prime Minister Modi ran away from a debate on Rafale in parliament and left it to a "woman" to defend him is also in bad taste. After all Nirmala Sitharaman is the defence minister of this country and is well briefed to speak on the contentious Rafale deal. Whether or not she is convincing is a different matter but as a senior politician Sitharaman deserved better reference and respect. In India, the gender discourse and vocabulary is yet to impact the political class and sections of the elite. This is unfortunate.

### LOOKING BACK

June 12, 1989

## Manipur's troubles

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

Added to the proximity of these elections is the growing difference between the Chief Minister and his Home Minister Mr Tompok Singh nursed a feeling of being let down when Mr Jayachandra Singh was imposed on the State by the Congress(I) High Command in preference to his own claim to this high offices. The most glaring instance of this difference between the two dignitaries came to light when the Home Minister got the PLA leader Mani Singh arrested and thus sabotaged the Chief Minister's plan to strike an accord with the State's foremost insurgent outfit. There are other evidences also of Tompok Singh gathering increasing dissidence in the party, to stem which the Chief Minister has been compelled to think of a reshuffle. This should get the Congress(I) command's endorsement since word has been sent out from New Delhi that the Congress house in Manipur has to be kept in order in view of the impending elections.

# Stringent punishment for mob violence

By Aneeta Synrem

Mob violence and lynching are serious problems in our country. With the increasing use of social media, there is an increase in circulation of fake and provocative news, leading to violence and mob lynching. In the last five years, our country had witnessed several incidents of mob violence and lynching in the name of cow theft and killing. Consequently several innocent people have lost their lives and many sustained grievous injuries. There has also been an increase in incidents of mob lynching on allegations of witchcraft and child abduction. The situation is very dismal as such cases pose serious threats to the rule of law and the country's social fabric.

In the last 40 years, Meghalaya had witnessed several incidents of mob violence. The 1979 violence was the worst kind followed by the violent incidents of 1987 and 1992. During each of these violent incidents a particular community was the victim and obviously it is the marginalized community. The state had also witnessed mob violence in 2013 during the ILP agitation where innocent people had lost their lives. The most recent incident being the May-June 2018 mob violence at Motphran, Shillong arising out of a scuffle between few Khasi boys with the non-locals and provocative rumours spread on social media within a short span of time making the situation most volatile. Fortunately, this time no precious lives were lost but the trouble mongers had left no stone unturned to terrorize the marginalized group, thus forcing hundreds of people

including children, women and the aged to take shelter in protected areas. At that time the role of the Government was also unclear. Be that as it may, the issue here is mob violence and lynching.

The main causes of mob violence and lynching are: (a) hatred (b) vengeance, (c) rumour-mongering, (d) sudden provocation, (e) superstition (f) presumption of guilt of commission of offence or derogative act by the victim, (f) impunity etc. In the present day, the main

between Tehseen S. Poonawalla -vs- Union of India and others had issued several guidelines to be followed by the centre and the state to prevent mob violence and lynching. Besides that the Apex Court had recommended to the Parliament to create a separate offence for lynching and provide adequate punishment for the same. But the NDA government is over zealous to introduce instead the Bill in the Lok Sabha to criminalize triple talaq by

toward protecting people from mob violence and lynching by passing a bill i.e., "The Manipur Protection from Mob Violence Bill, 2018" on December 21, 2018. The bill recommends rigorous life imprisonment for those involved in mob violence, if it results in the death of the victim. And in addition to life imprisonment, the Bill also recommends a fine of Rs 5 lakh for those involved in mob lynching.

The increasing trend of mob violence in our state needs to be dealt with firmly by the government so as to uphold the rule of law. The Meghalaya government needs to ponder on the issue of protection of people from mob violence. It is hereby suggested that without any further delay our state government should make a law which provides for death penalty to the perpetrators of mob violence if it results in the death of the victim and rigorous life imprisonment with fine of up to Rs. 5 lakh for mob violence that causes grievous hurts to the victim or destruction of public/ private property. Provision should also be made for conducting the trials involving mob violence in special courts within a time frame and the investigation of such cases be done by SIT (Special Investigation Team) led by a senior IPS officer of the district where such violence took place and the investigation be completed within a stipulated time period, with a further provision to pay adequate compensation/financial assistance to the victim or his family. Stringent punishment alone would deter the mob from taking the law into their hands with impunity.

**The most recent incident being the May-June 2018 mob violence at Motphran, Shillong arising out of a scuffle between few Khasi boys with the non-locals and provocative rumours spread on social media within a short span of time making the situation most volatile. Fortunately, this time no precious lives were lost but the trouble mongers had left no stone unturned to terrorize the marginalized group, thus forcing hundreds of people including children, women and the aged to take shelter in protected areas.**

source of spreading mob violence and lynching are fake and provocative messages, objectionable videos on social media like WhatsApp, Messenger and Facebook. Having gone through those provocative messages, the mob shun their reasoning and resort to violence taking the law into their own hands with impunity.

The Supreme Court in its judgment dated July 17, 2018 passed in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 754 of 2016

pretending to be completely ignorant of the fact that marriage under the Muslim law is a civil contract, therefore, for any breach or wrong to a civil contract, the remedy always lies in civil action. But sadly, the present government had so far not made any law for protection of the life of citizens from mob violence and lynching.

Manipur is the first state in the whole country which had taken a concrete steps

### TO THE EDITOR

## Futile rescue mission

Editor,

The Rescue Mission being undertaken at present at the Ksan mine in East Jaintia Hills to save the miners or to recover their remains seems to be a futile exercise with each passing day. Now it is already a month and still there is no sign at all that the miners trapped inside the rat hole mine can be rescued. It is impossible for the fifteen miners to survive that long inside the water-filled rat-hole mines. According to me it is just a matter of time that the mission will be abandoned because the pumping itself is futile as the water refuses to recede and how can it recede when the water from the Lytein river is still being allowed to flow or seep into the rat-holes. The only way, if possible, is to divert the Lytein river rather than pumping out the water from the rat-holes and the main Box cutting or shaft. If the water of the Lytein river is not diverted it is futile to pump out the water. If this is not being the Government might as well call off the rescue mission for good.

Yours etc.  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email

## After a month, miners still buried

Editor

What can we say about the rescue efforts of the Meghalaya Government vis-à-vis the 15 miners trapped in the Ksan mine in Luthari, East Jaintia Hills. Having read the news in your paper every day since December 14, we are led to believe that the entire

rescue operation was clumsily put together by an administration that is clearly out of depth. Add to that a State Government that seems to stumble from issue to issue and exposes its lack of maturity and experience. It is not easy to run a state. The elected who are now part of the cabinet are people who have had no exposure to public life or public service. Yes service...the word is alien to them. The bureaucracy and police seem to lack direction since the top rung of the government is directionless. What has Meghalaya now come to? Like Toki Blah in his recent article commented, we do lack real leaders with the vision and foresight to lead the state and its people to a new and challenging future. And leadership is to serve; not to be served. Right now we have only rabble rousers as politicians. They only appear when a populist issue emerges.

For so many months we have not heard any political party analyse and deconstruct the Citizen Amendment Bill (CAB) 2016 for the benefit of the lay person. The only thing we heard is that the Bill is to be feared. So we live on this fear psychosis from month to month and year to year and also cast our votes based on these fears. Our people here are not known to use their thinking and to look at an issue dispassionately. Everything must be like the rush of amphetamine for us to respond.

Now the mine accident issue is replaced by other more urgent issues. Even mainstream media has moved on to some new issue. But we in Meghalaya cannot forget 15 souls inside that dark hole which could well be their grave. Is the Government even

bothered? We heard the Home Minister and other cabinet ministers have been vacationing; some in India others abroad. No wonder every person who has the money wants to be in politics. It's so easy to make wealth and live it up. Why would anyone care for the voters? After all, they were paid money for their votes, weren't they? The voters did not vote for development, for better roads, better health care etc. Some people in the urban centres perhaps did not take money for voting but they too extract their pounds of flesh in different ways. So politicians know how to deal with us. As a Christian I hope that the cries for justice from their 15 souls reach heaven and that those responsible for such inhuman mining practices and those who bungled in the rescue mission receive their punishment from a God who watches our every action. I wonder how those in the Government could even celebrate Christmas. Oh, but hang on, did I just not say that most of our ministers went on a vacation despite this tragedy? That's how caring this government is. I hope they are taught a lesson soon.

Yours etc.,  
Andrew Sohliya,  
Via email

## Vital medicines missing at NEIGRIHMS outlets

Editor,  
It is very self-assuring to go on record saying that the NEIGRIHMS management has done a yeoman's service especially for the needy sections of populace by

way of opening two medicine outlets where the patients can buy prescribed medicines at a very affordable, discounted rate. These two outlets are situated at the entrance floor of this Institute, and have been functioning since a few years ago. At the initial stages it was very satisfying to say that we could get any type of medicines for the asking from the outlets in question. Of late, however it has been very exasperating because whenever urgent medicines are needed to be purchased from these two retailers we are being told that such medicines are unavailable. Conversely, when we step out a few feet away but within the periphery of this Institute we find another medicine shop and where all types of medicines are available as per physicians' prescription but the same are being sold sans any discount/concession whatsoever.

Prima facie, it makes a discerning person skeptical about how such a coincidence can happen if that is a coincidence. Hence, I appeal to the incumbent Director of this premier health institute to exercise his authoritative capacities, in addressing the non-availability of life-saving medicines at the two said outlets. This action would go a long way in ameliorating the plight of the destitute patients who are in dire need of life saving medicines at the discounted rate.

Yours etc  
Jerome K. Diengdoh  
Shillong -2

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

## Reservation for upper caste a political gimmick Quotas without jobs serve no purpose

By Arun Srivastava

The BJP and especially Prime Minister Narendra Modi boasts of performing a master stroke by announcing 10 per cent extra reservation for economically weaker sections without tinkering with the quotas of the SCs, STs and OBCs.

Though Modi and the BJP leaders feel the party has managed to win the confidence of upper caste people, the fact remains that this is a double-edged weapon that Modi plans to utilize against Congress during the Lok Sabha elections.

Already the move has scared the SCs, STs and OBCs. They look at the bill in the backdrop of the statement by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat calling for a review of the reservation policy in the run-up to the Bihar Assembly elections in 2015. He had argued that it has been used for political ends and suggested the formation of an apolitical

Patel, who is also a Union minister, has claimed that the OBC population is 50-60 per cent and so the 27 per cent quota was too less.

There is little doubt that the quota gamble will backfire as the OBCs and Dalits are turning against Modi and BJP. It is an irony that while the government is offering reservation to upper castes, it has not taken a decision on quotas in promotion. Modi is desperate to win over the upper caste people by offering quota, but has he cleared the backlog for reservation? What about the vacancies at the Centre? How will the latest quota be implemented?

The constitutional definition of economically weaker sections is vague. In a country of 1.3 billion people, the quota bill benefits only around 4,500 people. Modi has not spoken about his failure to create jobs. One thing is

**The duality of the move could be understood from the simple fact Modi was providing 10 per cent reservation to upper castes, who constitute roughly 15 per cent of the population. Tejashvi Yadav has already rung the caution bell saying "the bill is anti-backward" and "anti Dalit". Modi was trying to dilute the gains of Mandal agitation. Already the demand for raising the quota for OBC from 27 per cent to 54 per cent has been made by parties championing the cause of backward castes. Even some allies of the BJP, such as the Apna Dal, have started to toe the line of the Mandal opposition parties.**

committee to examine who needs the facility and for how long.

At that time Lal Prasad had used the statement to run an aggressive campaign that the RSS-BJP planned to end reservations. In fact, the backward and Dalit leaders feel that Modi's 10 per cent quota is nothing but a tactic to confuse backward class people.

At a time when there are no sufficient government jobs even to meet to the needs of the backwards and Dalits, how could upper castes feel they would get their share? Modi claims to provide quota in education. When the state of education is already in a pathetic condition and the institutions are gasping, how could the upper castes claim to get quality education? With no job on the board, Modi is fooling the upper castes by announcing reservation in jobs and in the process trying to create a conflict between the backward communities and the upper caste people.

The duality of the move could be understood from the simple fact Modi was providing 10 per cent reservation to upper castes, who constitute roughly 15 per cent of the population. Tejashvi Yadav has already rung the caution bell saying "the bill is anti-backward" and "anti Dalit". Modi was trying to dilute the gains of Mandal agitation. Already the demand for raising the quota for OBC from 27 per cent to 54 per cent has been made by parties championing the cause of backward castes. Even some allies of the BJP, such as the Apna Dal, have started to toe the line of the Mandal opposition parties. Apna Dal leader Anupriya

clear that jobs cannot be created without economic development, which is not taking place.

Former chief justice AM Ahmadi's statement is worth mentioning here: "The government's decision was in conflict with the majority view his bench had taken. It is a poll gimmick" The SC bench headed by Ahmadi had capped reservation at 50% in 1992. This was "directly in conflict" with the top court's judgment. Modi ought to realize that, as Ahmadi says, "economic criterion cannot be the sole basis for determining the backward class of citizens contemplated by Article 16 of the Constitution."

Economist Amartya Sen is absolutely right when he says "it indicates 'muddled thinking' as the bill raises questions about its political and economic impact."

Modi must explain why his predecessors refrained from bringing the upper castes under the ambit of reservation. For years this demand was raised by political parties. When BSP's Mayawati rode to power in Uttar Pradesh in 2007, she demanded reservation in jobs for the poor belonging to the upper caste. This was supported by the Congress as well as the BJP. But this was not implemented. In 2011, Mayawati wrote a letter to then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, demanding that the provision of reservation on financial grounds should be put in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution so that it could not be challenged in a court of law. Again in 2015 and 2017, she made a demand for separate quota in jobs on the basis of economic status. (IPA Service)

# Buying a ticket to weddings

The Big Fat Indian Wedding is by now well-known round the globe & wowing people with its extravaganza. Many foreigners are even willing to pay to experience it, discovers *Sonali Jha Chatterjee*

**W**ould you invite strangers to your wedding? These strangers, rest assured, are not gate-crashers; they are well-meaning foreigners who would like to be a part of your wedding ceremony. And they are willing to pay for the privilege.

Welcome to the concept of wedding tourism where couples tying the knot may invite strangers to their wedding!

First things first. Why has the Indian wedding ceremony blown up to such proportions as to merit a whole new chapter in tourism? Well, today's weddings are no longer only about the pheras around the fire accompanied by Vedic chants and the rituals that the bride, groom and the family members partake in.

Now most high-profile Indian weddings have spilled over from a few hours to a few days. What was once a simple ceremony palpable with intimacy is now a three to five-day entertainment event for guests and the families as well as for the couple. This means there is a need to be extravagant and lavish and of course, all this comes at a price.

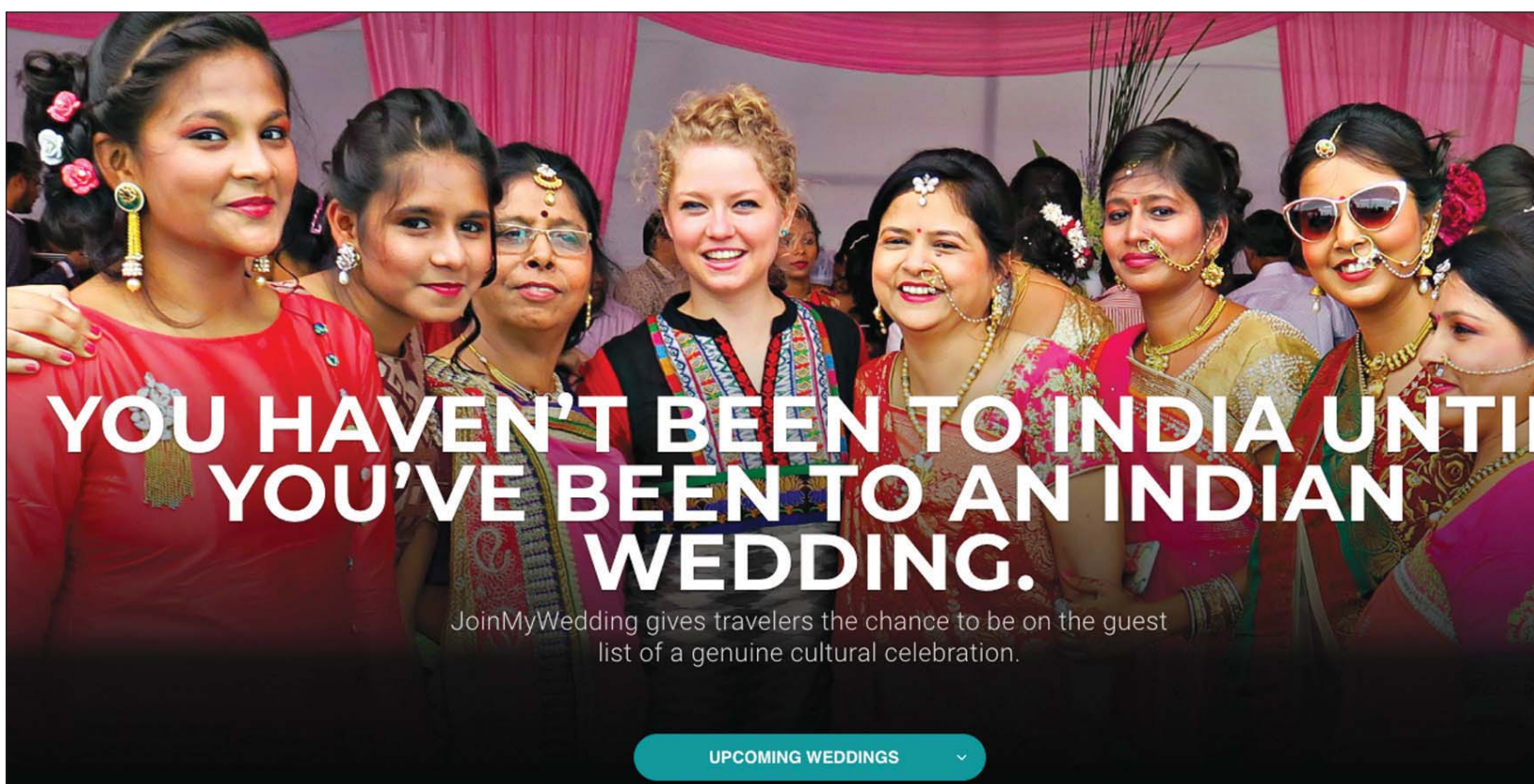
Templates for such 'ideal' weddings, though in a smaller version, have been set in recent times by the media bombarding all with wedding photos of celebrities. Anushka Sharma wed Virat Kohli, Deepika Padukone wed Ranveer Singh, Priyanka Chopra wed Nick Jonas, Isha Ambani wed Anand Piramal. Most of these wedding ceremonies went on for days. Pictures around these weddings are no less than a setting of a blockbuster Bollywood movie.

With such examples on display, is it any wonder that many foreigners want to be a part of the elaborate dos which they usually do not experience in their own milieu. Besides, it could be the ultimate guide to the cultural, traditional and ritualistic picture that India presents in their imagery.

However, the question also crops up: is this truly a typical Indian wedding? If the wedding tourists want to get a feel of what is real, then the glamorous weddings only the rich can afford is far removed from it.

Indeed, how does a wedding become a touristy affair?

To say that a wedding ceremony is now open to consumers who have enough money to pay for food and drinks would be taking it a bit too far, according to some couples.



André Baptista, 29, is tying the knot in February 2019. When queried about having foreigners at his wedding on payment, he says, "It's extremely subjective. Personally, while I am planning the wedding, I'm trying

to make it an intimate affair with family and friends. So, no, I wouldn't like my wedding being 'gate-crashed' by strangers, no matter the monetary benefits."

"I would not like to be treated like

a character in a show putting on a performance at this extremely meaningful moment in my life. The beginning of a new chapter is trivialised by spectators who are fascinated by what they might consider a novelty."

Ruchika Kohli who married three years ago has a different take on this subject. She says it is a good idea because "it gives foreigners an opportunity to explore the traditions of Indian culture and its rituals. Also, Indian

weddings are an extravagant affair unlike in the western world," adding, "The tourism perspective is not bad with all the extravaganza coming in exchange of dollars."

But the idea of floating an invite to all those who want to attend in exchange of money depends on those who have the final say in decision making. In a large number of cases in India, the bride and groom are hardly the ones who decide on their wedding arrangements; instead it's the immediate family.

Says Baptista, "Most weddings planned in India don't involve the bride or the groom. The celebrations being more status symbols and a social declaration by parents and relatives, an average wedding can throw up a guest list of anywhere between a few hundreds to a thousand, most of whom are known neither by the bride or the groom. So, what's a couple of more strangers, in this case foreigners, matter? And if they pay to attend, it would help offset a few costs."

Interestingly, the website joinmywedding.com is helping those tourists who would like to be a part of an Indian wedding. Those who want to invite strangers to their weddings get in touch with each other.

The brain child of Orsi Parkanyi and Marti Matecs, the website is quite a hit and seems to be getting a good bit of traffic. The economics of it also seems to be working out with the host, guest and the coordinator satisfied with the outcome as is evident from what Austrian citizen, Christoph Flamm says, "It was the coolest thing I did in India. The food, the people, the culture - you get everything!"

Well, what about the money they had to spend as entry fee? US citizen Adam Swanky says, "The monetary contribution I made was the best and easiest to thank the couple for their hospitality and this extraordinary experience."

As for the hosts Urvi and Paras, they were enthused by the fact that their families "couldn't wait to meet our special guests on the big day and explain all the beautiful Indian wedding traditions to them."

Blending in with the local colour and making new friends is what seems to attract those who genuinely want to immerse themselves into this experience of understanding a new culture. (TWF)

Image: joinmywedding website and Pixabay

## Vancouver greenest city to visit in 2019-20

By Sujoy Dhar

**N**ot many know that of all the urban hubs in the world, Vancouver in western Canada's British Columbia province has the longest uninterrupted waterfront path. We are talking about the 28-km Seaside Greenway of Vancouver, which is a pathway that is crowned by the famous Stanley Park Seawall, extending from the Vancouver Convention Centre to Spanish Banks Park.

Vancouver is a coastal, seaport city sitting pretty on the western half of the Burrard Peninsula, bounded to the north by English Bay and the Burrard Inlet and to the south by the Fraser River. Vancouver Island, across the Strait of Georgia, shields Vancouver from the Pacific Ocean.

While any time of the day if you are checking out the rather touristy Vancouver Convention Centre watching the seaplanes taking off and landing against the backdrop of a beautiful mountain scape (at Coal Harbour), you would see people merrily walking, jogging or cycling in this recreational spot in the city.

### Green corridor for cyclists

The one green initiative that strikes you once you are in this city is the dedicated cycling lane. Cycling is the fastest growing mode of transportation in Vancouver. From 2008 to 2011 alone, trips by bike increased by a full 40 per cent, according to official data.

The protected bike lanes on key city streets, painted in green, have increased both cycling and walking trips, it says.

Protected bicycle lanes are dedicated bike lanes with concrete medians and planters, bicycle parking corrals, or vehicle parking lanes which divide them from vehicle traffic.

This separation increases feelings of safety and comfort, which makes cycling an attractive commuting option for those who are not used to riding their bikes regularly.

According to the city's official website, Vancouver adopted its Renewable City Strategy in November 2015 — the first jurisdiction



in North America to create a comprehensive 100 per cent renewable energy target.

Since then, the city has developed an ambitious electric vehicle charging infrastructure strategy, enacted a Zero Emissions Building Plan and agreed to expand its Neighbourhood Energy Utility.

Its Greenest City Action Plan is aimed at urban sustainability.

"We are working with Council, residents, businesses, other organisations, and all levels of government to implement this plan," the officials say as they aim at a strong local economy, vibrant and inclusive neighbourhoods and international recognition, all for meeting the needs of generations to come.

### Stanley Park: A green oasis

On a late September morning a visit to the Stanley Park revealed for the writer everything that Vancouver talks about.

Stanley Park is Vancouver's green lungs attracting locals and tourists, cyclists and joggers. The park is about 400-hectare natural

West Coast rainforest with a delightful view of a canvas that includes water, mountains, sky, and the majestic trees along its famous Seawall.

Vancouver advertises it for tourists as "kilometres of trails, beautiful beaches, local wildlife, great eats, natural, cultural and historical landmarks, along with many other adventures".

But for a visitor from a part of the world where cities are nothing less than noxious urban nightmares, it is also about serenity and inclusiveness in a public space in sync with nature and an urban skyline.

Of the 28 km uninterrupted Seaside Greenway in Vancouver the Stanley Park Seawall is the best stretch.

The Seawall is divided into two sections — one for walkers and joggers (closest to the water), and one for cyclists and inline skaters (inside path).

In Stanley Park, beautifully carved, red cedar portals of aboriginal motifs welcome visitors to the Brockton Point Visitor Centre

and to the traditional lands of the Coast Salish people. Marked by the traditional slant-roof style of Coast Salish architecture, they were constructed over three years and installed in 2008. The gateways were created by Coast Salish artist Susan Point, in collaboration with Coast Salish Arts and other stakeholders.

Here you also spot nine beautiful totem poles which are carved in wood with secrets telling the stories of the land and its people.

Stanley Park is one place for walkers and cyclists as well as your brooding relaxation time. While you can sit back and enjoy the skyline and the waterfront, cyclists, joggers, runners pass by.

From mid-March to the end of October, you can also enjoy a one-hour narrated horse-drawn carriage ride through the park's eastern side and its sites.

### Zero Waste Granville Island

If Vancouver has been ranked on top bracket as one of world's most liveable cities for years, then Granville Island and Public Market here is the biggest tourist magnet. And hold one, this is a tourist hotspot which is also a zero waste zone where plastic bags are now thing of the past. Sitting south of the downtown peninsula under the Granville Bridge, it is technically a sandpit and not an island.

The Granville Island Public Market acts as a cultural hub with theatres, artisan workshops and craft studios.

In the early 1900s, Granville Island housed factories, plants and sawmills for shipping, logging and mining industry. Today Granville Island is a top draw for tourists and locals alike. "By re-purposing established buildings Granville Island was transformed from a rundown industrial area into a vibrant cultural hub while preserving the neighborhood's unique historical feel and becoming an internationally renowned example of urban renewal," says the Granville Island authorities.

The authorities here replaced garbage cans with zero-waste stations that include separate receptacles for recycling and food scraps

while reusable shopping bags were introduced to phase out single-use plastic shopping bags completely.

The public market attracts foodies with lip-smacking range of food items, fresh from the ocean or oven. Stalls serve unique homemade products besides the baked delights, pizzas or the shimmering seafood.

But while you indulge in gastronomic delight in Granville Island, the authorities have expanded food scraps collection to the public market, restaurants and other businesses and eliminated Polystyrene foam packaging for quick-service food vendors.

Outside of the market, catch a theatre show, browse an art gallery show, or choose a kayaking or paddle-boarding tour.

And anytime, you are assured of some soulful music here by talented performers.. Granville Island rocks!!!

If you are in Vancouver and not been to Gastown, then you surely missed a vital part of the city. It is one of Vancouver's most vibrant and heritage-inspired zone with strong connection to history while catering to locals and tourists with its shopping and dining attractions.

Besides its cobblestone streets, the Gastown steam clock built in 1977 at the corner of Cambie and Water streets in the neighbourhood also added to the popularity of the neighbourhood.

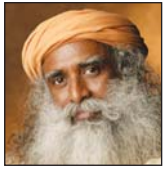
A tourist to Vancouver who wants to immerse in the cultural and heritage effervescence of Gastown and yet stay in an eco-friendly hotel, there are options galore around the place. Even the Hyatt Regency Vancouver located close to Gastown prides itself for its green footprints. It is first downtown hotel to be awarded the highest rating of Five Keys by the HAC Green Key Program, since Vancouver Hyatt uses the services of Bullfrog Power (100% green electricity from wind power) for all its meeting rooms.

Vancouver beckons all those who want to go green in an urban centre this year!

(IBNS-TWF)

# The purpose of life

**Sadhguru, Isha Foundation**



What is the purpose of life? On a day when you are bursting with happiness, did you ask what the purpose of life is? No. Only when life gets a little sedate and depressing, you ask, "OK, what is the purpose of this damn life?" The question, "What is the purpose of life?" has risen only in the miserable minds on the planet. They glorified things like "To be or not to be."

You need a purpose to life only when being alive is not sufficient. Right now, the biggest thing in your life is that you are alive. The stock market going up or going down is not the biggest thing. You being alive right now is the biggest thing. Everything else is secondary. But most people are not aware of it. Something did not happen or something else did not happen — these are the biggest issues for them.

## Human mind is looking for a purpose because people have not experienced life in its full depth & dimension

Human mind is always looking for a purpose because people have not experienced life in its full depth and dimension. If your experience of life becomes deeper, you will see this question will completely disappear. When the process of life becomes absolutely exuberant, it does not need a purpose.

Let us say you go to work, your purpose may be to make this much money or to take care of this or that. But if you go to a party, what is the purpose? No purpose — you just like to be there. If life became like one big party for you, you would not wonder what the hell its purpose is. You just like to be there. That is all.

Life is made in such a way that it does not need a purpose. It is a purpose unto itself. It need not lead you on to something else. Just being exuberantly alive is sufficient unto itself. Life does not need a purpose of reaching somewhere. That is the beauty of Creation.

Right now, you have a keyhole vision of life, through your sense organs. The sensory perception of

different creatures on this planet is working in different ways, as it is necessary for their survival. With this keyhole vision, definitely after some time you wonder what the purpose of life is because you do not see anything in full. This is the nature of sense perception. If I show you one side of my hand, you cannot see the other side of it. This is so about everything. You always see everything only in parts. Even if you look at a grain of sand, you will look at only one part of it, not the other.

All the information that is in your head right now has entered through the five sense organs and it is all bits and pieces. It cannot perceive even a grain of sand in its totality. It perceives everything in parts. These bits and bits, if you add them, you will not get a whole. You will only have bits.

The more you gather, the more broken you become. No matter how many bits you gather, they will never become a whole. This is why in the tradition, Shiva has always been represented as

one with three eyes. When we say "the third eye," we are not talking about your forehead opening up. It is about seeing beyond the sensory eyes. It means that the ability to see has transcended the limitations of sense perception. Sense perception is such that if I just cover these eyes with my hands, they cannot see beyond them. And in the physical world, there is always something or the other which is blocking the perception. So when we say "third eye," it means knowing life in its full depth and dimension.

Though life is made in such a way that it does not need a purpose, to encourage people to explore life a little more, we can say that the purpose of life is to know it in its full depth and dimension. Otherwise, you will not understand that life does not need a purpose. Once you grasp that you don't need a purpose, just to be alive is great.

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

# A plus point on stage

**By Pooja Mahesh**

Imagine playing the same kind of roles repeatedly over a period of time. While this sounds boring, it is something that some actors have faced, particularly those who are plus-sized. "When I was 19, I got the chance to play the role of an elderly lady. At that age, I thought, 'what a challenge!' While it was great, this kept happening over the course of my career. I would always play the role of a supporting role like a grandparent or a heroine's sidekick but never the protagonist even though I was praised for my acting prowess," shares Anuradha H R of her experience as a plus-size actor in the theatre world.

It was to break this narrative that Anuradha formed a theatre troupe called 'Big Fat Company' in 2017. Through this initiative, she hoped to question the aesthetics of the body and the stereotypes related to body size, and begin a conversation on the subject.

Having such a troupe in place helped create opportunities for plus-sized actors like herself who were tired of being pigeonholed into specific roles owing to their physique, and create a conducive space for the actors to be themselves.

"It's nice to work with a team where everyone is vocal about their experiences. We were able to share our stories without hesitation, and without having an inferiority complex," says

Krithi Bettadh, an actor with the Big Fat Company.

This is perhaps the most defining feature of the troupe: everyone is made to feel self-worthy, no matter what their body size is.

At first, recruiting actors for the troupe proved to be difficult as many found it offensive that they had been considered for a 'fat theatre group'. After the initial call out on Facebook failed, Anuradha began tapping into her network of actors to find out who would be interested. Though it was tedious, she soon found a few actors who were willing to be a part of the troupe.

While most had extensive experience acting on stage, TV and films, some had just begun.

In July 2017, the ensemble began its workshops that helped them re-discover their bodies, how they moved, how their identities were linked to their bodies and how they made various decisions based on their bodies.

"For many of us, this was an eye-opening experience as we had never done what we did in the workshops. We had always been told that it won't look nice, and that we couldn't move our bodies with grace among others. Now, it was interesting to find out what our bodies could do. For most,

the experience has changed their view of their bodies and how they approach acting," says Anuradha.

The workshop sessions were led by Shabari Rao, dancer and performance artiste, who also directed their first production. Shabari worked with the ensemble on a series of workshops that provided them the opportunity to reconnect and acquaint themselves with their bodies as performers. Acting was something that they had become distant with due to the size of their bodies as not many directors work with plus-size actors. This workshop provided them the opportunity to not only do this, but also become better actors.

"Working with them was really wonderful as it was amazing to see how much they were able to work with their bodies and how much joy they found in using their bodies to the maximum rather than trying to hide their bodies or shape them into what somebody else might want," says Shabari.

Once the workshops ended, they began focusing on their first production, Head 2 Head, a play adapted from Girish Karnad's Hayavadana. It explores the theme of identity, in the mind and body, and the experiences of being a plus-size person in today's world.

Several of the questions that were

posed and explored in the play come from the actors' personal experiences. "The play has three strands. First, we perform on a said script. Second, an improvised performance through which we talk about the politics of theatre in relation with our bodies. Third, our own personal stories with our bodies are also looked into," elaborates Anuradha. The play also gave the actors an opportunity to do stylised roles, as they are often not given such roles.

Staging Head 2 Head for the first time in early 2018 allowed the troupe to tackle questions, and evolve as actors. But why is staging such a play important? It has allowed Anuradha and troupe to question the traditional views of what beauty is and what plus-size actors can do beyond the usual roles that they are assigned. "I feel that I have finally found a place that brings out my potential, where I can open up and share my story," says Krithi.

The future for the Big Fat Company looks promising. While Head 2 Head was more or less a statement of what Big Fat Company can do, Anuradha is hoping that they can challenge the stereotypes more subtly as well by staging plays like Romeo and Juliet, and Shakuntala. "In the long run, however, we hope that Big Fat Company can become obsolete as we believe that plus-size actors should be accepted for a variety of roles across different productions," Anuradha says. (TWF)



## 'Star - Gazing'

**By Pt. Ajai Bhambi**

**Sunday, JANUARY 13 2019**

Moon conjunct Mars on your solar return chart indicates a mixed year. People who are calm and patient will not see much problems, but people who are very ambitious need to watch out as their work may not materialize at the last moment. So, do not do anything big in haste. Even if you don't have work, then don't worry as the situation will be the same until the middle of next year. There will be some opportunities for change, but don't do it until the middle of the year. After year mid, you can do so without hesitation as it will bring you success.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

You participate in conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about your views this week. This is an excellent time to make some financial investments and adopt new strategies in financial matters. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation business associates. You move on the path of success and betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Students of Computer Hardware and Engineering achieve better results now. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

Your work status may change for the better. There could be a promotion or new job opportunity that enables you to come into the limelight in a positive way. Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. Integrity and honesty will take you places now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities that come your way.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

Your self-confidence gets a boost and you meet difficult tasks and resolve work-related issues confidently. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You would admire and adapt new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. You put in a lot of efforts and then find this has been establishing strong professional base and this brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is good time to organize your workplace and make it more modernized and equipped with good infrastructure. This would help you to get a better perspective to achieve desired goals. Also, circumstances or your own reserve may prevent you from openly declaring or expressing your feelings. Avoid being lazy and laid back as temporary gain or success in business needs to be followed up with hard work and dedication.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider society is possible during this week. You adopt new styles and spend on luxury items. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasure and romance during this week. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. You would maintain balance of the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. You turn things around in business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. Monetary transaction brings gains in property related issues. An overseas or long distance journey with includes pilgrimage is on the cards. You maintain a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

Your creativity will assist in your output at work and help you undertake new assignments. You may especially enjoy experiencing different cultures and ethnic styles. Your ideals are higher than usual, teaching may be part of the picture, and your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background than you indicated this week. Students in journalism, law, management and related fields attain success and good results. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

Your professional skills wisdom and craft is appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively from now onwards. This time takes some kind of pressure on professional and personal aspects. You may begin to take on more responsibilities on

the job. Your job could become rather tedious or boring, or working conditions may be frustrating. You may have to draw some boundaries with friends and the demands of others.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

You would be emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You manage to communicate with moody and angry people with a sensitive approach and gentle manner. You would combine your inner and outer strengths to achieve success and happiness. Sometimes you would protest against domination by people at work. You may have to face egoistic people. Some associations would be competitive in business but you shine and work well in your field of activity. There would be some changes in your social circle, and you meet new and unusual people. Your hobbies, moments spent with family, all come into focus. Some lifestyle changes made by you begin to show results.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

New associations and beginnings in work areas as some unknown opportunities and changes may come. You would improve your romantic and love life by bringing more sincerity, cooperation and humanity as unusual attractions and dreams could fulfill this time. You may explore new infrastructure and improve office as this brings more efficiency and continuity on your work. Family members would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled in this phase. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

This period brings excellent opportunities for people in show business and related fields. You would work more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You have been more determined and hard-working and this brings fulfillment of all desires particularly on your personal and domestic life. Your personal charm and attractiveness would have a positive effect on your relationships. People see you as a loving and lovable person, and as someone who is aware of their needs and feelings, which can benefit you at this time. Others are willing to help and cooperate with your goals and ambitions. It would be better to go for long term investments and speculations for financial gains.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

A new work opportunity can change the way you work and relate with people professionally. You are bold and adventurous and you cannot tolerate delay that prevents you from behaving exactly you want. How willing you're prepared to experiment and explore new approaches will determine your success this time. You would achieve a lot in business and professional aspects by combining creativity and practicality. You play the role of the senior in the family and personal situations by taking on extra responsibility and giving direction. You can expect superiors to support you and stand up for you in tough situations at work. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. You will be considerably more proactive, healthy, and focused.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

The planetary configuration brings more stability in relations and professional life. You have a tendency to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach while dealing with people at work and home. You give a new method to communications, projects, learning and self-expression. You may be especially focused on pleasing your family and fond of the life of the home and family. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to display a whole lot of self-discipline. You would work in association with senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at the work place, which boosts your confidence. You use your best talents and co-relate all activities to boost the business and work opportunities. Make changes to your fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

This phase brings excellent work opportunities for people in teaching, hotel, finance and in communication fields. People in marketing and sales would work hard to meet professional commitments. You would impress people from your communication skills as this brings positive results in matters related to love, family and professional relations. You would express yourself with charm and grace, whether it's through what you say or you write. Health remains good during this period. Excellent professional opportunities await those students who have completed their education in fine arts, drama, music and finance. Your romantic affair would give a big boost of confidence, and personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated and admired. Spending time in solitude among natural surroundings will be therapeutic.

# World is going vegan

**By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi**



Vegans choose not to eat any animal product — no meat, fish, dairy, eggs, honey or other animal-derived ingredients.

They avoid fur, leather and wool products, and products which have been tested on animals, such as body care, cosmetics and household cleaning goods or products containing animal ingredients.

The Swedish ambassador told me that when he gave dinners at his home in Stockholm, if the diners were for people above 60, he would probably just get meat eaters but if they were for people under 40, he would, in any gathering of six people, get two vegetarians.

My ministry just concluded the fourth national organic fair. There were 450 stalls. It attracted many people every day. This time we had a vegan section and a vegan food court. It did extremely well, especially the vegan pizzas where the basic cheese was made of cashew. I took my office staff there for lunch and we loved the food.

Someone I know has started an on-line vegan shopping mall and it has 800 items on it already. He told me that he has no dearth of offers from people who would like to invest in his start-up. The problem he has is with finding staff who will promote this properly.

Since more and more people are turning vegan and vegetarian for health reasons, it makes sense to start a vegan business. I just met two entrepreneurs in Nagpur, young boys who have created delicious milk made from almonds and are now looking for someone to help them bring it to the market.

All over the world vegan businesses are starting up. From Linda McCarty, who is one of the world's top designers and only does vegan clothes, to Sonal in Gurgaon, who runs a flourishing ice cream business that doesn't use milk.

For some years I was on the board of an English monthly called The Vegan. It is a very chatty magazine — interviews with stars who have become vegan, vegan events taking

place daily in the UK, vegan recipes and lots of ads from vegan companies. It is over 25 years old and is still making profit.

Michael Ofei has, on a site called The Minimalist Vegan, listed 38 business ideas which, he believes, will do well and change the appetite of the buyer towards ethical living. I too believe that if the choices were available, people would gravitate towards more ethical ones: garments that were ethically sourced and made, for instance, or delicious vegan sweets and ice creams. I bought a packet of freshly made vegan marshmallows last week and finished them in less than ten minutes!

While the demand for vegan products is now mainstream and rising, the problem is with the supply. We need to help shift the demand by increasing the supply. Here are some of Ofei's ideas:



- Vegan restaurant/cafe
- Vegan pizzerias with home delivery options
- Gelato Bar with dairy-free ice cream
- Nut Cheese Deli
- A food truck specialising in vegan burgers
- A vegan alcoholic beverage retailer
- Vegan bakery (few people know that breads have egg and milk in them, and are sometimes meat)

Having a vegan business is great activism. It makes it easier for others to live vegan. So many carnivorous people I know say that they would change their ways partially if they could get vegan products easily and effortlessly. Make the market evolve.

In the words of George Bernard Shaw, "Animals are my friends and I don't eat my friends."

It is not difficult to run a vegan business online. Food goodies include mock meat and dairy products, along with home cleaners, toiletries, cosmetics, skin care, food such as chocolate, jams, chutney, pet care, general grocery items and household items.

What are the items that should not be in vegan shops — T-shirts which are made of BT cotton (they should say 'organic cotton'), vitamins and sweets which contain gelatine, palm oil as I said earlier, white sugar which is refined using bone, bone china, white paper or any white coloured product (bleach kills everything in the sea), chemical dyes of any kind (Rajasthan has lost most of its rivers due to these dyes. I went to see a river, near Udaipur, on my way to Sojat village which grows all the mehendi in India. The river was blood red and carcasses and the bones of animals and birds who had drunk from it, littered its banks).

I certainly don't agree with vegan shops which sell silver, gold and semi precious or precious stones, even if they make them into cute little animals. All these are mined on forest land, and millions of animals lose their lives in the process. Why not have amazing glass jewellery instead. Silk, wool, leather, fur, suede, feathers, coral, beawax, pearls, anything made of bone — definite no-nos.

To run a credible vegan shop, one has to be very discerning and look at every ingredient of every item. It is difficult to find biscuits that do not have palm oil in them, for instance. But they do exist.

I have often said the heart is a door. When it opens, it opens for all. Most vegan shops go out of their way to see that that not only are the products made of sustainable material, but also that they use less water and are not made in sweatshops (paying low wages for long hours of work to poor people). Some go even further and source products from democratic countries only (where do they find these?).

*(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)*

"Who has confidence in himself will gain the confidence of others."

--- Michael J. Gelb

## The Shillong Times

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### One month past the mining disaster

IT was on December 13, 2018 that 15 miners were trapped inside a 300 ft shaft with horizontal crevices in what is defined as 'rat hole mine' because the horizontal holes from which coal is gouged out resemble holes burrowed by rats and moles. Since December 14, several agencies have been deployed in the rescue mission. However, the rescue operation suffered from gaping loopholes which bring into focus the point about hazardous mining practices under state patronage. Rat hole mining is unregulated hence it operates in a laissez-faire environment. Deaths inside the mines have happened in the past too but no one, except the mine owners and the family members of the dead were in the know of such misfortunes. Family members were resigned to their fates and were too powerless to report the tragedy. Besides, most miners are from outside the state and illegal migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal. This latest mine disaster was reported only because there was a solitary survivor. How can a modern state allow a mining operation that (a) deliberately ignores the safety of the miners who enter the mines to dig out coal from which the mine owners make their millions (b) has flouted all environmental norms; poisoned rivers and affected agricultural land (c) has no plan in place to reclaim mines that are abandoned for decades and which have become reservoirs that flood nearby mines if the miners accidentally breach one such an abandoned mine.

Mining in Meghalaya should actually be carried out as per the rules set out by the Meghalaya Mining Development Corporation which in turn draws its sustenance from the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957. According to the MMDR Act every person desiring to prospect for any mineral has to get a mining lease from the MMDC and follow all the rules of the MMDR such as environmental protection, mine safety, prevention of pollution and avoiding danger to public health etc. In Meghalaya mining is happening without the sanction of the MMDC on the plea that it is a Sixth Schedule state. But the Sixth Schedule never envisaged that private rights would supersede community rights. That the mine owners are hiding behind the Sixth Schedule is a travesty of the very legislation for protecting the tribal minority from exploitation by the majority non-tribal population. Today the tribal majority is suffering because the Sixth Schedule is being flagged as an Instrument to protect the private interests of a small group of mine owners at the cost of the environment and safety of miners. These are contentious issues that need urgent community dialogue.

# Is the Government giving up on the trapped miners?

By H H Mohrmen

It is now exactly a month since the tragic accident occurred where miners were trapped inside a rat hole mine at a place called Ksan, but in spite of all the efforts made by the rescue teams, we are yet to see the light at the end of the tunnel. The fate of the trapped miners is still unclear as the efforts of those involved in the operation are to rescue the trapped miners despite all odds.

It is also unfortunate that as time passes the accident has gradually slipped away from the minds of the people and fate of those trapped miners will also be forgotten. As always media space will be taken over by more popular issues like the Citizen Amendment Bill, 2019 and the 10 percent quota and other pressing concerns of the day. And gradually the trapped miners issue will be pushed to the back burner. In such a situation, if the accident is to have any meaning for us then it should be for lessons learnt from this grim episode, because, as the saying goes, "Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it."

The incident at Ksan not only made the State Government turn red in the face, but it also shows how ill-prepared the administration is when a situation like this occurs. But the most tragic part is the attitude of the government towards the unfortunate accident, where it was left to almost the State Disaster Response Force SDRF, the NDRF, the Indian Navy, the Odisha Fire Service, the team from the Kirloskar Brothers Ltd and the Coal India Limited to handle the operation, as top government officials were on leave or on vacation during the crucial part of the operation.

In spite of the fact that commercial mining in the state began more than four decades ago, the government was caught off guard and the initial reaction of those in the administration was only to inform the NDRF team about the accident and seek their help. The state government as the first respondent didn't know how to go about rescuing

those 15 lives where time is of the essence. They neither had any technology or knowhow to conduct an operation in case of a mining disaster of that magnitude. The SDRF were also only trained to respond to disasters in the event of an earthquake, fire accidents, warlike situation, or floods as this is evident from the drills conducted time and again. But a mining disaster was not on their radar screen. Therefore much precious time was wasted in arranging for the right equipments and personnel to arrive.

This scribe has time and again raised the issue of closing abandoned mines which the miners have left unattended, but all efforts fell on deaf ears. During summer, the overflow from the abandoned mines flows to the streams nearby and pollutes the water bodies. Now we see how the abandoned mines can create other problems as well and can become a hurdle to the rescue operations too. The incident also brought to light the kind of license that the government allowed to the coal mine owners in executing their business which can only be described as mindboggling. The coal mine owners do not have a blueprint, a map or not even a rough sketch of the mines they operate in this free for all kind of business. In the absence of any regulation the government does not insist on the coal mine owners to even have a rough sketch of their mines, in spite of earning crores of rupees from the business.

On the contrary the Meghalaya Adventurers Association which is only a voluntary organisation of people who are interested in caves has surveyed, documented and mapped more than one thousand caves in the state. MAA through its annual expedition using their own resources have a map of every cave they explored handy, in fact information about the depth, the length and other aspects about the different caves were published in two volumes. But the coal mine owners

cannot even prepare a simple sketch of the mines which earn them crores of rupees. This only shows the apathy that the mine owners have towards the safety of the miners and the protection of the environment.

And what is the attitude of the coal mine owners towards the disaster? A stoic silence! For the mine owners such accidents are taken in their stride and expected. The trapped miners are just collateral damage that goes with the business of coal mining. No one from the mining community or from the different associations that they have, have made any public statement about the accident and neither did they show any regret for the human tragedy at Ksan.

From media reports we also learned that expectations from the victims' families has also changed from hoping to see their loved ones alive to wishing that at least the rescuers will be able to retrieve their bodies to enable the families to conduct their final rites. This is what time can do in a situation like this. Hope just vanishes; just like that!

Apart from the Congress MLAs and the two ministers who visited the place where the accident happened, neither the Chief Minister nor his Deputy visited the accident site. The CM had ample time for other things but he is yet to visit the tragedy site or to even meet the families of the victims. It has also been a month since the rescue operations began. Personnel of the various governments agencies engaged in the operation had put all their efforts to rescue the trapped miners, but the government is yet to show any sign of gratitude to the different teams. In the accident the government has not only failed its own people but it has also failed those benefactors who came to our help as a state.

What lessons have we learned from the incident? The most important

statement from the Chief Minister after he had an interacted with heads of the agencies engaged in the rescue operation was a five word sentence, 'It is an uphill task'. Of course the CM admitted that the accident could have been avoided or at least the rescue operation would have been easy if the mining activity is regulated, but that is too late now. So is the government going to give up on the trapped miners?

Now after the accident at Ksan both the government and the opposition in the state are talking about the need to regulate mining. The Shillong MP VH Pala who in the past led a delegation to convince the central government to free mining in Meghalaya from the purview of the central laws which govern mining, is talking about regulations now. The Chief Minister too, is talking of the need to regulate mining. Now all those who advocate rampant destruction of the environment caused by mining have been saying this all along. Why were their voices stifled by governments past and present? Why does it take the present government and the Congress party so long to realize the need to regulate mining?

The CM's other statement in defending the large scale illegal mining going in the state is to say that it is not possible for the administration to man every inch of the state. Taking the CM's statement into consideration, activists can also ask how then government can regulate mining if it cannot oversee how the activity is being regulated in every nook and corner of the state! But the truth is there is a difference between denying that illegal mining is going on by omission and with government agencies actually aiding the activity and government departments conniving with the illegal act. The different agencies turning their blind eye to what happened in spite of the ban have only proved that the government itself is halfheartedly implementing the NGT ban.

## Mighty Indian State is trapped in a rat-hole! Many more Meghalaya-type tragedies waiting to happen

By B. Sivaraman

It is almost a month since tragedy struck the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya when 15 miners got trapped in a rat-hole mine that got flooded from a nearby river. The rescue workers — from the state and the national disaster management authorities from the Navy, Army and even the Air Force as well as experts from CIL and Odisha — are still working day and night. The entire nation — and even the international community — hope desperately for a miracle and wish them luck.

The larger tragedy is that the mighty Indian state itself is trapped in a rat-hole of callousness and indifference. Rat-hole mining is illegal, unscientific and hazardous. It is rampant in Meghalaya. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) in its interim order of 17 April 2014 said: "[A scientific study] shows an alarming situation existing in the state of Meghalaya, especially in the Jaintia Hills wherein rat-hole mining has been in practice for a long time. We are of the considered view that such illegal and unscientific method can never be allowed in the interest of maintaining ecological balance of the country and safety of the employees".

The NGT further directed: "Accordingly, we direct the Chief Secretary, Government of Meghalaya and the Director General of Police, State of Meghalaya to ensure that rat-hole mining is stopped forthwith throughout the State of

On third and fourth days, 1,68,000 and 1,44,000 litres of water were pumped out but still the water level had not receded because this shaft was interlinked with some 20 other inundated shafts.

The NDRF team arrived on 20 December, one full week after the disaster. Only after 13 days the state government approached the Centre with a request for 100 HP pumps. Finally, it was Odisha Fire Service which, in a praiseworthy gesture, voluntarily came forward to help with 100 HP pump sets on 29 December and IAF airlifted them. Indian Navy divers came after 17 days but expressed inability to dive 320 feet as they did not have the necessary equipment. The pumps also malfunctioned; the diesel pumps could not be used and the nearest power line was 5 kms away and by 5 January 2019 only 10,00,000 litres of water could be pumped out cumulatively!

This is the record of the Indian state, which pats itself on the back for carrying out "surgical strikes" inside Pakistan. This is the competence of rulers who erect 597 feet statue for Patel but could not mobilise divers with suitable equipment to dive up to 320 feet!

Illegal mining is a pan-Indian phenomenon. According to the MB Shah Commission report, 94 of the 192 iron ore mining leases in Odisha did not have the mandatory environmental

**The ruling BJP-National People's Party (NPP) coalition, while in opposition earlier, demanded that the Congress government use Meghalaya's status as a Sixth Schedule state to get the NGT ban lifted. It made this the central issue in the polls as well.**

Meghalaya and any illegal transport of coal shall not take place until further orders passed by this tribunal".

As NGT has the status of a Green Tribunal of the Supreme Court, this is virtually a ban on rat-hole mining in Meghalaya. Far from enforcing the ban, the authorities continued to remain indifferent. In its final orders dated 25 March 2015, the NGT openly indicted the Meghalaya government: "It is undisputable that orders of the tribunal have been violated without exception".

The ruling BJP-National People's Party (NPP) coalition, while in opposition earlier, demanded that the Congress government use Meghalaya's status as a Sixth Schedule state to get the NGT ban lifted. It made this the central issue in the polls as well. The mining mafia could defy the NGT orders with impunity because patronage from powerful political forces across the spectrum. About 30 per cent of the 374 candidates in the Meghalaya Assembly elections held on 27 February 2018 were either owners of mines or had stakes in the largely unregulated coal mining and transportation industries.

Immediately after the tragedy struck, the NDRF, Navy, Army and Air force units were pressed into service though belatedly. Still, the logistics support from the state and the Centre did not come about. The Supreme Court also indicted the Meghalaya government over this callousness. In its affidavit filed before the apex court, the Meghalaya government itself admitted that it could procure only two pumps to pump out the water. While the big farmers using 10 HP pump sets for irrigation in the rest of India can pump out 96,000 litres of water per hour, for some inexplicable reason the Meghalaya government, in its affidavit, claims that they could pump out only 1,08,000 litres of water on the second day of the disaster.

clearances, and of the 96 that had them 75 had mined far beyond their permitted levels over the past several years. There was a change of government in Karnataka due to illegal mining and a CM in Jharkhand had to step down. Karnataka and Goa alone have lost an estimated Rs. 51,000 crore revenue in one decade due to illegal mining. Lakhs of hectares of land and lakhs of workers are involved in illegal mining. But there are no labour standards or safety regulations.

Hundreds of illegal miners in Jharia area of Jharkhand have died due to underground fire and earth caving in; chromium mining in Odisha has taken a toll of hundreds of lives, and many maimed workers in Madhya Pradesh stone quarries assemble like beggars to take money offered by their colleagues on their day of wages. Workers in uranium mining in Jharkhand and asbestos mining in Cuddapah in AP are dying in dozens and among Saharia tribes of MP entire villages are known as 'Villages of Widows' as men in mining have died due to TB.

The Ministry of Mines sends out inspectors numbering a few. The safety issues of mining workers are not routinely addressed by the labour ministries. There is a Directorate of Mining Safety. But the catch is that as the powers that be usually turn a blind eye to illegal mining, for the safety enforcement authorities such mines do not exist. There is no question of enforcing any safety standards in them. For instance, on the official website of the Director General of Mining Safety there is not a single reference to rat-hole mining or the Meghalaya tragedy. Such indifference is a greater tragedy that could pave the way for many more Meghalaya-like tragedies. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Observe Meghalaya Mining Day

Editor,  
The Jan 12, 2019 issue of the Shillong Times carried a front page ad from the Department of Arts and Culture announcing various drawing and music competitions for Meghalaya Day to be celebrated on Jan 22, 2019. May I suggest that this year's celebration be appropriately sombre in view of the mining tragedies in the state and the focus of the country on our shame and mis-governance. Short shrift has been given to law and order, and there is barefaced defiance of strictures from the highest tribunals and courts of the country.

I commend the Shillong Times for its daily updates and commentary on this month-old human tragedy. The government just seems to be going through the motions of minimum lip service, hoping that the citizens will soon be distracted by other happenings and the state apparatus and actors can go back to business as usual. Caught wrong-footed between its own vested interests and mining patrons on the one hand, and necessity for compliance with statutory orders and moral propriety on the other hand, the government has lost its moorings.

Perhaps the situation can still be salvaged with a new attitude of remorse and

reconciliation with the people, and for the chief minister to keep good faith on his promise of safe and environmentally responsible mining. Better communication and action on mining policy and plans must be demonstrated. The initiative lies with the government.

This situation must not be allowed to go away. I suggest to the Shillong Times to title their front page daily report with the number of the new day that the crisis has entered. Last Saturday The Hindu featured a full page titled "Meghalaya's Rat Hole Traps". The report and a video can be seen on the online edition at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/meghalayas-rat-hole-traps/article25973337.ece>.

Those who may doubt the resolve of the courts, environmental agencies and civil society efforts would be advised to revisit the story of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited, one of the largest iron ore mines in the world, located in a bio-diverse area in Karnataka. It was shut down in 2006 for environmental lapses.

Perhaps Meghalaya Day 2019 can be the beginning of a new era in responsible mining in the state. Will the government take the opportunity?

Yours etc.,  
Glenn C. Kharkongor,  
Via email

#### Need to change religious rigidity

Editor  
I am extremely shocked and anguished to read the news items which appeared in your esteemed daily under the caption, 'Nepali woman, two sons die in menstruation hut' (ST, Jan 11, 2019). Though it was a case of suffocation, yet the woman and her two minors would not have died had the woman not been confined to that non-ventilated hut for seclusion due to her menstruation. Because of such out dated taboos, three precious lives were lost. Now it is learnt that such practice had been banned and made a criminal offense in Nepal hence women folk here should awake and forsake such futile rituals.

A society has to be a progressive. It should not cling to the belief of its forefathers. It needs to change with the changing times and circumstances. Keeping ego aside we should adopt what people in other religions or communities are following in similar circumstances.

Another religious practice, which is hampering my community, is the observance of thirteen days of ritualistic mourning on the demise of a family member. Continuance of this thirteen -day long penance

and seclusion by the family member of the deceased does not appear to fit well in this modern world. I don't want to go in details in highlighting the ordeal, a family has to undergo, physically, mentally and financially in the event of death of a family member. We all are aware of it and many of us, would like to modify or make it easier but who will be the first to break this taboo? In the absence of any law, like one we have in Nepal for menstruation practice, we all are following the same archaic thirteen day ritual.

We will all have to die one day for we don't know yet how to lead an everlasting life. So why not change to the existing system individually? This can be done by giving a will or declaration, in writing, to be executed on one's demise. Perhaps then the surviving members of the family or the kinsmen may respect such a will of the testator.

Yours etc.,  
Krishna Chettri,  
Shillong-2

#### Need to swiftly counter fake news

Editor,  
Apropos the article, "Stringent punishment for mob violence" by Aneeta Synrem (ST, January 12, 2019). There are indeed

enough provisions in the Indian Penal Code like Section 302 (Punishment for murder), 304 (Punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 307 (attempt to murder) and 34 (Acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) that ensure stringent punishment for mob violence.

Apart from plugging legal loopholes, if there are any, what we really need is quick justice delivery to improve the curative measures to effectively treat mob - kangaroo syndrome. However, it is rightly said that prevention is better than cure. The saying is even more categorical in the United States ~ "an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure". So, first of all we need to create an effective preventive mechanism to nip a mob offence in the bud. The first step must be to counter the spread of rumours. Most of the recent cases of mob violence had their origin in hate speeches and rumours on social media which snowballed to street murders. Rumours must effectively be dealt with to unplug the panic channel that can instigate the mob to lynch.

Rema Rajeshwari, Superintendent of Police in Jogulamba Gadwal district of Telangana has reportedly made a team of 500 police officers to

counter fake news. They go to villages to spread awareness about social issues. They have joined WhatsApp groups in villages and nip any rumour in the bud. His efforts have earned him great success. Not a single rumour-related lynching and mob violence has reportedly been staged in his jurisdiction. Given that mob violence has become a new normal, his model needs to be followed in every district of our country.

West Bengal police have also done a good job in timely and effectively tackling rumours. Last year, a fake news that the state government had sanctioned a five-day Eid holiday was doing the rounds on social media to incite communal tension. But West Bengal police had promptly taken the help of Twitter to dispel it in time. Such administrative vigil both digital and direct to weed out any kind of hatred generating rumour is the need of the hour. There should be an effort to build strong public opinion against mob violence as it throws down the gauntlet to the law of the land.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

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

“Laws ostensibly directed at undocumented immigrants inevitably affect the treatment of lawfully present immigrants and citizens who share the ethnic, racial, or national origin characteristics of undocumented immigrants.”

--- Pratheepan Gulasekaram

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.154 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2019

### US shutdown and more

UNITED States under Donald Trump has gone into a tailspin. The nation is on the verge of a national Emergency, and democracy is under stress. The President is insisting on having his way and fulfilling his 2016 promise of erecting a 900km wall along the southern border with Mexico to check the perennial problem of illegal immigration and drug trafficking. The Democrats holding strength in the US Congress are blocking the President's intent and are unwilling to give their nod for \$5.7billion funds for the purpose.

For Trump, it's always been a case of 'his way or the highway.' He's holding back signing of other fund releases even for urgent purposes, virtually holding the nation - and the Congress as well as the Democrats to ransom.

Notably, the resultant shutdown of the treasury since December 22 has derailed governance as release of funds for various departments including for payment of salaries has been stopped. This leaves the nation in a state of paralysis. Neither the ruling Republicans led by Trump, who run the Senate, nor the Opposition Democrats leading the Congress, are in a mood for reconciliation. Senate is, in retaliation, blocking the funds sanctioned by the Congress for other purposes to keep the administration going - like a flow of oxygen trips. This has turned the situation into a full-blown crisis.

Shutdown of the treasury isn't new to US administrations, though. The first such shutdown happened under Gerald Ford in 1976 - some 200 years after the formation of the nation - followed by five when Jimmy Carter was president, and eight under Ronald Reagan. The last shutdown -- under Bill Clinton in 1996 - lasted 21 days, a record beat by the present shutdown. Partisan politics is at play. If Trump declares a state of Emergency as a last resort, it would raise serious questions on the system of democracy. America would be found wanting in the matter of smooth governance. Contrast this with the situation in China or Russia, where democracy is a far cry but governance is obviously much healthier and not marred by disruptions of any kind. So too with a limited democracy like Singapore!

The world was in awe of America for a century. It was a fitting tribute to the cause of democracy worldwide. Consensus, not confrontation, is the way forward for every democratic system. Consensus involves a give-and-take. In the US today, confrontation is the buzzword. Trump's contribution to this is significant. For democracy's sake, it is imperative that the warring sides of US politics see reason, reconcile, and take matters forward.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Political interests before people

Editor,  
The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019 in the Lok Sabha on January 8 this year was the final nail in the coffin for the people of the Northeast. The purpose of the Bill was more inclined towards bringing in illegal Hindu migrants from neighbouring countries as a vote bank for the BJP. To make it more "acceptable" they put in other religious groups including Christians to camouflage their real intention. This is the worse form of communal politics which we have never experienced before. To top it all, the NPP a close ally of the BJP seems unperturbed by the develop-

ments. The UDP is nothing but a rubber stamp and feeds on whatever is thrown at it. We need political parties and politicians to put up a strong resistance to such communally driven policies that are detrimental to the local indigenous communities and the state as a whole.

Yours etc...  
Dominic S.Wankhar  
Shillong-3

### Questions on the mining tragedy

Editor,  
It is now past a month and new rescue techniques are being adopted every day with little success. The whole operation makes us wonder

whether we have the experience required to tackle such mine accidents. Somebody had rightly remarked that India can send a spaceship to Mars but cannot handle a mine accident that has trapped 15 people inside since December 13. Other countries must be looking askance at our sheer incompetence to handle the rescue operations considering all kinds of media persons have visited the mining accident site. Since rat hole mining has been going on for a long time, should the state government not have a stock of measures ready to tackle such accidents? Can the state government be a just disinterested onlooker? Have they not collected sufficient revenue from coal mining? Should the state govern-

ment not have insisted on safety measures for the miners? Or has the state government decided to look the other way at all the malpractices as long as the money coming from the coal trade can continue to fund elections?

As reported by your newspaper the Citizens' Report on the entire gamut of collusions and conspiracies related to the coal mining business in the state would put Bihar to shame. As an onlooker I find it appalling that the churches have not said a word on this mining tragedy. But of course they would have a lot to preach about corruption! Isn't collusion by mine owners and government officials at different levels - the DMR, Transport and Police De-

partments symptoms of corruption most foul? And this rhetoric about coal mining being a livelihood for many needs to be backed by research. Mine owners are few compared to the larger population of the state and the ancillary businesses arising out of coal mining are also negligible. There is a priest who keeps writing letters to the editor in this newspaper. All he is bothered about is the lack of physical cleanliness of the city which he says has now spread to the rural areas. Why bother about external cleanliness when the soul is impure? I say this because most of the mine owners are members of different churches and they fund the churches generously. So are they absolved of their sins, including the sin of seeing

15 people enter the hole of death? The hypocrisy is too glaring and despicable.

I feel that Meghalaya is headed towards a rule of lawlessness and with each new government things are only getting many shades worse. I wonder what the youth of the state have to say about this or are they only concerned with the Citizenship Amendment Bill? Quo Vadis Meghalaya

Yours etc.,  
Anthony Sawkmie,  
Via email

### Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016

# The idea of India and other perspectives

By Keith Nongsteng

Considering the ramifications that the proposed amendment to the Citizenship Act, 1955 would have upon the socio-cultural fabric of our state of Meghalaya and the North East as a whole, I feel obligated as a citizen of this country to pen down my opinion on such a crucial and controversial piece of proposed legislation that was introduced by the current dispensation at the Centre. For the readers' knowledge, the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 (hereafter to be referred to as CAB 2016) as passed by the Lok Sabha on the January 8, 2018, seeks to insert a controversial clause in the principal Citizenship Act, 1955, which grants an easy one-way ticket to Indian Citizenship for persons belonging to five minority communities namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Christians who are from three neighbouring countries, namely, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Further, they shall not be treated as illegal immigrants for the purpose of the Principal Act. This will open the floodgates of unwanted demographic change.

The Father of the Indian Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had expressed in the Constituent Assembly that citizenship of India was indeed a complicated topic of discussion. At Partition, we must recall that though the idea of a Two Nation Theory materialized into the creation of Pakistan as the natural home for all Muslims, it did not extend to the concept of India as the natural home for Hindus, for we have remained unhindered as a secular state since 1947. Here lies the crux of the problem - religious identity politics. The peculiarity of the CAB 2016 is that it seeks to grant citizenship status to illegal immigrants solely on the credentials of their religious background, and this to many of us defeats the very purpose upon which the idea of India was conceived by our Founding Fathers in the first place.

The concept of India as a natural home for Hindus can be traced back to Hindutva stalwarts such as VD Sarvarkar and KB Hedgewar. It is not surprising here to note that in the BJP's manifesto for the 2014 General Elections, it had been categorically stated unambiguously that "India shall remain a natural home for persecuted Hindus and they shall be welcomed to seek refuge here". It is not surprising therefore that they would resort to this move once they took control of Lutyen's Delhi. A question may be raised by friends from the other side that the Bill is not only for Hindus, but for adherents of four other religious groups. Originally, the Constitution of India stated that any reference to Hindus in law is to

be construed as containing a reference to the followers of Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism, meaning they are subject to Hindu laws. Here I also bring in a view expressed by an RSS meet in Bhopal in 2014 that Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists belong to the greater Hindu society. This view has therefore been carried forward in this Bill. The other two communities are the Parsis and Christians, who I believe were included as a political appeasement tactic to sound more inclusive across the secular spectrum. Persecuted Muslims have not been included in the CAB 2016, and for this, no explanation is required as everything can be read from one statement made by Assam's Finance Minister when he said that "without the Bill, we are surrendering ourselves to the philosophy of Jinnah. This is a fight between Jinnah's legacy and India's legacy." But what is India's legacy? It is a legacy of double standards where on the one hand we deport illegal Rohingya Muslims back to Myanmar and on the other, we accept with open arms illegal, undocumented non-Muslims Bangladeshis! Is it a legacy of communalization of our Constitution in favour of particular religious groups?

It must be noted here that we as a country already have a burden of more than 1.25 billion people on our strained economy. It is interesting too that India has signed neither the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol. If persecution is the magical word for this entire Bill, then we urge the NDA government to deal with religious persecution within our own country first. Recent reports released by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch do not speak in a positive, promising tone for the state of minorities in India.

As per 2011 Census the total population of Meghalaya was 29.7 lakhs, a 2.76 percent annual growth rate since Census 2001, as opposed to the national annual growth rate of 1.76 percent. This trend clearly indicates that there is an abnormal influx of immigrants into the state, a substantial portion of whom are undocumented, who come from neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh. A given law of migration states that people will usually migrate to regions which are closer to their own neighborhood, where they expect to find similarities of culture to an extent. Thus we cannot expect illegal Bangladeshis to go settle in Kerala or in Maharashtra. They will tar-

get their nearest vicinities. If the CAB 2016 becomes an Act, it is guaranteed that there will be a huge influx of foreigners into our state. On the pretext of religious persecution, they shall enter Meghalaya as we already share a highly porous border with Bangladesh. Want of a better life will push these illegal immigrants into Meghalaya and other North Eastern states. The states of Assam and Tripura have reached their inflexion point when it comes to providing economic opportunities for them. This becomes a dangerous situation for the genuine residents of Meghalaya, particularly the indigenous population. As it is, at present, there is no dedicated legislation apart from related provisions of 6th Schedule to check the influx of illegal immigrants into our state and this is a matter of concern that should be taken up by the state government forthwith.

In a research conducted by AMAN Public Charitable Trust about the coal mine workers of the Jaintia Hills, the numerical composition of the surveyed mines revealed a 60 percent domination of suspected Bangladeshi workers. In the Khasi Hills, the same report says that 10 percent of the mine workers are Bangladeshi immigrants, for some don't even hesitate to tell the investigators about their country of origin!

Let me now present some legal lacunae when it comes to the constitutional validity of the CAB 2016. For a layman's understanding, Article 13 of the Constitution of India states that any law which is in contravention of the Fundamental Rights will be considered null and void. Status of this important Article has been laid down in subsequent Supreme Court rulings, most notably the Minerva Mills case, a landmark decision of the Apex Court which has expanded our understanding of the concept of the basic structure of the Constitution. The primary ground for any challenge questioning the constitutionality of the Bill would rest on the basis of its violation of Article 14 (Equality before Law) of the Constitution. Article 14 guarantees to any person, irrespective of their citizenship status, equality before the law within the territory of India. It further prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Differential treatment to immigrants on the basis of religion violates this tenet. Furthermore, there is a gross violation of Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty). As the object of the Bill is explicitly to make illegal immigrants eligible to apply for Indian citizenship, it serves as an im-

licit encouragement for foreigners who are eligible under the said exemption to migrate to India for any number of reasons, on the pretext of persecution.

It is important to point out here that this is not the same as granting asylum to refugees, but rather a promise of citizenship to all foreign nationals belonging to the prescribed religious communities. There will most likely be a negative effect on the cultural identity and inclusive growth of the genuine citizens of this country, and the state of Meghalaya in particular. The biggest and most controversial lacuna of this entire Bill is how it totally defeats the purpose of the National Registration of Citizens (NRC) in Assam. The NRC is not designed to classify migrants on the basis of their religion. Through Passport (Entry into India) Amendment Rules, 2015 and Foreigners (Amendment) Order, 2015, cut-off date for the illegal immigrants has been set on or before 31st December 2014. Hence, any non-Muslims found to have entered Assam after March 24, 1971 need not go through the deportation process, thereby nullifying the NRC process.

Another point of discussion is Secularism, a word enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution of India by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment. The biased CAB creates a tension with this basic tenet of the Constitution. The Amendment pushes the idea of an India which gives preferential treatment to mostly non-Muslim communities.

Despite dissatisfaction being expressed by many in the opposition bench of Lok Sabha and the people of North East, they still went ahead with this constitutional amendment. To some extent, we must congratulate the Government of Meghalaya for having passed a Cabinet resolution to oppose the Bill, but is it enough? Is not the will of the people of Meghalaya greater than their legislative posts? I urge the Government of Meghalaya to take a firm, realistic step and challenge this preposterous Bill head on. "Suri Kup Snieh Langbrot" (Wolf in Sheep's Clothing) goes the famous Khasi saying. In the mask of a humanitarian Bill - can we not see that there are forces trying to build a Hindu Rashtra for no other benefit than their own and that the ramifications will have to be faced by us in the region? Yes, love your neighbor, but not at the expense of your own family!

(The author briefly studied in the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi and categorically states that he does not belong to or speak for any political party. His views are solely his).

15 people enter the hole of death? The hypocrisy is too glaring and despicable.

I feel that Meghalaya is headed towards a rule of lawlessness and with each new government things are only getting many shades worse. I wonder what the youth of the state have to say about this or are they only concerned with the Citizenship Amendment Bill? Quo Vadis Meghalaya

Yours etc.,  
Anthony Sawkmie,  
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.

## Gathbandhan rocks Uttar Pradesh, mocks BJP Saffron party needs engineering feat to make machine run again

By Aditya Aamir

The day after Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav sealed the SP-BSP gathbandhan for Uttar Pradesh, several you-tubers went to different parts of UP to test the impact of the gathbandhan. Impact it did, and how? 'It rocked', is one way to put it, sent shock waves and drew, in equal part 'resolve' and 'triumph'. The resolve in gathbandhan-votaries, who promised to "wipe-out" Modi from the face of Uttar Pradesh, just you wait and see!

One you-tuber "reporter" went with cameraman to Varanasi, PM Modi's constituency. There, at a sword with a view to stand-

blurting out his Muslim identity!

Suddenly, with the gathbandhan tied, caste consolidation is a rock in Modi's way to a second term and going communal is an option. Which, by the way, calls for the specialized services of Yogi Adityanath, the man some blame for Modi's plight, and hardcore supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "defeat the tugbandhan" and the sense of 'triumph' in gathbandhan-votaries, who promised to "wipe-out" Modi from the face of Uttar Pradesh, just you wait and see!

Now what? For the BJP and for the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah juggernaut, the duo's vaunted "election-winning machine"? For starters, get a pair of new

*The minute SP and BSP inked the alliance, the BJP was left with a patchwork of state-wise electoral battles to contest. If it's against the gathbandhan in Uttar Pradesh, it might be with the Kootamayi in Andhra Pradesh; with a TRS-AIMIM module in Telangana; with the Congress-JD(S) alliance in Karnataka, with DMK-Congress arrangement in Tamil Nadu; with Mamata's TMC in West Bengal...*

ing crops, he lined up a ragged group of "kisans" and asked them the question: "Ab Tumhara Kya Hoga Modi?" And like one they said, "Curtains!" That rocked the reporter on his toes and he retorted, "But why, what wrong has Modi done?" The reply: "That's the problem, Kuch bhi nahi Kiya, Ganne Ki Kimat Badane Ki Baat Kahi, Par Dhari Ki Dhari Reh Gayi."

"Does that mean the gathbandhan wins?" The farmer grinned: "ab Ki Baar Modi Ki Jamanat Japth." The rest of them matched bold grins. They seemed to be having a ball and all them claimed they were with the BJP "till last week", with one old guy with a missing tooth saying, "I just quit, minutes ago!" drawing loud guffaws from the rest of the rustic lot. They gave the feeling they were waiting all these days for the gathbandhan to coalesce to get their back on Modi and Yogi.

While this "upload" was getting "views" on youtube, another reporter was in another UP district talking to Dalit voters about gathbandhan and Mayawati and Akhilesh and Narendra Modi. The mostly young Dalit caught in the camera viewfinder came out as if preparing to go to battle with swords drawn, victory already in sight. To the question, "Who will be next Pradhan Mantri?" they chorused "Behenji", "Behenji", "Behenji"...

And while this was the impact felt at places rural, a couple of other youtube 'reporters' were accosting another breed of men and women, those in the narrow lanes of small-town Uttar Pradesh, where the refrain was altogether different: "Who will be PM, Rahul Gandhi or Modi?" And the answer nine out of 10 times, "Modiji" The only guy who said "Rahul Gandhi" stopped short at "Insh...." catching himself in time from

caterpillars for the juggernaut to traverse the bumpy road ahead and play catch-up with the gathbandhan. One view is that the formation of the gathbandhan has robbed the elections of a referendum on Modi, and the BJP can no longer make it a 'Modi vs. Rahul' presidential.

The minute SP and BSP inked the alliance, the BJP was left with a patchwork of state-wise electoral battles to contest. If it's against the gathbandhan in Uttar Pradesh, it might be with the Kootamayi in Andhra Pradesh; with a TRS-AIMIM module in Telangana; with the Congress-JD(S) alliance in Karnataka, with DMK-Congress arrangement in Tamil Nadu; with Mamata's TMC in West Bengal...

The implications: BJP will have to draw up different strategies for different turfs. Modifications will have to be made to the juggernaut and that will call for an engineering feat! Then, there is the risk of sliding from right to far right, to extreme right, i.e., embrace the politics of Yogi Adityanath and Sakshi Maharaj; Bajrang Dal and VHP. That's the default page for ideologically-driven parties and the BJP is severely ideological. So, 'Vikas' might play out even as the notes of 'Mandir Wahin Banaenga' and 'Gauraksha' ring loud in the electoral battlefield.

If the gathbandhan defeats the saffron party, it will be the battle of Bhima Koregaon repeated in Uttar Pradesh with only the enemy different - then the British, now the BJP. It cannot be Mahabharata, but it could have shades of the Ramayana with Ram Mandir. And 'Jat Hanuman Jait Singh' has the option to join either side. Rahul Gandhi will be in the grandstands! (IPA Service)

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

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

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### Colonial laws come to haunt

WHEN the Law of Sedition was drafted by Thomas Macaulay in 1833 it was intended to suppress dissent among Indians and to ensure that Indians as subjects of the British Crown did not show disloyalty towards the Empress of India who ruled from London. The law was used to book many Indian freedom fighters and to suppress the flame of nationalism in the hearts of Indians during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is ironic that the Law of Sedition and other laws like the Contempt of Court and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) used in 1958 to suppress the Naga rebellion. Today the same Law is being misused to curtail any form of criticism of the government, and to suppress the voices of our own people. Some days ago, a noted intellectual of Assam Dr Hiren Gohain and other fellow activists who spoke against the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019 were booked for sedition and questioned by the Police. Two students of Jawaharlal University – Kanhaiya Kumar and Umar Khalid were also booked for sedition. What they spoke within the campus was misconstrued to be anti-national.

The Indian Constitution that was crafted with great attention to details by Indian political stalwarts like Babasaheb Ambedkar had given citizens enough rights to air their views under Article 19 (1) (a) which guarantees freedom of speech and expression. While there are reasonable restrictions of this right in that it cannot be used to defame anyone without any grounds, there is that essence of freedom that is guaranteed that criticism of the government is the only way to keep it on the straight and narrow. Now that the Opposition in many legislatures don't do their duty of putting checks and balances on the government, it is left to the media to point out the acts of omission and commission of governments in the states and at the centre. Civil society is the fulcrum of democracy. To curb the voice of civil society by using draconian acts and laws is akin to turning India into a dictatorship. While the unity and integrity of the country cannot be put to the test by words and actions that border on sedition that should be clearly distinguished by an honest critique of government policies. The Citizenship Amendment Bill has been widely criticised in the entire North Eastern region but perhaps more vociferously in Assam because there are solid grounds for doing so. Governments in a democracy engage with citizens. They don't gag them.

### LOOKING BACK

June 13, 1989

### The farce lingers

It is a farcial situation that while Bangladesh sends delegations at regular intervals to persuade the Chakma refugees now lodged in Tripura camps to return home, fresh refugees continue to cross the border and swell the number of camp inmates. Even as a so-called "highpower delegation from Bangladesh was in Tripura last week, about 4000 refugees entering Tripura are counted as one single day's total number of a renewed phase of exodus from the Chittagong Hill Tracts which is going for polls to constitute three District Councils for as many districts in the CHT. S many as 8000 Chakmas entered different camps in south Tripura since last one moth and this ironically is the period which witnessed an apparent show of willingness on the part of Dhaka to tell the world that it is keen on repatriating its Chakma evacuees now enjoying India's hospitality.

Mr Rajiv Gandhi would still call it a purely "domestic problem" of Bangladesh, supremely oblivious of the adverse impact this "domestic" policy of a sovereign neighbor is having on the domestic situation of

tiny Tripura which New Delhi has to care for as India's own domestic problem. When domestic problems and policies of two sovereign neighbours come thus in total conflict, it assures an international dimension. Not even the SAARC principles and commitments stand in the way of India asking its neighbour to create such a situation at the source of the Chakma refugee problem as would spare India the burden of another country's failure to solve its domestic problem satisfactorily.

Towards such a solution which would be fruitful India can morally have the right to lend its good offices to ensure that there is no more of the steady influx which Dhaka acting on its own has so far failed to arrest. If the refugees now in Tripura have refused to go back or have not been persuaded to do so despite the Bangladeshis delegation's entreaties, the reason must obviously be that conditions in the land they have deserted are not yet created for their staging a journey back home.

Quotas and queues have always been the bane of Indian politics. Our netagan are busy in populist bravado, vote-bank one-upmanship and nonsensical doling out reservations like moonphalis to pander to their constituents. Underscoring, 21st Century India's quagmire: Quota=Votes a sure shot combination to victory.

With an eye on the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls the Modi Sarkar in an unprecedented decision hurriedly passed (in two days flat) the 124th Constitution Amendment Bill granting 10% reservation for economically weaker sections (EWS) of the general category in educational institutions and Government jobs. On the premise the family earned less than Rs 8 lakhs a year or lived in a house less than 1,000 sq feet or those who owned farmland less than five acres. It's another matter that the BPL has shot up from Rs 32 a day to Rs 2100 a day totaling Rs 8 lakhs!

Undeniably, the law has the seal of political expediency on it. Obviously, the immediate trigger for it is the rout of the BJP thanks to upper castes backlash in the recent Assembly elections in MP, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan with rising unemployment among others. Of course, the Opposition readily obliged. After all they too would benefit and could be perceived as rejecting a Bill which benefits the EWS.

In one fell stroke, the Government can immediately provide jobs to 3 lakh general category individuals under the new quota as there are nearly 29 lakh posts lying vacant within the Central and State Governments, 13 lakhs in education sector, over 4 lakhs in police and nearly 3lakhs in railways.

Predictably, the next day this was challenged in the Supreme Court on the grounds of violating the Fundamental Right of Equality and was in "breach of the basic structure of the Constitution" by introducing Articles 15(6) and 16(6) into it." Besides, it also raised questions about the purported definition on EWS leaving it to the States to decide, specially against the background of the Supreme Court striking down general

# I Want Reservation Politicians oblige

By Poonam I Kaushish

reservation for UP's rural areas in 1975 on the basis that poverty therein could not be a ground for reservation. In 1980, it ruled that J&K cannot use rectification of regional imbalances as a ground for reservation.

Again, in the landmark Indra Sawhney case in 1992 a majority of a nine-judge bench ruled that economic criteria could not be the sole basis for reservations under the Constitution. Other cases upholding the 50% limit on quota are the 2006 judgment in the M. Nagaraj case and the 2018 verdict in the Jarnail Singh vs Lachmi Narain Gupta case. This was reiterated by various High Courts: In 2015, Rajasthan struck down 14% reservation for EBCs, next year Haryana stayed 10% reservation for EBCs, ditto in Gujarat where in 10% EBC reservation to meet the Patel demand for those earning less than Rs 6 lakh was struck down. In 2017, Kerala notified 10% EBCs

continue to loose? Has an objective study been made to find out the end result? Is reservation an end in itself? Are quotas the answer for maintaining India's social fabric and harmony? According to a former Chairman of the National Commission on Backward Classes, "politicians have converted reservation into a circus."

Alas, in its quest for getting EWS votes our polity fails to realize the ramifications of their actions. Already divided on caste-creed lines, it would now further divide the aam aadmi on a class basis between the haves and have-nots and rich and poor. Indeed, a short-sighted and antithetical move to narrowing India's burgeoning divide amongst its citizens.

Unfortunately, ground realities and make-believes sociology do not always correspond. Reservations by themselves will not transform the village

struggle but of class struggle. Backwards and forwards have become more meaningful than the Left and the Right in politics.

With everyone propounding their own recipe of a social harmony, the nation is getting sucked into the vortex of centrifugal bickering. So caught up are all in their frenzied pursuit of votes through quotas they confuse themselves, voters and history itself. Wherein, it is now difficult to recognize India as the same country which Emerson described as the "summit of human thought".

Our leaders need to realize it is dangerous to indulge in the ongoing political power games passed on class-caste rivalries. By that token, the whole social reform movement will become meaningless. They should remember that universalisation of reservation will mean goodbye to excellence and standards --- a 'must' for any modern nation that wishes to forge ahead.

Certainly, social justice is a desirable and laudable goal. But it cannot be at the cost of nurturing mediocrity. Remember, there is no place for double standards or the Orwellian concept of 'more equal than others' in a democracy. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. The Fundamental Rights provide for equal opportunities for all irrespective of caste, creed or sex. Let's not fudge or forget this.

Time our leaders rise above mindless populism, petty politricks and cry a halt to quotas as they are detrimental to long-term growth. They need to think creatively about how to achieve the goal of putting everyone on equal footing. Merely having reservation will not spell excellence. Specially in today's increasingly competitive global village.

After all, social justice and equal opportunity is not the prerogative of a chosen few. As it stands the system of caste-based quotas has already become divisive and self-defeating. Time now for our petty power-at-all cost polity to think beyond vote-bank politics and look at the long-term implications. No longer will young India accept that power in privilege can be transformed through electoral competition into power in numbers. --- INFA

**With everyone propounding their own recipe of a social harmony, the nation is getting sucked into the vortex of centrifugal bickering. So caught up are all in their frenzied pursuit of votes through quotas they confuse themselves, voters and history itself.**

in Devaswom boards.

Questionably, what is the logic of providing reservation for 10% of the EWS of forward classes? Can the Government unilaterally increase the 50% benchmark to 60%? What was the criteria of deciding Rs 8 lakhs income as the cut-off? Is the economically backward section per se standardized among the forward classes? What happens to the 40% general category left out? Where do they get educated and jobs? Already some States have hiked the percentage ranging from 69% in Tamil Nadu to 80% in Bihar and Karnataka.

How does it better the lot of the mass of EWS if a few persons get jobs? Is it fair that a meritorious person denied admission or a job? How is the Government going to avoid reverse discrimination? Has anyone assessed whether those provided reservation have gained or

society whose social structure is built upon an edifice of illiteracy and ignorance which in turn perpetuates an iniquitous class-caste system.

True, many EWS families are poverty-stricken. But it needs to be remembered that poverty exists in a family unit and not at the class level per se. If one has to eradicate poverty, then all poor families belonging to a class should be eligible for State privileges. But at the same time it should not ostracise poor families belonging to castes not listed as ST, SC or OBC.

Significantly, in the garb of meting out social justice, our netas continue to bask in reckless ad hocism and announce reservations. The truth is that we are today caught in a vicious circle which has been made a lot more malignant by our unstable and fragmented politics. Not just that. The scepter that haunts the nation is not that of caste

written by big sages. This made the boy come to the conclusion that every character be it Mahisasur or Hanuman or Tarzan or Phantom was a real one!

It is a matter of grave concern that our science teachers in the platform of Indian Science Congress have been giving statements which are totally against Article 51A (h) of Constitution of India that says ~ "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform". Since this has been enshrined in our Constitution as the Fundamental Duty of every citizen of India, a scientist is therefore supposed to be an embodiment of it rather than a violator of the same.

We have already been suffering from the consequences of the spreading of myths. Given that advertisements for vashikaran for taming a person are mushrooming day by day, they are undoubtedly doing a brisk trade. This means that the umpteenth number of our brothers and sisters have been slow poisoned in the name of vashikaran or taming! How long are we to

consume poison?

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

### Violence against women on the rise

Editor,

I refer to the news report, 'Requiem for dead sisters' a theatre staged at SANKER (ST Jan 14, 2019) which ostensibly highlighted the continued violence against women. Closer home many young women have been raped and killed and their cases are still pending in court. Even women's organisations and the People seem to forget these atrocities against women. Even the Meghalaya State Commission for Women does not speak about these cases and nor does it pursue them. Hence the evildoers and rapists have a field day and become serial offenders. These cases should be followed up diligently by all those who claim to support the cause of women. It is very unfortunate that such cases are happening very rampantly in a society that

boasts about given privileges to womenfolk. And it looks like those privileges might soon be taken away from women if we are to go by the KHADC legislations.

It is ironic too that Meghalaya should have one of the worst indicators when it comes to women's health. So the claims that women are privileged in this state must be weighed against the disadvantages they suffer and the burden they carry as single mothers bringing up children single-handedly. It is not an easy situation for the woman at all in this matrilineal society. And to be raped and killed is the worst form of violence against women. Sadly no one is putting up a theatre to remind all of us of the many souls lost in such atrocities. We need to reflect in these atrocities and respond accordingly and also put pressure on courts and governments to speed up justice delivery.

Yours etc.,  
SandraLine Mawroh,  
Via email

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

# New Reservation Quota What will be accomplished?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The recent decision of the Government to provide an additional 10 per cent reservation in government jobs and educational institutions to the 'economically backward sections' is undoubtedly a big gimmick, which even the Congress did not oppose to ensure safe passage in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Analysts point out that the BJP has possibly given up on the Dalits and backward classes and concluded from the recent poll results in the three heartland States that something must be done to check the erosion of its core base of upper caste voters.

The contemplated reservation of Rs 8 lakh household income or having farmland less than 5 acres caters to the middle income sections and not to the economically weaker sections. The income criterion would actually make over 90 per cent of Indians, if not more, eligible in the new quota. Moreover, the Rs 8 lakh cut-off for OBCs defines what constitutes the creamy layer amongst them. The third criterion is of the size of the house being less than 1000 sq.ft. As per the NSSO report of 2012, even the richest 20 per cent of the population had houses with an average floor area of 45.99 sq. metres which is almost exactly 500 sq. ft. Apparently this may mean well over 80 per cent would be eligible.

As is well known, the thrust of Indian planning over the years has been urban centric and titled towards the upper and middle income sections. But the point that needs to be noted is that while the Government could introduce reservation for any section of society, it needed to furnish empirical proof that the beneficiary group was inadequately represented in government jobs and education.

It needs to be further mentioned that several court judgments beginning with the 1991 Indra Sawhney verdict by a nine-judge Constitution bench held that the government must justify reservation for any group with specific data about its share in jobs and education. At present the section that is proposed to be covered is very well represented in both the above areas and thus the reservation may go against earlier court observations. Thus, there is a possibility that, if challenged, the apex court may not be favourable disposed to the reservation.

One should not forget that the Narasimha Rao government had in 1991 tried to introduce reservation for upper castes through an Executive order, but the Supreme Court held it constitutionally invalid. However, Modi government now planned a Constitutional amendment. Thus, keeping in view the fact that the basic structure of the Constitution gives scope for socially and educationally backwardness, economic backwardness - which also appears to be a misnomer - may not be find acceptance.

Added to this, is the fact that this reservation takes the total above 50 per cent, the limit fixed by the apex court. Some experts are of the opinion that the Constitution does not recognise economically weaker sections as a separate class for providing preferential treatment. Possibly the government has to amend Articles 15 and 16 to provide quota on the basis of economic status. It may not pass the legal test if and when the matter is examined by the apex court, which had repeatedly stated that reservation cannot go beyond 50 per cent.

However, it needs to be mentioned that Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have a total quota of 69 per cent and 68 per cent respectively reservation. Some other States have proposed quotas above 50 per cent like

Haryana (67 per cent), Telengana (62 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (55 per cent) and Rajasthan (54 per cent).

Till now reservation was limited to social and educational backwardness. "The backwardness contemplated by Article 16(4) is social backwardness. Education and economic backwardness may contribute to social backwardness is a distinct concept having its own connotation", the bench of Justices Ranjan Gogoi and R. F. Nariman had stated.

The whole reservation policy for the upper castes and that too for the middle income sections among that category may not fulfil the objective of giving a fair opportunity to the really poor and the economically weaker sections. Delving into history, one can find that the basic objective of reservation of SCs and STs, the first phase and later the OBCs were all aimed to uplift the conditions of the neglected and the impoverished and bring them into the mainstream of life and activity.

According to a section of sociologists, extending such benefits to Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Khatri, Kayasthas and Banyas may not be acceptable from the point of social justice. However the sudras among the upper castes like Marathas, Jata, Gujars and Patels may have been considered for reservation benefits.

The present reservation would benefit the same social groups, which ridiculed the quota system as vote bank politics have helped them to get quota benefits. The irony is that the stage is being set for claims and counter-claims of backwardness by the so-called economically backward sections to be eligible for quotas. This will undoubtedly be a major cause that may lead to political and social tensions.

Taking into account the present situation, one cannot deny the fact that the announcement is politically motivated coming as it does just 100 days before the elections. The quota makes little sense and is just a reflection of the NDA Government's desperation at not being able to create jobs with unemployment and underemployment on the rise. Moreover, parties that have their base predominantly among the OBCs are almost certain to raise the demand that their quota should now be raised to become proportional with their share of the population.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India regretted its "dichotomy rendering of social justice" by failing to grant reservation in education and employment to Christian and Muslims of Scheduled Caste origins. It expressed concerns over the hasty passage of the 124th Constitutional Amendment Bill 2019 and petitioned the Prime Minister to increase reservation to SCs and STs proportionate to their population. As a section of sociologists have repeatedly pointed out that reservation should be based on economic criteria and the objective has to help the process of removing backwardness and alleviating the conditions of the poor or economically weaker sections. It is indeed a tragedy that the Government does not think it necessary to focus on the above sections that need help and support to uplift their conditions.

It would have been better if the income levels have been kept at Rs 2 lakhs or Rs 2.5 lakhs at the most so that the EWS or the lower income groups (LIG) would have been benefitted. --- INFA

“We need to work together to support common-sense solutions to establish and maintain regulatory certainty and predictability for the mining industry and reduce excessive, duplicative, and expensive permitting delays.”

--- Cathy McMorris Rodgers

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.156 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JANUARY 17, 2019

### Power play in Karnataka

SIX months ago, the Congress and the JDS came from out of nowhere and stole victory from the jaws of defeat in Karnataka and formed a post-poll alliance government. Its days seem numbered, as several legislators from the ruling side are willing to play the Opposition BJP's game. Given the context, the fall of the HD Kumaraswamy government is simply a matter of time. For, the two ruling parties put together enjoyed a majority of just three seats in a house of 224.

It's a surprise that the alliance government survived for as long. Two reasons are obvious. One, the Congress didn't want to send any wrong signals to the people before the crucial 2019 Lok Sabha hustings that alliance governments do not have a long life – something that had been proven in New Delhi time and again, starting with the 1977 Morarji Desai-led Janata Party government. Congress on its own can no more gather the seat strength to form a national government and alliance politics is the only way forward, as it did in the past two UPA periods as well. The BJP with Narendra Modi at its head effected a turnaround in 2014 and gained a majority for the BJP on its own in the Lok Sabha, though the NDA arrangement was carried forward. Even today, after nearly five years, the BJP retains much of this strength though anti-incumbency trends are already evident against it.

Another reason for the Congress-JDS alliance to carry on this far is the strong position of the BJP in the assembly, it having won the largest number of seats, at 105, and having had the first right to form a government post-poll. The frenzy with which the Congress and the JDS formed a post-poll tie-up robbed the BJP of a chance to win power. It was clear to all that the saffron party was thereafter waiting in the wings for the right moment to pull the government down.

Buying a few legislators is the easiest thing for the BJP to do, considering the political clout and money power it commands today. What came as additional help was a ministry expansion in which several hopefuls from the Congress could not be accommodated. Add to this the constant cribbing by Kumaraswamy that the Congress was maltreating him – seeing him as a clerk and ordering around. The fact remains that an unholy alliance had put him in the CM post. Even in the post-poll tie-up, the Congress had deserved that post. And, he has made a laughing stock of himself.

# Coal mining and the blue ocean strategy

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

We are caught in the whirlwind of coal mining with no end in sight. On one hand, the state government is vociferously defending and trying all ends up to lift the ban on coal mining (for obvious electoral promises made and gains expected [read Lok Sabha, 2019]). However, alas! It has admitted to illegal coal mining and the fish is out of the water. Concurrently, there are aggressive stakeholders with no fear or respect for the rule of law carrying out terrifying attacks on civil society. Add to this, the so called nexus/collusion amongst groups across levels ranging from the politicians to the police to local governance to private mine owners. The result of all this is a series of claims and counter claims, attacks and allegations, covert and overt operations to unethically win the case/arguments of the day. Amidst this myriad cocktail of coal disoriented drunkenness, the tragedy at Ksan was just waiting to happen.

Scarily, numerous indicators indicate that Ksan is not the first tragedy of its kind. Accidents like these are not new; however, they go unknown/unreported/unrecorded. Sadly, if things continue the way they are, Ksan will not be the last either. Importantly, caught in this whirlwind of coal mining are the real sufferers who are genuinely hard hit by this impasse. These are the marginal laborers/daily wage earners/underprivileged. They mainly comprise of the youth under conditions of scarce employment thriving for competencies and capabilities to earn a livelihood and have a decent living. It is these people we must care for and plan on ways and means and schemes to give them a platform for gainful employment with a dignified life. As such, I place the following pointers –

Firstly, we are a people habituated to surviving in a 'pond-like mentality'. We tend to take pride in it. We limit ourselves to it across plans and discourse and debate. As a community we proudly go circling around the pond and think of it as the be all and end-all of the world; not realizing that there are 'oceans' for real. If anything, this coal mining issue(s) is a perfect depiction of our pond-like mentality. Point being, how much longer are we going to debate on the limitations and ill-effects of coal mining? Have we not done enough of debate and thereby recognized the cost-benefits trade-off of coal mining? Are we willing to deteriorate our

sustainable future against a windfall of economic gains of a few years (if against all hope coal mining is at all lifted)? The more we embroil ourselves in such debates the more time we lose and the more rigid we become to the extent of alienating our visions from other more fruitful/profitable professions. That being so, we are going from bad to worse. We are moving from a 'pond-

which are far more sustainable; both economically and socially. If anything at all, the arguments presented by the authors reliably highlight that it is indeed possible to move from the 'old into the new'; just will-power across all stakeholders is required. As such, it is time as a state that we do a serious brainstorming and strategize the 'blue ocean' way.

As a state we have nu-

*“Scarily, numerous indicators indicate that Ksan is not the first tragedy of its kind. Accidents like these are not new; however, they go unknown/unreported/unrecorded. Sadly, if things continue the way they are, Ksan will not be the last either. Importantly, caught in this whirlwind of coal mining are the real sufferers who are genuinely hard hit by this impasse. These are the marginal laborers/daily wage earners/underprivileged.”*

like mentality' to an 'ostrich mentality' whereby we delve our heads deep into the ground so as not to see or are unwilling to see the possibilities around us. As such, it is high time that we move from coal mining and start looking at other employment and livelihood opportunities on a serious and strategic note. It is time that we not only 'think out of the box'; rather it is time to 'move out of the box altogether'.

Secondly, how do we go about conceptualizing 'alternatives' to coal mining? To this end, there is one guide (apart from others). It is titled 'Blue Ocean Strategy' authored by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne published by Harvard Business Review in the year 2004 (with an expanded edition published in 2015). The crux-of-the-matter argument of the book circles around 'exploring into new markets, opportunities and possibilities while unlocking new demands and creation of value for the benefit of all stakeholders'. It concerns the 'doing of something new' in a new environment/system. It is about 'moving away from current modes and practices' and thriving and strategizing for alternatives

merous missions ranging from Lakadong turmeric to Aqua to Milk to Mushroom to Jackfruit with numerous other projects through government departments. These are to be comprehensively and holistically implemented in a supplementary manner while also looking into new employment avenues other than coal mining. For this to happen, a change in mind-set across all stakeholders and political will is a must.

Thirdly, how do we construct 'blue ocean strategy'? Well, there are a number of elements/frameworks associated to it. At the outset, there is innovation. For innovation to happen, it is critical that we understand our current status and the cost-benefits out of that status. This status can be employment/livelihood/environment/governance/macro systems and so forth. Consequently, we innovate and come up with a new idea/proposition/plan/model of development. The point to be noted here is that innovation comes with 'a certain degree of risk' (not uncertainty; else it is not innovation). Point being, risk cannot be mitigated completely; but uncertainty can. Hence, the million dollar question; Are we willing to be innovative as a peo-

ple? Do we take a risk towards a new horizon altogether? Be that as it may, 'blue ocean strategy' requires four basic processes towards being innovative. It starts with 'addressing' the questions and issues at hand. In the context of coal mining, the questions invariably concern safety, security, employment, returns, environmental degradation, long-term health of the state, other viable livelihood options and so forth. This is followed with 'elimination' of practices and industries which do not work and which are unsustainable. Then there is 'reduction' of investments/interventions that do not yield meaningful returns. At the end, we have 'creation' of a new mode of economy and employment. This is where we are supposed to be; the stage of 'creation'. Worryingly, we are still stuck at the stage of 'addressing' (since 2014) with no end in sight. One can only wonder; when do we learn?

Lastly, coal mining is now at the hands of the Hon'ble Courts, the NGT and the central government. Our state government is primarily a 'sitting-duck'. What will be the outcome is anybody's guess. Further, the recent affidavit submitted by the Ministry of Coal (Government of India) in the Hon'ble Supreme Court to exempt Meghalaya from central mining acts has set the cat amongst the pigeons. In our land tenure system where land is primarily private/clan owned, the coal miners will be having a field day. Couple this with the lifting of coal mining (if it happens), then the worst is yet to come. Hence, do we welcome the 'worst' or do we look towards innovation? Nonetheless, it is true that efforts are being made to move beyond coal (in certain pockets). However, we have a long way to go; and the comprehensive way to go is the 'blue ocean strategy' mode. If that be so, then in the long-run we can think of a 'Blue Ocean Shift' (written by the same authors and published in the year 2017). The 'shift' here refers to moving from the good to the better to the best (across socio-economic conditions). Notably and in the context of Meghalaya, we have to grapple with 'strategy' first. The 'blue ocean shift' construct is at the moment too far-off and by all means it will not happen in our lifetime.

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

## Police leadership has failed in India Political masters are equally responsible

By Sanjiv Krishan Sood

It was disconcerting to see a Minister of Uttar Pradesh Government claim that the law and order situation in the State had improved after the Adityanath government took over. The statement, coming a couple of days after the brutal killing of a policeman in Gazipur by an unruly mob, is bizarre and shameful, especially considering that this is the second murder of a policeman in the State within one month. The Director General UP Police also has similarly claimed improvement in crime situation in the state in 2018 over 2017.

Claims made by the minister and the DG(P) are no consolation to the son of the deceased policeman, who raises a valid question when he tearfully asks how will a police, that cannot protect itself, be trusted to protect the common public?

This tragic state of disregard for the law and law enforcers has been in the making for some time and has been accelerated by the highhandedness of the police themselves on one hand. On the other hand, active encouragement and liberty that the supporters of the ruling party receive from the government in illegal acts has created an environment in which the party workers consider the police to be subservient and browbeat them with impunity to give in to their illegal demands. Police also has surrendered abjectly to the whims and fancies of the ruling party. Resultantly, whatever respect or fear the common public had for them, has vanished completely.

Few months ago, a video of a young woman police officer being threatened by a crowd led by a person claiming to be a local leader of BJP, had gone viral. The police officer handled the situation firmly and did not give in to the illegal demands of the crowd; yet, she was summarily transferred a few days after the incident.

The police leadership failed in standing up to the political masters in protecting the officer. The DG Police should have taken up the matter with the government in the above case and prevented the young lady from being punished for no fault of hers. The police, especially in the states ruled by the BJP, appear to be under pressure to go soft on the crimes committed by lynch-mobs against minorities in name of "gau raksha", "love jihad" etc. Lynch-mobs, secure in the knowledge that their political masters will protect them do not hesitate to attack them with impunity. Inaction by the police in cases of mob violence by self-appointed protectors of Indian culture, and protection accorded to them by politicians, further encourages them to take law into their hands and disregard the authority of the police.

Humiliation of the authority of police in the manner discussed above disincentivises and creates a defensive mentality amongst them. They thus prefer to play safe, lest they invite wrath of the government.

Politicians have always used the police to advance the cause of their followers and to protect their own. This is true for almost all the States of the Union, in varying degrees. However, it is the police leadership, which has failed in standing up to illegal pressure and demands of politicians.

Politicians, especially in Uttar Pradesh, appear to have let the lynch-mobs lose. In an interview to India TV in June 2017, UP chief minister Adityanath said, "Agar apradh kareng toh thok diye jayenge (If

they commit crimes, they will be shot)." Adityanath boasts of 63 killed and 500 seriously injured in 1,500 encounters since he took over as a proof of his resolve to ensure proper law and order.

This is a mockery of the Supreme Court order in a landmark 2012 case, in which the Court held: "It is not the duty of the police officers to kill the accused merely because he is a dreaded criminal. Undoubtedly, the police have to arrest the accused and put them up for trial. This Court has repeatedly admonished trigger-happy police personnel, who liquidate criminals and project the incident as an encounter. Such killings must be deprecated. They are not recognised as legal by our criminal justice administration system. They amount to State sponsored terrorism."

The police in UP after 2017 has been a willing tool in the hands of government in spreading this kind of state-sponsored terror. This highhandedness is one cause of them slowly losing respect of population.

Responsibility for this dismal state of affairs lies squarely on the shoulders of the police leadership. Lacking courage of conviction, they take an easy way out and kowtow to the whims and fancies of politicians, or resort to subterfuge to deal with them. I recall a prominent TV anchor telling me that he was flooded with calls from senior officers to raise the issue of attack by mob on the residence of a District SP (superintendent of police) in UP in 2017. The police did not have courage to lodge FIR against the mob, even though the lives of the family members of the SP were at risk. The SP was conveniently transferred, or he perhaps thought it prudent to seek transfer and the matter appears to have been quietly buried.

Police leaders continue to display abject incompetence in leading the police from front. This is apparent from the overall image of the police in the minds of the common public, which is formed through their interactions with them. The level of operational efficiency (or lack thereof), overall law and order situation, rate of conviction, etc., are hardly anything to be proud of. The working and living conditions of policemen remain subhuman in most states. Their training and lack of camaraderie is apparent from the shameful manner in which the murdered Inspector, Subodh Kumar Singh, was abandoned by his subordinates when surrounded by murderous crowd in the Bulandshahr incident.

The police leaders talk passionately of police reforms and blame all ills of policing to lack of implementation of Supreme Court orders in this regard. However, except for some honourable exceptions, they are not willing to take any initiative to implement whatever is within their powers for the wellbeing of either the policemen and police-women in the country, or the police system as a whole. For example, there cannot be any justification for the low standards of training of a policeman. That they need to inculcate soft skills amongst them is something that every citizen realises but the police leadership appears to be oblivious to this requirement. The case of a policeman shouting "thain-thain" when his weapon malfunctioned during an encounter recently in UP is indicative of their inability to use and maintain their equipment properly. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Shillong Lajong FC woes

Editor,  
Shillong Lajong FC'S recent string of losses in the I-league has come as a big disappointment, given the quality of the opposition. Being an avid fan of the club-the first from the region to make its foray in the I-league, it's been a frustrating watch of late. The team's performance this year has been a shadow of the past. Comprising of a bunch of 20 something inexperienced players with no foreign recruits, the team is a far cry from the Lajong of old. Is it because the management is trying to do the Royal Wahingdoh or Dempo stunt by going through the normal route (relegation) because of reasons best known to any football fan? But then, the Club will be playing with the pride of the fans of Lajong in particular and the pride of Shillong football in general, if at all Lajong is ever to be relegated. With the emergence of Corporate clubs that can

just be bought into the league, it will be difficult to get back to the I-league, let alone win it. With the probability of I-league and ISL merging, smaller clubs with shoe-string budgets stand no chance of competing with big spending clubs. Therefore, if Shillong Lajong FC can pull up its socks and avoid relegation by staying mid-table, it will be a revival of sorts and hopefully the confidence of the team will be boosted and it will get back to its winning ways once again.

Yours etc.,  
Bajop Kharsyntiew,  
Via email

#### NEIGRIHMS PRO misleading

Editor,  
The clarification issued by NEIGRIHMS with regard to outsourcing the paediatric cases published in ST on Jan 16, 2019 is misleading. While your news item on Jan 15, 2019

(NEIGRIHMS sends paediatric cases to local hospitals) very clearly pointed out that paediatric and endoscopy services were suspended due to vacation policy introduced by the incumbent director, the clarification has sidestepped the issue and reported other activities of the hospital. On investigating this issue, it has come to light that this clarification is again filled with lies, to cover up the inadequacies of NEIGRIHMS administration. This is similar to the curtailing of the Operation Theatres due to the vacation policy, there is no qualified paediatrician in the entire hospital as the lone faculty has been asked to go on vacation in January. Because of this, not only the ward and ICU services, but also the out-patient services have been crippled. It is being handled only by young MBBS graduates.

Instead of improving the services in the hospital, this Director, is ada-

mant on this ill-conceived vacation policy which is hampering patient care. While your newspaper has responsibly brought this to notice, the administration is trying to cover it up with lies. In this regard, I would raise the following queries.

1. Is the gas manifold system being installed only in the paediatric ICU and ward? What about the other wards of the hospital? Why is it that only paediatric patients are referred outside?

2. If it takes 7 days for the gas manifold system will the services be restored after January 22?

3. Will starting post-graduate services in dermatology, ENT, ophthalmology improve the services in Paediatrics Department?

4. Is the upgradation of the lecture theatre related to this clarification?

Yours etc.,  
Megha B. Mahendra  
RTI activist,  
Via email

#### Coal ban again!

Editor,  
After the NGT coal mining ban in 2014 now is the turn of the Apex Court. In fact there is no need for two separate orders for coal mining ban and transportation. The illegal coal mining in Meghalaya took place because the NGT, from time to time had allowed piece-meal transportation of coal from Meghalaya from different depots. Because of this the illegal coal mining took place side by side and coal became a never ending resource emanating from different depots. What the NGT should have done was not only to totally ban coal mining but also export (transport) coal from Meghalaya once and for all and with proper supervision. Now that coal mining and transportation are banned it is easier for the

state authorities to control not only illegal mining but also illegal transportation of coal. However, there is no power on earth to stop illegal coal mining and transportation completely because these will continue in the absence of proper implantation of the ban. What the Supreme Court should have done was to allow Meghalaya Government to take over whatever coal is left un-transported either in the depots or at the different dump-yards and auction it so that the State Government becomes richer by several hundred crore rupees and have the money to pay the Central Pollution Control Board. A note of caution however, is that illegality will continue as long as there are bans

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email.

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

*“Confidence is the hinge on the door to success.”*

--- Jack Nicklaus

## The Shillong Times

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### Between hope and desperation

THE sighting of one body inside the Ksan mine on day 34 of the mine disaster has given the parents of the deceased some hope of retrieving the bodies of their loved ones. Realistically speaking it is not possible to have survived in an atmosphere suffused with sulphurous gases for over a month. The rescue operation was at best a delayed reaction; badly coordinated and lacked the sense of urgency from state authorities. The navy divers and National Disaster Relief Force (NDRF) were rendered helpless because of the inability to drain out the water from the mine. The hydrologist from Hyderabad was flown in only three weeks after the disaster. It appears that there was a complete lack of planning about what the priorities should have been. The North East Space Application Centre (NESAC), in Meghalaya, the Regional Head office of the Geological Survey of India also in Meghalaya and other related parties and institutions should have been sounded to see if they have solutions. In fact an SOS from the Government of Meghalaya should have gone out instead of going about the rescue mission on a piecemeal basis. Whatever rescue missions arrived at the Ksan mine were requisitioned only after the Supreme Court intervened because of a petition pending before it.

The people of Meghalaya too have been found wanting in their response to this tragedy. Many took this as another mine accident and blamed the miners for taking calculated risks. The coal mine owners were impervious to the tragedy. All they could think of was how to transport their illegally mined coal until January 31, the date earlier given by the Supreme Court on December 5. On January 15, the date of the next hearing the apex Court took a grim view of the transportation issue after it was briefed by the lawyer for the Citizen's Forum about the illegality and venality of the coal mining process and the 15 miners trapped inside the Ksan mine. There is absolutely no empathy with the parents and relatives of the trapped miners who have been waiting on tenterhooks for positive news which has evaded them for over a month. There are interest groups whose loyalties lie with the coal miners instead of with those trapped inside the mines. The ethnocentric fault lines that emerge on a regular basis tell us that the value of human life in Meghalaya is determined by its ethnicity and economic status.

This article appears on Day 35 of the mining tragedy at Ksan. The lack of compassion for the 15 miners was palpable from Day One. Arguments like this have been floating around – “Why did the miners choose to go down that hell hole despite knowing the risks involved? Aren't they there for the money?” And in hushed tones the conversation goes... “Apart from the three locals the others are not even, ‘our people.’ And nearly all of them are Muslims...perhaps illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from Assam and Garo Hills in Meghalaya, so why bother? But all this is par for the course when humanity is dead. The fate of those people inside the mine is sealed by their very socio-economic status. For them digging coal is a livelihood. For the mine owner it is wealth accumulation.

Wealth is power and we see that so clearly. Without wealth you have no voice. Even democracy costs money. Without money you can't buy votes, so how can you contest elections? Wealth can buy property across the country; it can buy loyalty from the political establishment. Wealth can buy academic degrees. There's no end to what wealth can do. It can get you the best, most expensive treatment for the host of ailments you pick up because you are rich and pampered. The rich mine owner can either contest elections himself or fund someone's election and then make him/her dance like a puppet on a string. So what if in the process of mining, the rivers are poisoned and turn a sulphurous blue? So what if the soil is rendered unfit for growing food? Those with money can buy the food they like at a premium. It's the poor that need to grow their food in what is called 'subsistence farming.' And there are many subsistence farmers in Meghalaya in case we forget and continually raise the bogey that coal mining provides livelihoods. The question is: Livelihoods at what cost? The way the mine owners and their supporters are arguing the case for coal mining is: Who will provide

# When the State Conspires Against Us

By Patricia Mukhim

livelihoods to the hundreds of people relying on coal mining? The same can be said for drug peddling too. The drug peddler also feeds his family and accumulates wealth from that trade. So why is he treated as a criminal? If drugs have taken away many young lives then coal mining too has killed and continues to kill many unfortunate souls.

What is tragic and also ironic is that the State is willing to go all out to argue the case on behalf of the mine owners. Why is the Conrad Sangma Government so beholden to the coal lobby? Is it because the entire 2018 election was funded by coal? Is it because the NPP had promised to work at lifting the ban on coal mining if it comes to power and now has to deliver by hook or crook? So is this a Government by, of and for the coal mine owners? What happens to all of us who are not mine owners? To those of us who care for this Mother Earth that we live in? Those who can no longer watch in silence while the earth is abused day in and day out? Earth cannot speak for itself. It only acts in fury and that fury is awaiting us. What will happen to the coal mine areas when an earthquake of high intensity strikes? The abandoned mines will collapse one by one and anyone who is inside at the time will be dead. And it's not as if such phenomenon had not happened. In 2011 Sohkympor village in Jaintia Hills witnessed cracks on the earth's surface that cut across the PWD road near a market place. At the time Mr BM Lanong was Deputy Chief Minister and also the Minister Mining and Geology. After seeing the cracks and speaking with geologists he was told the crack was due to rampant mining. After that there was silence on that front and Government never paid attention to the unscientific and hazardous mining practice in Meghalaya.

Then there are those who argue vociferously that the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution

guarantees rights to tribals living under it to mine the earth beneath any which way they choose to. This is such a convoluted reading of a Constitutional guarantee provided to people at a time when they were part of the larger state of Assam with a predominantly non-tribal population. The Sixth Schedule was meant to conserve forests (other than reserved forests) water bodies and the culture of the people for whom it was created. Essentially the Sixth Schedule is for protection of our land; not for extractive mining which destroys the land and the waters that provide sustenance to us. Nowhere does the Schedule speak of individual rights of the tribal. It was envisaged to protect community rights. The rivers, forests and lands then were common property resources (CPR) which are meant to be shared inheritances, not privately owned. Much of the coal mines were once community-owned land which have been grabbed by a few moneyed people in connivance with the heads of the elaka. This abuse of the principles of the Sixth Schedule now also needs to be contested in a court of law because of the propensity of some to misuse this for private gains. The Sixth Schedule as conceived by JIM Nichols Roy was an instrument to protect tribal 'homelands', their culture and by extension their environment, for, how does culture thrive without the environment to foster it? Of course the Sixth Schedule also empowers the District Councils to enact laws on inheritance of property, marriage and social customs and is also vested with the power to try cases between tribals. The Sixth Schedule empowers the Councils to collect land revenue and taxes from markets etc., not to pay salaries to their staff but to utilise those funds for securing the rights of the community. And certainly the Sixth Schedule does not say a word about mining because that already comes within the purview of state laws.

And to those arbiters of

tradition who keep harking back to the Instrument of Accession one would like to ask this question: What has the so-called 'Khlieh ki Nongsynshar Shnong' done to protect the rights of the poorest in the community? Have they taken cognisance of the large scale damage to the environment? Did our ancestors not care about Ka Mei Ramew (Mother Earth)? Do they ever allow the poor to have their voices heard in their elite gatherings? The socio-economic caste census 2011 is not lying when it says that 76% of rural Meghalaya is landless. Is the above organisation even concerned? In fact the above-mentioned organisation is not just elitist but patriarchal too. So whether the Sixth Schedule? Is it really protecting all of us tribals or some influential private mine owners who seem to have so many powerful people speaking on their behalf?

Now that the whole country, nay the whole world knows the kind of mining practised in Meghalaya – which is a ruthless and inhuman way of sending poor humans without safety gear inside a hole to gouge out the coal and inhale sulphurous gas for 12 hours every day – the state will stand out as the prime violator of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution which is to protect the life and liberty of every individual. As citizens of Meghalaya we should hang our heads in shame that we have allowed this criminal activity to carry on before our noses for so long. And an unimaginative state has not bothered to create alternative livelihoods for the poorest. Is this why Meghalaya was created? That we should be regressing on all human development indicators? The only thing Meghalaya has done so far is to create affluent political, bureaucratic and business elite. The rest of the population survive on their wits despite the government. And the present MDA Government is moving on auto-pilot. No one knows who is actually in charge. Wonder when the stage of redemption will arrive?

## EBC Reservation Worn out gramophone record

By Dr S.Saraswathi

The poll-eve legislation of the 124th Constitutional Amendment in Article 15 and 16 in the Fundamental Rights providing for 10 per cent quota for economically weaker sections in the open category was passed by both Houses of Parliament within 48 hours! It has got Presidential assent too. Bitter political enemies of the BJP lent it support. Practical politics precludes opposition partly because of its timing except for the DMK nurtured by Dravidian politics clinging still to Reservation Policy as the one and only remedy for social backwardness.

Noteworthy is the voting figures – 323 Ayes and only 3 Noes in the Lok Sabha, and 175 Ayes and 7 Noes in the Rajya Sabha. The Bill passed through both Houses so quickly makes it clear that the Houses function or don't function on account of party animosities and not issue importance.

Most of the political parties are in favour of reservation for economically backward classes (EBC), and the Congress had even promised it in its 2014 election manifesto. Gujarat State has already announced its decision to implement the new quota this month itself. The 10 per cent quota is over and above existing 49.5 per cent for SC, ST, and OBC and is granted to economically weaker sections in the general category.

We are now a reputed democratic nation for specialising in freebies and concessions as an easy path towards development in the opinion of receivers and an alternative to the hard way of developing human resources for the patrons. This path is more attractive to the recipients as it involves no extra labour on their part. We are supposed to be correcting centuries of past injustice and have to accept the method voted by majority without arguing.

The 10 per cent quota applies to all those who are not covered in existing Reservation and have a family income below Rs.8 lakh a year, or agricultural land below 5 acres. Those who have a house in above 1,000 sq. feet area, or a plot of above 100 sq. yard in a notified municipal area are not eligible.

In less than 24 hours after Parliament's approval of reservation for the EBC, an NGO "Youth for Equality" filed a PIL in the Supreme Court seeking quashing of the legislation alleging that it violated the basic structure of the Constitution. This contention is based on the judgement of 1992 in the Indira Sawhney case.

In the mid-1980s, the BJP had conceded the merit in the concept of reservation for the poor among the forward communities. This was recalled in January 2003, when the Congress Government in Rajasthan moved a Resolution in the State Assembly recommending 14 per cent reservation for the poor among forward communities. As it would exceed the 50 per cent cap for reservation, it was sent to the Union Government for clearance.

The need for a Commission to identify the EBC and the means to accommodate the change in the Constitution was then raised. The proposal was dropped as Article 16(4) does not cover economically backward, and had to be specifically added. The ceiling of 50 per cent was also pointed out as an obstacle.

The two hindrances still remain intact. But, the change is now introduced as a Constitutional Amendment and not an executive order to answer queries regarding its constitutionality. The Constitution can be amended any number of times. The ceiling of 50 per cent is already relaxed in a number of cases and the proposed quota does not curtail that of SC, ST, and OBC. If at all, the objection can come from economically non-backward forward castes whose chances are further curtailed.

The predominant feeling of the Constituent Assembly,

as recorded in the Mandal Commission Report states: "Special measures were required to remedy special inequalities of caste and community which tended to accentuate economic disparity among the groups". So, the Commission concluded that, the description of backward classes in clause 4 of Article 15 should be similar to that in clause 1 of Article 340, which limits it to "socially and educationally backward classes". This was the reason that the word "economically" did not find a place in clause 4 of Article 15 though several members pointed out that in the identification of socially and educationally backward classes, economic backwardness could not be ignored.

Mandal recommendations were validated by the Supreme Court in the Indira Sawhney Case in 1992. The Social Welfare Minister of the then Congress government, Sitaram Kesari, was not only in favour of reservation for SC, ST, and OBC, but also wanted to ensure that reservations should be equal among the economically backward.

The famous Judgement in Indira Sawhney Case, known as Mandal judgement, rejected the Union Government's proposal for 10 per cent reservation for the economically backward and placed a cap of 50 per cent for the total reserved quota, which should not be exceeded except in some extraordinary situation.

It is this judgement that is stressed by opponents of the present amendment. The "quota regime" enunciated by the Supreme Court is a blend of the twin principles of "positive discrimination" and "right to equality". But, real politics is inclined to abuse the reservation concept by making it permanent as a "basic structure" of the Constitution.

No law, no rule, and no judgement is made for ever. When conditions change, a democratic government has to change. Change is the road to progress. Delving into the debates of the Constituent Assembly or into earlier judgments are for our understanding of the thinking in the past as it has evolved over the years so as to assess better current conditions and introduce necessary amendments and not to tighten the chain ourselves in further knots.

The sharpest thorn in the Reservation Policy is the 50 per cent ceiling, which is sought to be invoked now to block recognition of EBC. A Constitution Bench in 2006 ruled that 50 per cent limit was necessary to safeguard "equality" which is part of the basic structure of the Constitution.

Tamil Nadu had increased the reserved quota to 69 per cent by legislation, and managed to put it in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution which is immune from judicial scrutiny. In this matter, States are over-willing to help one another so that their own liberal Reservation Policy will remain secure.

MGR acknowledged the presence of "have-nots" in all categories including the "forward". But, the DMK suggested setting apart some seats in the general category for the poor in all categories. MGR's suggestion for introducing income criteria in determining backward classes had no political support. The PMK in Tamil Nadu has long been demanding reservation for poor students irrespective of caste and community in private schools located in their areas.

In 2003, The NDA government made a move to introduce a separate quota for the economically backward among the "forward" castes. It did not succeed. Are we then playing a worn out gramophone record or doing serious business?-- INFA

(The author former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Eggs excluded from midday meals

Editor,  
It is horrifying to learn that as many as 12 Indian states have banished egg from midday meal as a result of government's reservation against non-vegetarian items. It is a brutal act as surveys reveal that most of the students as well as their parents are eager for its inclusion. This is quite natural as some estimates show that 3 out of 4 Indians are non-vegetarian. Word has it that egg banishment has been done to satisfy upper caste vegetarian lobbies. Moreover, in some schools and anganwadis, Dalit students are reportedly made to sit separately from upper caste students. They are allegedly given insufficient food and served last. Such things are criminal offences and totally against our Constitution. A nutritious and hearty midday meal can indeed check dropout rate as well as malnutrition among our children. It is

highly unfortunate, to say the least, of allowing prejudices to rob non-vegetarian children of a nutritious food item of their choice in a secular country like ours.

Given that we have 48.2 million hungry, malnourished children with stunted growth in our country, this showcases our myopic attitude towards our own children. Moreover, according to the 2018 Global Hunger report, India, Djibouti and South Sudan are the countries where child wasting are most prevalent. Children under the age of five who become victims of acute under-nutrition with low weight for their height, are tagged in the group of child wasting.

Eggs are highly nutritious. Further, sweets can be adulterated but a boiled egg cannot. Huge amount of eggs go bad every year in India due to lack of cold storage. Therefore, such a tragic decision of banishing eggs from anganwadis and schools will make more

eggs go bad along with the health of our future citizens. The Midday meal scheme should have been used to give more amount of nutritious food to the students of anganwadis and schools to address the problem of malnutrition among children. Government should see to it that no prejudice deprives young ones from getting safe and nutritious food items. Students should also enjoy the meal together and learn the ideals of equality and fraternity. It will be suicidal if we fail our children for the sake of prejudices.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

#### Arguing about politics

Editor,  
In an age where Christian leaders seem to have a their own views and opinions about politics, it might be important to find out what

was Jesus Christ's opinion when it comes to politics. Some of the religious and political leaders approached Him and asked the question, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?" Jesus knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it." So they brought the denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

What was astonishing about Jesus' response was that he avoided falling into their trap, by giving a simple yes or no answer. The coin Jesus asked for was used not only as currency, but as instruments of Roman propaganda. The front of

the denarius had a profile of Tiberius, crowned with laurels of victory and divinity. Around the image is the inscription "Ti Caesar Divi Aug F Augustus," which means "Tiberius Caesar, Worshipful Son of the God, Augustus." On the back of the coin is Pax, the Roman goddess of Peace, with the inscription "Pontif Maxim," which stands for "Pontifex Maximus," meaning "High Priest." So the denarius imposes the cult of emperor worship which asserts Caesar's sovereignty over all who would use it.

Jesus meant that Caesar cannot be given what he really wants which is ultimate allegiance and acceptance of his system of exclusion and discipline, but rather what he deserves. By responding in this manner Jesus introduced the first theory of limited government at that time. Every king or governor claimed they were the choice of God. Jesus told

people not to give their allegiance to rulers. This was revolutionary. Jesus took the following two approaches in answering the political question of the Pharisees. He resisted political simplicity, but also resisted political complacency and primacy. Jesus advocated neither acceptance of the political system nor revolt against it. In a sense Jesus was a social revolutionary of his time. As a revolutionary he spoke about the kingdom of God, but never showed any signs of hunger for earthly power. He claimed to be a King but did not even have a quarter to His name. He demonstrated to us a kingdom that has outlasted the mighty Roman Empire itself.

Yours etc.,  
Pyndapbha Warjri  
Shillong-2

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*“Confidence is that feeling by which the mind embarks in great and honorable courses with a sure hope and trust in itself.”*

--- Publilius Syrus

## The Shillong Times

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### UK caught in Brexit

WHAT was once Great Britain is today confusion worst confounded; its vaunted democratic system of governance failing immensely in leading the present United Kingdom on the right path. Brexit, yes but how, is a serious question that has brought Prime Minister Theresa May's leadership itself to the brink. She somehow managed to weather a no-confidence but is yet unable to decide which way to take the nation forward. Worse, her ministers are divided on the course she should take, and the main Opposition Labour, led by socialist Jeremy Corbyn, is accused of fishing in troubled waters to hasten new elections. The clock is ticking fast. A little over two months, leading up to deadline of March 29, are left for the UK to exit EU – and the nation as also the rest of Europe is ill-prepared to facilitate this. There are humanitarian issues apart from serious problems of trade. Citizens of UK could go and live anywhere in Europe without the usual document hassles as long as the nation remained with EU. This has been the case for nearly three decades after EU's formation in 1993. What would happen to them now is a grave problem.

The voting out of Theresa May's 'divorce' plan on Thursday was not unexpected, but it leaves a nation in deep worry and EU in more confusion. She has been given three days' time to return to parliament with an alternative proposal, or Plan B. She might seek an extension of the deadline for exit by a few months, by which time some plan of action could be set in place to tackle related challenges. The worst scenario is UK leaving EU without signing a deal. Also, leaving Brexit would mean an end to the open borders system that was granted vis-à-vis the Irish peace process, under the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. This could put Britain's unity itself at stake. Problems started in 2016 amid a row over UK's role in EU, when David Cameron called a referendum on his nation leaving the EU, his own obvious line being for continuation with EU. People who voted for it, and against, later said they didn't know what Brexit meant for the nation. A second referendum is what anti-Brexit lawmakers are demanding. Legally, UK is entitled to change its decision to leave EU – anytime before the March 29 deadline. Even this is not possible as such a referendum would require nearly six months' time. The way forward for May, thus, is either to buy time with EU or go for a no-deal Brexit.

# Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016: Favours foreigners over citizens

By Albert Thyrianiang

The other day I passed through Nellie a town in Nagaon district, central Assam. It is infamous for the 1983 Nellie massacre in which more than 2000 people were brutally killed. Leaving Assam's bloodiest massacre aside, the tragedy ultimately led to the Assam Accord of August 15, 1985. One of the most important clauses of the accord states that illegal immigrants who came to Assam after 1971 would be deported. The Assam Accord, of course ended the six year anti-illegal immigrant movement that started in 1979.

On January 8, 2019 the Lok Sabha passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016. The Bill proposes that Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who are persecuted on account of their religion will be eligible for Indian citizenship after residing in the country for six years instead of 11 years. The Bill also says that the beneficiaries who came to India as late as 2014 are eligible for Indian Citizenship if they belong to any of the above-mentioned religions. The Bill, if it becomes a law will render the Assam Accord null and void. Another effect of the Bill is that it will nullify the NRC, an exercise to detect Bangladeshi nationals who illegally entered the state after March 24, 1971, the date fixed in the Assam Accord. No wonder Assam is in shock.

Not just Assam but the entire North East erupted in protest against the dangerous Bill. Shut down, rallies, public meetings are some of the protests to vehemently oppose the bill. People also vented their anger through social media. Violence was reported, notably the firing by security forces in Tripura injuring five youths, two of them seriously. The police were also not very kind in Assam. Sahitya Akademi awardee, Hiren Gohain, rights activist, Akhil Gogoi and journalist, Manjit Mahanta were slapped with sedition charges after a suo-moto FIR was filed against them for alleged secessionist speeches.

The BJP government which is adamant in pushing the Bill is blind and deaf to the genuine concerns of people of the North East and such insensitivity towards the sentiments of the region is bound to have serious fall outs. Assam BJP spokesperson, Mehdi Alam resigned from his post and from the party. The Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) pulled out of BJP-led Assam government. All Chief Ministers in the region,

including BJP CM of Manipur have opposed the bill. The Nationalist People's Party (NPP) in Meghalaya and other alliance partners of the BJP in other states of the North East are seriously considering parting ways with the NDA. Many BJP MLAs in the region have either written or spoken to the Prime Minister/Home Minister to withdraw or modify the Bill to avoid confrontation.

The passage of the Bill in the Lok Sabha and the subsequent massive protests in the seven states has brought North East into the limelight. The national media have focussed their lens on the fragile and complex region, a home to more than hundred major tribes and many more sub-tribes, who except for their tribal features, are distinct and different from one another. Discussions on national televisions are held on prime time for which besides the big-mouthed politicians, lawyers and constitutional experts are part of the panels. Hence by default, the Bill has helped the rest of India to understand this neglected and alienated region better.

These prominent personalities referred to clearly state that the CAB is both communal and unconstitutional. It seeks to grant citizenship on the basis of religion and the countries they come from whereas the Indian Constitution is secular. Part II of the Constitution of India, 1950 and the Citizenship Act, 1955 have only birth, descent, registration, naturalization and incorporation of the territory as methods for gaining Indian citizenship. Religion and previous domicile of the persons do not come into picture at all. The Bill will overturn the Constitution by granting citizenship to persons of certain religions from certain countries. This is not just against equality for all articulated in article 14 of the Constitution but is against international democratic norms. The world might be laughing at the 'largest democracy' in the world.

The controversial and contentious Bill is anti-Assam, anti-North East, anti-tribal and anti-minority as some have termed it. It is so because it is Assam and the North Eastern states that will be adversely impacted by the proposed law, for the simple reason that North East has a 1,596 kilometre long porous border with the erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The region, connected to the mainland by the 21 to 40 kilometres

wide Siliguri Corridor will bear the brunt. These states are inhabited by various indigenous tribals who are a minorities compared with the population of India. Hence the makers of the Indian Constitutions made special provisions for protection of the survival of their identity, language, culture, customs, land, forests under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. If CAB becomes a law, the Sixth Schedule will quickly be dismantled and the wisdom and genius of the fathers of the Constitution will be replaced by idiocy and stupidity of right wing BJP members and their mentors like the RSS and others.

The fear of the people of the North East is not imaginary. It is very genuine. Tripura is a glaring example. The tribal state has become a non-tribal state. The tribals are now only 31 per cent of the total population. Tribals have become a minority in their own land. They have lost their political and economic power to the 'immigrants' from across the border. The Chief Minister of Tripura is a non-tribal. Tribals have little voice. They are even looked down and frowned upon. Protests are brutally put down. The recent firing at protesters in Tripura is one such one incident. No state in the North East wants to be another Tripura.

According to rough calculation Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Christians population in Bangladesh number around 15 million (Hindus alone are 14 millions). Now, just think about the following foreseeable situation. Leaving out Assam the average population in the other states in North East is just 2 million. If one million or even half a million from the neighbouring country come and settle in each of the six states as Indian citizens in the next 5 years, the demography will change rapidly. The political, economic and even social equations too will be significantly altered!

The BJP has for long been vehemently accusing the Congress of playing vote bank politics and indulging in minority appeasement. Today the 39 year old ultranationalist party that grew from two members in Lok Sabha in 1984 to 282 in 2014 and rides on the Hindutva ideology is playing the worst kind of vote bank politics and majority appeasement. The Bill was hurriedly brought from nowhere with an eye on this year's general elections. After the blunder of demonetisation that resulted in impoverishing

ordinary citizens and loss of at least 1.5 million jobs, the haphazard implementation of GST, the broken promises of bringing black money from abroad to be distributed to all poor households and the recent loss in assembly elections in the Hindi heartland, the fast diminishing popularity of PM Modi has forced the BJP to pass the Bill in the Lok Sabha that favours foreigners over citizens.

Prima facie the Bill is a conspiracy by the RSS and the BJP to turn North East into a Hindu majority region to ultimately fulfil their plan of converting India into a Hindu state. It might be a long term strategy of the right wing groups to enable the BJP to get a clear majority in the legislative assemblies of these states and thus realising their dreams of seeing the BJP rule all the states in the North East.

Regional political parties need to take a stronger stand against the Bill. BJP governments or those in alliance with the BJP in all states need to firmly protest including resignation and pulling out of the NDA to convey a clear message. So far this not has happened. Even BJP MLAs and MPs from the region need to make their protests louder. Letters to the central leadership might not be sufficient to convince the powerful men in Delhi to put the Bill in abeyance.

The argument that the central government will ensure that the whole country will share the burden of accommodating the immigrants is an eyewash. As stated by many it is obvious Bangladeshis won't travel to Gujarat, Maharashtra, UP etc. The government won't physically force them into trains and buses out of the North East. It is convenient for them to settle in one of the North Eastern states. The North East will have to be a dumping ground and the legal or illegal immigrants will sooner than later outnumber the local population, ultimately rendering the provisions under the Six Schedule meaningless and the powers of the district councils of no value. Even state governments will be dominated by the population from the adjoining country, just like Tripura. The uniqueness of North East India will be gravely endangered.

After widespread protests some signs are visible towards cancelling the Bill or at least amending it significantly not to affect the North East. The Union Home Minister has conveyed that he will meet the Chief Ministers from the region. Hope better sense prevails and the North East is not handed over to foreigners.

# Is this the promise of Acche Din?

By Aiborlang Nongsiej

The eve of the New Year 2019 brought lots of joy and happiness to all people. In fact, they greet each other with smiling faces and expect the New Year to be a good and prosperous year. However, January 8 of 2019 turned to be the worse beginning for the people of Northeast India with the Citizenship Bill 2016 being passed in the Lok Sabha. The Bill seeks to provide Indian Citizenship to the Non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since then, different organizations in Northeast India have held protests against this Bill and it continues to date. Therefore, being a citizen from Northeast India I just want to ask the NDA led BJP government, if this Bill is going to bring Acche Din or to destroy the nation, particularly the people of Northeast India? In the past few days we have seen different organizations of Northeast India protesting against the Bill by way of protests being held in different states. Unfortunately many people are seriously injured and even hospitalized because they are against the passing of the Bill by the central government. The Government of Tripura ordered a Lathi charge against the protestors.

The Citizenship Bill is Passed by the leadership of the NDA led BJP government, yet ironically few BJP leaders of Northeast India have stood with the people to protest against the Bill. Several local news channels and newspapers reported that even BJP Chief Ministers such as N Biren Singh of Manipur, Sarbananda Sonowal of Assam and BJP leaders of Meghalaya such as Shaun Lyngdoh, A.L. Hek and Sanbor Shullai are also against the Bill. In fact, some of them even threatened to quit the party if such a Bill is enacted. However, the question that arises is whether this is a genuine protest against the Bill by BJP members of Northeast or is it because of the next general election that is knocking at our door?

Let us not forget the promise of Acche Din by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his election campaign in 2014. Till date that promise has not been fulfilled. Of course, there are lots of changes brought about by the leadership of Narendra Modi. Unfortunately these changes are only stumbling blocks for the common people of India. Demonetization which seeks to bring back the black money from different banks outside India had no effect on the rich, while the ordinary people were struggling, especially the illiterate and the people from rural areas who have no contact with the bank. I have heard that several people took advantage and exchanged money with some illiterate people from the rural areas that had no access to the banks and they exchanged the money with the value of 500 and 1000 denominations. Again the implementation of GST is of no gain to the ordinary people except the rise in prices of commodities in the market which again affected the common people. Hence, the next general election is coming soon and I do not know when the promise of Acche Din promised by the Prime Minister will be fulfilled.

The Citizenship Bill is very much against the people of Northeast India, particularly the tribals and it is because of this that many organizations like the North East Student's Organization (NESO) held a protest across the Northeast. As far

as my knowledge is concerned the Bill is going to destroy the people of Northeast India. Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Assam share long borders with Bangladesh and therefore the implementation of this Bill will affect the people of these four states of Northeast India. Hence, I wonder how the BJP-led NDA government could think of such a Bill when India is already suffering from unemployment, over-population, lack of nutrition, poor in health facilities, and illiteracy in most of the states of India particularly the Northeast region which is neglected by the Centre. Personally, I am afraid that militancy may again rise up in Northeast India if the Bill is enacted as threatened by the Confederation of Hynniewtrep Social Organisations (CoHSO) (ST January 16, 2019). I wonder if this is the Acche Din promised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The rescue operation at Ksan East Jaintia Hills, in which 15 miners are trapped inside the rat-hole for more than a month, shows no positive signs of tracing the bodies inside the rat-holes, in spite of using different technologies by the operators. This reveals the capacity of Indian technology. The news about the miners trapped at Ksan is being reported globally by different news channels of the world and sad to say that the whole world also came to know how poorly equipped India is to undertake rescue operations. With this rate of development, how can a country accommodate more non-citizens from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan? When Donald Trump campaigned for his Presidential election in America, he promised the people to build a wall to prevent migrants from Mexico to America, while our Narendra Modi Government seeks to grant Indian citizenship to the aliens from three countries. This shows how foolish we are in spite of India being the country with the second largest population in the world and burdened with economic problems. Does Acche Din, also mean that people are forced to rise up in rebellion?

Every day read of this burning issue in the newspapers and I believe that it is a threat to the Northeastern region. Hence people of the region are against this Bill. It is very unfortunate that the BJP led NDA Government passed this Bill at the end of their tenure before the next general election that is coming soon. I do not know what the intention for passing this Bill is. But what I know is that they have promised Acche Din to the people residing in the Indian Territory who voted them to power during the last general election and not to the Non-Muslims of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is very unfortunate to see my own people from northeast protesting against the Bill while the central government pays no attention to the protests. In fact the Lok Sabha where the BJP is a majority passed this Citizenship Bill in spite of the protest in the Northeast on that particular day. Now we see that the central government pays no attention to the sentiments and emotions of the people of Northeast India.

Prime Minister Modi must be reminded that the promise of Acche Din by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to the citizens of India and not to the citizens of our neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

## TO THE EDITOR

### A bridge too far

Editor,  
The sole lifeline between the villages along the international border with Bangladesh and those on the Indian side is the Dawki Bridge that sits on NH 40 bridging East Khasi Hills and West Jaintia Hills. Villagers have to undergo many hardships while passing between Dawki and Wakhdaid due to the irresponsible behaviour of truck drivers and tourist vehicles of all sizes and shapes that park haphazardly and block the highway. The continuous heavy vehicular movement on the Dawki Bridge will one day lead to a human disaster which can be foreseen by any discerning observer. It is urged that the SDO PWD of

NH 40 Division and SDO Civil of Amlarem and Pynursla take initiatives at the earliest to regulate this traffic and also to strengthen the bridge and not wait for an accident to occur which may lead to loss of precious human lives.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic S.Wankhar  
Shillong-3

### NEIGRIHMS on a downslide and no one cares

Editor,  
A news video of the inauguration of the 1000-bedded multi-specialty hospital in Sikkim has gone viral. Constructed at a cost

of Rs 475 crore the hospital which is another version of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Delhi will provide free treatment for dialysis and cancer. It will start functioning from February 1, 2019. Compare this initiative to what is happening in Meghalaya where the premier medical institute NEIGRIHMS is in the news everyday for the wrong reasons. From outsourcing the Paediatrics and other departments to reduction in the number of operations conducted due to want of anaesthesiologist etc. We wonder if this is the death knell for NEIGRIHMS and the present director has been sent here to finish it off. Is this some kind of mainland conspiracy by

the present NDA Government which has filled all institutions with its hand-picked people?

Now it is learnt that Dr Jyoti Prasad Kalita, MBBS, MS Mch with expertise in cardiothoracic and vascular surgery, has submitted his resignation due to internal problems but essentially for not seeing eye to eye with the Director. This will be a great blow to the Department of Cardiology. While in Sikkim, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling called upon people to take ownership of the hospital and not to encroach so that the roads leading to the hospital will be bigger and more well planned.

Meghalaya should have taken ownership of NEIGRIHMS and the Government should take a

pro-active part in ensuring that an AIIMS like institution functions to the optimum and improves with each passing year. But the state governments of Meghalaya have done very little to check and balance the NEIGRIHMS. The Government of Meghalaya is allowing this Institution to degenerate to a point where a comeback would be impossible. Today we witness a systematic attempt to destroy NEIGRIHMS brick by brick. If these are the kind of people posted to head an institution in the sensitive North East then it shows that the central government is not sensitive to the special needs of the region. Could it be because this

health institute is named after Indira Gandhi a Congress leader? If that is so then it is really sad and perhaps we should think of removing the name of the lady. It is not good to add the names of any political leaders to any institution.

Despite the several complaints in newspapers about the poor functioning of NEIGRIHMS no action has been taken by the Centre. We in Meghalaya are the biggest losers by this slow death of NEIGRIHMS.

Yours etc.,  
NG Marwein,  
Via email

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

# A life less ordinary



**British doctor Jack Preger retires after 40 years of service to Kolkata's poorest in the streets & slums**

**F**orty years after he first opened his medical bag and started treating the poorest of the poor on the pavements of Kolkata, Dr Jack Preger has decided to retire.

Now aged 88 he is keen to return to the UK, and in mid-January he will leave behind the city where he has lived and worked for four decades.

In that time Dr Jack has helped more than 500,000 people and set up an award-winning charity, Calcutta Rescue. It provides medical treatment and education for people living in some of the city's most deprived slums.

Dr Jack has frequently been compared to Mother Teresa in terms of his total commitment to the poor and the impact he has had on the destitute in Kolkata. However, his approach was very different and he has received far less recognition for his extraordinary achievements.

In his final act as Chairperson of Calcutta Rescue, Dr Jack was given the honour of unveiling a foundation stone at the site of the charity's new education centre in North Kolkata. A fundraising campaign is underway to renovate the old building which, when open, will support around 350 children from nearby slums.

The British doctor is widely regarded as the grandfather of street medicine, and helped pioneer many of the practices now used to treat the poor around the globe.

This includes work on tuberculosis, leprosy and Aids – for many years his charity was the only place in Kolkata where people could get free HIV drugs.

Despite his age and failing eyesight, Dr Jack has continued to play an important role in guiding Calcutta Rescue. He frequently visited the clinics, where he used his wisdom and huge experience to ensure patients received the best possible care.

Dr Jack said he had great confidence in the charity's Chief Executive, Jaydeep

Chakraborty, and the management team, and appealed for people to continue to support the charity after his departure.

Dr Jack added: "I'd like to say thank you to all of the staff for making Calcutta Rescue what it is. Many have spent most of their working lives with us. I hope that tradition of kindness and respect for all those who are in our care, whether it be the children we educate, our staff or our patients, is there for as long as this organisation continues. I very much hope it will continue for many more years to come."

Chakraborty said: "Dr Jack has selflessly and quietly gone about his work of serving some of the poorest citizens in the world. Those of us who work with him have seen the manner in which he has done it and the things he has given up – he leads an almost monastic existence.

"He is one in 10 million. We are never going to have another Dr Jack. But we have Calcutta Rescue, the organisation he founded. What he has created for the people of Kolkata and West Bengal is immense, and those people still need Calcutta Rescue's help."

Born in Manchester in 1930, Jack Preger studied at Oxford University before becoming a farmer in Wales.

He ran a remote cliff-side farm near Cardigan for eight years. But, whilst driving his tractor there one day in 1964, a mysterious voice told him to

become a doctor – prompting him to sell the farm and start a degree in medicine at the age of 35.

Following a radio appeal, he went out to the newly-formed Bangladesh where he established a 90-bed clinic for war refugees and two farms where they could live and work.

But he was deported in 1979 after exposing a child-smuggling ring.

He moved to Kolkata, where he began providing free medical care to some of the multitudes living on the streets in abject poverty.

Alone at first, and with very little money, he opened his medical bag and started treating patients on the pavement under a flyover.

Over time Western travellers saw the

vital work he was doing and stopped to offer money and help.

He faced repeated challenges, from crime bosses to hostile bureaucrats who forced him to fight repeated legal battles to continue his life-saving work, which even led to him being jailed at one point. But, with support from people in Kolkata and around the world, including Sir Edmund Hillary who conquered Everest, he persevered and finally managed to establish Calcutta Rescue as an Indian-registered charity.

In 1993 Dr Jack was made a Member of the British Empire for his "continued perseverance and incredible selflessness".

In 2017 he became the first living non-Asian to win an Asian Award when he was named Philanthropist of the Year.

In August 2018 he was inducted into The Telegraph newspaper's coveted Education Foundation Hall of Fame. (IBNS-TWF)

Photos: Alan Joan Costa



# Animals too show laterality trait

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi

**W**e humans have always considered ourselves different from every other species on Earth. But as time goes on, scientists repeatedly show that the traits we consider unique and based on a superior intelligence are also found in most animals.

One of these is the trait of laterality. The term laterality refers to the primary use of the left or right hemispheres of the brain. The two halves of the animal brain are not exactly alike. The left hemisphere controls the right side of the body and the right controls the left side.

Most people are right handed because it is thought that the left hemisphere makes the right side stronger. Also, in 90-92 per cent of all humans, the left hemisphere controls language.

Are animals any different?

Despite the varied structures of animal brains, many mammals, birds, fish and invertebrates have the same trait of laterality. Many animals use their left eye and left ear (indicating right brain activation) more often than the right ones when investigating objects that are potentially frightening.

Left-handed people are more vulnerable to stress as are left pawed dogs and many other animals. Right-handed animals have better immunity.

A 1987 study by leading animal behaviour scientists, Mac-

Neilage, Studdert-Kennedy and Lindblom, showed that macaque monkeys have a left-hand preference. For primates, a left-hand preference was observed for visually guided reaching movements and a right-hand preference for manipulating objects.

In prosimians (non-ape primates like bush-babies, lemurs, etc), the right hand is used for major tasks, like grasping a branch after a leap, and the left is used for quick small movements, like catching insects.

Young horses prefer breathing with their right nostrils. Horses with a higher emotional content prefer looking with their left eye! Recent research in Applied Animal Behaviour Science, though, showed that about 53 per cent of horses prefer to lead with the right leg.

Dogs prefer one paw to another – except when they are frightened by noise (Bransonn and Rogers, 2006). Trainers of guide dogs, in fact, test them for laterality, as the dog may be better at walking to the left, or the right, of their blind owner.

Cattle prefer viewing new things with their left eye (as do magpies, chicks, toads and fish) and familiar things with their right eye. Bats show a left-hand bias for climbing or grasping.

Kangaroos use their left hand for things that require fine manipulation, but the right hand for behaviour that requires physical strength.



Most parrots favour one foot when grasping objects, usually the left.

The Zebra finch male views the female with his right eye when courting her (Workman & Andrew, 1986). Emei Music frogs listen to positive signals (like a mating call) with their right ear and with their left negative signals.

The presence of laterality in the brains of birds is particularly interesting, as humans had al-

ways believed that it could only be possible if there was a corpus callosum in the brain. Avian brains do not have a corpus callosum at all, but still display laterality.

In fact, there is similarity between the avian and human brain when it comes to laterality. The songs of the song-bird species is also controlled by the left hemisphere. There is also similarity in the syntax of bird songs and human languages. Birds go one better, however, as the brains of birds have both hemispheres working to control singing/language, while humans only possess this ability in one hemisphere.

In the same way, as we humans can open a door with either hand equally, yet struggle to write legibly with our non-dominant hand, complexity of the task appears to be an important factor in the handedness of animals. Animals that do activities requiring significant levels of dexterity, show evidence of a preferred "handedness".

Italian researchers, Quaranta, Siniscalchi and Vallortigara, found that dogs wag their tails to the right when they see positive stimuli which they want to approach, and they wag to the left when confronted with something they would like to avoid.

There is some evidence to suggest that dogs and cats can be right- or left-pawed, although the ratio seems to be more even-

ly split than in humans. In one study 46 per cent of cats used only the right paw in reaching for food, 44 per cent the left, and 10 per cent were ambilateral.

"There is some suggestion that limb preference might be a useful indicator of vulnerability to stress. Ambilateral animals with no preference for one side or the other, and those that are more inclined to left-limb dominance, for example, seem more flighty and susceptible to poor welfare than those who lean more heavily towards right limb use," says Dr Wells of Queen's University, Belfast. She adds: "We have discovered that left-limbed dogs, for example, are more pessimistic in their outlook than right-limbed dogs. From a pet owner's perspective, it might be useful to know if an animal is left or right limb dominant, as it may help them gauge how vulnerable that individual is to stressful situations."

Determining which side of the brain dominates the other could change the way domestic animals are bred, raised, and used, including predicting which puppies will make the best service dogs, and which racehorses will race better on left or right curving tracks. So, another myth of man's superiority bites the dust.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)

# Keeping fit not difficult

**T**o workout or not to work out — you must be thinking how to proceed when you have already made a pledge to yourself to keep healthy.

First of all it should not even be a question. It's an obvious choice for the various health and mental benefits which are attached to it. In today's sedentary lifestyle, unwanted stress, use of pesticides and adulteration in various food and drinks make it imperative to work out as it is the best solution to overcome most illnesses.

Workout has major cardiovascular benefits which keep our heart healthy and it's one of the biggest stress busters because when we exercise our body releases Endorphins, or happy hormone. It keeps us positive and it's also proven to be one of the best ways to fight depression.

Working out is the best way to lose weight. It also increases energy level. It has been scientifically proven that people who stay fit are more productive than those who don't. It gives you better skin and hair too. Working out is essential for your brain health as it reduces your chances of various illnesses like Alzheimer's disease and brain strokes. Also one of the most important reasons to workout is to fight cardiovascular diseases. It helps maintain good cholesterol levels, and also reduces the chance of a wide range of health problems including stroke, type-2 diabetes, types of cancer, arthritis, etc. It strengthens your lungs, reduces blood sugar levels and regulates blood pressure.

There is a famous quote that says, "If you think health is expensive, try illness". It is proven that a healthy person who works out will spend only a fraction of his/her money on gyms, trainers, diet, then on doctors and hospitals alone, besides the mental trauma that comes along (the choice is yours).

Gyms are also great places to socialise and make new friends and open up new avenues for your business or work as you meet like-minded people. It also has benefits as it reduces the urge to drink alcohol, chew tobacco and smoke.

Now let's come back to the other part of our lives. Working out improves your testosterone levels, a healthy person with optimal testosterone levels will easily combat depression, have better muscle mass, better sexual activity, improved libido, improved mood and wellbeing and it helps men with erectile dysfunction.

It is also beneficial for people suffering from thyroid as it keeps it in check, regular exercising helps reduce high levels of uric acid. That is why it is essential to include exercising in your daily lives. It cannot be an option but a routine just like eating, sleeping or watching TV.

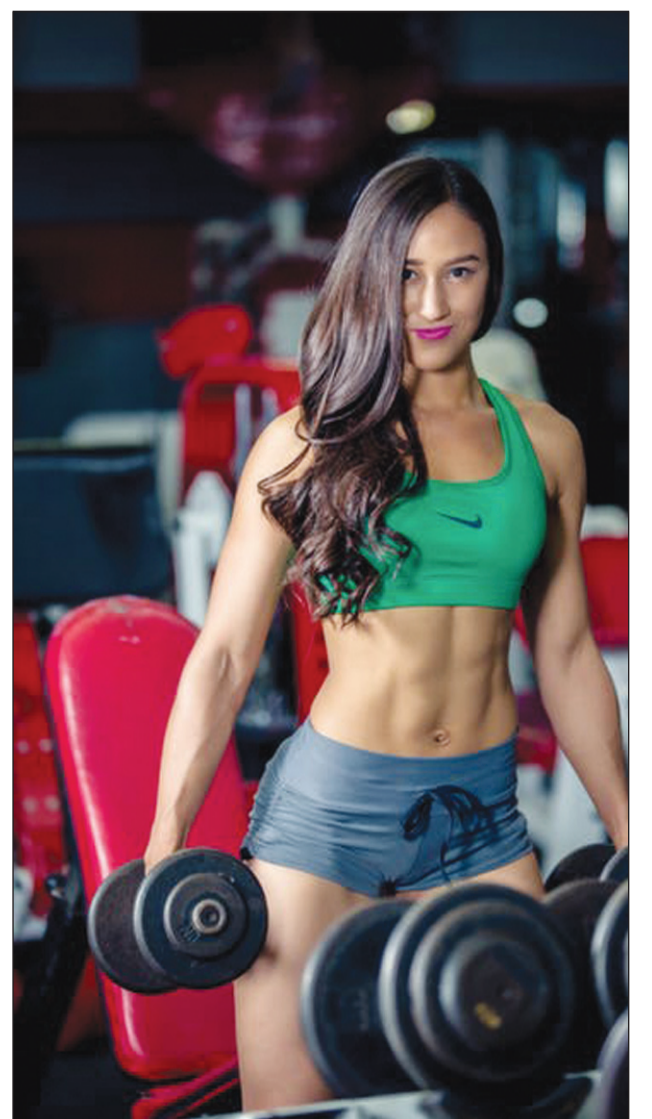
You have to dedicate an hour of your day 4-5 times a week to stay fit and healthy and it is not just walking or jogging alone as your body needs to maintain good muscle mass, cardiovascular and core strength all together so you must incorporate even lifting weights, cardio exercises, Yoga, Zumba, Aerobics, Circuit Training, kick boxing in your daily routine and it's advisable for all ages from the young to the elderly as age is just a number, it's all in the mind.

One can also run or walk briskly every morning and breath in the fresh air. That is the best way to shed that extra flab.

But if you want a regimented workout timing, then make sure the gym has facilities, dieticians and trainers. When you are starting you need proper guidance as like everything else you need to learn initially. Do not see what others are doing and try to mimic them.

This New Year 2019 make a difference to your life and you will see how it changes you as an individual and makes you a positive person. So start now and at the end of the year ask yourself the question that matters, "Was it worth it?"

(The article has been contributed)



Peel

# What is creativity

**Sadhguru, Isha Foundation**



There is really no such thing as creativity. Everything that human beings have created is only an imitation and modification of what is already there. It doesn't matter what kind of machine you create, still, the finest mechanical and electronic systems and the most complex chemical factories are there in your body. Or, if you look at creativity in terms of art, everything that you do is just a small imitation of nature. Though all of us receive the same impressions, someone may assimilate them in a certain way but all creativity is just an imitation of the larger creation. If you are a great imitator, we call you a great artist. It is not that it is of no value, but it is not springing from you. It is something that reflects out of you. If you are just receptive to life, if you become a reflection of life rather than becoming a mind and a jumble of thoughts, this is what is generally considered as creativity.

If you want to be creative in any field, all you have to do is observe in the deepest possible way. If you develop a sense of observing every little thing that is happening around, it brings enormous vision as to what you can do with everything. Creativity need not necessarily mean that you invented something fantastic. Someone can be creative about how they sweep the floor. If you develop the means to truly observe what is happening within you on all levels of who you are, then you would be enormously creative. But even if you just observe what is happening around you constantly, you will see there is always a way to do the same thing in a more innovative way.

So if creativity has to happen, we have to develop a certain level of un-distortedness in the mind. If you carry the baggage of life with you all the time, you cannot see anything the way it is. In yoga, we always describe the mind as a mirror. A mirror is useful to you only if it is clean and plain. If it is undulating or has accumulated something, it does not show you things as they are. The nature of a mirror is such that if you stand before it, it carries you in full glory. If you leave, the mirror leaves you 100%. It will not retain even a little residue of who you are. The next person who comes and stands in front of the mirror is also reflected in full glory. If a million people look at themselves in a mirror, they will not leave an iota of their quality in the mirror. If you can keep your mind in such a way that the exposure to life does not leave any residue on your mind, then you see things just the way they are. Then there is room to innovate and create every aspect of your life.

With my own life, I am supposed to be a spiritual teacher but if someone wants to build a building, they come to me. If someone wants to arrange flowers, they come to me. If they want to stitch clothes, they come to me not because I have knowledge about these things in any big way. It is simply because I see everything the way it is and when you see everything the way it is, how you want it to be becomes very simple. You develop a certain level of involvement.

If you don't make any distinction as to what is important and not important or what you like and don't like, you see everything just the way it is. But the moment you decide what is mine and not mine and what is important and not important, how will you get involved with that which you think is not yours. Where there is no involvement, nothing functions well. When you are deeply involved with everything that you are in touch with right now, only then do you see everything clearly, the way it needs to be seen. When you see things like this, it is very easy to create anything because it is just a question of what material you have in your hands and how to put it together.

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

**If you want to be creative, you have to observe in the deepest possible way**

# 'After Love Sonia I despised male touch'

**Mrunal Thakur, who became popular in living rooms as 'Bulbul', made her Bollywood debut with Love Sonia, which is a film on how women are trafficked and employed as sex workers, in 2018. Souvik Ghosh catches up with the 26-year old actress was recently in Kolkata for the special screening of her first film.**

**Tell us how traumatic was it to enact the role of a sex workers or a survivor in Love Sonia?**

It was traumatic for the girls. For me, it was just 'action and cut'. (In the film) I was living their life which was difficult but imagine there were so many girls who get sold and raped in each and every second. The thought itself gives me so much trauma that I despised male touch but the fact is that through this film, one can become a voice of so many voiceless (girls). I am glad their lives may get changed through my acting and profession (due to the film).

**Was there any point of time in the course of shooting when you felt like withdrawing yourself from the role due to the trauma?**

There was one scene in particular. In the Hong Kong scene (scene shot in Hong Kong) where the girl (Mrunal's character) gets raped or sold for the first time. That scene was very difficult for me. While shooting the scene, I felt disgusting to have an older man on top of me because he looked like my grandfather. So I still remember standing under a shower with a feeling of disgust. The next scene was when the girl gets stitched (surgery of hymen). This is a fact that girls, after they are raped for the first time, get stitched so they can be resold as a virgin for the second time. So these two scenes were like really heartbreaking for me.

**Taking the women issue further, I would like to talk about the #Me-Too movement, which had overwhelmed Bollywood last year. Recently, actress Rani Mukerji said all girls should immediately fight back by either slapping the man or kicking him in between legs. How do you respond to that being a newcomer to the film industry?**

See the background that Rani Mukerji



**While shooting, I felt disgusting to have an older man on top of me because he looked like my grandfather. So I still remember standing under a shower with a feeling of disgust**

to happen in our industry. There are a lot of girls who have been tricked, manipulated by the industry (people belonging to the industry) saying that they will instantly give the girls fame, recognition, money but nothing takes place. I want to tell women, not only in Bollywood or television but also in multinational companies and government jobs, not to compromise because that makes other women in the line go through the same thing. We need to stop and change (this scenario). So when it comes to #MeToo, everybody has his opinion but I feel whoever is guilty should be punished irrespective of his identity.

**You are presently working for Super 30 and Batla House. After having an outstanding Bollywood debut with Love Sonia in 2018, do you feel the pressure of picking and choosing roles?**

No, there is no pressure. In fact I feel 2018 was like my achiever year. I have achieved last year but whether I have failed or passed, it would only come out in 2019. There is no pressure because I don't want to prove to anyone. Acting for me is passion. After Love Sonia, I was just sitting at home, washing my laundry and still happy. Now I am doing the other projects which make me happy. So acting is my happiness. So I will only do projects which make me happy because there is no point working on a project which doesn't make one happy, right? (smiles)

**You were associated with television for a long time. How films are different from the small screens?**

Deadlines. In television, we have deadlines. In small screens, we have to give 23-minute footage in around 12 hours. Whatever one shoots, the entire thing goes on air on the same day. There are no retakes and they are very quick. In films, it is easy and has a lot of time for research on a particular character. In television, it doesn't happen as one lives the character for few years. But working in television has helped me because it is like a newspaper. I kept feeding (on television). It was like lessons for me. I kept learning things like camera angles, direction, make up and also how to wear microphone. I have already dealt with all sorts of pressures while working for television. So I am happy to have started my career with small screens. (IBNS-TWF)

Images: Mrunal Thakur's Facebook

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JANUARY 13 2019

Moon conjunct Mars on your solar return chart indicates a mixed year. People who are calm and patient will not see much problems, but people who are very ambitious need to watch out as their work may not materialize at the last moment. So, do not do anything big in haste. Even if you don't have work, then don't worry as the situation will be the same until the middle of the year. There will be some opportunities for change, but don't do it until the middle of the year. After year mid, you can do so without hesitation as it will bring you success.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

You participate in conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about your views this week. This is an excellent time to make some financial investments and adopt new strategies in financial matters. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation business associates. You move on the path of success and betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Students of Computer Hardware and Engineering achieve better results now. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

Your work status may change for the better. There could be a promotion or new job opportunity that enables you to come into the limelight in a positive way. Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. Integrity and honesty will take you places now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities that come your way.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

Your self-confidence gets a boost and you meet difficult tasks and resolve work-related issues confidently. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You would admire and adopt new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. You put in a lot of efforts and then find this has been establishing strong professional base and this brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is good time to organize your workplace and make it more modernized and equipped with good infrastructure. This would help you to get a better perspective to achieve desired goals. Also, circumstances or your own reserve may prevent you from openly declaring or expressing your feelings. Avoid being lazy and laid back as temporary gain or success in business needs to be followed up with hard work and dedication.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider society is possible during this week. You adopt new styles and spend on luxury items. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasure and romance during this week. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. You would maintain balance of the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. You turn things around in business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. Monetary transaction brings gains in property related issues. An overseas or long distance journey with includes pilgrimage is on the cards. You maintain a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

Your creativity will assist in your output at work and help you undertake new assignments. You may especially enjoy experiencing different cultures and ethnic styles. Your ideals are higher than usual, teaching may be part of the picture, and your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background than you indicated this week. Students in journalism, law, management and related fields attain success and good results. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

Your professional skills wisdom and craft is appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively from now onwards. This time takes some kind of pressure on professional and personal aspects. You may begin to take on more responsibilities on

the job. Your job could become rather tedious or boring, or working conditions may be frustrating. You may have to draw some boundaries with friends and the demands of others.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

You would be emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You manage to communicate with moody and angry people with a sensitive approach and gentle manner. You would combine your inner and outer strengths to achieve success and happiness. Sometimes you would protest against domination by people at work. You may have to face egotistic people. Some associations would be competitive in business but you shine and work well in your field of activity. There would be some changes in your social circle, and you meet new and unusual people. Your hobbies, moments spent with family, all come into focus. Some lifestyle changes made by you begin to show results.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

New associations and beginnings in work areas as some unknown opportunities and changes may come. You would improve your romantic and love life by bringing more sincerity, cooperation and humanity as unusual attractions and dreams could feature this time. You may explore new infrastructure and improve office as this brings more efficiency and continuity on your work. Family members would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled in this phase. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

This period brings excellent opportunities for people in show business and related fields. You would work more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You have been more determined and hard-working and this brings fulfillment of all desires particularly on your personal and domestic life. Your personal charm and attractiveness would have a positive effect on your relationships. People see you as a loving and lovable person, and as someone who is aware of their needs and feelings, which can benefit you at this time. Others are willing to help and cooperate with your goals and ambitions. It would be better to go for long term investments and speculations for financial gains.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

A new work opportunity can change the way you work and relate with people professionally. You are bold and adventurous and you cannot tolerate delay that prevents you from behaving exactly you want. How willing you're prepared to experiment and explore new approaches will determine your success this time. You would achieve a lot in business and professional aspects by combining creativity and practicality. You play the role of the senior in the family and personal situations by taking on extra responsibility and giving direction. You can expect superiors to support you and stand up for you in tough situations at work. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. You will be considerably more proactive, healthy, and focused.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

The planetary configuration brings more stability in relations and professional life. You have a tendency to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach while dealing with people at work and home. You give a new method to communications, projects, learning and self-expression. You may be especially focused on pleasing your family and fond of the life of the home and family. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to display a whole lot of self-discipline. You would work in association with senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at the work place, which boosts your confidence. You use your best talents and co-relate all activities to boost the business and work opportunities. Make changes to your fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

This phase brings excellent work opportunities for people in teaching, hotel, finance and in communication fields. People in marketing and sales would work hard to meet professional commitments. You would impress people from your communication skills as this brings positive results in matters related to love, family and professional relations. You would express yourself with charm and grace, whether it's through what you say or you write. Health remains good during this period. Excellent professional opportunities await those students who have completed their education in fine arts, drama, music and finance. Your romantic affair would give a big boost of confidence, and personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated and admired. Spending time in solitude among natural surroundings will be therapeutic.

comes from is different from mine. The background from which girls of Kolkata come is again not the same. In a way, Rani Mukerji is right because she was standing by wearing her own shoes. We need to understand the situation around the globe.

It is easy to lecture what could have been done. But until and unless, one wears the shoes of that person (victim), he doesn't understand the specific situation. Talking about #MeToo, I am glad that it has happened. It was very necessary to have something like this

## CA not the only option

By Ranjan K Baruah

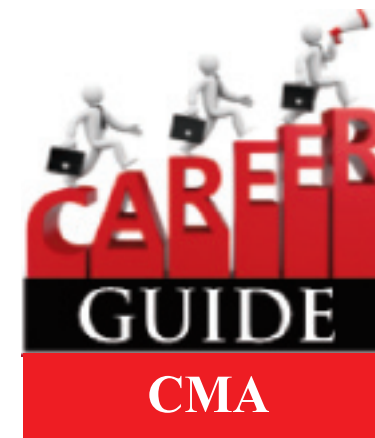
Whenever we talk about career in commerce then the first word that comes to our mind is 'Chartered Accountant' or shortly known as CA. Apart from CA, other courses include company secretary or popularly known as CS. There are many other similar courses and one of them is known as CMA or Cost and Management Accountancy that is imparted and managed by the Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICAI).

Any student after passing Class X exam may take admission in the institute but to appear in the exam of foundation course, students must pass Class XII. There are direct admissions for graduates except from fine arts. After the foundation course, aspirants reach intermediate course and then they have to appear for the final exam.

In the process students have to complete soft skills and communication training and computer training. Before appearing for the final exam and to complete the stage, other training and exposure are needed which are mentioned in the course details of ICAI. After finishing the course, aspirants enrol as members with the institute to practise the same in the country.

With the increase of trade and commerce and globalisation, CMA brings opportunities for students to be employed by others or become self-employed with their expertise and experiences. Maintenance of Cost Records and Cost Audit under The Companies (Cost Records and Audit) Rules, 2014 under section 148 of The Companies Act, 2013 brings opportunities for CMA.

ICAI is a premier professional body of Management Accountants in the country established on May 28, 1959, under the Cost and Works Accountants Act, 1959, enacted by Parliament to regulate the profession of CMA in India. Its objectives are to



develop the cost and management accountancy function as a powerful tool of management control in all spheres of economic activities; to promote and develop the adoption of scientific methods in CMA; to develop the professional body of members and equip them fully to discharge their functions and fulfil the objectives of the institute in the context of providing financial leadership of enterprises globally etc. There are different chapters of this institute in different parts of the country. I have taken inputs from the website of ICAI while compiling this write-up and interested students may visit the

official website for further details.

Updates:

**Volvo Group Scholarship Programme for Master's Students in Business and Economics in Sweden:** The University of Gothenburg is offering a scholarship to the students to pursue a postgraduate degree program. The scholarship programme covers 100 % of the tuition fee for a two-year Master's programme for one student. The purpose of this scholarship is to attract top quality international postgraduate students to the university and to support Sweden's research effort. The scholarship is awarded in the field of International Business and Trade, Accounting and Financial Management, Economics, Finance, Innovation and Industrial, Management, Knowledge-Based Entrepreneurship, Logistics and Transport Management, Marketing and Consumption and Management. Application deadline: February 1, 2019.

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

*"A man's conscience and his judgment is the same thing; and as the judgment, so also the conscience, may be erroneous."*

--- Jean Baudrillard

## The Shillong Times

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### Cars that fly

INNOVATION is the key to a smarter world and a better life. Appreciably, change is the 'mantra' around the world; and most things are set to change sooner than later. What one can do is, simply hold one's breath and wait to see a new world run more by technology, robots etc and less by humans who invented them. News now is cars that can both ride on roads and fly in the air are to be made or marketed in India in another two to three years. Known as Personal Air and Land Vehicle One, and firmed up by a Dutch company, this is set to revolutionise travel in the years ahead. The vehicle has been found to be both air-worthy and road-worthy, a prototype of it having been presented first at the Geneva Motor Show in March last year. The car takes just 10 minutes to convert itself from flying mode to riding style, as had been demonstrated by the PAL-V automobiles firm.

The car can take two in, or a couple for that matter, on a dream journey. It could be a curious tale of them taking off from their home in one city and landing right at their destination in a distant city, or in the middle of a forest, hassle-free. Amphibious automobiles that can be driven on roads and ride on water, alternatively, are already around for the past quarter of a century. Safety is guaranteed. Two global authorities – the US Federal Aviation Administration and the European Aviation Safety Agency have given their clearance for the vehicle's air-worthiness. The vehicle also meets road safety requirements. It promises 160 km speed per hour on road and 180 km while in flying mode. Charting the routes and modalities thereof would need to be worked out once the vehicle sales pick up and reach around the world. This could just be the start, and more motor companies are bound to step in with this new technology in more advanced forms. The fever about driverless cars, electric cars etc is now old story. What's good about this travel is there's no worry over road conditions or traffic congestions. It is a moot point why India with a vehicular population of 23 crore, or China with 35 crore, could not come up with such innovations. There is little to expect when, for instance, India's R and D spend for the past 20 years remained stagnant at about 0.6 per cent, though it registered a three-fold rise.

### LOOKING BACK

June 13, 1989

## IAF Museum among World's Largest

A corridor of history in the capital recreates the glorious era when Indian pilots provided their mettle in their powerful flying machines. The Indian Air Force Museum, located near the Indira Gandhi National Airport, gives a vivid picture of the air force and the strong base on which the present generation Military aviation stands. The museum has a report published during the first World War, saying that Lt Indira Lal Roy, an Indian pilot in the Royal Flying Corps, was responsible for downing nine German planes in 13 days. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross posthumously.

The gallery is the first of its kind in India and one of the biggest in the world. The museum displays a photographic history of the Air Force carrying one back to the times of the World War. Framed photographs of decorated Indian officers of the Second World War line the corridor. Small arms like revolvers, pistols, swords and knives seized from the enemy during the Indo-Pakistan Wars in 1965 and 1971 are reminders of the days when wars were less sophisticated than they are today. The exhibits include uniforms of air force officers of the 1920's and the 1960's.

The gallery also informs

the visitors of the important developments of the modern aviation history. Photographs, mementoes and models of the Indo-Soviet joint manned spaceship-Soyuz T-11 on display. Golden lettered rolls of honour of officers and men who laid down their lives for the country are also on display. The historical photograph showing Lt General Niazi of Pakistan signing the surrender document of the Indo-Pakistan War brings back some proud moments.

Fifteen types of military aircraft that have formed the backbone of the IAF since its inception on October eight, 1932, record the changes that have taken place in Indian military aviation. The Westland Wapiti, the first plane to fly through the Khyber Pass in 1929, Hawker Hurricane, Hawker Tempest and Vickers Spitfire that matched the awesome power of the West German flying machines during World War II, stand majestically in the hanger. The French Toofani, the British Vampire - the first jet acquired by the IAF and the Gnat, the little speedster that created have for the Pakistani Sabre Jets during the 1971 war, rest peacefully in the large hall.

# Ksan is when Mother Nature and the Voiceless speak up

By H H Mohrmen

In the last two months Meghalaya has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. The rat hole mine accident has put the state in the limelight and the people of the state to shame. The story of fifteen miners trapped inside a rat hole mine inundated by water at a place known as Ksan which falls under the Saipung sub division of the East Jaintia hills district is being broadcast far and wide. Unfortunately the news has put the state government and its people in very bad light not only because the mining activity is illegal in the first place, but because of the way it was carried out which shows that the coal business is being run by heartless people who care very little about the safety of the people who work for them.

The incident also brought to light the kind of Disaster Management preparedness that we have in the state. Our disaster response force may be prepared for other kind of disaster but not for the kind we saw unfolding at Ksan. In spite of all the efforts from the SDRF, the NDRF, the team from Indian Navy, the Fire Service from the state of Odisha, the Powerful Water Pump from the Kirloskar Brothers Company and the scientist from the National Institute of Hydrology, Roorkee and the National Geophysical Research Institute of Hyderabad, we are yet to come to the conclusion of how this will end.

The pertinent question that we need to ask ourselves is whether we can allow this dangerous method of mining to continue? Can we allow the existing rat hole mining method, both the box cutting and side cutting which are environmentally hazardous and have no safety mechanism for the miners to continue in the state?

The incident at Ksan also brought to light the fact which the activists have all along tried to expose about the way how coal mining has polluted the surface water in the area. During summers when it rains, water which overflows from the mines carries acid mine drainage (AMD) to the streams and pollutes the rivers nearby and downstream. And at

the outset of every summer before the miners start their mining activities the water from mines is pumped out to the surface which again pollutes the water bodies. This is how the entire water system in the state is polluted when water laced with acid is pumped to the ground.

And now that we know how deep the mine shafts are, we also realise that in this method of mining even underground water in the area is no longer safe for human consumption. Because the main shaft of the mine goes many hundred feet below, many a time it reaches and hits on the underground water before it reaches the coal seams. Hence not even the underground water is spared. This column has time and again tried to expose this truth but it is only the unfortunate incident at Ksan which helped people understand the magnitude of the problem.

The report of the three member fact finding Commission instituted by the NGT to find out about the illegal mining and transportation of coal from Meghalaya despite the ban, also corroborated the charges made by the activists that mining and transportation of coal continues despite the ban. This writer in an article had even called the MDA a Mining Denial Alliance, and lo and behold it is the Ksan tragedy which brought the truth to light. What was not reported was the fact that transport of coal is more profitable to the coal mine owners and traders during the ban. This is one aspect of the transportation of coal that the Commission led by Hon'ble Justice Retired BP Katarky missed in its report.

If one coal challan cost more than Rs 60,000 one can imagine the amount of money that changes hands when coal is transported illegally without having to pay anything to the government. Now the question is who gains from the illegal transportation which has been going on all along? Is it just the Police, the Officials of DMR and the Transport Department? Or are those in the authority also

getting their share from the spoils?

The truth is even during the last few weeks when the Supreme Court allowed transportation of coal; all trucks drivers deliberately overloaded their trucks and happily paid fine for overloading. The complaint is because the cost of challan is more than sixty thousand rupees hence the need for overloading and this happened even at the international port where coal is exported to Bangladesh. The point is that wherever there is coal there is crime; in fact the coal trail is being paved by illicit acts of corruption. Again the pertinent question is who gains from this?

After the complaint filed by the Dimasa Students Union, Assam alleging that illegal coal mining in Meghalaya has polluted river Kupli, the NGT had ordered an interim ban on rat hole mining and transportation of coal from April 17 2014. Impulse NGO also filed a case with NGT against coal mining in the state, but after that NGT allowed transportation of supposedly extracted coal from Meghalaya several times. The other question is who are the people in charge of taking stock and of assessing the so called extracted coal in the first place? It cannot be denied that numbers were exaggerated since the assessment was done. But as a matter of fact in spite of the ban, transport of coal did not stop and mining continues in the mines which are located in the far flung areas like Ksan and Briwar.

Now, on January 4, NGT imposed a of whopping Rs 100 crore fine on the state of Meghalaya for its failure to curb illegal coal mining in the state. The question is why should the state pay the fine? What about those who benefited from the illegal act? For a poor and a debt ridden state like Meghalaya, Rs 100 crore is not a small amount, but why would the government only pay the fine?

Finally the appointment of an Amicus Curie by the Supreme Court of the Country to help the court in the matter is like the

court hearing the voice of those who had lost their lives in the mining. The Amicus Curie together with the Citizen's Charter is also speaking the voice of the voiceless, the voice of the people who live in the villages downstream of Kupli, Lukha, Myntdu or Prang whose waters are not fit for human consumption. We now hope that what is unfolding before our eyes is that the Universe has finally heard the cries of the dead fishes, the turtles and all the aquatic life that coal mining has helped to make extinct.

Ksan is not just the name of a place. In the indigenous religious system we have a saying 'Ksan nia ksan chang' when we bid farewell to the departed souls. In fact there are two common sayings for such situations, 'Chong suk blam kwai ha duar U Blai' and 'Ksan nia ksan chang ia kiwa dang sah cha sla pyrthai.' The first statement is common to both the Khasis and the Pnars but it is the second saying which is unique to the Pnars. 'Ksan nia ksan chang' is to beg the departed souls to plead with the Almighty on behalf of and for the wellbeing of those who are still on Earth.

Ksan is therefore a place from where those who have lost their lives working hard in the mines to eke out a living pleaded ardently for a better future for the state with their Maker. There are miners whose deaths may have been recorded and may also have people who still remember them, but there are many miners whose deaths were not recorded and have nobody to remember them. They may have died since the seventies, the eighties or the two thousands, but Ksan is a place from where their common cry is heard. The Khasi Pnar also believe (ba ka snam kiba iap mynsaw ka shait ud haka por ba ngen u bnai) that the spirits of those who die accidental deaths howls in pain. Let us therefore hope that Ksan is where their blood mourns for one last time and their cries of anguish will be heard. Ksan is from where Mother Earth shouts, "Enough is Enough."

### TO THE EDITOR

## India's healthcare system decrepit

Editor

The temperature for the 2019 Lok Sabha (national parliamentary) election in India is rising and is being felt both within the country and abroad alike as the whole world is waiting to see the final outcome with great interest. While both the ruling coalition and the opposition parties are making heaps of promises none seems to care for improving the poor healthcare infrastructure of the nation. People representing higher economic groups in India can afford to get advanced and quality medical treatments in upstart hospitals and nursing homes in India or abroad.

However, the poor citizens of the nation who represent the bulk of India's 1.2+ billion staggering population are heavily dependent on the existing government healthcare system. For a country of India's size it will never be easy to provide adequate healthcare for every section of the society as yet. India

needs to enhance her revenue generation through proper tax collection, debt recovery from wilful defaulters and corrupt industrialists, renters, feudal lords and politicians and bring more people under the tax brackets to increase the revenue base of the country. India needs to work towards building her financial assets to support a nationwide upgrade of health infrastructure. The task is challenging no doubt; but, not impossible! What is needed is a strong political will and a comprehensive economic and health policy to support India's poor health infrastructure.

Yours etc.,  
Saikat Kumar Basu  
Lethbridge AB Canada

## Playing with the Sixth Schedule

Editor,

The entire MDA cabinet seems to have taken off for Delhi, not so much to protest the Citizen Amendment Bill 2016 but to plead with the Union Government to allow coal

mining to resume by circumventing the laws. In this the Sixth Schedule is being used as the golden key for unlocking the gates for an unregulated mining regime by using archaic methods. One is amazed at the brazenness with which this present government is acting. The trapped miners have yet to be rescued but the focus is already on opening up the mines again. What do we make of this Government? Is it not unscrupulous and as greedy as the miners whose case it is taking up with gusto? Perhaps it is the pressure of delivering on the pre-election promise of the BJP and its partner the NPP to remove the ban on coal mining which is building up now. Or they won't stand a chance in the Lok Sabha elections and also the elections to the District Councils. That must be why this NPP-led Government is so desperate.

What has also come out very clearly after the Ksan mine tragedy episode is the divide in society between those who continue to support rat hole mining and others who oppose it and have opposed it for a

long time. Environmentalists have been red-flagging this issue time and again but to no avail. In fact their lives are at stake for being whistle blowers. Today the Congress which is in the opposition is blaming the MDA Government but they have forgotten how coal was merrily being illegally mined and transported during their rule too. That was how a police constable was killed in Ri Bhoi district. The Congress cannot forget its own acts of omission and commission too quickly. They have to share the blame for allowing illegal mining equally with the MDA. So stop misleading the people of Meghalaya. We are not fools. We see, we feel and we will vote wisely this time. Alas the alternatives in Meghalaya are all tried and tested and none of the political parties regional or national are worth voting for.

Yours etc.,  
SK Lyngdoh,  
Shillong - 4

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

# Rat-hole or death-hole mining?

By Barnes Mawrie

The sad incident at Ksan (East Jaintia Hills) coal mine will remind everyone of the famous incident at Copiapo in Chile in 2010. It was on 5th August 2010 that 33 miners were trapped 2,300 ft below the mine. However on 13th October 2010, after being 69 days underground, they all came out alive, hale and hearty. This was possible because those mines were scientifically done and the miners were not in a rat hole but in big chambers able to move and breathe freely. That is not the case with the mine accident that took place in Ksan in our state. Our poor miners were trapped in a rat hole where there was absolutely no chance of escape. Rat hole mining is both dangerous and undignified. The very name itself is an insult to our human dignity. So for every reason whatsoever, this type of mining should be banned altogether.

In the wake of the fatal accident at Ksan of the 15 miners who are for all practical reasons, dead and buried under the mine, there is all the more reason to declare a moratorium on unscientific mining. Our sincere condolences and

because these miners would have still survived had the above measures been taken. It is clear that there are many moral lapses on the part of the government. Questions are asked today like: why does the government not act in time to save the lives of those miners? Why does it take the Supreme Court to push the government into action? Why is necessary electric power not provided to work the big pumps for the rescue? Why does it take so long for the authorities to get the experts to work on the rescue? And finally of course, why is illegal rat hole mining still allowed in the state and what has the government done about it?

2) The coal mine owners whoever they may be, are totally responsible for the loss of these precious lives. They are guilty of indirect manslaughter because they permitted people to work under such dangerous conditions. No person with a moral conscience would have put persons under such perils. It is evidently an objectification of persons, a preference for money to human lives. Can such people go scot free? Probably with all their

**It is high time that some reforms in our land system be made. It is my opinion that all mining activities should be in the hands of the government and not with private individuals. Mining is such an elaborate activity which involves thousands of persons. Therefore, it is evident that private persons (as it is now) are incapable of handling the safety measures of all the miners. Only the government or big corporates like the Tatas can meet these requirements which are so basic and so ethical. However, there is another way to this.**

sympathy to the families of these ill-fated miners. They are innocent, poor labourers who are made victims of someone's greed. The coal mines owners whoever they may be, should be made to pay heavy compensation for the innocent lives lost.

It is rather perplexing to observe how in spite of the NGT ban on coal mining in Meghalaya, coal is still being clandestinely extracted. This raises a lot of suspicion on the authorities concerned. Where corruption at the top level is rampant like in our state, no ban will work out. The imposition of fine on the government by the NGT seems almost like a joke. Is it going to be implemented or is it just a legal procedure? There are always secret agreements and arrangements between the government authorities and the coal mafia. I would like to bring out some ethical aspects about the latest incident:

1) The government of Meghalaya should be held responsible for its lack of political will in not pressing ahead with the Mining Bill. The implementation of mining laws would have ensured safety measures, scientific mining, safe working conditions, life insurance and of course just remuneration for the miners. However, with everything left in the hands of individual greedy mines owners, no such just measures are made available for the poor miners. They work at the mercy of these bosses who care a hoot for the precious lives of the hoi polloi. The fate of the 15 miners clearly proves this. This is highly unethical

political clout and money power, they will dodge the law and escape punishment. But such people will always be burdened with a sense of guilt throughout their life.

It is high time that some reforms in our land system be made. It is my opinion that all mining activities should be in the hands of the government and not with private individuals. Mining is such an elaborate activity which involves thousands of persons. Therefore, it is evident that private persons (as it is now) are incapable of handling the safety measures of all the miners. Only the government or big corporates like the Tatas can meet these requirements which are so basic and so ethical. However, there is another way to this. The private mine owners could be helped to form themselves into a kind of corporate body and pool their ideas and resources together so as to be able to provide scientific mining of coal and also take care of the safety measures and other needs of the miners and their families.

In the wake of this state tragedy which has embarrassed the government as well as the people of Meghalaya, such steps should be taken soon. The government needs to act resolutely and put a moratorium to rat hole mining in the state and get the Mining Bill passed at the earliest and implement it. It is unethical to play with human lives and as long as these measures are not taken, more lives are in danger.

“A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people.”

--- Mahatma Gandhi

## The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2019

### Meghalaya at 47

IN the human milestone, 47 years is when a person has settled into parenthood (for those who are married) and a more or less stable existence. It's a time when the futures of adolescent children are planned by both parents. In a sense this is an exciting stage of life since the resources for establishing that future growth path also has to be carefully charted out if not already done. This enables a smooth take-off for the children into a challenging future. What about the status of a state which turns 47 this year? Does it have anyone to plan out its growth path? Who should be doing it and what is that growth trajectory?

Democracy envisages a participatory model of development. This means that people should decide the development priorities through a robust system of consultations and discussions. But that would mean an informed and educated electorate that knows what sort of representatives would best serve their interests. Has that happened in the case of Meghalaya? Those who led the struggle for statehood wanted only one thing - a state to be carved out of the erstwhile state of Assam - so that the tribes could chart out their future course of development. Since Assam was seen as a state with a majority non-tribal population it was believed that the tribal states needed a more nuanced development in tune with their cultural milieu. The autonomous district councils created vide the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution were not considered strong enough institutions for speedy, all-round development. It was felt that a full-fledged state alone would serve that purpose. It needs to be reminded that in the fight for statehood it was not just the tribes that stood as one for that demand. The non-tribal residents of the state too stood shoulder to shoulder with their tribal brethren in this struggle. This common fight for a shared future has alas been lost sight of by those who led the state thereafter. The fault-lines appeared and led to violent events that shook the state from 1979 until the 1990s and which created the "other" as a bogey for all the failures of the political elite.

The repeated failure of the elected to provide a blueprint for development has created the need for an issue before every election. And this "other" has provided grist for the election wheels. Its time people called the bluff and realize that a state can only progress if all its citizens irrespective of their caste, ethnicity and religion, work in tandem. As of today there is not much to celebrate about Meghalaya. The important development milestone in health, education, employment generation, power, agriculture, etc., are far from being achieved. Poverty is on the rise. Time for people of Meghalaya to take ownership of their own future! The political class can no longer be trusted with that future.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Why remove a Motto?

Editor,

News is circulating in Jowai these days informing us that the KJP Synod Mihngi has scrapped the original motto of the Thomas Jones College, Jowai just because of its Jaintia language origin. Such a thing is unheard of except from the floor of the said Synod. It must be stated here that many institutions like colleges and universities in many countries of the world including India have their mottos inscribed in their logos in Latin language, but there has been no opposition to that in any country at any time. We wish to cite one instance nearer home, i.e. the Union Christian College, at Umiam Khwan which has its motto in Latin: Venite Ad Vivam Aquam. It could be in any other language too. The KJP Synod Mihngi Higher Secondary School, Jowai, has its motto in English: To God Be the Glory. It must also be said that any language which is unwilling or incapable of absorbing words of its own sister dialects or even of other languages, is not qualified to be recognised as an important language.

The deletion of the original

motto which has been in existence for many years since the inception of the College and which was duly registered along with its Constitution for the purpose of affiliation to the University, is a great disrespect to the then church leaders who were instrumental in its creation and in the establishment of the College. These leaders include, among others, Tbn Edwingson Bareh, Tbn Darlington Blah and the great scholar Prof B Pakem, who are no more with us today. It is also disrespectful to Prof Tbn BN Lamare, the first Principal of the College. All these facts and implications are not known perhaps to those who proposed as well as to those who agreed to the proposal by raising their hands both physically and spiritually perhaps, for scrapping the said motto. We, however, believe that they did not intend to despise or to make a fool of everyone of those most respected Christian leaders of the Synod who had passed away, as none has any right now to do so. Those who proposed and those who agreed to the proposal must have thought by now that they have outsmarted the real founders

and patrons of the college." Little Knowledge is (indeed) a Dangerous Thing".

Yours etc.,  
P M Passah,  
Moosalynghkat, Jowai

### Meghalaya Day

Editor,

Meghalaya celebrated 47 years of statehood on January 21 but do we the people of the state really have anything worthy to celebrate? More than four decades have passed and sadly we are yet to boast of development, progress and change for the better. We are far away from the rest of our fellow citizens in other parts of the country. There is no Medical College, Engineering College, up to date health centers and hospitals. Roads in the rural areas are in a pathetic condition. The list is never-ending. This time, the 15 miners trapped in the coal mine at Ksan, Jaintia Hills since December 13, 2018, has definitely exposed the lack of conscience of mine owners and the State Govt. Be it the present government or the other governments in the past, coal mining has always been left unchecked for reasons known to one and all

This time around too, the incident will die a natural death after a few more days and weeks. Mining, illegal or otherwise will continue as before.

Therefore the celebration of our Statehood will be limited only to the numerous programmes chalked out this year from friendly matches, drawing competitions, etc. As a citizen of the State of Meghalaya, I am filled with shame, embarrassment, disappointment and fear that a more meaningful progress of our state and its people will never ever see the light of day.

Yours etc.,  
Jennifer Dkhar,  
Viaemail

### Abandon mine rescue mission

Editor,

The ongoing rescue mission at the Ksan mine should be called off in order to avoid logistical challenges including the huge expenditure. Now, after more than one month the expenses must have run into several crores of rupees. Already so far, all possible technologies available here in India have been

### CBI: New Inning

# Will govt let go?

By Poonam I Kaushish

chief was made member of the Human Rights Commission post retirement.

Paradoxically, as per the latest Lok Sabha data from 2006 to July 2016 the agency secured 68% conviction rate in corruption cases. It probed 7,000 cases, filed charge sheets in 6,533 cases, secured conviction in 4,054 cases while 2,095 cases ended in acquittal. But despite this, its credibility is zilch when dealing with high-profile

2G scam were exonerated, Chidambaram's Aircel Maxis case is progressing at snail's pace etc.

The constant display of CBI's non-performance in ensuring deterrent punishment to accused netas clearly erodes public trust in the criminal justice system as it has failed to establish its image to fight corruption without prejudice for which it was created in 1963. Today it has metamorphosed into a Frankenstein's mon-

tion (FBI) in the US to allow it to independently take up cases of high-tech crime. In all western democracies, investigative agencies have undergone huge and numerous makeovers and evolved over a period of time. Therefore, we need simply to set CBI free.

Predictably, this is anathema to our political leaders who candidly confess that granting sanction for prosecution was one of the "botlenecks" in giving the CBI autonomy. Brazenly, there are umpteen instances where prosecution sanction was denied underscoring that the premier investigative agency requires a drastic clean-up.

Undoubtedly the new CBI Chief has a formidable and arduous task ahead of cleansing the grimy stables, purging it of "yes men" and cleansed of backdoor instructions. He would need to behave responsibly leaving no room for suspicion and send a no-nonsense message that CBI's means business and its credibility is supreme. There is no point in initiating a biased investigation which does not guarantee a fair probe.

High time we make the investigation body a top-class outfit. Our leaders need to desist from subjecting the CBI to bureaucratic prescriptions of effecting economy in administration. India needs a sleek CBI that acts without favours and prejudice.

As the empowered committee selects the new CBI Director it needs to make sure the person is truly above board known for his honesty, expertise, integrity, competence and commitment. He should have no political affiliations, lest he be dubbed the Prime Minister's hatchet man. His impeccable record would go a long way in establishing the credibility down the rank and file and guarantee an unbiased assessment of all cases. Thereby, bringing in the much-needed accountability to inspire confidence among a disgusted public.

Will Modi seize the moment and gather the political will to make the CBI independent? Surprise and silence his rivals by introducing the long awaited Lokpal Bill and placing CBI under Lokpal oversight in the last session of Parliament before he demits office? At the end of the day, the powers-that-be must desist from playing havoc with the CBI. They need to answer two pointed questions: Will the CBI be guided by the law of the land only or by the Government of the day? Questionably, who will cast the first stone? Kiski laathi aur kiski bhains? The buck stops at Modi's doorstep. --- INFA

Another way forward is to grant the agency power to investigate and prosecute through a separate statute called the Central Bureau of Intelligence and Investigation Act. And give it the same status as the Federal Bureau of Investiga-

ster and is working on selective principles of applicability of law to preserve Jungle Raj within.

The crux of the issue: Who should control the CBI? Needless to say, a Catch-22 question for our power-greedy polity to honestly answer and for us to stupidly expect as political manipulation and internal sabotage are twin challenges that have dogged the CBI throughout its history.

What next? Prime Minister Modi has oft spoken about ushering in transparency in governance. Time he walked his talk and made the CBI independent whereby it stops being His Masters Voice and prevents abuse of power. For starters adopt a 2011 Parliamentary Standing Committee report on the "Working of the CBI" which recommended it be made an "independent and autonomous" status to prevent political interference in its functioning.

Another way forward is to grant the agency power to investigate and prosecute through a separate statute called the Central Bureau of Intelligence and Investigation Act. And give it the same status as the Federal Bureau of Investiga-

### Opposition parties have to focus on big picture

# Mamata yet to shed her provincial image

By Amulya Ganguli

Even if the rally of the national opposition leaders in Kolkata last Saturday was a fairly impressive affair, it was nowhere near what the people of the city had seen earlier, notably during the Left Front's heyday. Perhaps the opportunity provided by television to see and hear the speakers at home, or on the large screens put up at strategic locations, made many people stay away from the brigade parade ground.

Even then, the chief minister's appeal to those in the audience who had started to leave when six or seven of

she pursues similar policies in West Bengal showed that the gulf between the Trinamool Congress and the Left is wider than between the Trinamool Congress and the Congress. At the root of this breach lies the anarchic conditions which marked the state's panchayat elections, forcing hundreds of opposition candidates to withdraw from the contest to give the Trinamool Congress a free run.

It is undoubtedly a black spot in Mamata Banerjee's record which the presence

*"After all, it made no sense when the Congress president and the CPI(M) general secretary were absent from what was being touted as a "united" India rally. If anything, it showed that Mamata Banerjee is still bound by her restrictive provincial outlook which makes her incapable of looking beyond West Bengal and acquiring a broad national perspective."*

those on the stage were yet to speak showed that it wasn't an event which would become part of the political folklore. This shortfall in the failure to catch the public imagination might have been averted if Mamata Banerjee had shed some of her biases and gone out of the way to ensure the attendance of Rahul Gandhi and Sitaram Yechury. After all, it made no sense when the Congress president and the CPI(M) general secretary were absent from what was being touted as a "united" India rally. If anything, it showed that Mamata Banerjee is still bound by her restrictive provincial outlook which makes her incapable of looking beyond West Bengal and acquiring a broad national perspective.

It isn't clear what Mamata Banerjee stay away - after all, he did send a letter to "Mamata-di" wishing success for the rally - but there is little doubt that his presence would have made fewer people leave the venue. In the end, it was left to the dissident BJP leader, Shatrughan Sinha, to echo the Congress president's trademark anti-Narendra Modi slogan, chowkidar chor hai.

Since the Congress in the state is no longer a major challenger to the ruling Trinamool Congress - the BJP is seemingly taking this place among the non-Left parties - the reason for Mamata Banerjee's standoffish attitude towards the 134-year-old patriarch of Indian politics is difficult to explain.

However, it is possible that Mamata Banerjee instinctively felt that the presence of Prince Charming would detract from the unstated purpose of the rally of projecting herself as a prime ministerial aspirant. It was apparently the same clash of ambitions which also made the BSP's Mayawati stay away. But if these conflicting aspirations provide grist to the BJP's propaganda mill depicting the opposition unity efforts as a recipe for a khichdi or hodge-podge alliance, so does the Left's boycott of the rally.

Yechury's remark that Mamata Banerjee cannot complain about the BJP's undemocratic ways when

of 22 parties at the rally cannot erase. It shows that it will take much more than the joint raising of hands by the leaders on the dais to foster faith in the opposition's ability to take on the BJP.

The background of few of these parties inspires confidence because of the lawlessness of their cadres, as in the Trinamool Congress's case, or because of the penchant for cynicism and whimsicality, as in the BSP's case.

Besides, while criticizing the Trinamool Congress, Yechury might have remembered that it has learnt many of its violent ways from the Marxists. For the opposition jamborees to make an impact, the various parties will have, first, to come clean about their transgressions, as Rahul Gandhi did when he ascribed the Congress's defeat in 2014 to arrogance, or when Akhilesh Yadav admitted the high-handedness of some of the Samajwadi Party supporters.

Secondly, the parties will have to overcome their state-level animosities and focus on the big picture. They will have to leave behind their adversarial relations in the states, such as the one between the Left and the Congress in Kerala, and display the kind of broadmindedness which the Telugu Desam and the Congress did during the assembly elections to come together. Otherwise, if they continue to bicker in the states, they will be easy prey for the BJP.

In addition, the parties will have to break free of the habit of looking to the pre-liberalization period before 1991 when life moved at a leisurely pace like the cumbersome ambassador cars. The calls, therefore, for dispensing with the electronic voting machines (which are admired all over the world for the speed with which they produce the results) must be forsaken once and for all.

Demands of this nature are a reminder that not a few of the regional leaders are old fogeys who would happily do away with computers and the English language if they could. They have to be told, therefore, that the country is now well into the 21st century. (IPA Service)

*"In the great books of India, an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence, which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the questions that exercise us."*

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

## The Shillong Times

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### MDA: Compassion fatigue

IT appears that compassion fatigue has taken over the MDA Government as far as the rescue mission of the trapped miners is concerned. Murmurs are heard in the corridors of power that the rescue process is turning out to be an expensive affair; that the rescuers are tired and that the State can ill afford the heavy expenditure, especially since it is assumed by those in the district administration that the 15 miners (or more) are already dead. Those in Government cannot, of course, be expected to have empathy, especially with the poor. The bureaucracy in this country has always been stand-offish in its attitude towards the governed. They don't know what it's like to walk in the other man's shoes. This Native American aphorism is a reminder to practice empathy. But empathy is precisely what is lacking in faceless government systems.

The decision to abandon a rescue mission is a moral and ethical one. For the family members it is heart-wrenching to be told that the bodies of their loved ones will lie in that watery hole forever because the state did not do enough, or did everything belatedly. It is also not as if the resources required for the rescue operations were not available; they all came in too late in the day. Even technicians were brought in two weeks after the disaster.

Article 21 of the Constitution says everyone has the right to life, liberty and security. This undoubtedly is the most fundamental of all rights and has a much wider meaning which includes the right to live with human dignity, right to livelihood, right to health, right to pollution free air, etc. In fact the right to life includes everything that ensures a person's full potential. Going by the above therefore it would be fair to say that most Indians cannot afford a life of dignity. The miners going inside a claustrophobic rat-hole, breathing sulphurous gases and unsure of returning to the earth's surface in the evening are barely existing; not living. Article 21 for them is a mere paper tiger that will never be made good. But that is because they are poor and powerless to demand better labour laws.

Post the December 13 incident it will be interesting to watch if the apex court will continue to allow the disgraceful rat hole mining practice which reduces humans to the status of rats. Human life cannot be sacrificed at the altar of greed and profiteering.

The controversy on the Rafale deal refuses to die down, although the Supreme Court rejected the PIL and a petition seeking its intervention for investigation into the deal. The Indian National Congress backed by other opposition parties allege that the ruling BJP made huge money in the deal, whilst BJP and the government accuse the Congress of raising a bogey and compromising on national security.

The petition filed by senior leaders of BJP itself, Yashwant Sinha and Arun Shourie, and the lawyer Prashant Bhushan allege the Prime Minister of "criminal misconduct.... and gross misuse of the friendly media to purvey falsehood and drown vital facts and questions in an avalanche of abuse". It should be recalled that the Prime Minister himself, in one of his visits to Paris, clinched and announced the new deal of buying 36 fly-away aircrafts. Hence he is the main target of these petitioners and the Opposition.

Some of the antagonists have even said that "Rafale is the biggest scandal in defence since independence", and they would make it an issue in the coming Parliamentary elections unless a Joint Parliamentary Committee is constituted to investigate and come out with the truth. In fact, as I write this, Parliamentary proceedings are being stalled by the Opposition until the demand for a JPC is conceded by the government. The stalemate is likely to continue if no reconciliation is brought about on the issue.

So far, the ruling party is not budging. It terms those questioning or doubting the deal as anti-national. Naturally, the mystery deepens in the minds of the people and worries many observers about the authenticity of the deal and the veracity of the statements made by the warring political parties. Let us aim at demystifying the debate by placing some facts that raise questions to be answered.

Purchase Agreement before the Parliament invoking the 'confidentiality clause due to national security reasons' treat these as classified information. But others in the know of the deal deny the existence of any secrecy clause in the contract. The French President Emmanuel Macron has said in an interview to an Indian Journal that, "how much is to be disclosed is entirely left to the Indian government".

The bones of contention in the deal are mainly three- the Process, the Price and

# Rafale deal The controversy compounds

Dr. D.K.Giri

the Person. In this deal, the person in the midst of the controversy is Anil Ambani who has been given the offset contract in an 'arbitrary manner'.

In 2001, the need for buying fighter aircrafts was identified. The Request for Proposal (RPF) was issued in 2007, and after a due process of selection, Rafale was chosen in 2012. The UPA regime in 2007 defined the need for buying 126 aircrafts in terms of: (i) the Air force should get sophisticated aircrafts fast as MiG 21 and MiG 27 were to be retired; (ii) advanced technology has to be acquired to beef up the capability of the Air force; (iii) Indian aerospace industry

billions USD or 54,000 crore, 18 of them in fly-away condition, and the rest was to be made by HAL, the public sector unit on defence manufacturing.

Yet, after Rafale was chosen, the negotiations went on for 4 years from 2012 to 2016. The UPA government came in for criticism for pricing and offsetting conditions etc. Then suddenly, the Prime Minister, on a tour to France, announced that India will buy 36 fighter aircrafts in fly-away conditions in a government-to-government deal. The NDA government signed the contract on 23 September 2016 for 7.8 billion euro or 58000 crore. These 36 ready-to-fly aircrafts were to be deliv-

cheaper than the 18 originally agreed on; the actual higher price is due to India-specific add-ons like new weapons package, and the logistical support. The weapons mentioned are: Meteor, an air-to-air missile covering 100km which can take out any enemy aircraft, and Scalp, long-range ground attack missile of 300 km range. Other add-ons are logistical support and post-purchase maintenance etc. It may be mentioned also that in the earlier deal, the offset benefits were to be shared between HAL 70 per cent and Dassault 30 per cent.

The opponents contest that there are any add-ons. In fact "add-ons are cock and bull after thoughts". It has been stated that by the CEO of Dassault that "the same configuration as has been tested and approved by the IAF in the MMRCA evaluation is maintained." Then where is the justification or the additional costs? Originally, 126 aircrafts including 18 ready-to-fly were costing 42,000 crore, now 36 fly-away ones cost 54,000 crore. What a staggering surge in price!

The third 'scandal' is the person in Anil Ambani who was awarded the offset contract. Anil Ambani's company was in heavy debt, he has never made an aircraft in his life. How was he brought in? Anil Ambani's induction into the deal is as incompressible as the dropping of HAL is inexplicable.

Curiously, only days before the new deal was signed two companies were incorporated; Adani Defence System and Technologies Ltd. and Reliance Defence Ltd. Anil Ambani even travelled with the Prime Minister when the deal was signed in Paris. Here, the government contention is that it is up to Dassault to choose its partner in India and GOI has no role in it. But "even if Dassault provides the name, it is hard to imagine how GOI does not provide its opinion given the political and economic dimensions of such a contract. The former socialist president Francois Hollande in fact said that GOI imposed Anil Ambani on the French side.

From the above account, clearly, the allegations of collusion, lack of transparency, and crony capitalism may stick unless the government comes up with convincing rebuttals.--- INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

## Opposition front has many hurdles to cross before poll

# State alliances are the best option to fight BJP

By Kalyani Shankar

Can the Opposition unite and pose a challenge to the BJP in the coming months? There are so many ifs and buts. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had organised a mammoth rally in Kolkata's Brigade grounds on Saturday. A who's who of the opposition had gathered to prepare a roadmap for a coalition against the ruling BJP. Addressing the 'United India rally', Mamata predicted that BJP's days are numbered and that the "expiry date" of the Modi-led government is over.

The rally was perhaps the beginning of the opposition efforts ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls to oust the BJP government. Though earlier when the Karnataka chief minister H.D. Kumaraswamy took oath in May last with several of them gracing the occasion, it did not move forward but this time, it is likely to be followed up with another rally in Amravati in Andhra Pradesh by N. Chandrababu Naidu and another in Delhi organised by the Aam Admi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal.

Pradesh where the Congress is almost zero? In the north-east, alliance with regional parties is required. The Left parties have remained outside, as they do not want to share the platform with Mamata Banerjee. The Telangana chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, who was busy mobilising a federal front was absent at the rally because he did not want to share the dais with Naidu and the Congress leaders. These are the challenges which come in the way of opposition unity.

Once this issue is resolved, then comes the question of who would be its prime ministerial candidate. This has been pushed aside for now, claiming that it will be a collective leadership and the candidate can be decided in the post poll scenario. "Throw the BJP out. We will figure out who can become the Prime Minister. Modiji need not to be followed up with another rally in Amravati in Andhra Pradesh by N. Chandrababu Naidu and another in Delhi organised by the Aam Admi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal.

*The other speakers also echoed the same sentiments. This is the first big effort after the BJP lost the three big states - Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh last month. The opposition boasts of a wealth of leaders. But as former Prime Minister Deve Gowda pointed out it would be a Herculean task as the problem is for different party leaders to forget their differences and come together.*

An impressive list of leaders from 23 parties including former Prime Minister Deve Gowda, former Union ministers Sharad Pawar, Arun Shourie and Shatrughan Sinha, three chief ministers - Chandrababu Naidu, Arvind Kejriwal and H D Kumaraswamy, former chief ministers Akilesh Yadav, Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah and Geogong Apang among others, participated.

From the podium Mamata Banerjee appealed to the country "Badal do, badal do, Delhi mein sarkar badal do (change the government). The other speakers also echoed the same sentiments. This is the first big effort after the BJP lost the three big states - Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh last month.

The opposition boasts of a wealth of leaders. But as former Prime Minister Deve Gowda pointed out it would be a Herculean task as the problem is for different party leaders to forget their differences and come together. There are many opposition parties of various hues and ideologies pulling in different directions.

The possibility is not a national coalition but state specific alliances. The ego of the regional chieftains comes in the way of unity. In fact the Congress Party is working on this strategy and so do the other parties. For instance, in UP, the SP and the BSP have come together keeping the Congress out. In West Bengal will the Congress go with the Trinamool Congress or the Left? Will the Telugu Desam continue its ties with the Congress in Andhra

galaxy of leaders while he will do a presidential style campaign.

The third challenge is for the regional stragglers to show an extraordinary determination to sweep the polls in their respective states. They did well in 2014 by winning an impressive number of seats. A repeat performance would go a long way in challenging Modi.

The fourth challenge is a "one-on-one fight" against the BJP. This would avoid a division of opposition votes but it appears difficult. Prime Minister Modi is counting on a divided opposition to win in 2018.

The fifth and the more important is that the opposition has no new narrative. Just Modi-bashing will not get them votes. Unless they come up with a vision, voters will not be enthused.

The Prime Minister has reacted in his characteristic style: "My stand on corruption has made some people angry as I prevented them from looting public money; they have formed the mahagathbandhan." Modi is sticking to his corruption plank.

There is no doubt that the opposition unity is very difficult but no harm in trying. After all the BJP came to power with just 31 per cent vote share in 2014. As one of opposition leader said "Manzil bahut door hai, Raasta bahut kathin hai; Dil mile na mile, Haath mila ke chalo" (our destination is far and the path is difficult; despite our differences, we have to tread the path holding hand together). The coming days and weeks will show whether the opposition means what it says. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

## Cracks in Opposition unity

Editor,

Cracks appear in united Opposition over PM face for 2019 polls. On 19th January 2019 over 20 Opposition parties may have gotten together at a rally in Kolkata Brigade ground to project unity, but the issue of prime ministerial candidate remains a sticky one as various parties are pitting their own leaders for the coveted post. While Congress is pushing for Rahul Gandhi, BSP wants Mayawati. Congress' PL Punia asserted that people's hopes and their confidence rest on Rahul for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and he will form the government.

Meanwhile, BSP's Sudhendra Bhadoria projected Mayawati as the next head of the state, asserting that she will make efforts to uplift the poor, scheduled castes, Muslims and women in society. Such projection from member of a party which did not support 'Tri-

ple Talaq Bill' for the cause of women on the floor of the Rajya Sabha is not only delusive, particularly for their pseudo concerns for Muslims and women, but also divisive and non-pluralistic and exposes merely a biased discriminatory appeasement policy. In a congregation where everybody is a leader, everybody is a worker and everybody is an organizer it would be difficult to arrive at a consensus simply because everybody is likely to press for his/her candidature as has been seen in the past. There is every possibility of a falling apart proving the adage of, "too many cooks spoil the broth" true once again.

In fact the congregation was a Mahagathbandhan of some of the frustrated and almost forgotten leaders of insignificant political relevance. But most of them are dynastic draculas promoting close relatives and gifting political posts to them for familial development only. Sharad Power was the proponent of conferring the tag of 'foreigner' on Ms Sonia Gandhi' and then formed NCP with what

objective is not clear even today.. Thr fodder-scam decorated (having siphoned off six treasuries of erstwhile Bihar) Lalu's son Tejaswi Yadav (read up to Class XII & IRCTC scam tainted) represented RJD in the conclave for obvious reasons. Birds of a feather flock together. Leaders of the country, frustrated and having lost relevance and having criminal nexus, who are promoters of dynastic domination in national politics can never be relied upon and expected to render services to the nation for the cause of people and developmental progress. Otherwise also no dynasty is a production-oriented factory/workshop/plant having a standard cycle or line of production wherein you make inputs of raw material and obtain a high quality leader at the end of the production line as output. Einstein's son could not be an Einstein, nor could Winston Churchill's son be another Churchill.

Yours etc., Samares Bandyopadhyay Advocate Calcutta High Court, Via email

## MP elections at hand

Editor, Elections to the Lok Sabha are nearing and various political parties would be resorting to a sort of pilgrimage to various places and localities. Having said that, an MP is supposed to be the voice of the entire state and the people who voted, but of late the sitting MP Vincent Pala has not been up to the mark as a representative of the people. He is the voice of those with business interests. Much is left to be desired from the Congress MP in terms of his performance for the state. An MP has to be approachable and has to put the interests of his community and state always ahead. The UDP candidate stands a strong chance considering his understanding of state issues and it's needs. Let's hope the current hullabaloo about who's in and who's out of the Lok Sabha race

will die down sooner than later.

Yours etc., Dominic S. Wankhar Shillong-3

## MeECL violating safety concerns

Editor,

That human life is cheap in our country, is a well established axiom of our lives. However, the callous disregard for safety I witnessed at the transformer situated behind Madan Iewrynghep (Fire Brigade) would shock even the most seasoned citizen. The transformer is situated at road level and is supposed to be gated and not accessible to the public. I say "supposed to", because to my horror this morning, I saw the gate wide open with small children playing near it. After shooting off the children and telling them not to go near the area, I immediately went to the MeECL office at Jingkieng, Nongthymmai to report the matter. The person I met there very

*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.*

*"Let new India arise out of peasants' cottage, grasping the plough, out of huts, cobbler and sweeper."*

--- Swami Vivekananda

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.163 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2019

### Shock from Shuja

WITH election time approaching, there admittedly can be a lot of smoke without fire. But there are several loose ends to the claim made by a now US-based hacking 'expert' from India that the 2014 Lok Sabha polls were rigged - in favour of the BJP. He did not actually hack an EVM yesterday. The Election Commission has rejected the charge, and at its behest the Delhi police has filed an FIR to ascertain the antecedents of the 'expert' who styled himself as Syed Shuja at a media event in London. Police would also examine whether any political plot was involved in the so-called 'expose'. This addresses only one side of the curious tale, resembling "science fiction", as claimed by former Union minister Kapil Sibal who was present at the event.

Technology is not easy to understand; more so the electronics technology, which is both used and misused. If by chance there's an iota of truth in what this 'expert' has claimed, that would be a huge setback to the democratic practices followed in this country. At the same time, the loose ends in his claims need be noted. The 2014 elections were held at a time when the UPA II led by the Congress was in power. A question is which external agency tried to manipulate the verdict - which went hugely in favour of the BJP. Also, why this 'expert' remained silent so far; more so, as he says he had escaped the bullets from the security personnel of a senior BJP leader one day in Hyderabad, leading to his escape from the country, ultimately to the US. He has also stated that he had, along with his associates, tried to 'black-mail' the BJP with the information he had about the alleged hacking of EVMs, and that these associates had been killed in the shooting. He has also linked BJP leader Gopinath Munde's death, as also leftist Gouri Lankesh's murder, to the 2014 EVM 'fraud'.

True or not, these are bound to be major electoral issues. Yet, notably, the background of the individual who raised the charge is shrouded in mystery. The presence of a Congress leader at the event added to the sense of disbelief. The Electronics Corporation of India Ltd denies the claim Shuja had ever been in its staff, as he claimed. His name and antecedents are in serious doubt. All the same, it is important that this case be investigated from all angles and the veracity of these apparently outlandish claims established beyond reasonable doubt.

### LOOKING BACK

June 13, 1989

#### ABSU alleges six starvation deaths

ABSU Vice President, Mr Pradeep Kumar Daimary has alleged that at least six Bodos have died of "starvation" in the relief camps at Geroa Bazar in the Darrang District of Assam. Terming the deaths as indirect murder of innocent people by govt", Mr Daimary held both the Centre and the Assam Govt responsible for it. In a statement issued here on Thursday, Mr

Daimary stated that 189 Bodo families became homeless after immigrants of Dalgao, who were instigated by the Police, set fire to the Bodo houses. The 2732 homeless Bodos, who were given shelter in a relief camp arranged by the local people, were without food for the past four days owing to lack of funds thus resulting in the deaths.

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Man-made disaster waiting to happen

Editor,  
I am writing this letter to draw the attention of the members of the Bakur Village Dorbar Shnong, Dawki, Amlarem Sub Division, West Jaintia hills to the footpath connecting Jowai-Amlarem-Dawki road near St Francis de Sales School and ending at Iew Bakur. This footpath has been in existence since long and is being used by all irrespective of their socio-economic status. Recently the owner of a plot at the highest end through which a portion of the footpath passes, intends to divert the footpath by constructing an elevated RCC footpath. The problem here is that the foundation of the elevated footpath is

directly erected on the bedrock right on the middle of the stretch of the stream. By doing so he is illegally encroaching on the small stream passing alongside the footpath. The foundation will be constantly hit by the flow of the water during the peak monsoon season thus weakening the foundation and also hampering the smooth flow of water. The construction of this elevated footpath is posing a great threat to the life of commuters and especially school-going children who use this footpath daily, since the force of nature cannot be predicted. If God forbid some life might be lost if the elevated footpath cannot withstand the force of nature then who will be held accountable? As a concerned individual I request the Dorbar Shnong Bakur, to look into this life-threatening situation seriously so that tragedy is averted in the near future. I also request the Sub divisional Officer, Civil, Amlarem to kindly look into the matter for the welfare and safety of the school children.

Yours etc.,  
Skhem Lamin,  
Dawki, West Jaintia Hills

#### Whither Harijan Colony?

Editor,  
It is very sad and unfortunate that the issue of shifting the Harijan Colony has died down or forgotten altogether. In fact the issue of shifting the Mazhabi Sikh employees of the Shillong Municipality from the present location at Mawlong Hat to the present complex that

houses the Shillong Municipal Office should have taken place long ago but for the past spineless Congress government. In fact, the alternative location is ideally suited for them. Those Harijans who are not employees of the SMB and settled in Mawlong Hat Colony are illegal settlers and ought to be evicted forthwith. They should settle elsewhere because the present location belongs to the Government. In fact even this MDA government is spineless. Where is the HLC that was supposed to deliberate on the issue of the Harijan Colony? Is it defunct or is it still alive? Why does it take so long to settle this minor issue of shifting the legal employees of the SMB?

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email

#### Children sexually abused

Editor,  
Minor girls and women have reportedly been subjected to prolonged sexual abuse, mostly at the hands of powerful men in shelter homes in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. It is a shame that child shelter homes at Muzaffarpur in Bihar and at Deoria in Uttar Pradesh have been used for sexual exploitation of children. Surprisingly, adverse reports on those shelter homes had allegedly been ignored. While the Muzaffarpur Social Welfare Department had given an adverse report on the shelter home, the Deoria shelter home continued to flourish even after the suspension of its license.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
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.

### Kolkata Gathbandhan

# A new 'united' arrival

By Dr S.Saraswathi

happy with the "big brother" attitude of the Congress.

The Front, therefore, defies numbering at the present stage and can be identified by the place of the first rally. The second

Assembly election. The new found friendship between the BSP and the SP setting aside all past tirades exchanged between them takes us back to 1990s when Kanshiram of the BSP and Mulayam Singh of SP

votes would go to this alliance overlooking the implications of the "Gathbandhan" phenomenon are also questionable in the Lok Sabha election as people seem to be aware of the weaknesses of a coalition of multiple parties with individual ambitions.

Pre-poll alliances have to undergo two steps -- one to arrive at some common policies and programmes, and the other an acceptable seat-sharing arrangement. No common formula for seat sharing -- not even a commonsense approach of selecting the most popular local candidate -- will be acceptable for all parties or in all places. Selection of candidates even within a party is not simple. Sometimes, even a very small party with very few seats can upset a coalition government in a political situation, where coalitions are not based on ideologies and are opportunistic to get power and positions.

Former PM and JD(S) leader H.D Deve Gowda wants a common election manifesto. His suggestion touches a very important area, but not without its own hitches. Whether special status for Andhra Pradesh -- a demand that led to TDP's withdrawal from NDA -- can be achieved in a federal front government for example, is not a minor point, but not mentioned by any party. Outwardly, it seems more difficult in a federal front with States making similar claims. Formulating a policy for sharing river water and linking rivers to be chalked out by consensus in the federal front is nothing short of a miracle.

The Mamata-led gathbandhan cannot ignore the moves of some prominent non-Congress and non-BJP parties to come together to assert their importance. These will be needed whichever alliance gets nearest to the seat of government. The TRS, YSR Congress, and BJD, which are planning to work out a common strategy, need to be watched.

A group of regional parties will not be able to satisfy all regional ambitions of its members -- be it development, or language. Unity of regional parties can survive only if common national thinking overrides all local aspirations. Governance of the country is far different from that of a State. Few regional parties have sound views on foreign matters, national finance, and national development. An amalgamation of State parties or State governments is necessary for national planning and administration, but not adequate to form the national government. Such coalitions have to convert themselves as a national union for the good of the entire nation. ---INFA (The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

*It is an admission of the popularity of the BJP that requires pooling the strength of two dozen parties for electoral fight. It reminds us of the vow of the "Three Musketeers" of Dumas with a small correction, "All for one, and All against one" meaning one candidate for all parties in every constituency, and all parties against one party/one leader.*

and third meetings are likely to take place in Amaravati and Delhi. The Kolkata Gathbandhan comprises certain state-level pre-poll or post-poll alliances formed against the BJP and also tested recently. Among them, the BSP and SP alliance has already arrived at a seat-sharing formula in Uttar Pradesh for the coming Lok Sabha poll leaving out all including the Congress except perhaps the RLD.

Though this alliance was forged mainly to keep

came together to form a government in UP. It may affect the prospects of both the Congress and the BJP and hence a crucial factor in Kolkata Gathbandhan provided it is carried on faithfully. Under the circumstances, the Congress is under compulsion to express its readiness to contest all seats in UP without any ally as a matter of self-respect and frantically seek smaller allies as a political necessity.

In 2014, the combined vote share of the BSP and

*Notable was the presence of a BJP MP Shatrughan Sinha and two rebel BJP members -- Yashwant Sinha and Arun Shourie, and absence of a few non-NDA parties -- TRS from Telangana, BJD of Odisha, YSR Congress of Andhra Pradesh, and PDP of Jammu and Kashmir. Communist parties also did not participate in the rally organised by their arch rival.*

the BJP out of power, the two parties mentioned that they could not also forget their bitter experiences in their alliance with the Congress in the past -- SP in 2017 and the BSP in 1996. The JD(S) and Congress in power in Karnataka is undergoing perennial conflict keeping suspense over the survival of the government at the end of every day. The Congress and TDP alliance has just now experienced utter defeat in Telangana

SP was 42.1 per cent in UP and if that of the RLD is added, it comes to 43 per cent, which is slightly above the vote percentage of the BJP. Neither the SP nor the BSP was with the BJP in 2014 to upset the saffron party's performance. It is also difficult to believe that the alliance made will be able to obtain the sum total of their individual votes as elections do not work like simple arithmetic. Expectations, if any, that all anti-BJP

### Banking sector

# Plans may lead to revival

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

It is heartening to note that the Government is likely to push through some key decisions ahead of the General elections. On the cards is a decision on transfer of surplus funds by the Reserve Bank of India to the Government. This is likely to follow the Bimal Jalan committee report, which is expected before March-end. The Government has also given the go-ahead to the amalgamation of three public sector banks - Bank of Baroda, Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank - thereby creating the third largest bank in the country and ensuring a strong entry with economies of scale.

The other major activity is LICs acquisition of IDBI Bank and this process is expected to be concluded within a month or two. Meanwhile, State Bank of India's mega qualified institutional placement of equity shares is expected in the last quarter of this fiscal as it aims to raise Rs 20,000 crore to help gear up lending.

At the same time, the apex bank in its bi-annual financial stability report estimated the ration of gross non-performing assets (NPAs) to gross advance to come down to 10.3 per cent in March 2019 from 10.8 per cent in September. As is well known, bad loans have been the bane of the domestic sector, particularly affecting the PSU lenders. The RBI blamed the deterioration in asset quality to the credit boom of 2006-11, when lending grew by over 20 per cent.

The other factors that contributed to the rise in NPAs were tax credit appraisal and post sanction monitoring, project delays (sometimes unforeseen) and cost overruns. The other point not mentioned in the report is obviously political interference in grant of loans and corrupt practices due to an unholy nexus between a section of political leaders and bankers.

It is over reassuring to hear that with focus on recoveries and regulations such as the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC). The report found asset quality improving with the bad loan ratio at 10.8 per cent in September last year from 11.5 in March 2018.

The present RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has said in the report that "the banking sector appears to be on course to recovery as the load of impaired assets recedes". Further, he observed: "Notwithstanding the significant costs wrought by the enhanced recognition of asset impairment in public sector banks, it appears to have led to a greater discipline in credit assessment, higher sensitivity to market risk and better appreciation of operational risks."

Thus, as NPA formation has slowed down and recoveries from recent NPAs are streaming in, the future of credit repayment culture appears bright. As the RBI banking progress report pointed out: "Minimising the time taken to resolve cases and the development of a conducive environment that discourages unnecessary delays assume importance". Notwithstanding the cleaning of balance sheets across ownership, the struggle for public sector banks would continue as these will feel the pinch owing to absence of capital as per requirement, according to a banking expert.

Another positive development has been that Finance Ministry's directive to banks to check all loans above Rs 50 crore which have been classified as bad asset from the angle of possible frauds. The RBI decided to build a public credit depository registry to capture data of all big loans as well as of wilful defaulters and match the data with SEBI, the Insolvency and

Bankruptcy Board and other agencies to check for fraud. The steps had been initiated keeping in mind the increasing number of such cases as well as the sums involved. Loans accounts worth Rs 69,755 crore were involved in banking frauds over the past three years with the Rs 14,000 Norav Modi-Mehul Choksi earning the dubious reputation of being the biggest and most brazen one.

To delve into statistics, as per the RBI, Indian banks lost Rs 16,409 crore in 2015-16 in frauds and Rs 16,652 crore in 2016-17 which doubled to Rs 36,694 crore in 2017-18 after the Norav Modi-Mehul Choksi case. The number of fraud cases has been rising -- from 4693 cases in 2015-16 and 5917 cases in 2016-17. The number of such cases reported by banks was generally hovering at around 4500 in the last 10 years before their sudden spurt in 2017-18, stated bankers. Sanjay Battacharyya, former SBI Managing Director, said: "After the horse bolted once, bankers should have exercised for greater caution. During 2017-18, PSU banks accounted for 93 per cent of frauds of more than 1 crore."

The vital question that needs to be understood is that of autonomy of banks and financial institutions as this is crucial to the development of a strong banking sector. It cannot be denied that there is lack of professionalism in this sector as also interference by political leaders at all levels. To strengthen banks, they should be allowed to follow their own regulations to determine the amount and quantity of loans.

The Government is helping the public sector banks to reduce NPAs but at the same time if they are judicious in scrutinising loan applications and following a professional code, then one can expect a turnaround of most banks. Also as three banks are being merged, the Government could also think of another such merger in the coming fiscal. However, this is not to say that genuine financial needs of industry, specially the micro and small sectors, should not be considered. As is well known, industry can prosper and with it the economy through better disbursement of loans to genuine entrepreneurs. Statistics reveal that MSMEs are more prompt in returning loans more than the big industry houses.

Moreover, the formation of an expert committee, headed by U. K. Sinha, former Chairman of the Securities & Exchange Board of India, to identify issues and propose long-term solutions for economic and financial sustainability of small businesses is no doubt a positive development, both for banks and the MSME sector.

As is generally agreed, the future lies in consolidation of banks as this would obviously ensure economies of scale and help in gearing up profitability. Whether it is giving loans to industry or agriculture, PSU banks should endeavour to ensure profitability through their lending operations. Experts are of the opinion that of banks are given sufficient autonomy, there should be no reason why reasonable profits cannot be achieved.

It is expected that in the coming years capital scarcity and bad loans may be steadily eased and this may lead to strengthening banks and this has been reiterated by RBI its latest financial stability report. There should be no reason why PSBs can't match the profitability of private banks with more professionalism and better governance.---INFA

"Children wish fathers looked but with their eyes; fathers that children with their judgment looked; and either may be wrong."

--- Giambattista Vico

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.164 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 2019

### Enter Priyanka Gandhi

AT the precise hour when the Congress party's graph has started rising from a low, here comes a booster dose. The decision of the Congress leadership to introduce Priyanka Gandhi as general secretary of the party that her brother Rahul Gandhi now leads from the front is bound to inspire the rank and file of the party that found itself in parched lands since 2014. This comes at a time when the countdown has begun for the next Parliamentary polls to elect a new government at the Centre by mid-2019. Clearly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is seen to enjoy the largest clout as a leader will have a tough time reinventing his leadership at a time when the political winds are seen turning against the BJP -- as was evident in the loss of three Hindi-belt states over and above the upsets the saffron party had taken in Gujarat and Karnataka assembly polls. To add to Modi's and the BJP's predicament, NDA ally Shiv Sena has made it clear that it would support the BJP at the next polls only if it projected Maharashtra politician and Union roads minister Nitin Gadkari as its next PM nominee, instead of Modi.

Forty-seven-year-old Priyanka Gandhi is bound to draw large crowds if she enters the campaign scene, just as her grandmother Indra Gandhi did. This is going to happen for real, even though she has now been given charge of only eastern Uttar Pradesh. Knowing the electorate's mood as we do, chances are that she would draw more crowds than her brother can. In the end, this could lead to a situation in which the family ends up putting its weight behind Priyanka, over and above Rahul Gandhi. Notably, Indra Gandhi had functioned as president of AICC when Jawaharlal Nehru was PM. That led to her induction in the Union ministry after Nehru's demise, and eventual elevation as PM. Clearly, the Congress rank and file had their own reservations about the leadership profile of Rahul Gandhi even as mother Sonia made sure he was made the party chief. If the Congress with its UPA allies wins the next LS polls, Priyanka might stand a better chance to be PM. There are issues, for real, though; and Priyanka's road to leadership is paved with thorns. The shadow of her husband, controversial realtor Robert Vadra, hangs heavy on her. The BJP's target now will not only be Priyanka but Vadra too.

# Sixth Schedule Amendment takes Meghalaya to Dark Ages

By Patricia Mukhim

It is intuitive that the only concession made in the amendment to the Sixth Schedule as far as Meghalaya is concerned is the increase in the number of seats in each of the three Councils; increase in financial allocations and administrative powers. The most important democratic process for devolution of funds which is by way of elected village and municipal councils is dispensed with in the case of Meghalaya. So the status quo remains and the Village Administration Bill is in the dustbin for it has not been talked about at all in the Amendment proposal. How the increased funding will be deployed to the last person in the village is also not spelt out. So the Territorial Councils will now have to set up their administrative units for scheme implementation which will run parallel to the state government institutions.

This proposal is shortsighted and caters to a populist, male-centric demand to keep women out of grassroots politics. The vacuous argument that women are able to fight elections on merit in Matrilineal Meghalaya because they are already socially empowered and do not need reservation, is tenuous and overlooks the entrenched gender biases that operate insidiously in Meghalaya's Matrilineal society. Assuming that women would automatically be able to create a level playing field in the political arena without any affirmative action is a misplaced idea. The Matrilineal society in Meghalaya is a much-hyped, unduly romanticized idea. In practice it is fraught with uncertainties and insecurities since women are easily abandoned or divorced and live decrepit lives as single parents. Preliminary studies have shown that Meghalaya has the highest number of female-headed households with kids having to drop out of school due to acute financial stress. These kids then enter the labour markets as children labourers. There is nothing romantic, or liberating about being a woman in this Matrilineal society.

When a certain minister was asked why the Amendment to the Sixth Schedule failed to bring in more enlightened clauses in

line with those proposed for the other Sixth Schedule areas, the answer he gave was, "The stakeholders wanted it that way?" So who are those stakeholders? Are the 30 lakh people of Meghalaya not stakeholders in any consultation/decision-making process? Are only the heads of traditional institutions who fear that the democratic electoral process would bring in accountability and transparency and who use tradition as the red flag to against modern constitutional principles, the only stakeholders here? Are the amended proposals not a slap in the face of democratic traditions and an insult to the years of engagement that women have had for participatory governance?

We are told by sources in the Home Ministry that Chief Minister Conrad Sangma and his colleagues have prevailed upon the Ministry to exempt Meghalaya from elections to village councils and municipalities and from 33% reservation for women in the Territorial Councils and the Ministry obliged. Hence Conrad Sangma tweeted, "Thank you @narendramodi ji and rajnathsingh ji for the historic decision to approve constitutional amendment to substantially increase financial resources and other powers of Autonomous Councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of #Northeast." Historic decision for whom? I am not sure of the views of women in the NPP, the Congress, the UDP or the PDF for they hardly speak. We have never heard women say a word on any issue. Even Agatha Sangma who is fairly high up the NPP echelons has not spoken or engaged in issues related to women. She has not uttered a word on the Lineage Bill passed by the KHADC and similar issues that leave women at a disadvantage. I even wonder if women have the agency of "voice" to speak before the patriarchs in their respective parties. And we dare believe that women in Matrilineal society have overpowering voices? What a farce!

As far as elections to the urban municipalities and village councils are concerned, the resistance

has been largely because of the fear that the "tribal" character of these bodies would change and that politics would enter the villages. Are we suggesting that the people of Meghalaya still follow tradition in the dress, food habits, personal choices etc., and that the villages of Meghalaya are apolitical and do not know how to play their political games? Do we believe that the village dorbars are purged of partisan politics? If so why do prospective MLA/MDC/MP candidates woo the dorbar shong and promise them development largesse? Who are we trying to fool here? We fool no one but ourselves!

Those who stoically advance arguments that women in Meghalaya are already empowered must look at the representation of women in the ADCs over the years. Only in the KHADC have we had women representatives and the percentage over the years is just under 6%. The JHADC and GHADC have never elected women. If women are truly politically empowered they would have occupied 50% or more of the seats in the Councils. In the state assembly women MLAs have never exceeded 6%.

This time the assembly comprises only 5% women. Is this not a story in itself? And look at the antecedents of these women MLAs. With due respect, two of them are the daughter and wife of the former Chief Minister. The other is the daughter of a former noted politician although they have fought elections on their own merit. But pedigree is still important even in the tribal state of Meghalaya. So will the critics of the Women's Reservation proposal show us just how empowered women are to create political spaces for themselves? Do the above statistics not speak for themselves?

It is easy to dismiss writers like this as being rabid feminists but when the political system is skewed in favour of the male and refuses to change then it's time to engage and unveil the hidden patriarchal biases in Matrilineal society. Sadly, most women in this Matrilineal society strut around with the confidence that they

are privileged and that it is the male that is the victim of this social practice. This skewed worldview comes from the ignorance of what it is to be a poor, abandoned, destitute, voiceless woman in a Matrilineal society. There are many such women in Meghalaya today and they are victims of rape and sexual abuse. Many are pushed to prostitution as a livelihood. And I am saying this not out of any assumption but because I meet many such people on a day to day basis. Our state assembly which is the platform for discussing issues that afflict women have often given them short shrift. Even women MLAs get caught in the politics of masculinity and join issues with men on agenda that skirt women's issues. Just check the legislative assembly debates since 1972 till date and see how many times women-related issues have come up for discussion in the Assembly? And please don't say there are no gender biases in a Matrilineal society for there are glaring biases in the way girls and boys are allocated duties at home. The expectations from girls are always much higher than from boys.

In the light of the above therefore one has to say that Conrad Sangma who we all thought would be a dynamic, progressive chief minister has turned out to be a conformist who dances to the tune of the conservative sections of the polity. Mr Conrad Sangma you have disappointed us big time!

And about the MDA, I have the following questions to ask. Where is the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the coalition which should have been the road map for the next five years (now four)? What has happened to the Education Policy that was so hurriedly pushed through? Why has it not come to the Assembly yet? And the major bungling in the rescue mission at the Ksan mining tragedy is well documented by OPEN magazine whose feature writer Omkar Khandekar has given a stinging report of the operations in an article called, "Depth of the Tragedy." It tells us all we need to know about how the Government has responded to the calamity and indeed it's a sordid story.

## Brexit provides an opportunity for India New dynamism likely in economic ties with UK

By Subrata Majumder

At last, Brexit heads for reality on March 29, amidst big haggling for benefits over two years. A new dawn will break over UK's sovereignty. It will prop up a new dynamism in India-UK economic relations. Emerging as a new single market, UK portends for a new important economic partner for India.

Even, while being in EU, UK has been playing an important role for India-EU relation. It acted as a main functional partner for enhancing economic relation. For example, UK has been the biggest export destination for India among member countries. India has a favourable trade balance with EU and UK was the linchpin for it. Therefore, UK exiting EU is likely to impart a major impact on India-UK and India-EU relations.

Given the lead role played by UK in India-EU relations, arguments were levelled both in favour as well as against Brexit. One group thinks that it will open new opportunities for a surge in economic relation while another group predicts gloom with UK becoming a single market.

Given UK as the window to the large EU market, naysayers apprehend that Brexit will bring some damage to India-EU trade relation. And, since EU, including UK, accounts for one-fifth of India's total exports, it will cast a shadow

destination for foreign investors in the world. Incidentally, India is the third biggest investor in UK. There are 800 Indian companies in UK. This is more than total Indian companies in the remaining 27 EU member countries. Concern was raised over UK's exit from EU, which will dent Indian investors, since Brexit will rip UK's border-free access to EU market.

Nevertheless, the optimists are hopeful that this may lead to investment diversion to India. In addition to NRI investors relocating their plants to India, UK investors will be keen to invest in India as an alternative market. Over a period, India has accumulated several factors, which will act favourably to woo British investors. Brexit unleashes greater opportunity for Indian immigrants in UK. Given the EU rules, which restrict member countries to prefer EU immigrants over non-EU immigrants, Brexit will get UK rid of the apartheid rule and take the advantage of low cost Indian professionals. Under the rule, EU countries can opt for non-EU immigrants, provided there is a shortage of talent within EU. The strict EU immigration law has virtually curtailed the scope for Indian immigrants at the time when UK was experiencing greater shortage in professions

### Brexit will impart a major impact on UK's export based industries and services. Concerns are raised over motor vehicles, petroleum products and pharmaceutical products, which account for one-third of UK's exports to EU.

over its overall exports. However, optimists believe that an independent UK is likely to play a more important role to rejuvenate the trade relation on bilateral basis with India and enhance exports. With tariff benefits waning to EU exporters, large opportunities will emerge for India's export to UK's market.

Incidentally, trade relation between UK and EU has been on a downturn trend over one and half decades. EU accounts for the biggest share in UK's exports and imports. But, it was on a downtrend. In 2002, EU accounted for 55 percent of exports and 58 percent of imports of UK. The share slipped to 43 percent in 2016 and 51 percent in 2014 respectively.

Brexit will provide a new opportunity for UK's trade diversion to India as it could become an alternative market for UK. India, harping on high GDP growth, surpassing China and amidst global recession, eventually poses as a big market for UK. Currently, UK has adverse trade balance with India. UK's exit from EU will open new opportunities for enhancement of trade with India in the wake of doing away with tariffs benefits for exports to EU.

Export of pharmaceutical is a case in point. Pharmaceutical product is the second biggest item of UK's imports from EU. In 2017, it accounted for 7.9 percent of UK's total imports, valued at £ 20.3 billion (\$ 26 billion). UK is the second biggest export destination for India's pharmaceutical products. Annual exports to UK were \$532 million. Given the large import market for pharmaceutical products, Brexit provides a big opportunity for Indian exporters, with imports from EU becoming costlier due to tariff restriction.

UK is an important destination for foreign investment. As of 2017, it was the third biggest

such as physicians, nurses, IT professionals and researchers.

UK's exit from EU will pave the way for India-UK strategic partnership. It is likely to boost hope for India-UK FTA in near term, against the prolonged haggling in negotiations..

However, the major challenge, which UK will face is its over-dependence on EU for trade. More than half of UK's export is accounted by EU. In 2017, EU accounted for 48 percent of UK's exports of goods and 40 percent of service exports. Similarly, EU played a major role in UK's imports. In 2017, EU accounted for 54 percent of UK's import of goods and 49 percent of services.

Brexit will impart a major impact on UK's export based industries and services. Concerns are raised over motor vehicles, petroleum products and pharmaceutical products, which account for one-third of UK's exports to EU. With the exit from EU, these industries will face a major challenge for survival, unless alternative markets are there to offset the loss. To this end, FTA can be a major succor to these industries.

Automobile is a successful manufacturing industry in UK and the biggest item of export to EU, sharing 18 percent in 2017. It is apprehended that Brexit will dampen the UK automobile industry. It will also pose a new challenge to MNCs for the supply chain industry. For example, components and parts will be subject to various different regulations and costs and intra-staff transfers will be subject to controlled migration rules.

Therefore, Brexit will oscillate between hopes and despair. To this end, India, with its high growth trajectory and historical bondage, can play an important role to pull out UK from despair by engaging into strategic economic partnership. (IPA Service)

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Amendment to the Sixth Schedule

Editor,  
I heartily welcome the landmark amendment to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution which was approved by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday. I also welcome the devolution of financial resources from the Finance Commission to the Councils and the amendments on streamlining of the administration of the Councils. But the Councils of Meghalaya will not be as powerful as those of in Assam, Tripura and Mizoram because certain parts of the amendments are exempted from being applied here. The reasons for the exemption seems to stem from not having elected village councils and municipal councils in Meghalaya and because there is no grass roots democracy in the state so Meghalaya is exempted from enjoying the enabling provisions. This is very unfortunate. We here resist to have elected village councils and municipal councils because we fear that this goes against tradition. So we have to pay a heavy price. We are also deprived of better devolution of funds

from the Finance Commission and from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj because we are afraid of grassroots democratisation of the traditional institutions and we are bereft of allocation of major subjects for the Councils of Meghalaya unlike that of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. I hope a way out can be found by our political masters though we have very little faith in them to surmount this problem.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Viaemail

### Scientists should remain cool

Editor,  
Apropos the letter - "Whither scientific enquiry" by Sujit De, (ST Jan 16, 2019) I would say with all seriousness that we have to "alert ourselves" of false knowledge. Needless to say, it is more dangerous than ignorance. As in previous years, this year as well "Science Congress" (India) was in the eye of the storm. Who are the critics? What is their level of comprehension about ancient Indian science? I

think it should rather be another matter of scientific enquiry. Scientists should not lose their cool or else they are not scientists! Yes, contrary to the rigid conviction of Sujit De, as one can conclude from his outright aversion to certain knowledge of the ancient sages, I would like to say again with utmost earnestness that it is Indian "sages" who were the "first" to propose that even the stream of scientific enquiry "could go astray" by the wrong line of thoughts et al. Well, what was held as "true" by a Newtonian group of scientists was disapproved when physicists like Niels Bohr, Schrodinger, and Heisenberg come up with Quantum Physics. Niels Bohr had a tough time convincing Albert Einstein about the "Uncertainty Principle" of Werner Heisenberg.

Please do not call me a chauvinist, but the sages of India had always tried to delve deeper than the standard scientific inquiry -- the fact has been well acknowledged by front-ranking group of western scientists. Indian sages intensely "doubted" the limited "sensory tools" and weak mind of a human

being. So, they had come up with a profound discipline called YOGA. It is the "greatest" discovery of all time if we can fully understand its higher meaning and its purpose. I'm not saying here about the stretching and twisting of arms and legs but controlling the mind to climb to the higher dimensions of consciousness. This discipline can help connect one even to the super-soul and thereafter the "doer and the knowledge become one". This mystic science emphasizes that it is not just about knowing and empirically explaining the material subjects/objects, but being in communion with the knowledge and a lot more.

Let me leave aside the technology of test-tube babies during Mahabharata and the like as we have not yet invented microscope to look into history. Can we just undermine now the Shakespeare of the 16th century though the works attributed to him have been suspected of having been authored by Christopher Marlowe?

The Vedanta, including Mahabharata, Yoga Vasistha, Bhagavad

Gita..., are based on this conception of communion with the Supreme Whole. This very profound idea had held great minds like Schrodinger who credited his insight into the discovery of the ideas related to Quantum Mechanics to this ancient knowledge, spellbound. Here is how the Nobel laureate eulogizes ancient Indian wisdom - "In all the world, there is no kind of framework within which we can find "consciousness in the plural"; this is simply something we construct because of the temporal plurality of individuals, but it is a false construction. The only solution to this conflict insofar as any is available to us at all lies in the ancient wisdom of the Upanishads." If we deeply ponder over this small quote by Schrodinger, it should totally put our ripples of misgiving, and tenacious prejudices against India to rest. Is it not idiotic to call one limpy and cowardly who has already climbed Mount Everest 50 times? Don't trust a fool who has not come out of the darkness of night but repeatedly says there are

no stars in the sky! Yes, we can't help those who have blinded themselves with the thick cover of ideologies and prejudices and set out to find fault-lines against some with certain purposes.

Finally, among many others, I will quote another great opinion by the father of Atomic Bomb, Robert J. Oppenheimer - "What we shall find in MODERN PHYSICS is an exemplification, an encouragement and refinement of Old Indian wisdom" (source - "The Tao of Physics" by Fritjof Capra). Had this nuclear scientist gone a little insane while expressing this thought? I totally agree that we should not take everything at face value. But at the same time, we should not look down on those profound riches that have come out of the womb of our own Mother. Now the West has given us enough appliances to scientifically verify many of them. Let the truth be given a chance to emerge out of the darkness of illusion. The sunshine of science should not at all be tempered with the cloud of prejudices and envy.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
Shillong-2

*“Consult your friend on all things, especially on those which respect yourself. His counsel may then be useful where your own self-love might impair your judgment.”*

--- Ambrose Redmoon

## The Shillong Times

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### Elections 2019

NATIONAL politics is set for turbulent times. With the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi set on a downhill ride in terms of popularity, exemplified also in the opinion poll results out this week, there should be glee on the faces of regional party leaders who are angling for power in Delhi. Their hopes might soon be fulfilled if the present trends are any indication. In the 2014 polls, Modi sought people's support for the BJP to evict the corrupt regional players from power in Delhi, the likes of the NCP and the DMK, in the backdrop of several scams that dented the image of the UPA. The wholehearted support the people extended to him saw the BJP getting a majority on its own, and the NDA claiming a two-thirds support in the lower house. Corruption graph came down at the top levels at least, no doubt, though there are instances like the Rafale which might have had provisions to draw funds for the ruling party through the arms of a business conglomerate.

As the results of two opinion polls done by reputed agencies showed, the scenario post poll 2019 could be one of a three-cornered push for power. The NDA would not be able to gain a majority, the UPA could be in a worse plight, and the regional players could come up with more seats than the UPA, though they are not a unified entity but a rag-tag group of power players. Technically speaking, there could be situations favouring a hung parliament, but post-poll realignments and greed for power on the part of politicians would ensure that a government is somehow formed. It could be Modi again, or it could be anyone else at the helm. The opinion polls were based on people's perceptions before Priyanka Gandhi's role in Congress leadership was announced. This could materially change the scenario in ways that would favour the Congress more. Whether she could create a wave of sorts for the Congress is too early to say. What's certain is that Modi cannot recapture the wave he created in his own favour and that of the BJP yet again. Whichever way one sees it, here are chances the regional players would call much of the shots post 2019 polls, and a scenario worse than the UPA II period would emerge. This could, thus, be a season of political uncertainties – which would mean lack of focused attention on the nation's growth in diverse fields.

It's finally official! Priyanka Vadra takes a bow as Congress General Secretary UP (East) and suddenly there is a spring in the comatose Congress, notwithstanding its three-State victory. The future in UP which so far looked desolate suddenly seems upbeat after the Congress's '440-Volt jolt' Brahmastra: Political Priyanka has arrived!

Shedding her reticence, Priyanka who was campaign-in-charge of mother Sonia's Rae Bareilly and brother Rahul's Amethi Lok Sabha constituencies is now leading the battle from the front. Since the UP Assembly elections 2017 she has been attending strategy sessions, helping Rahul select candidates, fine-tune campaigns, repair fault-lines between young Turks and Congress veterans and got the Party to focus its energies on doing well in elections.

Undeniably, the Party has thrust the 47-year old, seventh from the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, into the limelight after opinion polls showed the UP voter's disenchantment with the Congress heading for disaster against the SP-BSP combine and Modi's BJP. All this with the hope that she would be able to revive a moribund Party and breathe life into it! But this raises a moot point: What are Priyanka's political credentials? Is her political baptism a case of too little, too late? Does she have the courage and wherewithal to fight against political odds and personal controversies ensnaring husband Robert?

Can she replicate grandmother Indira's sense of political timing a la Belchi carnage riding on an elephant and élan, "Log kehtain hain Indira hatao main kehtein hoon desh bachao!" Is the dynasty a panacea for the Congress's and nation's ills? For how long can one bank on family background and sacrifices? The jury is out.

Undoubtedly Priyanka's lineage is impeccable. The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty has provided three Prime Ministers, a great grandfather Nehru, grandmother Indira Gandhi and father Rajiv along-with mother Sonia, Congress Party President and "power behind the 10-year UPA throne".

Besides, Priyanka who bears a striking resemblance to Indira is viewed by Congressmen as

# Priyanka Debuts Can she revive Congress?

By Poonam I Kaushish

the best hope to revive the Party's fortunes and be the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty torch-bearer in the State post the BJP announcing 10% quota for the unreserved poor despite Rahul's new-found élan and confidence of taking Modi head-on. Like Indira, she has the clarity and confidence, is lucid and easily 'connects' with people having them eat out of her hands.

Already, she is getting under Modi's skin by taunting him, "A 56-inch chest is not needed to run this country, a big heart is needed to run it," she said. Said a family retainer, "She is a born natural, has spontaneity and ability to deliver a punch that has crowds eating from her hands, unlike Rahul who is much sober."

Remember, over the years, times out of number Sonia has discounted Congressmen's demand for Priyanka's induction into

content to be a pushover in UP, India's most politically-significant State with 80 of 543 Lok Sabha seats. It has not given it up in favour of Bhua Mayawati-Bhatia Akhilesh's alliance or BJP and is serious about its fight, so serious that it has risked its biggest trump card.

Two, it has told people outside UP that the stakes for Rahul have gone up with another Gandhi at the Congress's high table. Three the Rahul-Priyanka duo plan to connect to women and the youth and has fresh ideas for the State, different from poverty and conflict.

What next? Will Rahul's out-of-the-box strategy to get his sister to officially debut change the complex political scenario specially in UP? It is too early to say but as things stand Rahul has to think on his feet, reinvent the Party and change the political

voters mind-space or not, Congress candidates will benefit by her presence," said a senior UP Congress leader, adding, "we intend to be an alternative for minorities, upper-castes and non-Jatav Dalits and non-Yadav OBCs the combination which we lost to BJP, SP-BSP. Priyanka is the all-important roll of dice for us."

With expectations running high, Priyanka has her task cut out and will be judged by her ability to deliver electoral victories. The enormity of the task can be gauged from the fact that the Congress won only two Lok Sabha seats in UP and BJP 71 in 2014. Also, anti-Modism cannot be an ideology or an electoral alternative as the Congress no longer has a critical mass of loyal voters in States.

It could see the Party's metamorphosis into a duet between brother and sister given the strong bond between them and Priyanka would leave no stone unturned to help Rahul but without overshadowing him.

But she is no Indira or for that matter no Sonia either who resurrected the Congress's fortunes. At least, not yet. Her intellectual ability is untested. True, she has succeeded in the family pocket boroughs but they do not represent the whole country. In an aspirational new India with over 50% of the electorate between 18-35 seeking jobs and good quality of life, charisma is not a prescription drug for election victory.

More so, in the backdrop of Priyanka having to defend her husband's controversial land deals and questionable ill-gotten wealth. Also, one can win elections by invoking the family name but for how many elections and for how long? She has a long way to go to prove a leader who can resurrect the Party's fortunes.

Priyanka would do well to remember that politics is not a part-time occupation nor a cameo to re-emerge every five years or when the 'family business' is in trouble. Also, votes, not media space win elections and electoral success or failure is the only test of political legitimacy. Even as she represents a rainbow in the Congress's distant horizon today she connotes an ephemeral reality: A gamble which could bomb dramatically or blaze a trail of fame. --- INFA

**The reason is understandable. Her charismatic daughter not only has the political savvy, killer instinct but also grabs eyeballs and media headlines and could politically give Rahul and rivals a run for their money. Yet, her political CV is zilch, she has had no active political experience, if one discounts her stints as campaign manager for Sonia in Rae Bareilly.**

the Party and lead from the front. The reason is understandable. Her charismatic daughter not only has the political savvy, killer instinct but also grabs eyeballs and media headlines and could politically give Rahul and rivals a run for their money.

Yet, her political CV is zilch, she has had no active political experience, if one discounts her stints as campaign manager for Sonia in Rae Bareilly. How electrifying Priyanka's induction will be is anybody's guess. For starters, eastern UP isn't exactly a friendly terrain for the Congress. Of the 21 seats it won in 2009, 15 were from there but in 2014, it drew a blank except for the two family seats Amethi and Rae Bareilly.

Either way, three things are clear: One, her entry has told the UP voter that the Congress is no longer

discourse in its favour against the backdrop of Bhua-Bhatija's snub.

Certainly, Priyanka's entry will not only energise workers by conveying that she has stepped out of the shadows to bat along with her brother and mother to strengthen the Nehru-Gandhi family's grip on the Congress leadership and affirming its role in deciding the Party's future.

However, there is a down side. In the event she eclipses Rahul, makes him redundant and becomes a power centre it could prove disastrous for the Party. Succinctly asserted an old timer: Ek mayaana main doh talwarein nahin rahe sakte hain. Priyanka is a sure winner."

to 30 persons, leaving only a thin slice of less than 1/20 part for as many as 60 persons! Is there any justice and equity in all of this?

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

## Another Republic Day!

Editor,  
Republic Day or Independence Day have no meaning to the large number of Indian citizens who are struggling to eke out a living and can barely have two square meals a day. The other day I was passing through Jhalupara and happened to see people being served food by some organisation. There might have been about two hundred people, more or less - men women and children who were eating what looked like a nutritious meal. On enquiring from the people

in the locality I was told that there is a charitable trust that is providing these hot meals daily. Now how does Republic Day have any meaning for these poor souls? Instead of celebrating the day by having all kinds of functions where the high and mighty attend, it would be better to use the money to help the poor in the neighbourhood. I was very touched that there could be an organisation in Shillong that cares about the poorest and the needy and that people would cook meals for them every day. The volunteers of this charitable organisation must be commended for their hard work for it is not an easy task to do this every single day.

Yours etc.,  
MK Kapoor,  
Via email

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

## UN Predictions

# Fiscal turmoil, uneven growth

By Shivaji Sarkar

The global economy is stagnating and income inequality is increasing concerns over growth, as India enters a vibrant political phase and pines for economic direction. The phase is critical. World stagnation, as the UN has predicted in 2019 and 2020 in its World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2019, has ramifications for India. Its efforts for economic recovery would be affected impacting its future budgetary provisions.

Will its political wisdom be able to address this? Would Opposition Congress trying to fight on the "front foot" with Priyanka Gandhi being formally launched as AICC General Secretary and Rahul Gandhi as a sober campaigner, be able to make a difference? Another crucial question is whether the Congress has a vision beyond Manmohanomics?

Remember, the Manmohanomics of 1991 did one good thing. It ushered in partly in practice more in theory an era of liberalisation. The path has since been followed willfully by all successive governments, irrespective of the political colour. All finance ministers after Manmohan Singh, did so. That was good given there was a predictability of the course. But with years the supposed liberalisation, talked in 1991, got lost somewhere. It has led to a firmer grip by the bureaucracy or the government itself on the course and lives of the people and their businesses.

This has led to a certain level of GDP growth but the social distribution of wealth has been convoluted, leading to severe concentration of wealth, in one per cent people and the growth of wealth of the multitude in most cases either getting minimal or reduced, as per OXFAM. The worst has happened to the daily wage labourers, with their earnings coming down.

The WESP has noted the trend continuing in different regions. Though it predicts a three per cent annual growth till 2020 globally, it sees deceleration to two per cent in the European Union and the US, "as the impulse from fiscal stimulus in 2018 wanes. The Brexit or not has shaken the European economy". China too is slowing down to 6.6 per cent. Several parts of Africa, Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean are likely to see incomes stagnating.

Without mentioning India, WESP states: "Even where per capita growth is strong, economic activity is often driven by core industrial and urban regions, leaving peripheral and rural areas behind". This is happening in Indian farms and rural areas. And, the political fall-out marked the recent Assembly elections.

The global slowdown has had an impact on Indian exports and can cause domestic discontent.

Peculiar to Indian scenario, the WESP says, there "is a confluence of risks with the potential to severely disrupt economic activity and inflict significant damage on longer-term development prospects. The risks include waning support for multilateral approaches; the escalation of trade disputes; financial instabilities linked to elevated levels of debts; and rising climate risks, as the world experiences an increasing number of extreme weather events".

The prediction is pessimistic and India is suffering many of these. Growth is not being reflected in people's happiness. This is the greatest challenge to the political contenders for the 2019 elections. So far, no political party has shown that it has a grasp on the situation. Instead, all of the parties are in a wilderness failing to understand the crisis.

The Indian voters need an

answer. The Opposition is very vocal that the ruling BJP does not understand the phenomenon. True or not, do any of them understand? The recent Assembly polls brought to the fore not only the crisis but also that if a Telangana government brought a half-baked solution for increasing farmers' income by paying them Rs 4000 (now Rs 5000) per acre of their holding, all others consider this as only an instant vote-catching mechanism.

The announcement of Priyanka Gandhi leading eastern UP, once a Congress citadel has warmed up politics. One would have liked to see if there was a firm economic pattern also. No regional or national party has shown that vision, concept or wisdom.

Sadly, the parties are suffering from myopia. They have lost sight of the fundamental problems. Competitive rhetoric is raising doubts. People are in a quandary. They do not find a solution to joblessness, underemployment and falling incomes and a continuous rising inflation. The governments have lost the will and control to correct the situation.

So the UN Chief Economist and Assistant Secretary-General Elliott Harris states: "Alongside various short-term risks, there is an increasing urgency to deal with much more fundamental problems". He does not find sustainable development goals being achieved or poverty elevated till 2030. So do neither the political parties in this country. They are busy in caste politics, religious divide and raking up parochial issues. All lead to ignoring the 2030 SDG. Worse, India does not seem to have yet found the path.

A country that was once led by its own economic wisdom of Chanakya, that followed Gandhian principles, Marx, Engels, socialism or Keynes, and now the market economy or Deen Dayal Updhyay's integrative humanism, today finds all of these have failed and now it does not have a model to follow.

The governments are only tightening financial conditions through the banks and other instruments of taxation or interest rates. The UN says this can lead to financial turmoil. The WESP says "as global financial conditions tighten an unexpectedly rapid rise in interest rates or a significant strengthening of the US dollar could exacerbate emerging market fragilities, leading to heightened risk of debt distress. This risk can be further aggravated by global trade tensions, monetary policy adjustment in developed economies, commodity price shocks, or domestic political or economic disruptions."

That exactly is happening here. Large external financing needs and limited policy buffers are particularly vulnerable to financial stress. Often it is said that the country should spend more on research, which it is doing. Its research investment in theoretical non-productive research has grown phenomenally. Universities are producing more doctorates. But fundamental thinking is eluding.

This leads to uneven economic growth. The fears of incomes stagnating further would be real. It says double digit growth is required. That is also not a solution. Growth and amelioration of conditions are not synonymous.

So the government may continue or change for the present, ground realities may be disturbing and solutions half baked. Income inequality, as feared by the UN, is likely to aggravate. For a solution there has to be dialogue and the political leadership has to be sagacious. A tall order! --- INFA

## TO THE EDITOR

### Meghalaya's unfinished projects

Editor,  
The news item "Shillong's Crowborough Hotel Project Far From Completion" (ST Jan 23, 2019) is a sad reminder of how government after government has failed the state and it's people. The Crowborough Hotel is one of the numerous projects that has brought shame and embarrassment to the state. The news report states that the hotel will have a soft opening by January 2020 but the truth is that we the people of the state have been fooled enough by false promises of governments so we are in no mood to believe these false claims until and unless we actually see the Hotel stand tall in its fullest glory. However, what is sadder is the bare fact that time and money has been wasted in various unfinished projects in the state. If nearly four

decades is not sufficient to complete the Crowborough Project one wonders if the Assembly Building will also face the same plight. After all, after 19 years Meghalaya is yet to have an Assembly building of it's own.

We the people need to know if governments and those in the helm of affairs will ever work in all earnestness towards completion of at least a single unfinished project or is it mere lip service?

Yours etc.,  
Jennifer Dkhar,  
Via email

### Judiciary must introspect

Editor  
It is important to critically review the Indian judiciary from the people's perspective. It is certainly unfair that a fairly foggy and questionable elevation system for the judges is in place currently and possibly many deserving

individuals have been superseded or treated unfairly. However, what the judiciary is returning to the ordinary citizens of India; the core of the world's largest democracy must also be asked. Several top court judgements in India involving rich elites, politician and celebrities have raised eyebrows around the globe and has placed serious doubts regarding the impartiality of the highest judiciary in India! Can the poorest of the poor afford to knock the doors of the Supreme Court of India, the abode of justice for a fair ruling? Can an ordinary citizen approach the court and expect true justice other than a new 'date'?

Politicizing the judicial system of India started several decades ago, post-independence and several judges with political connections have benefited. But in spite of the huge perks the judges receive from the Republic

of India are they truly loyal to the citizens of the nation and the Constitution? This is an important question to ask. The Indian judiciary needs an honest self-introspection too.

Yours etc.,  
Saikat Kumar Basu  
Lethbridge AB Canada  
TIJ4B3

### Inequity in India on the rise

Editor,  
The recent Oxfam report estimates that the top one per cent of India's population have as much as 51.53 per cent of the national wealth, the top 10 per cent own 77.4 per cent and the bottom 60 per cent have 4.8 per cent. This means that to celebrate our Republic Day, if we are to cut a cake where 100 people are present, we have to give more than half of the cake to just 1 person, more than 1/4 of it to 9 persons, less than 1/5 of it

"Any critic is entitled to wrong judgments, of course. But certain lapses of judgment indicate the radical failure of an entire sensibility."

--- Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.166

SHILLONG, MONDAY, JANUARY 28, 2019

### Aiming for the Moon

AFTER the initial euphoria that lasted a few decades, marked by the landing of humans on the moon in 1969, space exploration efforts did not get much traction in later years. But, a perceptible push is evident of late, with China entering the scene in a big way with its plans for a crewed landing mission on moon, and some other nations too evincing similar interests. The latest on the space exploration front was the Chinese success in enabling a plant seed to sprout in the moon's soil – albeit with a short life. Yet, it proved a point. Notably, the new fervour on the part of many nations to take to space exploration, or to do it in a more energetic way, is prompted by the spirit of competition – as has been the case with this endeavour from the very start. By landing two humans on the moon's surface for the first time, Americans created not only history but also stole the wind out of the sails of the Russians (USSR). While Russia had taken the lead in space exploration till then, America took up the challenge by setting up the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958 and earmarking substantial funding for it. The results came in the form of the moon landing 11 years hence. The break-up of the USSR or Soviet Union, the resultant end of the Cold War, and the worsening economic woes forced Russia to reduce funding for its space projects. Then came an era of joint efforts by the US and Russia. Nothing much happened thereafter, though. Now China, the late starter came in from behind and is progressing with major future plans. It aims at landing its humans on the moon soon.

Thanks to China, it's revival time for space explorations in the US. Americans are now planning to set up a permanent lunar-lander to help organise frequent trips to the moon. The Congress is in a mood to allot \$1 billion for similar purposes. A lunar gateway orbital station and other technical requirements would follow. China is also planning regular trips to the moon. Plans are afoot in Europe to organise tourism trips to the moon in due course. India too has joined the space exploration race with its Chandrayaan and other missions. So too have Russia, Germany, Israel and Japan. The Mars missions, several of them in recent decades, have not been successful. Finding life on planets around us remains a dream so far, but hope is not lost.

It was Danny Burke from Ireland who has done his research on the monoliths in Khasi and Jaintia hills who on a visit to the Amlarem area remarked, "We have only heard about the Living-root bridges of the Khasi Pnar, but now we know that there are Stone bridges too. The people who live on the Southern slopes of Meghalaya bordering Bangladesh are famous for the living-root bridges which they made or rather wove by using the roots of the Ficus Elastica commonly called the rubber tree. These bio-bridges have brought name and fame for the State of Meghalaya. But the megalithic bridge too has its own story.

If there is a place in Meghalaya which has a huge potential for promoting tourism, it is Amlarem, because the villages in the Blocks have varieties of spots which can attract tourists. If we divide Amlarem subdivision into three divisions then we have the uplands, the eastern slopes and the western slopes and each area has its own unique selling point. The upland areas would comprise villages from Jaraiñ village to Jowai and in this sector we already have Krangshuri waterfalls which attract huge tourist traffic. The success story of Krangshuri started with the former Deputy Commissioner, Jaintia Hills, FR Kharkongor who had initially helped developed the area. In fact it was he carefully mapped out spots like Ialong sacred grove, developed the Jaraiñ pitcher plant lake, a spot on the bank of river Kupli at Iooksi and a few other spots.

Under the leadership of Donbok Buam who is also the secretary of the raid Buam, along with the support of the District Administration they have not only been able to develop Krangshuri, but now adjacent to Krangshuri, a new spot known as Sua ladong is also being developed to attract tourists. But the product will be incomplete if another unique potential of the raid which is the only place which produces smoked fishes is neglected. Jaraiñ village has a potential which is yet to be tapped as the place also has a spring which produces salt water which attracts birds from the other places to migrate to the area during the summer.

This sector also has villages like Mustern, Moosakhia, Samanong and Iongnoh which have virgin sacred groves, some of which are the largest in the

for this rescue operation. It will teach them to be more responsible next time they think of investing in another rat hole mine.

Yours etc..  
Dominic S. Wankhar  
Shillong

### No humanity left

Editor,  
I refer to a letter by Philip Marwein (ST Jan 23, 2019) calling for winding up the rescue operation of the miners trapped in a mine in East Jaintia Hills. Marwein seems to lack the moral compass that guides humans to care for one another. Perhaps he is keen to abandon the rescue operation because he believes it is futile to bring out dead bodies but has he not read the Supreme Court order which says that the State Government should rescue the miners dead or alive and that miracles can happen. Philip Marwein seems to toe the government line about giving up this rescue operation because "it is expensive." Is money more important than human lives?  
Let the mine owners pay

# Land of Stone Bridges

By HH Mohrmen

state. Chyrmang village and its sacred grove could attract tourists because the community's effort to protect and preserve animals in the sacred grove has helped increase the numbers of animal and deer in particular which visitors to the village can easily sight. The success of the project is also because of the support the community gave to the Forest Department in protecting the forests which are now under the Community Reserved Project.

In the Western slope sector, we already have the three villages of Shnongpdeng, Darang, and Dawki located on the banks of river Umngot and which are famous for the crystal clear water. The picture of the area that folks carry is that of a boat floating on the crystal clear water which looks like it is flying. The truth is the survival of these three spots depends solely on the condition of the river Umngot and as long as Umngot is free from

**The tourist attraction which traverses through the upland and eastern region is the famous royal path of the erstwhile Jaintia kings from Nartiang to Jaintiapur which is now in Bangladesh.**

pollution, the three spots will continue to attract tourists. This sector also has areas, the potential of which are yet to be tapped and perhaps this is the only place which has a large number of living-root bridges in the state, located in villages like Padu, Nongbareh and now Kudeng Rim which can be further developed.

After Krangshuri on the upland sector, Shnongpdeng, Darang and Dawki on the western sector, Kudeng-rim is another village on this sector which is going gung-ho in promoting the tourism potential of the area. Kudeng-rim already has beautiful falls on the river Amkshar and the old living-root bridge is now being developed into a double-decker bridge. Under the leadership of the Waheh Chnong Mondew Pohtam the community has gone ahead and added more value to the place by constructing a bamboo bridge without using a single nail and a tree house made of bamboo and many other attractions.

If this circuit is to be further developed, the community fish sanctuary famous for the endangered

chocolate mahseer fish, the rock garden and the Nongbareh living-root bridge should also be developed. It may be mentioned that during the second Jaintia rebellion under the leadership of u Kiang Nangbah, the fight against the British in this area continued even after Kiang Nangbah was hanged and the trenches built can still be found.

The Western sector also has caves which are tourist friendly. But Amlarem is also known for its culture. The area has rich cultural traditions but these cultures and traditions like the Longhai, the Chohñia, the Rongkhli (tiger festival) are dying out. The one that is still popular is Rongkusi.

Nongtalang is another village in the area which is famous for its culture. The joint family system is still prevalent in the area and Rongkhla is the festival performed by the people

of Nongtalang only. The other important selling points of Nongtalang are the two viewpoints overlooking Bangladesh and also few living-root bridges.

The Eastern Sector already has Syndai which is famous for its cave, the Rupasor bathing ghat with all the sculptures and carvings; the ruined temple; the image of Ganesh which is sculpted on a single rock, the image of a baby elephant sculpted on a stone on the river Umpubon and the river Prang. What the locals call the Myntdu also has images sculpted or carved on stone. Villages like Karkhana also have tourist friendly caves.

The tourist attraction which traverses through the upland and eastern region is the famous royal path of the erstwhile Jaintia kings from Nartiang to Jaintiapur which is now in Bangladesh. The path comprises of monoliths which comprise standing stones or menhirs and table stones or dolmens on many portions of the paths which were also used as resting areas (kor shongthait). But the most

significant aspect of the royal paths are the stone bridges which include those at Thlumuwi, Umiaknieh/Amjaknieh near the famous Krangshuri waterfall and the other two stone bridges near Syndai and over the river Umpubon.

Throughout the 70 KM path which was paved with stones, there are four stone bridges. If one travels from Jowai, the first stone bridge is the megalithic bridge at Thlumuwi or river Umwi near the Jowai Amlarem road. The second stone bridge is the Umiaknieh or Amjaknieh which is located very close to the Krangshuri waterfall. The two stone bridges have similar masonry style which is rudimentary in nature but the one at Umiaknieh has another addition in which the masonry work is much refined. Obviously the additional portion was added later, it may also be a repair work of the part of the original bridge which has collapsed.

The other two stone bridges are at located at Syndai near the river Umpubon and Rupasor bathing ghat. The two megalithic bridges at Syndai have different masonry styles; the finishing over the one over the river Umpubon is rudimentary in nature, but the megalithic one near Rupasor was built using stone blocks which were nicely carved and has an arch in which the stone blocks were fixed together using iron since cement was not available those days. Therefore from this preliminary study it is safe to conclude that the four megalithic bridges were not made by the same people or even in the same period. From the style and the nature of the work in making the four bridges, it can be concluded that they were built at two different eras by two different set of people.

When he first saw the megalithic bridges, Dr Glenn Kharkongor, Chancellor of Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong remarked: This is our Taj Mahal. From the report in the press we are informed that the Central Government has allotted a considerable amount of money for development of tourism in the State. The Government would therefore do well to allocate funds for protecting and preserving the stone bridges, the stone sculptures and carvings in the different parts of Jaintia hills. Jaintia hills is the only place where we have all kinds of stone structures from megaliths to microlith structures.

gear himself/herself to face the Lok Sabha polls with confidence and must also be willing to work hard and invest their time and energies in meeting people and finding out their problems. The Congress lost the last election here by a very small margin. And here also it was a case of anti-incumbency. Now that the Congress in Meghalaya knows what it is to be in the opposition I hope that they will work harder and connect with the voters. Although Priyanka Gandhi's entry into active politics will for now be as general secretary in charge Eastern UP, we hope she is given a bigger role in the Party after May 2019. That is if she has not already contested and won the Lok Sabha elections.

Yours etc.,  
BK Sharma,  
Via email

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

## UN Predictions Fiscal turmoil, uneven growth

By Shivaji Sarkar

The global economy is stagnating and income inequality is creating concerns over growth, as India enters a vibrant political phase and pines for economic direction. The phase is critical. World stagnation, as the UN has predicted in 2019 and 2020 in its World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2019, has ramifications for India. Its efforts for economic recovery would be affected impacting its future budgetary provisions.

Will its political wisdom be able to address this? Would Opposition Congress trying to fight on the "front foot" with Priyanka Gandhi being formally launched as AICC General Secretary and Rahul Gandhi as a sober campaigner, be able to make a difference? Another crucial question is whether the Congress has a vision beyond Manmohanomics?

Remember, the Manmohanomics of 1991 did one good thing. It ushered in partly in practice more in theory, an era of liberalisation. The path has since been followed willy-nilly by all successive governments, irrespective of the political colour. All finance ministers after Manmohan Singh, did so. That was good given there was a predictability of the course. But with years the supposed liberalisation, talked in 1991, got lost somewhere. It has led to a firmer grip by the bureaucracy or the government itself on the course and lives of the people and their businesses.

This has led to a certain level of GDP growth but the social distribution of wealth has been convoluted, leading to severe concentration of wealth, in one per cent people and the growth of wealth of the multitude in most cases either getting minimal or reduced, as per OXFAM. The worst has happened to the daily wage labourers, with their earnings coming down.

The WESP has noted the trend continuing in different regions. Though it predicts a three per cent annual growth till 2020 globally, it sees deceleration to two per cent in the European Union and the US, "as the impulse from fiscal stimulus in 2018 wanes. The Brexit or not has shaken the European economy". China too is slowing down to 6.6 per cent. Several parts of Africa, Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean are likely to see incomes stagnating.

Without mentioning India, WESP states: "Even where per capita growth is strong, economic activity is often driven by core industrial and urban regions, leaving peripheral and rural areas behind". This is happening in Indian farms and rural areas. And, the political fall-out marked the recent Assembly elections. The global slowdown has had an impact on Indian exports and can cause domestic discontent.

Peculiar to Indian scenario, the WESP says, there "is a confluence of risks with the potential to severely disrupt economic activity and inflict significant damage on longer-term development prospects. The risks include waning support for multilateral approaches; the escalation of trade disputes; financial instabilities linked to elevated levels of debts; and rising climate risks, as the world experiences an increasing number of extreme weather events".

The prediction is pessimistic and India is suffering many of these. Growth is not being reflected in people's happiness. This is the greatest challenge to the political contenders for the 2019 elections. So far, no political party has shown that it has a grasp on the situation. Instead, all of the parties are in a wilderness failing to understand the crisis.

The Indian voters need an answer. The Opposition is

very vocal that the ruling BJP does not understand the phenomenon. True or not, do any of them understand? The recent Assembly polls brought to the fore not only the crisis but also that if a Telangana government brought a half-baked solution for increasing farmers' income by paying them Rs 4000 (now Rs 5000) per acre of their holding, all others consider this as only an instant vote-catching mechanism.

The announcement of Priyanka Gandhi leading eastern UP, once a Congress citadel has warmed up politics. One would have liked to see if there was a firm economic pattern also. No regional or national party has shown that vision, concept or wisdom.

Sadly, the parties are suffering from myopia. They have lost sight of the fundamental problems. Competitive rhetoric is raising doubts. People are in a quandary. They do not find a solution to joblessness, underemployment and falling incomes and a continuous rising inflation. The governments have lost the will and control to correct the situation.

So the UN Chief Economist and Assistant Secretary-General Elliott Harris states: "Alongside various short-term risks, there is an increasing urgency to deal with much more fundamental problems". He does not find sustainable development goals being achieved or poverty elevated till 2030. So do neither the political parties in this country. They are busy in caste politics, religious divide and raking up parochial issues. All lead to ignoring the 2030 SDG. Worse, India does not seem to have yet found the path.

A country that was once led by its own economic wisdom of Chanakya, that followed Gandhian principles, Marx, Engels, socialism or Keynes, and now the market economy or Deen Dayal Updhyay's integra humanism, today finds all of these have failed and now it does not have a model to follow. The governments are only tightening financial conditions through the banks and other instruments of taxation or interest rates. The UN says this can lead to financial turmoil. The WESP says "as global financial conditions tighten an unexpectedly rapid rise in interest rates or a significant strengthening of the US dollar could exacerbate emerging market fragilities, leading to heightened risk of debt distress. This risk can be further aggravated by global trade tensions, monetary policy adjustment in developed economies, commodity price shocks, or domestic political or economic disruptions."

That exactly is happening here. Large external financing needs and limited policy buffers are particularly vulnerable to financial stress. Often it is said that the country should spend more on research, which it is doing. Its research investment in theoretical non-productive research has grown phenomenally. Universities are producing more doctorates. But fundamental thinking is eluding. This leads to uneven economic growth. The fears of incomes stagnating further would be real. It says double digit growth is required. That is also not a solution. Growth and amelioration of conditions are not synonymous.

So the government may continue or change for the present, ground realities may be disturbing and solutions half baked. Income inequality, as feared by the UN, is likely to aggravate. For a solution there has to be dialogue and the political leadership has to be sagacious. A tall order!  
--- INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

### Flouting the apex court orders

Editor,  
The Supreme Court had in its order notified all states that there shall not be any misuse of red beacons and siren as a matter of privilege and that only emergency rescue vehicles, law enforcement agencies, ambulances can utilize them according to necessity. However, in many states this law has been misused; so also here in Meghalaya. As per Central Motor Vehicle Rules 1989 only emergency vehicles can use their designated colour coded beacons and sirens which was reinforced by the Apex Court. But till date we find that many cars with private number plates continue to blare sirens which is illegal and also a contempt of the Supreme Court's ruling. Perhaps the Home Department needs to pull up its socks before the State Government becomes a laughing stock.

Yours etc..  
Dominic S. Wankhar  
Shillong

### No humanity left

Editor,  
I refer to a letter by Philip Marwein (ST Jan 23, 2019) calling for winding up the rescue operation of the miners trapped in a mine in East Jaintia Hills. Marwein seems to lack the moral compass that guides humans to care for one another. Perhaps he is keen to abandon the rescue operation because he believes it is futile to bring out dead bodies but has he not read the Supreme Court order which says that the State Government should rescue the miners dead or alive and that miracles can happen. Philip Marwein seems to toe the government line about giving up this rescue operation because "it is expensive." Is money more important than human lives?  
Let the mine owners pay

### Priyanka Gandhi's timely entry

Editor,  
Much has been said by the BJP and others about the entry of Priyanka Gandhi into active politics. People seem to have a problem with dynasty but they forget that here in the North East we have accepted dynastic politics. Meghalaya is a good example. It is my belief that a member of the Nehru-Gandhi family entering politics, this time to take charge of Eastern Uttar Pradesh will definitely bring in more goodwill for the Congress Party. Priyanka Gandhi has a grace about her and handles the media very

adroitly. She addresses them in a personal tone. She is able to touch base with ordinary people and appears to be better able to think on her feet than her brother Rahul Gandhi. For all we know, Priyanka might just give Rahul Gandhi a run for his money and might even be projected as the future Prime Minister of India. Yes Priyanka could turn the tide for the Congress Party despite the critics who seem to be unduly perturbed by her entry into politics.

The Congress needs a talisman to revive its waning fortunes. Its win in the assembly elections in three important states happened mainly because of anti-incumbency. Vasundhara Raje the CM of Rajasthan failed to provide relief to farmers. So too the CMs of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh both of whom have been at the helm for too long a time. The electorate want change because they link change to hope. They can at least hope in a new government because the old one had

failed them. But it is not necessary that people will vote the same way for the Lok Sabha elections. And the BJP did not do too badly in all of the three states. Hence the Congress which is not part of the Mahagatbandhan of opposition parties in Uttar Pradesh will have to play its cards well.

It is not yet known if Priyanka Gandhi will contest the Lok Sabha election. If she does then a win is guaranteed because of her personal charisma and connect with the voters. Whenever Priyanka has been roped in for the campaign she has given it her all. Perhaps this Indira Gandhi look-alike might even be brought to the North Eastern states to campaign here. She will win hearts and votes too, I hope. However, that does not mean that the Congress Party should rely only on the Nehru-Gandhi family to win elections. Every Congress worker must

*"Art is long, life short, judgment difficult, opportunity transient."*

--- Myriam Miedzian

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.167 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2019

### Of Hollow Claims

CHIEF Minister Conrad Sangma has allayed the fears of people about the disastrous effects of rat-hole mining by claiming that the rules governing the District Mineral Foundation would be put in place to address environmental concerns. The District Mineral Foundations (DMFs) are district-level bodies established under the new central mining laws to benefit local people affected by mining operations, by the end of 2018. DMFs have been established under Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015, also known as MMDRA Act, 2015. In Meghalaya the District Mineral Foundation Rules were notified in 2017. But at a meeting of all Secretaries of State Mining Departments held in November 2018, the Joint Secretary, Mining Department, Govt of Meghalaya, PL Lawai informed the Ministry that not a single rupee has been collected for the DMF as of October 1, 2018. The DMF funds are meant to address high priority sectors like drinking water supply, health care, sanitation, education, skill development, women and child care, welfare of the aged and disabled people, skill development and environment conservation. They are to get at least 60 per cent share of the DMF funds, as per the rules. For creating a "supportive and conducive" living environment, the mining rules state that the remaining DMF funds will be spent on making roads, bridges, railways, waterways, irrigation facilities and alternative energy sources. Most districts affected by mining operations are extremely poor and without basic amenities such as clean water, schools and hospitals. The DMF is necessitated because most districts affected by mining operations are extremely poor and without basic amenities such as clean water, schools and hospitals. This is exactly what defines the mining areas in Meghalaya.

The Central Mining Act clearly states that a mining licence or composite licence (prospecting licence-cum-mining licence) can be granted by state governments only through the auction route. Such a licence-owner company has to pay the DMF - established in the districts where it is mining - an amount equivalent to 10 per cent of the royalty. However, under the old mining law, licences were granted on a discretionary basis by the state governments. The companies with such licences have to pay an amount equivalent to 30 per cent of the royalty towards DMFs. It is precisely because of the reluctance to pay the required royalty to the DMF that the mine owners of Meghalaya want to skirt the Central Mining Act and to claim immunity under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. If the rules for operationalising the DMF are already there then what is the CM talking about?

# Ksan tragedy: A Jumla on the people of Meghalaya

By Albert Thyriani

Soon after Rahul Gandhi repeatedly used it in the Lok Sabha on July 20 last year, 'Jumla' became the most searched word on Google. Today The Hindi/Urdu word is one of the commonest terms in India. Jumla has come to mean a 'false', 'unrealistic' and 'unfulfilled promise'. It means a promise that is meant merely to woo voters and win elections and not with the intention to fulfil it. 'Jumla' is bound to be one of the latest non-English words to be incorporated into the English dictionary.

How is Jumla connected with Ksan? Well, before the link a recap of the fatal incident in Ksan may be of interest. The most unfortunate tragedy occurred on 13 December 2018, when 15 miners were trapped in an illegal mine in the remote village of Ksan in the East Jaintia Hills. Reports say five other miners narrowly escaped. A combined rescue operation involving the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), the State Disaster Response Force, the Indian Air Force, the Indian Navy and others has been going on till date. One decomposed body was retrieved and another located inside the 370 feet deep, flooded coal mine.

The misfortune would not have happened had the BJP and NPP not promised to lift the ban on coal mining in the state. Before the Assembly elections 2018, with a view to woo coal mine owners the BJP, in its 'Vision Document', promised to resume mining in the state, if voted to power. 'The Party will promote mining of mineral resources with a sense of responsibility towards the protection of the environment and regeneration of forests', states the manifesto as part of other gargantuan promises. Similarly the NPP through its Chief, Conrad K Sangma pledged to restart coal mining if his party was given the mandate to rule the state.

On April 17, 2014, the National Green Tribunal (NGT), a government body adjudicating on environmental issues, proscribed the now internationally well known 'rat-hole' mining in Meghalaya. The promise made by the two parties (which eventually came to power in the state after the election) was aimed at the mining constituency that include thousands who earn their livelihoods through mining and particularly the powerful coal lobby. It was an assurance mainly to win the elections. Surely the

two parties knew very well that it would be extremely difficult to convince the NGT to lift the ban because of the outdated mining technique that is most inhuman to say that least. Miners are turned into 'rats'. Moreover the environment has been compromised to the extent of irreversibility. The BJP and the NPP knew at the back of their minds that it would be next to impossible to make the NGT reverse its previous judgment. The unrealistic promise was meant not to be broken and hence it was a sort of Jumla on the coal mine owners.

Despite the ban on rat hole mining, illegal mining continued unabated. Certainly the state government, the central government, the state and

**The NGT itself and anti-mining activists repeatedly pointed that mining still continued rampantly. Two activists were brutally and almost fatally attacked by the mining mafia in November last year in Jaintia Hills while they were on a visit to gather evidence of mining in the district.**

district administrations and the police were aware of the illegal mining of the black diamond. All illegal activities happened under their noses. Little effort was made to implement the NGT order. Under the pretext of transporting coal (allowed by the Supreme Court on petitions by coal mine owners) extracted prior to the ban, illegal mining of fresh coal was going on with full knowledge of all authorities up to the highest. The NGT itself and anti-mining activists repeatedly pointed that mining still continued rampantly. Two activists were brutally and almost fatally attacked by the mining mafia in November last year in Jaintia Hills while they were on a visit to gather evidence of mining in the district. The MDA government closed its eyes on illegal mining because before election its constituent parties promised resumption of the same if they formed the government. There was no moral ground to put an end to mining. An all out effort to honour the ban would have incurred the wrath of the powerful coal barons who might have funded the last election campaigns. Had the promise not been made, the government would have probably stopped mining as per the NGT's order. Had the government tried to stop

mining would the tragic incident have taken place? Unfortunately a tragedy that killed 15 miners had to take place for everyone to take notice of the unscientific and hazardous mining that has damaged the environment beyond repair. Rivers are polluted to the point of killing aquatic species. Similarly over-ground water is unfit for consumption. The soil too must be gravely polluted. In many areas hills and houses are in danger of sinking because what is left underneath are hollows created by abandoned mines.

Ksan is the cry of the earth that is misused and abused, exploited and ill treated for greed rather than for need. Ksan is a tragedy in waiting. Ksan has

others have become a reality. 'Acche Din', 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance', 'Swachh Bharat', etc are but catchy and pleasing slogans.

And then on the eve of yet another general election extraordinary promises have found the legal route. The 10% Reservation Bill which was hastily passed in both house of Parliament and given presidential assent has now become a law. According to this youngest law, 10% reservation in government higher educational institutions and jobs will be reserved for economically backward upper castes or general category that exclude Dalits, OBC and ST/SC. Eligible beneficiaries are individuals whose family income is less than 8 lakh per annum, have less than five acres of agricultural land and own a residential flat of 1000 sq feet or even larger. Estimates say those who qualify for this reservation constitute 85-95 per cent of the population. This is blizzard. It is reservation to abolish reservation for backward categories through the back door. In spite of public knowledge that the law might not pass Government showed urgency in clearing the Bill like never before. No doubt, this Bill has become a law in record time to entice the targets - the huge population prior to the election in March-April this year.

Closer home, the North East has been on the boil due to Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016. This bill too aims to win over the large number of Hindus from Bangladesh who are residing in Assam and West Bengal, lakhs of whom do not even have any documents. Before the Bill is passed in Rajya Sabha, Amit Shah, the BJP president has already thundered in West Bengal that all Hindus from Bangladesh will be given Indian citizenship. Five years ago in the same state the Prime Minister screamed that all Muslim Bangladeshis in West Bengal would have to pack their bags once his party formed the government in the state. In Assam too the same false promise was made in 2014. After five year no one has carried his bags back to Bangladesh.

Just to capture power unscrupulous political parties and politicians promise the moon and the stars. It is up to the voters not to be taken for a ride.

Another message to voters: don't believe in Jumla promises by political parties and politicians. Be discerning electors. Know what promises are realistic and achievable and what are not. Often gullible voters believe when they are promised the moon only to be left disappointed and disillusioned. Their votes go wasted.

By now the Indian voters should have become wiser after having seen many Jumlas in 2014. By now we are convinced that the promise to bring back millions of black money stashed in wealthy countries abroad, the pledge to deposit 15 lakh rupees into the bank accounts of every citizen, the assurance to create two crore jobs annually, the vow to uproot black money, the declaration to deport all illegal immigrants were all election gimmicks. The people of India were tricked.

Not even realizable promises, such as providing basic amenities like electricity, water, toilets to everybody, the passing of The Women's Reservation Bill that will give 33 per cent reservation to women in parliament and state assemblies, the assertion for a minimum of 50 per cent profits for farmers, the creation of a Lokpal, the making of a bullet train network and

umbrella with the intention to oppose the Bill seriously and to totally remove it from Meghalaya and the whole of North East India.

The Govt of India may recognize the people here as rightful citizens and owners of their land but it is also clear that legal recognition does not mean the rights, territories, resources and cultures are also simultaneously respected. The people of Meghalaya should hit the streets to march against the CAB. This is not the time to be silent but a time show that we cannot allow a Bill to be passed which will ultimately turn the indigenous tribals into minorities in their own homelands.

Yours etc.,  
Batskhem Mawlein  
Shillong-2

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

India's GDP growth comparison with china's is unfair

## Indian economy unlikely to catch up with China's

By Nantoo Banerjee

Those comparing the People's Republic of China's economic slowdown in 2018 with India's projected higher economic growth in the current financial year and beyond and suggesting that the country's GDP will catch up with China in another 15 years or so are living in a fool's paradise of false prosperity. China's economy, which reportedly grew by 6.6 per cent in 2018, is worth \$14 trillion. The size of India's economy is worth only \$2.6 trillion, or less than a fifth of China's. The GDP of the United States of America, the world's largest economy, at the end of 2018 was around \$ 20.66 trillion. The US reported an economic growth of only about 3.5 per cent, less than 50 per cent of India's seven-percent-plus. The economic base of both the US and China is too vast compared with that of India. The annual growth rate of the massively large economies of the US and China, the second largest, is bound to slow down as their overall sizes grow bigger and bigger. Compared to the sizes of these two economies, India's economy, so-called the world's sixth largest, is still very small in terms of its population. Even at eight percent GDP growth per annum, Indian economy is not going to get any closer to China's in any foreseeable future. India's economy may have outgrown China's in 2018, but it is nowhere near China in technological strength and competence.

China is the world's largest trading nation, enjoying the largest favourable balance of trade. It is the world's largest exporter of manufactured products. China's top five export categories are computers, telecommunications equipment, telephones, integrated circuits and light fixtures. India is still struggling with export of low value-added petroleum products, cut and polished diamonds, jewellery and pharmaceuticals. Unless India invests substantially in next generation value chains, it will not be able to sustain a high rate of economic growth for long. India has neither the capacity nor the capability of manufacturing and exporting high technology products. It needs a strong determination and action to promote a technology-led growth. Unfortunately, its international trading partners will do everything to prevent such a situation.

China first built its industry before it became a full-fledged World Trade Organisation member, only to take advantage of WTO and norms to boost its exports. On the country, import-based Indian economy is facing increasing pressure from WTO and, now, proponents of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade agreement between the 10 member states of ASEAN - namely, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam - and six Asia-Pacific states combining China, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, to further open up its import avenue. This may have a serious adverse impact on India's intended local manufacturing-led economic growth.

Former Reserve Bank of India governor Raguraman Rajan's prediction at the World Economic Forum in Davos that India will

eventually surpass China in economic size and will be in a better position to create the infrastructure being promised by the Chinese side in South Asian countries appears to be highly unconvincing. Although, Rajan may be absolutely right that Indian economy will continue to grow while growth rate slows down in China. Sitting over the world's largest dollar hoard outside the US, China is expanding its global economic influence through a massive aid-and-trade initiative across Asia, Africa and South America that will more than compensate any export constraint in its traditional markets in North America and Europe. China's economic growth in 2018 - at its slowest pace in nearly 30 years - is forecast to go down further to 6.3 per cent in 2019. However, that is little to India's gain. On the contrary, China poses the biggest threat to India's manufacturing industry, which contributes less than 20 percent to the country's GDP as against China's 40 per cent. Currently, India runs the biggest trade deficit with China in its international trade. It is likely to grow in the coming years.

Paradoxically, China's public sector enterprises account for a bigger share of the national economy than its burgeoning private sector. In India, the public sector, which laid the foundation of the country's economic growth for many years, is on sale. This appears to be the biggest mistake of the successive governments since 2000. And, it is specially so when the country's private sector does not have enough financial strength to fund large scale projects with longer gestation period. Surprisingly, few talk about the financial mismanagement and losses of India's private sector enterprises that have slammed lakhs of crores of rupees worth non-performing assets (NPAs) on the country's state-owned banks. Private sector bad loans forced the government announce a \$32 billion bailout package to help the lenders set aside funds for the soured loans and kickstart new lending. For 30 years until 2015, the public sector-led Chinese economy averaged a 10 percent annual growth rate. Even today, China's public sector accounts for a bigger share of the national economy than its burgeoning private sector.

It is true that India, today, is the world's fastest-growing large economy, and will probably remain so for years if not decades to come. The IMF had forecast a 7.4 percent economic growth for India in 2018. India's growth predictions from other international banks vary from seven percent (Standard Chartered) to a high of 7.5 percent (Nomura). And, China's maturing economy may not ever again match such stellar growth numbers. But, given India's current technological strength and private sector investment incapability, such a growth rate is not going to bring the country's economy anywhere near China in a foreseeable future. Notably, the private sector's expansion in India, except in the automotive and textile sectors, has been mostly under the shadow of the public sector. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

## Priyanka Gandhi: Charisma & Capability

Editor,  
Apropos your brilliant editorial, 'Kayo-punch or panic' (ST January 25, 2019), Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's entry into active politics is not only a de jure recognition of the de facto reality but also establishes the fact that the Congress party is a feudal dynastic party. Some other regional parties like the Yadav family of UP, Chandrababu Naidu family of Andhra Pradesh CRS of Telengana, DMK of Tamil Nadu and Lalu's RJD of Bihar too had completed their apprenticeship training under the aegis of the Congress Party during a decade of UPA rule at the Centre led by Congress to learn the fundamental arts of nepotism, involving in innovative money laundering deals and devouring kick-backs from various scam-tainted contracts in their respective political playgrounds.

The recent induction of Priyanka to the party and her appointment as a General Secretary for Eastern UP is a New Year's gift to her as Rahul himself got the post of Congress President undemocratically from his mother in keeping with the traditional dynastic dominance that streamed forth from the regime of Mr Jawaharlal Nehru. The Indian Constitution does not have any provision or Article that the post of Prime Minister of the country is reserved for continuance by dynastic descendants perenially whether at the Centre or in the states. So the act of induction of Priyanka for electoral management is a deliberate attempt to contain power in the grip of a particular dynasty. It also exposes a lack of confidence in Rahul Gandhi to deliver electoral victories.

Two clones may be similar in appearance or in mirror reflection but cannot be genetically same as far as capability is concerned. Capability and caliber do not essentially get carried

through genes. Whereas Virat Kohli is being compared to Sachin Tendulkar in terms of their cricketing record and achievements, politics is a different ball game. It is too early to compare Priyanka Gandhi Vadra with Indira Gandhi without observing her performance. The "Gandhi-Card" may not click every time nor can it be a perennial trick played on the voters!

Yours etc.,  
Samares  
Bandyopadhyay,  
Advocate, Kolkata  
High Court

## Baba Ramdev & India's population problem

Editor,  
The recent comments of Baba Ramdev on the need to address the challenge of India's population growth is welcome. Though he has created a controversy on the means of population

control, the fact of the matter is that this serious problem of the country is out of public discourse after the emergency days. India is sitting on a time bomb, with its limited resources for the growing population. With just about 2% of the world's geographical area, India is home to over 15% of the world's population. Many of India's problems can be traced essentially to its unchecked and burgeoning population. It is time the nation and its citizens woke up, and found ways and means to address the issue collectively.

## Meghalaya and the CAB

Editor,  
The Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) was introduced in the Lok Sabha on July 15, 2016 seeking to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955 to provide citizenship to illegal migrants from

Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who are non-Muslims. The BJP had promised during the 2014 General Election to grant citizenship to persecuted Hindus in the above countries. This Bill will go against the cultural, religious, social and linguistic identity of the Garo, Khasi, Jaintia people of Meghalaya and will also affect their connection to their land, culture, spirituality, mythology and ancestry.

To all political parties including the NPP, UDP, HSPDP, and PDF let me say that protests alone are not enough to oppose the CAB. The Centre has to know that Meghalaya is serious about opposing the Bill. Most politicians and NGO leaders are playing games with the innocent people to enrich themselves and enslave others. They care more about money than the people. The Seng Bhalang including those from the Garo, Jaintia and Khasi community must come together under one

Yours etc.,  
A Bhuyan  
Nagaon, Assam

*"Be wary of passing the judgment: obscure. To find something obscure poses no difficulty: elephants and poodles find many things obscure."*

--- Henry Louis Mencken

## The Shillong Times

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### Congress's UBI promise

CONGRESS Party President, Rahul Gandhi has promised Universal Basic Income (UBI) if the party comes to power in the next Lok Sabha election. But whether the Congress President has done the maths and an economic survey as to what this would entail by way of public expenditure remains an unanswered question. The UBI is a periodic, unconditional cash transfer to every citizen in the country. The three main features of UBI are (a) it is universal in nature in that it is not targeted (b) it is cash transfer instead of in-kind transfer (c) UBI is unconditional. That means one need not prove his or her unemployment status or socio-economic identity to be eligible for the scheme. Currently the government spends its revenue on various subsidies. UBI would mean that government will move away from service delivery and empower citizens to access services through cash transfers. An important feature of the UBI is that it would give individuals freedom to spend the money the way they choose. This would help them choose the kind of work they want to do, rather than forcing them to do unproductive work to meet their daily needs.

UBI is a social security net and an insurance against unemployment and will therefore reduce poverty apart from ensuring equitable distribution of wealth since only the poor will receive the full benefits. Since every individual receives basic income, it promotes efficiency by reducing wastage through government transfers. This would also help in reducing corruption and bureaucratic costs by replacing many of the social sector schemes with UBI. However, there are several downsides to the UBI. It could make people lazy and dependent on doles. They may opt out of the labour market. If the UBI is funded by higher taxes, especially by the indirect taxes, it will result in inflation. This, in turn, will reduce the purchasing power of the people and lower the value of the amount transferred. The UBI might reduce the availability of workers in some sectors like agriculture. Hence wages in agriculture labour might increase due to non-availability of farm workers. Above all there is no guarantee that the additional income will be spent on education, health etc and that the money will be spent instead on alcohol, tobacco, drugs etc. Given India's huge population the fiscal burden on government would be high. The Economic Survey 2016-17 had noted that once UBI is implemented it will be difficult for the government to wind it up in case of failure.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Defaulting LPG Supplier

Editor,  
Through this column I wish to draw the urgent attention of the Deputy Commissioner (Supply), East Khasi Hills and the authorities concerned on the regular woes of the LPG consumers who are clients of the noted Khasi Pnar Gas Agency (KPGA). This Agency has been taking LPG consumers for a ride by repeated irregularity in the supply of LPG cylinders. This has happened throughout 2018 and with the onset of 2019 we consumers do not know what will our fate will be. This Agency is notorious for failing to meet deadlines for supply of LPG cylinders. Most of the time it supplies only one cylinder in two months or more whereas other Agencies of Shillong supply one LPG cylinder every month to each household with a connection. We consumers are tired of complaining to the Agency. We don't know why KPGA is defaulting and who it is selling the gas cylinders that it regularly receives from

Oil India or from other gas companies. I earnestly request the Deputy Commissioner in-charge supply to immediately attend to this problem and mete out exemplary punishment to this service provider, according to law so that it will not stop harassing the hapless consumers.

Yours etc...  
K. S Lyngdoh,  
Shillong-2.

### Free education & health from pvt sector

Editor,  
The guarantee of a minimum income to the poor can become a game changer in India if it is done along with the government's active participation in providing the people with quality education and health services to stop people's out of pocket expenditure (OOP) and to give private players a run for their money. The OOP expenditure acts as the quicksand that traps victims into the cycle of

As the interim Budget is expected to be presented later this week, one may analyse the economic scenario though there has been high growth (7+) and the government carried out some significant important reforms like the GST, bankruptcy code and lowered inflation. However, while the Government has initiated fiscal discipline at the Centre, some States continue with their profligacy. The path as laid down by the Finance Commission of 5 per cent fiscal deficit and 60 per cent debt-GDP ratio has been correctly defined and States need to follow this judiciously.

For balanced economic growth, it is essential that such growth must be spread across regions and percolate down at the grass-root level. This obviously calls for creation of massive physical and social infrastructure, mostly in the rural areas, to reinvigorate the economy and enhance the living conditions of the impoverished and neglected sections of society.

In this connection, it needs to be mentioned that in view of reports, specially the recently released Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), there is need for the Central as also State governments to get involved in improving school education by extending Niti Aayog's School Education Quality Index across the country. Governments should remove all input based mandates on schools – they should focus on outcomes.

Similarly, considering the poor condition of health facilities in rural areas, there should be plan to have one hospital in every subdivision all over the country and there should be a speciality division in every district hospital. Moreover, funds should be made available to the State governments to modernise health centres – to start with at least one in every block – so that villagers do not have to travel a distance for getting treatment. Though a recent national plan has been rolled out, it has to be ensured that affordable medicines and medical equipments and devices are made available at the block hospitals or health centres.

A most distressing aspect of the NDA's performance is the job scenario and increasing

poverty.

Since the government's has the lion's share of these two key sectors it can rescue education and health from private hijackers. It is a much better option than providing the poor with just loans and insurance so that they can pay ransom to the hijackers.

India is a welfare state. But the idea of welfare is held hostage as a large chunk of education and health services are allowed to be propelled only by profit motives of the market forces.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

### Child is meant to learn, not to earn!

Editor,  
Child labour means any work that deprives children of their childhood and interferes with their ability to attend regular school. It means children doing work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally

unemployment and under employment. Though there is no official data yet about the post 2016 unemployment situation, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) found the rising unemployment figures owed not just to lack of jobs but also to people's reluctance to accept jobs they deemed unsuitable. As is well known, new jobs are created but far less than the requirement. Private sector investment is not growing to the extent that it can create enough jobs as this sector is harping on contract jobs.

President Ram Nath Kovind painted a rosy picture of rapid development and stated that "India is at the doorstep of eliminating extreme poverty for the first

continues to hover around 1.3 per cent of the GDP and also fails to spend minimal norms set by the Right to Education Act. Some of the notable findings which should be a pointer to politicians and planners are:

Six crore Indians, who make up the poorest 10 per cent of the country, continued to remain in debt since 2004; As inequality rises, women and girls are hardest hit by rising economic inequality; Children from poor families in India are three times more likely to die before their first birthday than children from rich families; Tax rates for the rich and corporations had been cut in recent decades and when governments fail to tax the wealthy, they pass the tax burden on to poor people through consumer levies

**Growth and development are not synonymous and the state of grass-root development that benefits the people at the base level has been rather poor in the country over the years. It is indeed surprising that high GDP growth finds reflection in development matters, obviously with a dubious intent.**

time in memory. But analyzing the recently released 'Oxfam Inequality Report', it becomes quite clear that though statistically it can be proved that the numbers of poor are declining, their social and economic conditions are no less improved. This is demonstrated by the Report's finding that wealth of top 1 per cent increased by 39 per cent, whereas wealth of bottom 50 per cent increased by a dismal 3 per cent. Also the fact that India has been ranked at the 103rd position among 119 countries in the Global Hunger Index with "serious levels of hunger" is indeed quite distressing and may not be in tune with the President's observation.

In this connection, the report highlighted India's dismal spending in healthcare and education among others as public spending on health

like value-added tax.

It is significant to mention here that as per the Report, getting the richest to pay just 0.5 per cent extra tax on their wealth could raise more money than it would cost to educate all 262 million children out of school and provide healthcare that would save the lives of 3.3 million people. The 'Move Humanity' campaign estimated that if the wealth of the world's billionaires were to be taxed an additional 10 per cent, this could raise \$100 billion annually.

Added to this inequality is the widespread farmers' distress, as the smaller ones are at the receiving end as they get inadequate returns and cannot sustain themselves. As per Shanta Kumar committee report only 6 per cent of farmers' benefit from minimum support price (MSP) and mainly in paddy and wheat. According to a kisan

Indeed one of the main causes of child labour is poverty. As we have seen in India, poor families have more children, so it becomes very difficult for them to survive on the income of only one family member. So parents make their children work in factories and sell items on streets. Some parents even carry their infants on the street to earn money by begging.

There are cases of child labour where a child has to work against the repayment of a loan taken by his father who was unable to pay it off. This is called "Bonded Child Labour". It normally happens in villages in which children work as slaves to pay the loan taken. Not only poor families, but also some well established business families put their small children into business at a young age instead of making them complete their education. The largest sector where children work at early age to contribute to their family income is agriculture. India has more than 12.6 million kids who are forced to work in order to survive. Of those 12.6

leader, "we have lost Rs 1 lakh crore in every crop season because of the cost formula." Moreover, he pointed out that though the government said all farmers benefit from procurement that really doesn't happen, as many farmers feel "We are in debt due to government policies." It is significant to mention here that banks write-off loans by corporates who haven't repaid and then say it's just a technical entry and recovery of these loans may be around 15 to 20 per cent.

One may refer to a recent interview of BJP leader, Varun Gandhi, who aptly pointed out: That the Indian farmer requires a loan waiver today is a foregone conclusion with the incidence of debt in farm households increasing from 24 per cent in 1992 to 52 per cent in 2016. The average debt among agricultural households is about Rs 1 lakh and above whereas the income is as low as Rs 9000 per month. In other words, average debt is roughly the annual income.

Thus, it can be said that though the Government may claim of achieving 7 plus growth that is even faster than that of China, the conditions of the poorest segments of society are yet to improve. A large section of economists have found that growth is not an indicator of development. Growth and development are not synonymous and the state of grass-root development that benefits the people at the base level has been rather poor in the country over the years. It is indeed surprising that high GDP growth finds reflection in development matters, obviously with a dubious intent.

Though the Government has been announcing various schemes, a total of around 400, most are poorly funded, badly administered and inefficient. Meanwhile, the flagship scheme, MNREGA, has been reported to face serious financial crunch due to inadequate funds made available.

It would be better if the number is reduced and those that deliver services at low cost should be expanded. The choice between cash and kind should be left to people's preferences. Moreover, the services of voluntary organisations should be enlisted for ensuring that beneficiaries are getting due benefits.--INFA

million, 60% work in agriculture. They suffer from many complications and diseases throughout their childhood.

According to a study, Delhi alone has one million child labourers. The government should bring down the incidence of child labour through reforms and investments in education. Midday meal should be re-emphasized, homeless children should be provided housing through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, boarding schools, and law banning child labour should be strictly enforced. Together we can help those poor children by creating awareness so that children get the education they deserve.

Yours etc.,  
Jessica Rymbai & Jelly D. Sangma  
College of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry,  
Aizawl Mizoram

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

## BJP dipping graph cause for worry for Modi and Shah

By Dr Satish Misra

Even before the dramatic entry of Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra into active politics last week, the country's politics was becoming fluid as the BJP was losing ground and the opposition was gaining more space. Yet, neither the BJP nor the opposition seem to have a clear edge. Both are in the processing of finalizing strategies to win the 2019 Lok Sabha battle.

The popularity graph of the ruling BJP and its top icon Prime Minister Narendra Modi had begun to take a downward plunge as is evident in some of the recent surveys that were conducted recently. To name the few, surveys conducted by India Today-Karvy in January gives the BJP-led NDA 237 seats while the ABP News-Cvoter has given it 233 seats. India Today is giving the UPA 167 seats while ABP News is giving the UPA 166 seats. Majority of the surveys barring those having proclivity to the ruling establishment or the RSS are predicting a hung parliament in the Lok Sabha polls.

The BJP is losing about 100 seats and the Congress is said to be gaining about 50 seats according to these surveys. The regional parties are either gaining or retaining their parliamentary strength. Surveys have been done at a time when majority of people baring committed voter are yet to firm up their electoral choices as floating and uncommitted voter decides electoral outcomes. In any case, it is clear that the BJP's popularity graph, at the present juncture, is sliding

down. Elections are still three months away as the first polling is expected to take place in April. Lok Sabha elections in 2014 were held in nine phases and the first phase was held on April 7. All political parties including the BJP are going to do their best to improve their political fortunes but it seems more difficult for the Modi-led NDA that is suffering from anti-incumbency.

On economic parameters, the NDA has been a big disappointment as even the rising GDP has failed to generate employment and create favourable conditions for entrepreneurs or business class to take new initiatives as a result despondency is prevailing in the country. Agricultural class is already severely challenged as farm distress is crippling their existence.

Palpable tension is present in society in absence of social peace and communal harmony. Mutual suspicions have grown in the last five years and all this has initiated a process of rethink at the popular level about their political choices though final choices are yet to be made.

The Modi government is likely to take many popular decisions like it did in making 10% reservation in jobs and education for the economically weaker sections of the society or giving sops to people through the coming Union budget. There are reports that the NDA government, under specific instruction of the Prime Minister, is even going to present a full budget instead of an interim or vote on account as has been the convention until now. In full budget, the

government has enough scope to lure the voter through popular schemes. It is true that prediction of a hung parliament scares many in the middle class and thus is likely to accrue some electoral advantage to the ruling BJP. On the other hand, the advantage is lost in the background of rising frustration among the youth particularly among those who voted for the Modi's BJP in 2014 expecting dramatic improvement in their fortunes.

There are serious question marks on the opposition unity. It is very clear now that the shape of the opposition unity is going to differ from state to state. It is also true that the opposition is not in a position to present its prime ministerial candidate. To name the few, BSP chief and four times UP chief minister Mayawati and Trinamool Congress supremo and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee are nursing prime ministerial ambitions in case of an opposition victory in the Lok Sabha polls. There are others too waiting in the wings for their chance in case of a popular mandate that does not give clear advantage to any leader or any political party.

Apart from the goal of ousting Modi from power, unless the opposition does not offer a counter vision and a programme of action to the people, it is very difficult to lure away voters from the BJP because Modi despite losing some counts continues to maintain his credibility and popularity.

**The popularity graph of the ruling BJP and its top icon Prime Minister Narendra Modi had begun to take a downward plunge as is evident in some of the recent surveys that were conducted recently.**

That is precisely why former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda underlined the need to prepare a common manifesto before the people. Even if there is no national alliance to oppose the BJP, common manifesto could be coopted by state alliances.

The Congress, whose popularity graph after its victories in the Hindi heartland states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and the coming of Priyanka Gandhi into active politics is moving upwards, is sure to increase its numbers further than those being predicted in surveys that were conducted before her entry. The opposition leaders must make a realistic assessment as electorate when voting to elect the national government often tilts towards a national party.

If the opposition leaders including that of the Congress are really serious to throw out Modi's BJP then the index of opposition unity has to be high. Mere display of the opposition unity at huge rallies and public meetings is not enough as it only serves to build up an atmosphere but is not enough to win an electoral battle.

Coming general elections are wide open unlike that of 2014 when the BJP had a huge advantage. Initiatives, policy announcements, electoral adjustments and understanding, selection of candidates and above all credible promises by all parties in next three months will help the electorate to decide the shape and colour of the next government.

(Dr Satish Misra is a Veteran Journalist & Research Associate with Observer Research Foundation).

*"Be wary of passing the judgment: obscure. To find something obscure poses no difficulty: elephants and poodles find many things obscure."*

-- Henry Louis Mencken

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.169 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 2019

### Demise of a stalwart

GEORGE Fernandes was a politician and renowned trade union leader for decades. His demise draws to a close an era of hard-core socialists and the 'isms' that they pursued with some vigour. Whether the socialists have managed to achieve social well-being is a debatable point but no one could doubt their sincerity of purpose, which is clearly lacking in present-day politics. Fernandes as defence minister ended up with some stigma related to bribe-taking in a hidden-camera expose in 2001, and his final years were spent battling serious health problems. Overall, he was a good soul, a crusader for the working class, and left behind a legacy that the future generation can ignore at its peril. A multi-faceted politician, Fernandes mostly led a simple life. He struggled in the streets of Mumbai, working as a labourer, attending evening classes, and progressing into a firebrand labour union leader. The Emergency saw him getting involved in the Baroda dynamite case. In his later years he became Union Minister for repeated terms. As Railway minister, he launched the Konkan Railway project, something unimaginable along the West Coast because of the ghats and the treacherous terrain there. He made a mark in every ministry he led, which also included Communications, Industry and Defence. He headed the Defence Ministry when the Kargil war was fought.

Fernandes had his ear to the ground and often came up with novel ideas and out-of-the-box solutions. Yet, ideologically, he found himself on the wrong side of progress politics where Leftists as a whole too find themselves at the political margins. Fernandes himself took up wrong causes on occasions, driven as he was by the ideology he upheld. One such was the campaign he led against the introduction of colour TVs in 1982. Time proved him wrong. Fernandes had opposed it by saying it helped the rich with no benefit to the poor. A visionary, he had long ago identified China as India's main enemy, about which there's unanimity now. The Pokhran nuclear test took place under his watch as defence minister in 1998. An alleged coffin purchase scam during the Kargil war became news for a while and cast a shadow on him but it fizzled out sooner than most scams we hear of today. George Fernandes had his share of weaknesses but his strengths as a politician surpassed the flaws. He did not believe in right wing fascism as embodied in the Shiv Sena and warned the likes of Bal Thackeray about the diminishing returns of such an ideology. George Fernandes is a class apart.

# 6th Schedule Amendment: Has Meghalaya missed the bus?

By Toki Blah

On the 24th of January 2019 Meghalaya and the North East woke up to the electrifying news of a momentous and historic amendment to the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India. This amendment passed by the Union Cabinet but yet to be rectified by Parliament, pointed towards significant improvement in the financial resource and administrative enhancement of the Autonomous District Councils of North Eastern India. It spoke of direct adult franchise for village and municipal councils. There would be 33% reservation for women in such elections. Thus woman empowerment, a basic governance prerequisite of the 21st century, was catered to in the ADCs even before the same could be said for State Assemblies and the Indian Parliament itself. The constitution of a State Finance Commission to oversee the proper devolution of necessary funds to the District Councils was also established together with the necessary provisos for adequate transfer of funds. There will be a State Election Commission to supervise elections to the District Councils, the Village Councils and the municipal councils. The village councils in turn were to be now empowered to plan, formulate and execute development projects on a wide ranging canvas including land improvement, agriculture, land reforms, PHE, minor irrigation, animal husbandry among others. Seen from this perspective the term 'Game Changer' for the NE is most apt and fitting. The ordinary village Dorbar, that grassroots governance institution of the region is now set to become a force to be reckoned with in future governance, political and administrative exercises of the NE. Its an empowering legislature long overdue.

Of interest therefore is the appendage to the above amendments of a proviso that exempts Meghalaya, and only Meghalaya, "for the time being" from the purview for elected village and municipal councils and one third reservation for women. Why have the District Councils and our grassroots institutions of governance been left out? This really is most intriguing and letting curiosity get the better of me, I rang up a senior functionary in the Govt to find out the reason why this happened. He answered that this was as per the specific wishes of the 'stakeholders' whom the Govt had consulted with before submitting Meghalaya's views to the Central Govt! The views of these influential 'stakeholders' was that the

term 'Village Council' was most offensive to traditional sentiment as it smacks of Panchayati Raj vintage. Wow, what logic, for as far as I know the direct translation of Dorbar Shnong is Village Council. What else could it be? No adult franchise or direct elections to the village councils (in our case dorbars or Song Committees) because politics might pollute our traditional system which has always been apolitical. We don't want Panchayats. True to a certain extent, but the politically neutral profile of our grassroots institutions could have been protected in another way. For instance it could have been insisted that party politics be barred from Village Council elections. The purpose would have been served. The "stakeholders" also found that the inclusion of women participation and 33% reservation of seats for women in the District and village councils as most

then the next question is - do the District Councils, through which the funding will occur, possess or hold administrative credibility, fiscal integrity and financial trustworthiness as far as handling of public money and funds is concerned? Of greater importance is the question as to whether our grassroots institutions, as they are today without any empowerment or capacity building, be capable of handling huge public funds aimed at bringing in development to the people? The manner in which Dorbars and Song Committees manage funds (except perhaps for a few in the urban areas) is questionable and leaves much to be desired. They just don't have the capacity, manpower, expertise nor experience to manage huge sums of money. Some have no treasurers, no accounting system and some even don't hold regular elections for their office bearers. They run more or less on an adhoc

**The amendment of the 6th Schedule to the Constitution of India should be seen as an attempt to bring in change into the traditional system of grassroots governance in so far as the indigenous tribal systems of NE India are concerned.**

offensive to traditional practices and custom. It was the most ridiculous and regressive argument ever offered in the 21st century. Misogynistic double talk at its worst! One wonders if women organisations of the state, Seng Kynthai, Mothers Union or prominent women of the state were party to such views or if women in principle were ever identified as stakeholders fit for consultations. If not, then why not? Does the Govt consider them to be lesser beings? Why this pick and choose policy? Sorry but the State Govt has a lot to answer for!

One of the promises of this amendment is the devolution of ample funds to the District Councils, the village and municipal councils. In other words it means that Direct funding, that mouth watering manna from the Centre Govt to our grassroots institutions will at last begin. Our Dorbars will now be at par with Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas in the rest of the country. But direct funding is part and parcel of Panchayati governance system. Now why has this aspect of the Panchayati Raj not been opposed by the so called traditionalist stakeholders? The magic smell of money can obviously melt the most stringent traditionalist heart! If that is the answer

basis. They need more capacity building, the regulation and monitoring of an official external body such as the State Election Commission to breath in life and vibrancy into our traditional bodies. We have rejected this offer and in doing so have we reduced tradition to the realm of redundancy and incompetence?

Any piece of legislature should not be considered only for its immediate effect but of greater import is the long term impact of such laws. Our dorbars might now soon start getting ample funds through the District Councils. What will be the long term impact of such events on the Dorbars, the District Councils and society itself? Our District Councils are notorious and infamous for their lack of transparency and accountability. ADC jurisdiction will be the area where money can be spent, made and pocketed with more comparative ease than in the State Govt. Secondly the hub where most of the activity will take place will be the Village Dorbar and the search for like minded partners to spend the money with will be the main focus of the Executive Committee of most ADCs. ADCs will start interfering more and more in the election and appointment of Rangbah Shnongs and Gaonburas as

within the new scenario, pliable Village Headmen will be seen as assets to be cultivated and protected. The Dorbar will be turned into a business hub. There now exists a standing constitutional invitation for ruthless business men to enter both ADC and village dorbar elections. From a Social oriented institution manned by respectable and reputed members of the society, the dorbar of the future will be composed of men of straw out for personal profit and turnovers. They will be people more on the lookout for their own self interest than the interest and welfare of the people. They will be beholden and politically compromised by their political masters in the ADC. Saleable politics would have entered our dorbars by the back door. To this extend the visionless stakeholders will have destroyed our traditional dorbars forever. It will never be the same again. A village dorbar with no elected representative, devoid of gender sensitivity and not empowered to plan for its own future will simply disintegrate into chaos and confusion. Our dorbars will transform from the respected social service centres that they are into sleazy squabbling business hubs.

The amendment of the 6th Schedule to the Constitution of India should be seen as an attempt to bring in change into the traditional system of grassroots governance in so far as the indigenous tribal systems of NE India are concerned. Change is catching up with us and we need to have a vision on how to meet this change. A vision will help us drive change and its events into a predetermined destiny. Sadly for Meghalaya 'stakeholders' and the Govt have rejected change. We had no vision and so were not prepared to accept that change is inevitable. Being unprepared we have asked to be exempted from change and we got it. The Govt of India has exempted, "for the time being", Meghalaya from these amendments. Please rest assured that "for the time being" means forever. It might take another hundred years for a fresh opportunity for change to come our way. Visionless 'stakeholders' with an equally pliant Government have let us down. Frankly speaking it appears we have missed the bus! Perhaps only recourse left is 7th Schedule of our Constitution, Para 5 of the State List. State Govt can still make laws to save the day. We can still bring in viable reforms to our traditional grassroots institutions. Point is, does this Govt have the guts and vision to do it?

(The writer is President, ICARE)

## Supreme Court Orders Increasing cases of violations

By Dr S. Saraswathi

The judiciary, the main pillar upholding the Constitution, is increasingly facing resistance not excluding open defiance of its orders from other pillars of the same Constitution. It may not be an open struggle for supremacy, but contains seeds of disruption of harmonious functioning of democratic institutions towards a common goal of orderly governance.

In recent years, a trend in the management of public affairs is noticeable where the judiciary is dragged into settling the validity of different kinds of legislative decisions and executive orders. It is a healthy development in so far as it indicates growing public awareness to public issues expressed through public demands and protests. It is unhealthy whenever it confronts violation of the rule of law ignoring lawful means of seeking answers to problems and encourages direct action ignoring established institutions to force favourable solutions from the courts.

The need for judicial activism and intervention to promote reforms and change has elevated the importance of the judiciary. People hitherto avoiding the doorsteps of courts as entry into a battlefield for a prolonged fight now have no hesitation to voluntarily seek judicial clearance on even policy and procedures of the government and its organs.

The nature of interaction between the legislature, executive, and the judiciary in recent years is becoming significant to determine and uphold the three principal concepts - parliamentary supremacy, good governance, and judicial independence. Some instances may illustrate the nature of the struggle among them so that means of ensuring stability and progress can be evolved.

The case of dance bars in Mumbai, for instance, is an outstanding example of executive-judiciary interaction. These bars had been brought under regulatory rules by the government since 2005 when they were first banned, and the courts have been intervening to protect the interests of the dancers and bar owners. The Bombay High Court overturned the ban order in 2006. The State government went on appeal to the Supreme Court and obtained a stay order. In 2013, the Supreme Court declared the ban order as unconstitutional and lifted it. The government circumvented the order by an amendment to the Maharashtra Police Act 2014 and that too was overturned. Then in 2016, the government passed the Maharashtra Prohibition of Obscene Dance in Hotels, Restaurants, and Bar Rooms and Protection of Dignity of Women (Working therein) which was upheld by the Supreme Court.

Government orders issued from time to time to remove the scope for "immoral activities" in the name of dance provided for compulsory CCTV surveillance and ban on serving liquor. Recently, the Supreme Court quashed these government orders noting that the regulations were totally disproportionate, unreasonable, and arbitrary. The court agreed only to limit the timing of the bars to five-and-a-half-hours from 6 pm to 11.30 pm and to prohibit showering of money on the dancers. The court said it was not right to hold that people misbehave after consuming alcohol or to believe that such behaviour happens only in dance bars.

The Supreme Court said that governments cannot impose their notion of morality on the society and brushed aside the contention of Maharashtra Government that dance performances at beer bars, hotels and restaurants were likely to injure public morality. While agreeing with the bar on obscene dances, the bench disapproved total ban on dancing. It said, "a practice which may not be immoral by societal standards cannot be thrust upon the society as immoral by the State with its own notion of morality and thereby exercise social control".

More significant is the report that the Maharashtra

Government is firm on its decision regarding closure of dance bars in the State despite the apex Court upholding the constitutional validity of running these bars. The government cannot straightaway act on the orders of the court as long as the existing Act of 2016 upheld by the Supreme Court is not changed.

This is a typical case of conflict between judicial view and government policy on moral standards causing a direct confrontation between the judiciary and the executive. The judgement and the observations go against moral standards assumed by governments and imposed on the society when they do not violate legal prescriptions which also care for some degree of morality.

It was also argued that the ban on dance bars put in 2005 had not benefited the dancers, but on the contrary led to increase in commercial sex work. The judiciary had to think of probable consequences of executive decisions by intruding even in policies while the executive searches ways to overcome judicial hurdles to push through its policies/programmes.

This episode depicting a direct confrontation between the Supreme Court and the Government of Maharashtra is not at all a rare instance. They are common taking bulk of judicial time these days.

In another instance relating to the Sterlite Copper Plant in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu Government, under pressure from local parties to close the plant, and violent protests over pollution concerns issued an order for closure of the plant on 28th May 2018 and has resorted to various means of effective enforcement of the closure including cutting off power supply despite the clearance given by the National Green Tribunal on 15th December for reopening the plant. The tribunal set aside the Tamil Nadu Government's order for permanent closure of the plant. The government has appealed to the Supreme Court challenging the verdict of the tribunal. Entry into sannidhanam of Sabarimalai Temple in Kerala by women of all ages is indeed a historic event that has no parallel to reveal how complicated is the growing conflict between the judiciary and the executive -- the former keen on upholding the law of the land and the latter playing to the gallery most of the time as a political necessity.

The executive on the scene can neither follow court verdict nor reject it, for it has to face a third most important party -- people comprising devotees, women activists and general public -- and cannot ignore them. Kerala Government's affidavit filed in the Supreme Court in support of its claim of women pilgrims at the shrine gives a list of 51 women in the age-group 10-50. But, it has turned out to be questionable on various counts not excluding age and sex of the pilgrims listed as women. When religious faith and public sentiments are involved, the interaction between law, justice, and administration gets more complicated. Violations of Supreme Court orders by governments are not rare.

Karnataka's refusal to release Cauvery water as per Supreme Court order or Kerala's refusal to honour court verdict regarding the height of Mullaperiyar Dam are cases of flagrant violation of court directives rather than inter-State conflicts. Executive-judiciary confrontation has grown with spread of protest politics for anything and everything. Despite High Court's directives and Government's warnings, Government Employees Organisation and Tamil Nadu Teachers'Organisations are continuing their indefinite strike. Evidently, Jallikattu protest has become a model for protesters who hope to win by mobilising people's support against the government and/or the judiciary.

The four pillars are erected to uphold law and order and not to pull down the structure by individual will and action. --INFA

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

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Plight of consumers

Editor,

Every now and again we read and hear the slogan, "Jago Grahak Jago." Through various means consumers are made aware of their rights and how and where to file a complaint in case of any deficiency of service and delivery of faulty goods. Reading all these no doubt gives confidence to the common people and they muster courage and file complaints before the concerned District Consumer Forums for redressal of their grievances with high hopes of obtaining justice.

Alas, reality is far too bitter. Consumer cases are to be disposed of within a span of three months except for cases which require expert

opinions as per the Consumer laws, but cases in our District Consumer Dispute Redressal Forum are not disposed of for years, despite the presence of parties on most of the dates. There are cases where verdicts are also not passed for years, thereby sending signals of discouragement to all consumers who become victims of big business. An already suffering consumer suffers even more due to the delay in delivery of justice. Any consumer who has filed a complaint in the Forum can relate to this and I am sure is deterred from filing any case in future even if it means a big financial loss to himself/herself.

I, on behalf of all the consumers who are fighting for their rights in the Forum

with great distress but also with hope, would request the concerned authorities including the High Court to kindly look into the matter so that the common man does not lose faith in these Forums.

Yours etc.,  
An aggrieved consumer,  
Name withheld on request

#### Soon the school rush

Editor,

It must be admitted that ever since schools and colleges have been on vacation, traffic jams has eased relatively. This tells us the reason for traffic jams - school traffic converging on the roads from all directions and nearly all landing up in

and around Laitumkrah, Don Bosco and Dhankheti points. We have heard of traffic solutions being discussed at IIM Shillong but are not aware of whether the points arising out of the discussion are being implemented or whether this too is another 'talk shop' which anyways are a dime a dozen in Shillong, nay in this country of talkers. To my mind, and as some wit had recommended in this column, all schools especially the elite missionary schools and Pine Mount School should have their own school buses. This will greatly reduce the number of vehicles on the road. The Army, BSF, Air Force etc., have their own school buses to ferry students to different schools. Some of

these elite schools around the Laitumkrah-Don Bosco -Dhankheti circumference have been heard to say that they don't have space for parking the school buses. Well, whose problem is that? Certainly the citizens of Shillong cannot be punished by getting trapped in traffic jams for hours just because of some school's unwillingness to cooperate with the system.

Indeed, Shillong traffic is spiralling crazily and governments past and present have failed to rein in the errant school authorities. Why so? Is it because the sons and daughters of high ranking government officials and politicians are studying there? If some schools are using school buses, then why exempt others? Why

should preferential treatment be given to some schools that charge hefty amounts as fees?

Before the schools reopen this year can we expect the MDA Government to take up this matter with the urgency it deserves? Schools may complain that they don't have funds to requisition/buy school buses. How have others done it? Let them learn to come up with a revenue model that works.

Yours etc.,  
BR Raneer,  
Via email

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