

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."
— Benjamin Franklin

The Shillong Times

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Towers of corruption

IN a nation where every system is getting weakened and manipulated, the political leadership is found wanting and the scenario of corruption is steadily worsening, the question is, who will bell the cat. Belief was that India also had a system of checks and balances. Courts, for one, to dispense with justice. Yet, cases in this country drag on for years on end and law has several loopholes for the high and mighty to exploit these to their advantage. In this backdrop, a silver lining is the ruling of the Supreme Court this week to back an Allahabad high court order to demolish the twin 40-floor residential towers in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, close to the national capital and a beehive of economic activities. The Supreme Court had, a year ago, issued a similar order to demolish a string of skyscrapers in Kochi, Kerala, and the order was forcibly implemented. With the apex court taking a strong view, the local political establishment could not interfere. In the Noida case now, the apex court has given two months' time for the real estate company to pay back the money to those who have booked around 900 flats, and three months' time to the builder to demolish the two towers. In both Noida and Kochi, the court found serious violations of the environment and other rules. As for Noida, there was failure to maintain the distance between the two towers, besides other rule violations including the lack of open space required to be left free around the towers for gardening etc.

The Noida case dragged on for years. The Allahabad high court passed the order in 2014. The case took seven years at the apex court for the final ruling. It is likely the real estate firm will still try to find escape routes. Those who paid money to book the flats deserve sympathy. Their money got blocked for many years and hope is that they will get their money back. These firms obtain clearances by greasing the palms of bureaucrats and politicians and use these to woo investors. This apart, what works is the trust factor. When a firm comes up with offers, it is impossible to foresee what glitches lay ahead. The good side of such demolitions is that this will send the right signals to developers and others in the real estate sector that, if they do not play by the rules it will result in disaster. Such verdicts could cleanse the system of its ills.

Letters to the Editor

Pandemic extracts heavy toll on students

Editor,
I write this letter as a plea from a tired and stressed-out student. COVID-19 has affected all of us, especially students. As a college student, I worry for my future. Since classes and exams are all being held online, teachers and many other academics say that this "COVID Generation" marks would be quite difficult to evaluate. "They may not help you in your future", one educational institute administrator has said. So are our studies actually a waste of time?
Also, colleges and schools preach about mental health but do not seem to practise it. We are over-burdened with assignments, projects, extra courses and so on. Extra work is being made to do so as to compensate for the absence of a classroom environment. Apparently, it would make students learn the concept the same way as in school. This has taken a toll on our state of mind and well-being. Parents are also of no help. They just consider it the new normal and do not say anything to the school and college authori-

ties. Some do help out their children, but many are left to their own devices.

The pandemic has also taken a toll on our wallets. Students have had to spend more money on data balance and new WiFi connections. Craft projects have been made more difficult and expensive with materials not available due to closure of shops. Examination are more expensive too. With the need of specific A4 sheets and envelopes, we have had to pay for xerox, Speed Post fees and Examination fees too! Examination fees are usually the fee for the question papers and answer scripts. It makes no sense to be paying such a fee at the same rate as a "normal exam" since our question papers are just PDF files and we have had to make our own arrangements for answer scripts. We also have had and are still being told to pay inflated fees to support "the staff" during these uncertain times.

I plead to the government to make colleges reduce the fees in the same way they have down with schools. Most of the fees charged are unjustified since students and teachers alike do not use college materials for teaching. The only thing we are paying for is probably the brand

name of the college, that will be printed on our graduation certificates. I also ask them to have mercy on us. We are the future generation. We will burn out soon if this stress, work and worry is constant.

Yours etc.,
W Sohtun,
Via Email

Politics of convenience

Editor,
The new MPCC President Mr Vincent Pala has minced no words in castigating the United Democratic Party (UDP) which is an alliance partner in the current dispensation. From accusing it of creating a "messy situation" all around to allegations of misuse of authority by their very own ministers, holding charge of various departments in the Government its all a big mess; all of which portray the reality of failing governance. However, the Congress should also not feel "bad" when the very party that Mr. Pala is accusing was part and parcel of every decision taken in the previous Government too headed by the Congress. Hence no one can say that politics is a house of angels. Rather it is a house of holy sinners. Period.

The case of the secular Muslim

By Rajdeep Sardesai

It can't be easy being a 'secular', 'constitutionalist' Indian Muslim. The Hindu Right constantly demonises the Indian Muslim in a manner that every Muslim is expected to take a patriotism test on almost every issue; the Islamist groups on the other hand demand that all Muslims must assert a fierce religious identity above all else. Caught between fanatical Islamism and majoritarian Hindutva, the 'secular' Muslim is endangered and increasingly disempowered. The latest example of this is the manner in which the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan is playing out in domestic political narratives in India.

Thirdly, those who seek to pardon the Taliban's sins on the grounds that they are

inter-community equations. It is not just for the Indian Muslim to speak up but for every citizen, irrespective of religious denomination, who swears by democratic freedoms to raise their voice against the Taliban's excesses. The Taliban resurrection is not a 'Muslim' issue but a mirror to a catastrophic global failure to enforce the



strictly implementing Islamic Sharia laws have also got it horribly wrong: you cannot submit to constitutional secularism in the Indian state where Muslims are in a minority and then applaud the imposition of Shariah in Afghanistan where the Muslims are in a majority. Moreover, who gives the Taliban the sole prerogative to decide the 'framework' of Shariah laws for their people and women in particular? Net-

"The Hindu right wants the Indian Muslim to speak out against the atrocities being committed by the Taliban forces. The Islamists want the Indian Muslim to express community solidarity with the Afghan militia as 'freedom fighters'. Every time a Muslim cleric or public figure in India is seen to voice any kind of support for the Taliban, it leads to gloating 'I told you so' chants. Conversely, Every time a Muslim is attacked in India, it throws up accusations of a Hindu Rashtra being foisted upon minorities."

net, any attempt to become an apologist for the Taliban only does grave disservice to the Muslim community and citizens rights in India and Afghanistan.

Lets now turn to those who seek to target the Indian Muslim for the Taliban's wrongdoings. Firstly, the Taliban resurgence is fundamentally an internal Afghan issue, not tied up in any manner with India's fraught

ostracized. It cannot be that the lynching of Muslims are conveniently rationalized under the guise of cow protection laws or that anti-conversion and 'love jihad' like legislation are designed to hound minorities and then there is breathless outrage when the Taliban violate human rights. Universal human rights cannot be selectively embraced or abused: a rejection of the Taliban must be

accompanied by an elimination of a Taliban mindset. India is not a Taliban state, as a recent court order reaffirmed, but there are self-styled vigilante groups who demonstrate a bigoted mindset akin to the Taliban. This isn't about whether an unlawful group of thugs is fringe or mainstream, Hindu or Muslim: the identity of the oppressed and oppressor must be irrelevant in each instance when acting against violent mobs.

Thirdly, while condemning the Taliban's criminal deeds in the harshest possible terms, there must be a recognition that the fiercest resistance to the armed force has not come from the United States-led global military alliance but from local Afghans themselves. While the US leads a desperate evacuation from Kabul, spare a thought for the brave Afghan citizens, men and women, who have stood their ground despite a terrifying life threatening situation. Don't they deserve unequivocal support and are they not also Muslims who break the stereotype and labels that are sought to be imposed on an entire community?

Which is why we need to reject both the Islamophobes and the Taliban apologists and seek to embrace instead the liberal value systems that offer hope in times of despair. Politicians and clerics divide and rule by preying on the fears and anxieties of their followers only because they have so little else to offer. At times of severe economic distress and Covid, of floods and price hikes, it is so much more politically expedient to turn the gaze on a Taliban-like 'enemy' figure in Afghanistan rather than address the more urgent local matters in the immediate neighborhood. It's the age-old trap of using religious politics as a weapon of mass distraction, one which all right thinking Indians must collectively fight against.

Post-script: More than 140 leading Indian Muslim voices including prominent actors, journalists, activists, jurists have spoken out against the Taliban on the Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy platform. Unfortunately, their sane voices are rarely amplified by the media while any Muslim influencer who aggressively defends the Taliban instantly grabs the headlines. It reveals as much about the state of an acutely compromised media eco-system as it does about a fractured society where hate speech has a large constituency.

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Centre Takes Control of State Mining Funds

By Ayaskant Das

In what is being termed as a compromise of the federal structure of the Indian polity, the Modi government has taken direct control over funds worth more than Rs 25,000 crore earmarked to be spent on people and communities affected by mining activities across the country. In an order issued on July 12, the union government has directed state governments not to spend a penny out of the funds of District Mineral Foundations (DMFs) which have been collected as a certain percentage of royalties from mining leaseholders.

In the past more than five years, DMFs in 600 districts of the country have collected Rs 50,499.57 crore from mining leaseholders of both minor and major minerals. However, as per data collected by the Union Mines Ministry, state governments have already spent Rs 24,499.76 crore from these funds till June 2021 on various projects undertaken by them. Now, the latest order by the ministry has disempowered state governments from taking any decision on the utilisation of the remaining funds available with the DMFs.

"No sanction or approval of any expenditure out of the fund of the District Mineral Foundation shall be done at the State level by the State Government or any State level agency," the ministry has said in its order.

Apparently, the Modi government has issued the direction after taking notice of the fact that funds from DMFs were being diverted by state governments for schemes and projects that were remotely connected, if at all, with the welfare of mining-affected communities.

"It is inappropriate on the part of state governments to divert funds from District Mineral Funds for purposes other than using the same for the benefit of those affected by mining in the districts concerned. If such instances are few, the central government should have dealt with individual cases rather than invoking powers to diminish the authority of state governments to sanction expenditures from the funds. It will amount to eroding federalism. However, it is equally disturbing that state governments should fritter away the freedom given to them by transgressing provisions," retired bureaucrat EAS Sarma told NewsClick.

Of late, there have been numerous instances of mis-allocation of DMF funds by certain state governments. Earlier this month, members of the Opposition Congress party in Odisha demanded a probe through the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India into allegations of mismanagement of DMF funds in the state. As per their allegations, not only has the Biju Janata Dal state government under-utilised the DMF funds, but has also diverted certain amounts for 'urban centric' works.

In Madhya Pradesh, for instance, the BJP government has reportedly constructed an airstrip in Singrauli district, an area ecologically devastated by air and water pollution from large thermal power plants, out of funds derived from the DMF. This airstrip was inaugurated by the state's Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan in December 2020.

There have been reports of large scale corruption too in the utilisation of the DMF. An inquiry conducted by the tribal welfare department of Chhattisgarh in the year 2019 had revealed large scale irregularities in works undertaken in Korba district with funds from the DMF. These irregularities had taken place mostly during 2016-17 when Chhattisgarh was being ruled

by the BJP.

If funds from the DMF have been diverted for purposes other than those meant for the welfare of mining-affected people, has it been the state governments alone that have resorted to this practice? Interestingly, state governments have also been asked by the Centre to divert funds from the DMF. In the relief package that was announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in March 2020 in the wake of the outbreak of Covid-19 in India, state governments were issued directions to spend money from DMF funds for combating the pandemic.

"The State Government will be asked to utilize the funds available under District Mineral Fund (DMF) for supplementing and augmenting facilities of medical testing, screening and other requirements in connection with preventing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic as well as treating the patients affected with this pandemic," the central government had directed.

Moreover, is it the district-level authorities who take decisions when it comes to allocation of funds from the DMF for purposes other than that for which it has been envisaged?

"Ideally, these DMF funds should be allocated and utilised by Gram Sabhas which are the most basic units of governance. But, this latest decision of the central government makes it incumbent upon administrative authorities at the district level to collect the funds while having no power over its expenditure whatsoever," said R Ravi of Mines, Minerals & PEOPLE (mm&P), an alliance of people and communities affected by mining.

The Modi government is credited with bringing in a law for formation of DMFs in all districts through a set of amendments that it carried out to the Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Act, 1957 in the year 2015. As of June 2021, state governments had allocated Rs 47,288.36 crore from the funds that they had collected thus far. Data shows that as of June 2021, as many as 61,460 projects are underway with funds allocated from the DMF while work on 24,965 projects, for which funds have already been allocated, are yet to begin. These projects have been undertaken by state governments through decisions taken at their own level.

What fate awaits these projects? Also, how does the union government plan to utilise funds from the DMF for the benefit of those affected by mining now that it has taken complete control over it? These questions have been emailed to the Union Mines Ministry on behalf of NewsClick.

The diversion of DMF funds for other purposes has effectively shortchanged the poorest and the most marginalized sections of the society, including forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes, who reside in the mineral-rich areas of the country.

"It is also important to go beyond the debate of state versus central control of DMF funds. These funds are justified by continuing the culture of extraction in areas deemed as mining geographies. DMF may provide some opportunity to compensate for past harms but should not be a mechanism to freeze the imagination that mining and resource extraction is the only future for mineral bearing areas," said Kanchi Kohli of New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research. (IPA Service)

Yours etc..
Dominic Stadlin
Wankhar,
Shillong

Everyone is selfish when it comes to politics!

Editor,
Apropos of the letter to the editor, 'UDP looking at washout in 2023' by Khraw Sohtun, I cannot agree more with the writer when it comes to the UDP which portrays itself as a party of the people and the region and one that cares for the State and for which they like to be at the frontline throwing allegations at the Government and other political parties and legislators. The UDP is a major partner in the ruling MDA government, yet repeatedly they have been throwing dirt at the government, not missing out on any opportunity to do the same. However, those who have been observing the political scenario of the State are not fools.

The UDP as a party is keeping quiet about the wrongdoings of their own party leaders. The resignation of the Home Minister that came after the growing demand of the people showed that the decision was solely of the minister himself and not a decision taken by the party

members, although they had stated that they support the decision. It would make one wonder though that on what account was this decision supported? Was it on the fact that this party genuinely cares for the people of the State that they too supported and joined the bandwagon of those who were demanding the removal of the Home Minister and are seeking justice for Cherister Thangkiew who was gunned down? Or was there a political motive behind it?

We are well aware of politicians and their selfish motives. Many times, political parties play petty politics based on regionalism and by playing victim. Regional parties, because of their political interests, act as divisive forces and wish to emerge as heroes for a particular section of the people where in lie their political interests. But people cannot be swayed at all times. The newly appointed MPCC Chief and MP, Vincent Pala, had brought to light many allegations against the UDP stating that they are responsible for the failure of law and order and all other illegalities taking place in Meghalaya. As much as we would like to term the MP as an opportunist who is trying to resuscitate the Congress we cannot disagree with his statements. Never did the UDP as a party

have the backbone to take the blame on themselves and their party MLA, who is handling the portfolio that maintains law and order in the State. Never did the party speak up when illegal transportation was taking place right under the wings of the Home Department. The UDP came out in defence against the statements of the MPCC Chief. How much of it is enough to sway the people or win their trust? How does this party expect the people to trust them and how do they expect to retain their numbers in 2023 when there is nothing they are doing for the citizens and the State who they claim to care for? It seems the only reason they are clinging on to the NPP-led MDA government too is because of their motives, for at the end of the day, they are in a position where they are getting what they need by sitting comfortably on those cosy armchairs; so happily they will stay. Taken out of this setting, one may start to wonder how they will even survive.

Yours etc.,
Jordan Diengdoh
Shillong - 2

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"The first step toward change is awareness.

The second step is acceptance."

— Nathaniel Branden

The Shillong Times

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Challenges to grassroots governance

THE amendment to the Sixth Schedule gives an opportunity to the State of Meghalaya to take advantage of direct funding to grass-roots institutions which, of course, have to be elected bodies along the lines of the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts. The Dorbar Shnong which have, for a long time been hailed as 'traditional institutions' inherited from a hoary past are increasingly failing to deal with civic governance as they do not have the resources. They receive no state funding and rely on contributions from the residents. The tenets of governance that worked at a time when communities were small and self-contained can no longer cope with the demands of modern governance. One key factor that is missed in discussions about the Dorbar Shnong is that their members who actually have a full-time job to carry out and require the assistance of several government departments, are voluntary workers. They give a sizeable amount of their time dealing with the needs of thousands of residents apart from managing the civic needs of the localities.

Another grey area in the functioning of traditional institutions is the absence of a standard operation model a common Constitution which guides their functions. Each Dorbar has its own Constitution; its own manner of conduct rules and at times, these clash with modern jurisprudence and modern governance models. No two Dorbar Shnong have the same Constitution. Hence what is allowed in one Dorbar may not be allowed in another. The fact that the Meghalaya High Court had to censure a particular Dorbar Shnong for excommunicating a person/persons that had grievances against the Dorbar indicates the extent of arbitrariness and propensity to work outside the norms of the Indian Constitution — a document that has been meticulously framed to meet the governance needs of this vast and diverse country. In an enlightened democracy it is not possible to allow an institution which adopts a model of governance based on an oligarchy to continue to flourish.

India and its states have to necessarily follow a set of laws laid down by the Indian Constitution, especially since that same Constitution is being amended from time to time to meet the needs of its constituents in coping with the complexities of governance in the 21st century. No society can live in the past and be guided by norms of behaviour that date back to a time when the challenges of climate change, the need to rejuvenate rivers, conserve water sources and forests and a host of other community-led activities were not so acute. Governance must constantly reinvent itself.

Will we miss the bus yet again?

By Wankitbok Pohshna

trilateral.

In Shillong city, various dorbar shnongs come under the municipal administered area of Shillong municipality and most subjects on civic amenities are looked after by the SMB which of course stands as a non-elected body since 1972 the year our state was born. This is the outcome of the state's lackadaisical attitude towards its citizens when it comes to grassroots governance 50 years on. With urbanization exploding, the garbage collected by the SMB from households is set to two or three times a week and people living in these areas are deprived of the appropriate service for the remaining four days of the week. And if one has to

tered areas are not functional at all and it poses a serious threat to pedestrians during the dark hours. There are illegal activities with many taking advantage of darkness in most areas of the city while our law keepers are burdened with other tasks that are equally detrimental. Maintenance of roads and drains is irregular and in the end citizens are paying the price.

The distribution of drinking water is irregular, insufficient and unequal in all localities of Shillong municipality. The municipal tax charged from each household is exorbitant for the services that they seldom receive or nor receiving at all. In certain municipal areas that

state leaders, will they also clarify what the similarities or differences are that stand between the proposed Councils with the Dorbar system that we currently have now? There seem to be conflicting scenarios which is beyond basic human understanding between the two. We have a Dorbar Shnong with a set of rules that is conflicting with another dorbar shnong on one hand, and on the other we see certain dorbar shnong up against the state at times on certain issues that crop up with the breakdown of the law. There are dorbar shnong issuing diktats which stand against right to life, while there are those who think that they are themselves the law. There are many instances where the public are subjected to situations where they are deprived of their basic rights

if they do not subscribe to the diktats of headmen in their areas. So, is the State Government once again contemplating that the Dorbar system is to be considered as a means for devolution of vast government subjects to the grassroots population in their present form?

How many Dorbars are elected by adult suffrage and how many through voice vote? How many Dorbars allow or do not allow participation of women till date? While most Dorbars issue directions to their citizens on cleanliness or conduct annual cleaning drives in their respective shnongs, Shillong is still placed at the bottom rank in parameters of a clean city. Do we still find the age-old time-tested institution of the Dorbars relevant for urban governance?

In certain areas falling under municipality apart from municipal taxes citizens also have to pay to dorbars that collect funds in the name of maintenance of drains/footpaths/cleanliness etc. This places a double burden on citizens who have to pay both parties for the very same purpose. Does this sound legal? Who will address all these basic issues? If not the state, who?

The State Government of Meghalaya, the District Councils or whosoever is at the helm of governance is bound to answer these serious questions to the public at large since the Central Government is now paving the way for correcting constitutional anomalies when it comes to village and municipal administration in the state of Meghalaya this time around. Any decision based on emotions should not make us miss the bus once again as a society and as a State because this could take us back to primitive ways in societal management. Are we the citizens of beautiful Shillong ready to embrace another political mistake?

During the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment when The Panchayati Raj system for grassroots urban and rural governance was introduced in the country for decentralization of certain subjects that were of grass-roots importance, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram were then exempted on the plea that the traditional institutions under Districts Councils were already in existence. Our leaders made the central leadership believe that all was well with grassroots governance. No doubt there is the Dorbar system till date in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. However, in 2014 when the authority of the Dorbar was questioned by the single bench of the Meghalaya High Court and when the headman was stripped of his power there was chaos. This warranted the then State Government to come up with an Ordinance that lived for six months and the grassroots governance Bill that was initiated simultaneously had to be thrown out as trash since almost all stakeholders rejected the idea of such Bill carefully thought so by the State.

In 2016 the Division bench upheld the judgment of the single court and a certain direction was issued to the State on matters related to powers of the Headman. An interim stay was also granted by the Supreme Court on a special leave petition filed by the KHADC the same year and somewhat by the said order the Headmen were once again allowed to function as per rules framed by the Councils. Barring Jaintia Hills region what are the rules under which Headmen in the Khasi Hills are to function? The VAB of KHADC is yet to see the light of day. Currently the Headman functions as per sanad from the Syiem which is against the entire idea of grassroots devolution framework.

Now with the amendment to the Sixth Schedule currently under process, our State leaders and of course certain NGOs have expressed apprehension towards the creation of village and municipal councils that were to come under the purview of the Sixth Schedule. Their claim is that we have the robust Dorbar system well in place that could not be diluted at any cost. The million-dollar question is - which Dorbar system are they talking about and under which provision of the law? This is yet to be understood by most of us and further, failure on the part of the State to seriously address this portion of the amendment will surely deprive citizens of Meghalaya from many benefits that other states derive by such decen-

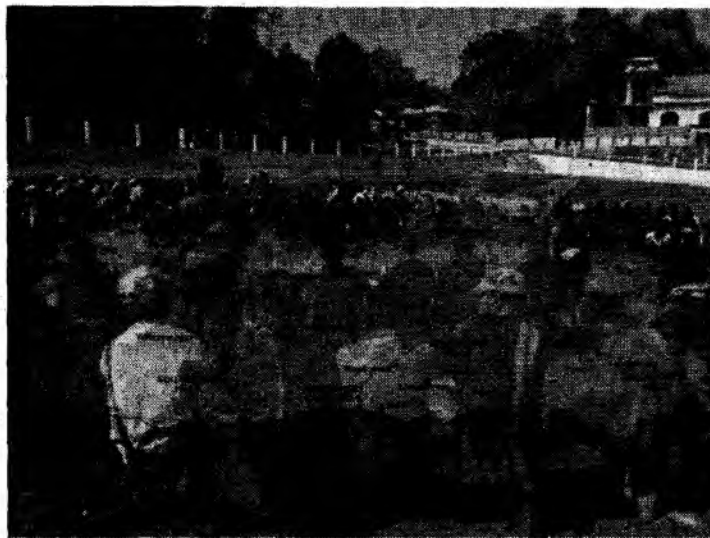
miss the slot which usually is in the morning hours of the particular route he/she is bound to keep the solid waste at home or dump it in the nearby secluded space or stream if the need arises. This can be well corroborated by the rampant dumping of garbage that is witnessed frequently in and around the city roads, vacant lands and streams.

We cannot forget that we are also on the verge of losing the Wah Umkhrak if not for the initiatives taken by certain groups and individuals to clean it up whenever they could. Instead of getting morning and evening slots on alternate days to dump household garbage, citizens have only one option and that is to wait for change to come and nothing else. There is also no effective garbage management system in the pipeline to dispose garbage from market areas in Shillong city to this day. And there is no holistic approach on this subject from the SMB and deliberately not even from the KHADC which is supposed to be the co-stakeholder.

What can be understood from the stand taken by the State on the current Amendment Bill is that people will further not be allowed to participate in urban governance. Urban management is not their concern here. Most street lights in the adminis-

do not have access to motorable roads even getting the cesspool service is a distant dream. Aren't the citizens living in these areas entitled to participate in municipal elections to choose their ward commissioner who will address issues concerning civic amenities? Or is the govt contemplating appointing headmen as ward commissioner? Aren't citizens of municipal areas entitled to receive grants through devolution as enshrined in the Constitution? Aren't citizens of rural Meghalaya also entitled to the same set of benefits that others receive in the rest of the country? Are we ready to accept that the present Dorbar system is not ready to take up such challenging subjects in question if we constantly reject such necessary changes that touch the lives of each individual in a society? Will the Dorbars or Headmen accept their role in urban or rural governance? All intellectuals, concerned citizens and general public living in municipal areas of Shillong as well as to those who do not fall under municipality should introspect on these issues that form the basis of our day to day lives.

Since the present Dorbar system has been placed before the Center as a yardstick to reject the village and municipal council form of grassroots governance by our



Vaccination and Christianity

By Wanjop Warbah

As the world, India and our state Meghalaya tries to bring life back to normalcy there is no denying that the impact of the spread of COVID-19 in our lives have been thrown into both; the chaos of change and the quiet of quarantine. Two years ago we never knew we would experience this and it has been a truly testing time for each one of us particularly those who have lost their loved and dear ones. So, as the coronavirus pandemic continues to cause deaths and disrupt billions of lives globally, people may turn to religious groups, family, friends, co-workers or other social networks for support. A few research survey conducted by different groups reveal that the outbreak has bolstered their religious faith and the faith of their compatriots. There are sections of people who say that their own faith has become stronger as a result

past. They thought it good for us to be always aware of our mortality. I am inclined to think they were right. So during these times it may be helpful to remember the words of Jesus Christ in John 14:27, Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (NIV).

As Christians, ever since the spread of the corona virus we all have prayed for healing from this dreaded virus, and now that healing has come in the form of the vaccine the question arises as to how many of us who have prayed for a cure, prayed for God's deliverance have taken the vaccine? In Philippians 2:5-7, God commands us, "In your relationships with another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" by "taking the very nature of a servant" and "not looking



of the pandemic. The majority say that the pandemic has not affected their faith but none has said that the pandemic has weakened their faith or their beliefs. Religion is just one of many aspects of life that have been touched by the pandemic. Family relationships, too, have been affected by lockdowns, economic turmoil and the consequences of falling ill. Many, that were hit hard by initial waves of infections and deaths say their family relationships have strengthened.

Perceptions about the pandemic's influence on faith are tied to people's own levels of observance. It is true that for those who are more religious are more likely than their less religious compatriots to say COVID-19 has strengthened their faith and that of others in their community or elsewhere. As a Christian I find that C.S. Lewis provides us some insights into how we might approach this unique situation. As a teenager, C.S. Lewis served as a British infantry officer in the trenches of World War I. He experienced first-hand the grim realities of that world crisis and returned home as a wounded veteran who would live with shrapnel lodged in his body the rest of his life. However, the emotional, psychological and spiritual wounds were to have an even greater impact on his life. When World War II commenced, Lewis was once again jolted into facing the realities of a world crisis that brought suffering and death to the world. However, by this time he had reflected on these realities and was able to eloquently help others think about how to face death and crisis in a manner that was honest, yet hopeful.

In one of his sermons at the onset of the war, and one could easily substitute the word, "pandemic" or "coronavirus" in place of the word "war," Lewis states: Yet war [the coronavirus] does do something to death. It forces us to remember it. The only reason why the cancer at sixty or the paralysis at seventy-five do not bother us is that we forget them. War [the pandemic] makes death real to us, and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the great Christians of the

to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Until we consider what the effect of our vaccination decisions have on others, we have not addressed the question from a fully Christian perspective.

"It is necessary for others in our society that we Christians take the vaccine. Given our numbers in the State and in many parts of the world, what Christians decide will determine whether the world achieves herd immunity and whether the vaccine succeeds in bringing the pandemic to an end. If Christians say no to the shots and continue to insist that it's their right to do so, then this will allow the virus to still circulate and replicate in the world. Moreover, taking the shots will in no way hamper our relations with God.

It is true that you can avoid the minimal risks by skipping the vaccine, but you cannot avoid the fact that doing so exposes you (and others around you) to the much greater risk of you contracting the COVID virus and spreading it to others. Some may say that the vaccine is a mark of the beast, but to me the Covid-19 vaccines are "definitely not the mark of the beast." On the contrary they have the potential to "give us hope, to give an indication that there is an end to suffering and death." Sadly, this view isn't always accepted among the church and the world. Many Christians today still don't accept the findings of modern science, and that affects everything from caring for God's creation to getting vaccinated. Many are also departing or rejecting the faith over the perceived science and faith conflict.

My view is that all Christians should praise and thank God for the awe-inspiring power of our bodily immune system. Yet we can also thank God for insights of doctors and researchers who have developed vaccines to strengthen our immune system, preventing countless early deaths and needless suffering. As we roll up our sleeves for a vaccine, we can be confident we are making an ethical and wise decision for the health of ourselves and our communities.

(Email: wwanjop@yaho.com)

Letters to the Editor

Why this irrational response?

Editor,

The saga of the slain Ex-General Secretary of HNLC (L) C. Thangkiew who has been deemed as an important figure by the leaders of Mawlai Town Dorbar (MTD) and Ka Sur Ki Nong Mawlai needs to be put under the lens for the fruitful understanding and knowledge of the general public. As always there are two sides to every story but the turn of events since the death of the Ex-General Secretary entices an interesting analogy especially on the approach of the Dorbar when it comes to deaths caused by militant groups and deaths caused by the police department.

The action of the police to end the life of a human being cannot be accepted in any shape or form, and for their lapses the Khasi Hills region had to bear the brunt

of bloodbaths, curfews and internet suspension for a brief period. But what is more thought-provoking is the prompt response of the Dorbar and Ka Sur Ki Nong Mawlai to burn effigies and organize signature campaigns in solidarity with the slain militant. These conglomerations have also been demanding axing of the heads of the police officials involved in the infamous operation, and they even went to the extent of consulting legal professionals to further their cause which were seen in their harangues which have been telecast. I

It is a sad state of affair to see militants with blood on their hands being extolled because protests of such magnitude were never seen in the past when innocent lives were taken away or harmed by HNLC. Young people, small time workers and even students were killed and injured by cadres of HNLC on the guise that they did not pay the ransom or were informants. Where

were the voices then? Voices were rare for these miserable events which are now done and dusted. And what about the IED blast in Laitumkhrak market or in East Jaintia Hills which caused injuries to several individuals. Is it because they are a different Dorbar? Or is it because they are only lay people and expressing solidarity for them will never be beneficial.

A much more serious question to ask is whether planting of bombs with intent to kill or causing harm is a non-issue in the eyes of these patriots. If not then where are the voices opposing the barbaric act which is resented all over the world? Sadly! such condemnation will never be seen instead what is more important now is to suspend the cops and threaten with more law and order problems.

The society itself does not bat an eyelid and neither do the political leaders who are taking advantage of the situation for their own brownie points. The truth is

we are being led from the point of view of only a few individuals and to believe them entirely will be similar to opening up a Pandora's box. It will not bode well for us in Meghalaya!

Yours etc.,
B.S. Lator
Shillong

Ratifying the Montreal accord

Editor,

The Central government must be commended for making a momentous decision to ratify the amendment to the Montreal accord on phasing out ozone depleting and environmentally harmful substances used in the refrigeration industry. The decision was made at an appropriate time as the United Nations 26th summit (COP26) on climate change is scheduled to be held in November at Glasgow(UK). This move is highly signifi-

cant because it complies with the assurance given by India to the UK, the host of the COP26 to play a significant role in the forthcoming meet. India, and a few other countries have set targets under the Paris accord on reducing global warming.

India has adopted the amendment to the Montreal protocol in 2016 that called for gradual elimination of the harmful chemicals used as cooling agents. They belong to the category of HFCs that cause depletion of the ozone layer that protects the earth from the harmful UV radiation from the sun. HFCs emit greenhouse gases that cause damage to the ozone layer. All these chemicals need to be replaced with safer substances.

India has adopted a national strategy of a four-phased cutback schedule. Accordingly, 10%, 20%, 30% and 85% of HFCs will be reduced by 2032, 2037, 2042 and 2047 respectively to achieve the target of eliminating them by the late

2040s. In fact, elimination of HFCs at the global level will prevent Greenhouse Gas(GHG) emissions equal to several million tonnes of carbon dioxide. It would help reduce temperature.

As for India, it could produce indigenous equipment and cooling agents that do not contain HFC. In fact, manufacture of new substances would generate additional employment and income. It is expected that the next generation of refrigeration technology would involve the use of safer chemicals like hydro-fluoro-olefins(HFOs). However, the energy efficiency of the refrigerants needs to be improved to reduce operation cost and make them environment friendly.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS
Kollam

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"The purpose of getting power is to be able to give it away."

— Aneurin Bevan

The Shillong Times

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Confused Kabul

UNDERSTANDABLY, India keeps its fingers crossed vis-à-vis its approach to the Taliban that is set to take over governance of Afghanistan. There is no clarity as to what this militant outfit would do and what its mission is in its Second Coming. For sure, all is not well within the Taliban hence days after the scheduled exit of the United States, the gun-wielders were not able to announce who would lead the new government. It is here that all eyes are glued to. The rag-tag group of militants, some of them closely linked to Pakistan, the Haqqani network that now claims it does not have much to do with Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban working at cross-purposes, the Northern Alliance on the other side of the spectrum, the resistance in the north-eastern province of Panjshir, the fight between the Doha-based Taliban leadership and the homegrown militants, and above all the spokes being put into the Taliban wheel by self-styled acting president Amrulla Saleh make the situation within Afghanistan quite fluid.

The Indian perspectives were reflected, nonetheless, in a discussion that India's envoy to Qatar had with the Taliban political affairs head at the latter's behest earlier this week — after the US quit the scene. India expects a guarantee from the emerging new power centre in Kabul that the soil of Afghanistan will not be used by the Pakistani ISI and other mischief-makers to interfere in the affairs of Kashmir Valley. A Taliban representative has admitted that Kashmir is a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan and the two must talk it out on their own. However, this, is not yet the official line of the Taliban. On the other hand, Al Qaeda with its roots also in Pakistan has sought to draw in Kashmir in the new scheme of things, saying the proposed Emirate — emerging governance system — should side with the Kashmiri Muslims. Also, the Islamic State (IS) that co-exists with Al Qaeda has as its basic motto a Global Umma, a world exclusively for Muslims and run by Muslims. This is easier said than done.

Whether in dealing with Pakistan or China or Afghanistan, India has aces up its sleeves. The divisions within the militants in Taliban will itself force the new Islamist regime there to adopt a realistic approach to all matters. A Taliban representative has stated as much: the world must leave it alone, and it would also avoid interfering in the affairs of others. This should be the way forward and good sense must prevail.

Meghalaya's political entrepreneurs

By Patricia Mukhim

One critical subject not taught in any university is political management. People go to business school to learn business management; they study medicine to become doctors; nursing to become nurses; engineering to build and design infrastructure; they specialize in teaching methods so they can teach better. There are those who learn communications skills because they want to join a media company or a newspaper. Every group of professionals has to go through the grill and pass in the subject they have chosen before they can get a job in that particular profession. Politics is the only job that does not require a certificate. You don't need any qualifications for a profession that touches the lives of millions. Politics is what decides policies and their implementation. Politicians are supposed to make laws but without really knowing how that law will impinge on those that will be bound by them.

The more one looks at Democracy and how it is panning out the more one feels that our freedom fighters and those who crafted the Constitution were perhaps steeped in idealism. They never envisaged that a time would come when politics would become a business, not a public service. They never imagined that politics would breed crony capitalism and that those supposed to make laws for public welfare would spend more time building their own nests from public funds. What has happened in Meghalaya in the past decades is exactly that. Those who have entered politics have made it a family business while the rest of the population is sinking into the morass of poverty. The NITI Aayog evaluation of districts says it all. Our healthcare system is dipping because not enough has been invested in health since the state was created. Early in the journey of our state we had a health scam; then a PHE scam. Then we were shocked. Now we are all too weary to even feel anger and dismay.

One realizes over time that striving for democracy is bone-wearying, agonizing, frustrating, cruel and even dangerous. Henrik Ibsen the Norwegian playwright and theatre director once said,

"You should never have your best trousers on when you go out to fight for freedom and truth." In effect this means that fighting for truth in a world of murky politics could get you dirty or hurt. This society does not seem to have the capacity to fight any more for the right reasons. The media exposes the ugly aspects of governance failure

a long time. There is a growing feeling today that the HNLC, a banned militant outfit, is gaining sympathy on account of the tragic August 13 incident. To shower sympathy to an outfit that Thangkiew had left behind because he no longer found it tenable to take up arms against the state, would be a hugely misplaced



but people are unperturbed, almost as if it's their fate to suffer the kind of government that we have today and the shoddy governance it provides. This reminds me of Thomas Jefferson the principal author of American Independence who once wrote to a friend, "I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing for God forbid if we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion." Indeed, public anger and frustration must be rightfully expressed when the public see that they are being taken for granted and that their silence is seen as approval of all wrongdoing.

The recent movement under the banner "Ka Sur Ki Nong Mawlai" is an external manifestation of many things that have gone wrong in Meghalaya. It took the death of Cherister Thangkiew for that brotherhood to emerge and for the group to demand justice for the deceased who was shot in cold blood before his two sons. It's a cruel deed if one uses the human rights lenses to view this whole tragedy and one does not quite understand how a police force that is known to be benign even when it should be aggressive in handling law and order problems, has suddenly become trigger happy. This and other questions will nudge our consciousness for

collective emotion. As a people who have seen the worst spectacle of militancy since 1996 up to 2001; the extortion, the ruthless killings, the kidnappings and the sense of fear that the outfit created which led to a stagnation of the economy, we cannot get carried away by emotions, to the point of supporting the outfit at this juncture.

This anger should in fact be directed at those holding the reins of political power and promoting the grab-what-you-can culture. We must focus on the here and now instead of going into the past and raking up the Instrument of Accession yet again and diverting people's attention from the present which must be urgently addressed. There is an attempt to create an ethnic ghetto out of the August 13 incident and all manner of views are coming out of the woodwork. This is where the Khasi fault-lines lie. It is important for Khasi society to hold the mirror to itself and to have the honesty to analyse those fault-lines. Where do we draw our intellectual breath from when the scholars we have produced don't teach us to challenge stinking thinking and to get out of the ghetto to breathe the fresh air of new and progressive ideas? Why do we want the younger generation to become slaves of putrid

ideas of the past that we use only before elections?

Someone the other day rightly pointed out that the leaders of the statehood movement representing the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo people demanded statehood without even a vision for what they want that state to be. They did not have an economic roadmap and nor did they care to negotiate the borders right then by consulting the Siyems, Dollois and the Maharis. When the state was created the only interest was elections and it has been so ever since — its politics that dominates the consciousness not just of the political leadership but also of the ordinary citizen. We are bereft of social leadership and yet it is society that needs healing and leadership at this critical juncture. Why is the Khasi society unable to produce a social leader or leaders who can give us hope. Let's face it - the church as an institution has failed to provide leadership at critical junctures.

Except for a few rare voices like Albert Thymians or HH Mohrmen's, the others don't dare offend their constituents, some among whom might be political leaders. Writers are not expected to write as a representative of a group in order to reaffirm the self-esteem of the group. Writers are supposed to push us to question politics, governance, society and every human institution. Free speech has to rest on shared morality and must escape the tyranny of local conformism.

And lest we overlook one, aspect of governance which is not possible without the shared responsibility of the powerful bureaucracy, let us also question why most bureaucrats prefer to look the other way in the face of blatant corruption in the system. Why are they reticent about answering questions from the media? Who or what are they protecting? Should the bureaucracy not be as concerned about the rule of law? As media-persons we ask questions on behalf of the public and not because of our personal curiosities. While most bureaucrats are responsive (perhaps because they have nothing to hide) there are those that are outright disdainful of the media. Or have they forgotten that they are "public servants"?

Such is the arrogance of power!

Distant court, distant justice One among many problems

By Dr S. Saraswathi

Only one Supreme Court is established in New Delhi for a country extending to 3.29 million sq km and a population of over 1.4 billion, which is practically inaccessible to most people fighting for justice. Is it an "injustice" done to people, spread across the length and breadth of the country as remarked by the senior-most judge of the Madras High Court at the time of his retirement recently? Or is this an unforeseen problem that can be remedied by a bundle of judicial reforms?

In any case, the remark echoes a common complaint of many litigants and lawyers especially from Southern India wanting to approach the Supreme Court in appeal against the verdict of high courts. Distant court, distant justice — is a strong feeling of aggrieved litigants unable to take their case to Delhi because of prohibitive costs involved in the process. For them, it means deprivation of the right to justice and equality. The judicial system depends on and works with evidence and facts and needs arguments and hearing in person. Remote hearing is presently a remote possibility.

Regional branches of the Supreme Court, under existing conditions, seem necessary to make the doors of justice physically accessible to the common man. The SC is meant for the entire population and not just for the people living around New Delhi is the central point of this argument. The retiring judge suggested that the SC should reconsider its previous decision against establishing branches or the Centre should amend the Constitution to provide for regional Benches.

There are 25 High Courts and three of them have jurisdiction over more than one State. The High Court of Assam in Guwahati serves Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura also besides Assam State. The Union territory of Delhi has a separate high court.

Apart from easing accessibility to the common man, more branches will lessen the burden on the SC and time taken for justice delivery. It will reduce the pendency of cases now running to lakhs in the Supreme Court. Data placed before the SC revealed that in the Allahabad High Court, the average waiting period to get justice in a criminal appeal against conviction by a trial court is around 35 years as the disposal rate is 18% and appeals pending are over 1.83 lakh.

The workload on the Supreme Court is quite heavy as it has original, appellate, and advisory jurisdiction. With reference to appellate jurisdiction, the necessity for more SC branches is felt, as involvement of common men is highest in appeals from high courts in civil and criminal cases. Appeals from any judgement, decree, or final order of a high court can be made to SC if the concerned court certifies that the case involves a substantial question of law.

Where a high court reversed an order of trial court and awarded death sentence for an accused or where a high court has withdrawn for trial before itself any case from any subordinate court under it which had awarded death penalty or imprisonment for not less than 10 years or merely certifies that the case is fit for appeal to Supreme Court, the appellate jurisdiction of SC is exercised. In civil suits, disputes involving not less than 25 lakh in cash or property or issues considered by the High Court as fit for appeal to the Supreme Court are allowed appeal. SC's appellate jurisdiction is very wide extending over all courts and tribunals in India except those constituted for Armed Forces. Appeal to SC has become a routine procedure. The apex court has also jurisdiction to call to itself any case pending in

any part of India if there was a constitutional question involved. It also has the power to entertain petitions from ordinary people who could not otherwise approach the court due to financial constraints.

The President can consult the Supreme Court on any question of law or fact that is of public importance and refer to it any dispute within its original jurisdiction. This role is also growing in recent years.

Litigations are increasing over the years with increase in laws, growing social-economic and other issues, problems arising from implementing development and welfare programmes, and growing complexities in social relations and active role of public organisations and political institutions. Citizen awareness of rights and privileges is visible. The workload on the judiciary has increased enormously and the one Supreme Court with three types of jurisdiction, original, appellate, and advisory, must be really struggling under their weight.

Low ratio of judges to population has been cited as a cause for pendency of cases. It was said in 1998 that there were barely 10.5 judges per million population in India compared to 107 in the US. Judges-population ratio in recent years has grown as 19.8 in 2018, 20.39 in 2019, and 21.03 in 2020 per million population, but still grossly inadequate. It results in enormous delay in even taking up hearing of cases causing overcrowding of under-trial prisoners in jails. Some of them have spent more time in jail than the length of maximum prescribed punishment for the offence alleged against them. The Law Commission, however, did not consider this ratio as scientific criterion for deciding adequacy of judges and gave importance to the rate of disposal of cases.

Number of cases pending in various courts was reported to be over 446 lakh and is expected to cross 500 lakh by 2022. Clearing pending cases is aptly described by a lawyer as similar to "draining a bottomless pit". The National Judicial Data Grid shows that pending cases outnumber the number of new cases filed in any year. It is worse than Covid-19 pandemic cases. The average hearing time for listed cases on a day could be as small as 2 minutes according to an analysis of cases pending in 21 high courts in 2016.

Judicial reforms in recent years have been mooted many times mostly in the context of delay and pendency. The issue is linked with vacancy in the post of judges which is said to be four out of 10 in high courts.

Primary role of the SC is to determine substantial questions of law relating to the Constitution and matters of great general importance. But, it is invaded by appeals from other courts. Setting up a National Court of Appeal can, therefore, be reconsidered.

"We can assert true accessibility when the person with the maximum disadvantage can still knock on the doors of the court of justice", said the CJI while speaking on modernising the judicial infrastructure. He emphasises technological innovations in the justice delivery system which can address problems of time and distance simultaneously. He said, "Modernisation of judicial structure does not mean building more courts or filling up vacancies... An efficient judicial infrastructure means providing equal and free access to justice. This could be realised through a barrier-free and citizen-friendly environment".

Efficient infrastructure must include qualified manpower including an adequate number of judges whether we go in for virtual hearing or more branches of the Supreme Court. ---INFA

Letters to the Editor

A call for change

Editor, Apropos of the letter to the editor under the caption, "Why this irrational response?" written by BS Lator (ST Sep 1, 2021) I would also like to state a few things which are highly relevant concerning the current fiasco in Shillong. Firstly, as a common citizen I would like to appreciate the courage of the writer for taking a stand on a matter which has not been taken up by anyone yet. Secondly, the 'irrational response' as pointed out by the writer is true to the core as in Shillong it is common to see protests led by pressure groups with vested interests for their own well-being rather than taking up issues for the betterment of the public.

I have never seen any kind of movements by these pressure groups demanding from the Government to improve the employment rate or to improve the standard of education etc. because such movements will not bear any fruit for them and most importantly they will be exposed for being out of depth. All they know is violence. For any issue that pops up in the capital which

they see as an opportunity to exploit, the first thing that these pressure groups will resort to is stone pelting or burning of properties. The viral videos post the August 13 incident and the videos available online will validate the claim.

Coming to the recent developments the state Government is trying its level best to bring back normalcy in the city but from what I see, it appears that the pressure groups still want to rake up the matter. The burning questions of today is, "Why are the pressure groups still clinging on to the issue when the Government has already announced a judicial enquiry as per their initial demand?" It will be more sensible to wait for the findings of the Commission instead of jumping on illogical bandwagons and threatening the people with lawlessness. I feel that the beloved Mawlai town and its people have been brainwashed by these pressure groups so much so that they are willing to live their lives at their mercy.

History teaches us that whenever any pressure group acts as a mouthpiece of the community there will always be political influence behind it and this time it's exhibiting the same inclination with many letters written to the

political masters who are interestingly echoing the same agenda. The time has come to turn the tables and it is never too late.

Yours etc.,
Mewanshuwa Shylla,
Shillong-17

Govt buying time

Editor, To me it appears that the killing of HNLC mainspring Cherister Thangkiew has unwittingly begun to give legitimacy to the banned outfit. There is a public outcry in Mawlai and not quite surprisingly, Mawlai has been known to be one of the epicentres of HNLC for a long time. But what surprises the most is the one stupidly executed police raid has given rise to public defiance of law and order authorities. That Bah Che received a hero's farewell amidst chanting of pro-HNLC slogans, even from school children is scary. Interestingly, except for Nongstoin and Malki, there has been muted re-verboration of the Mawlai public sentiments. Privately, most Khasis are in endorsement that Bah Che has been killed with an intent to take the wind out of HNLC sails. Clearly, one senseless act has

recoiled on the government.

Today, the government has been caught on the wrong foot. There is no way they can run away from the fall out. The Home Minister's dramatised resignation has not come out of a sense of remorse or responsibility. Don't we not know how Lal Bahadur Shastri resigned as Railway Minister after a train accident? Can we ever forget that our own DD Lapang had resigned after violence in Jaivaw? This cold-blooded murder is not going to spare anybody. Yes, there is a demand for suspension of the DGP and two police officers who led the raid on that fateful night. Government is seen to be dragging its feet for it has turned out to be the proverbial hot potato which neither can be thrown out nor can it be swallowed.

The Home Minister's wishy-washy statement that the government is examining the matter from all angles is a clever ploy to buy time. There is also the issue of judicial enquiry. Although the enquiry body has been constituted, we have not heard so far whether the investigation has begun or not. Probably not. Why should the government prod the Committee to hasten the probe? It suits perfectly well

for the government to let the tempers cool by themselves. The question lurking in every public mind today is: Will Bah Che's death at the hands of police become another dead issue after a few days? As far as I can see, it is not going to die down so soon. It's not just the political rivals who will keep the issue alive but also the large number of pressure group will not rest unless the issue comes to a logical end. Now whether the government will relent in appeasing the agitators remains to be seen. But the interesting development is that some MLAs supporting the ruling coalition have gone public saying that they would bring pressure on government to meet this demand. I personally think these MLAs are merely mousing mealy words for public consumption. Don't forget, elections are not too far away. Whatever happens during the coming weeks will have an immense impact in the coming elections, at least in Khasi Hills. There is an old saying that sitting on the fence for too long will cause pain in the posterior. Let the government of the day not sit on the fence for too long. It can do so only at its own peril.

Yours etc.,
Pynshngain Jyrwa,
Via email

Befriending Taliban

Editor, With the Taliban getting centre-stage in Afghan Politics, India's concerns regarding external security in its North Western Border holds water. Given the close proximity and support Taliban enjoys from Pakistan, India's external security threat becomes double edged. However, the silver lining in this backdrop is that traditionally and historically Afghanistan and India enjoyed very cordial relationships. India needs to bank upon this tradition and further augment the friendly ties with the Taliban. With Taliban high commandos stating that they won't be involved in the Indo-Pak dispute, this is a sign that the future may not be so gloomy vis a vis the Indo-Afghan relationship, provided efforts are made to embolden the traditional ties of friendship.

Yours etc.,
Sadiq H. Laskar,
Guwahati

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"History repeats itself, first as tragedy,
second as farce."

— Karl Marx

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Judicial inquiries - an eyewash

A judicial inquiry functions according to the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952 where the state orders an enquiry into matters of public importance and in recent years, to matters related especially to the violation of human rights. Meghalaya has seen several inquiry committees and judicial commissions but none have resulted in the punishment of the guilty. One judicial inquiry that the people of Meghalaya will remember is related to the May 2009 Shillong jailbreak case where the notorious criminal Fullmoon Dhar along with six others, including two undertrials escaped from the Shillong jail. Fullmoon Dhar was gunned down the next day in West Jaintia Hills while the six other prisoners were re-arrested. A one-man Judicial Inquiry by Retired Judge of Guwahati High Court, SP Rajkhowa was constituted to enquire into the entire gamut of that incident. Justice Rajkhowa submitted a 79-page report into the findings only in 2013 and was tabled in the Assembly nine months later.

The terms of reference of the inquiry which should have been primarily on the alleged encounter killing of Fullmoon Dhar ended up acquitting the then SP, West Jaintia Hills Mukesh Singh who pulled the trigger on Fullmoon. The report focused on the reason for the jailbreak and blamed jail officials, saying they connived with undertrials and abetted the jailbreak. The probe also failed to establish a politician-criminal nexus which was believed to have led to the jailbreak. Judicial enquiries nearly always end up becoming post facto cover ups. Justice Rajkhowa said in the report that there was no cogent evidence to give definite findings about the criminal politician nexus. Considering that it took three years for the report to appear and a considerable amount of money paid by the Government to a senior Supreme Court lawyer to defend it, the whole exercise was a futile one. At the time, NGOs had alleged that the report was doctored before being placed in the Assembly. The report was replete with grammatical and other errors.

Judicial enquiries are meant to suspend public outcry by promising that the process would be free and fair. The final Report is submitted to the Government which has set up the Commission. The Government in turn presents it to the state legislature within six months. If the Commission finds any government official or police personnel guilty of misconduct and transgression in upholding the law, there are no enabling provisions to compel the Government to act on the steps that the Commission proposes. Keeping this in mind, will the judicial enquiry on the alleged encounter killing of Cheristerfield Thangkiew lead to anything concrete and establish the guilt of the officers on duty who claim to have pulled the trigger on Thangkiew because he tried to attack them? And how long will it take before the report is submitted? By then the 2023 elections would have been over.

Lessons from the tragedy of Afghanistan

By Deepa Majumdar

Like the Rohingya, the Afghan people have a tragic history. Of the two, the Afghans are perhaps more tragic, because they are persecuted by their own people (the Taliban). In its more recent history, this ancient land has been a crucible of neocolonialism - in both its positive and negative aspects. A comparison with Meghalaya is not inappropriate, given the extreme westernization both have faced as cradles of colonialism and neocolonialism. In response, both have seen near-fatal searches for cultural authenticity. Both have undergone painful insurgencies. Both are tribally organized. But beyond a point this comparison stalls, because not even the worst xenophobia and the most violent insurgencies in Meghalaya can begin to compare with the barbarism and savage misogyny of the Taliban. All said and done, the Khasi community is matrilineal, even if this matrilineality falls short of the highest feminism. The Taliban could not begin to imagine a mother-centered matrilineal society.

Unforeseen and sad though this return of the Taliban has been, at least four lessons can be learned from this tragedy. First, the US debacle in Afghanistan should be seen as a clash, not of civilizations, but of secular capitalist hedonism and nihilism, with religious puritanism and zealotry. Like all pairs of opposites, hedonism and puritanism contradict one another. They therefore cannot resolve each other. If puritanism bestows chilling alienation, so does hedonism, through a descent into the body, mindless materialism, an iconic place for money, the breakdown of the family, and the modern hi-tech war.

Second, this debacle is the clearest sign that the spotlight of History is shifting from America to China (PRC). America's sudden chaotic exit, even as PRC hoots the Taliban, is surely history's way of anointing China as our next superpower. That PRC is courting the Taliban for purely mercenary reasons should not surprise us. Given its ghastly record of human rights violations in Tibet, which it invaded in 1950-51, PRC lacks the moral authority to question the brutalities of the Taliban. It would therefore be the greatest blunder ever, for Europe's former colonies in Asia to favor China over America, out of misplaced identity politics and anti-western bias.

Third, the fact that Afghan government forces caved in, so that the Taliban was able to fill the vacuum left by departing American forces, demonstrates how entrenched identity politics can be in realpolitik. It demonstrates as well how

little Afghan men cared for the threat to their womenfolk under Taliban rule.

Fourth, Afghanistan shares with not-yet-modern former colonies at least three graphic challenges: western neocolonial cultural imperialism, nativist authenticity movements that happen in reaction, and frail western-style governments riddled with corruption, often direct puppets of the west (America). In short, nations entering the threshold of modernity will fumble in their attempts at government formation.

The military-industrial complex of the neocolonial west confronts countries like Afghanistan with westernization and cultural imperialism, more through aggressive trade deals, advertisement, and temptation, than brutal coercion. Impoverished pre-modern non-western societies lap up the American dream, without heeding enough the fact that it erodes true ascetic values and virtues, which stand as the life force of any civilization. Unaware that a nightmare of crass materialism engulfs this dream, they succumb to its barrage of mind-numbing western secular pleasures, which may be decadent, but encourage individuality, enterprise, and creativity. Although perhaps the best that realpolitik has to offer, the American system is hardly flawless. Western hedonism and Talibanic puritanism (its mirror-opposite), cannot resolve the problems in one another. True ascetic norms (voluntary self-control, renunciation, etc.) transcend both extremes. Thus, the west's exposure, objectification, and exploitation of the female body can never redeem the blight of forcible concealment imposed by the Taliban on Afghan woman. Incapable of tolerating otherness and devoid of true universality, the west tries to create the non-west as a vassal in its own image of capitalistic hedonism.

Neo-colonial westernization spurs severe bids at anti-western authenticity that aim at nativist theocratic utopias that are, in truth, dystopias. Through brutal puritanical religious caricatures of true ascetic norms (which must be inspired, never coerced), they wring all pleasure out of people's lives. Puritanical groups like the Taliban far exceed the west in their intolerance of otherness and xenophobia. Abhorring otherness and devoid of the great heart and ethical sensitivity of the west, they are merciless towards "aliens." Like other former colonies, Afghanistan is therefore caught between the mirror opposites of neo-colonial hedonism and the authenticity movement of nativist religious puritanism,

a tragic conundrum.

Afghanistan also faced the challenge of a fatally-flawed government not untypical of the not-yet-modern failed states among former colonies. Trembling on shaky foundations, and with neophyte civil societies, these countries suffer culturally alien corrupt governments that are incapable of maintaining law and order, or dispensing justice. Whether they are less corrupt than grand larceny on Wall Street and the ravages of nature perpetrated by America's military-industrial complex is a different question altogether. Because these corrupt governments are dysfunctional, violent gangsters take over, dispensing rough justice, sometime using brutal extra-judicial methods and kangaroo courts. In Afghanistan, this nation-wide theocratic gang is the Taliban. As if this were not bad enough, and adding to its cauldron of crises, the Afghan government was, until recently, an artificial puppet propped up by America. Yet, it is unjust to see America as merely Ayatollah Khomeini's "great Satan." One must acknowledge the complexities of neocolonialism, by recognizing that even a superpower has virtues. To see America as just an imperialist predator with massive hi-tech violence undermines its nuanced character and historical responsibilities. No nation becomes a superpower based on might alone. Like an ambidextrous Goddess, America smites with one hand, and feeds with the other. Sometimes a good cop, sometimes bad, yet, America is generous to a fault. Like the gang member who ignores government and formal law, to dispense rough justice, so also, America ignores and despises the United Nations, to dispense extra-judicial global justice, cowboy style. This is how the will of History uses the superpower, which it conceives as the engine that pulls the locomotive of History. Thus, the American reconstruction effort, or what the Taliban calls the occupation, was perhaps historically ordained, not just as a means of granting essential liberties and better law and order, but more importantly, for the purpose of inculcating this war-torn land into modernity. Although each civilization possesses its own track of History, the superpower sometimes coerces a civilization that is lagging behind to join the chime of world History. Like an engine, it pulls all nations in the direction mandated by the locomotive of History.

Beneath its gleaming new infrastructure and thin veil of modernity, Afghanistan remained a failed state. Despite billions spent, Afghanistan

fell apart like a house of cards. Why? Because a nation cannot be born except from the deepest roots and sovereign aspirations of its people. It can never be created through artificial purchase, least of all, by an alien occupying force. From the Afghan perspective, America's reconstruction project was an occupation. The Taliban offered to deliver Osama bin Laden, provided America stopped bombing them. But America refused. Moreover, bin Laden was discovered and killed in Pakistan, not Afghanistan. This means America's war in Afghanistan was as unwarranted as that in Iraq. Despite all this, America's destruction, occupation, and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, were perhaps historically necessitated (not wasted) by the multiple crises that plagued this once pariah state, especially the plight of its women and minorities.

If anything, Afghanistan proves that colonialism and neo-colonialism are marvels of complexity and historical nuance. A means of inculcating Afghanistan into modernity, the US occupation (not the bombing, nor the needless loss of lives) was a mixed blessing that gave Afghan women, girls, minorities, and LGBT communities great relief from Talibanic terror. If anything, this proves that sometimes authenticity movements, although spurred by western domination and occupation, can be more violent than the original dominion. Moreover, at least some western (American) values and virtues, are universal. That Afghans are desperate to leave proves that even a faulty democracy is better than dictatorship. The hatred of the former colonies towards the west and America, often blinds them to their own demons. For Imran Khan (Pakistan) to say that the Taliban had broken "the chains of slavery," while somewhat true in the context of neo-colonialism, is sickeningly irresponsible towards victims subject to far greater slavery under the Taliban. How easily the world ignores violence against women and girls!

To the non-west, America's war fatigue sounds imperialistic. To be tired of a war it started, with no words of contrition for needless loss of life, is the acme of hubris. Nevertheless, Joe Biden's decision to pull out of Afghanistan makes sense. But not his chaotic exit, which should have been planned months ago, nor his blaming the Afghan people for failing to fight. A fake state riddled by the corruption of its elites and that of American contractors will fall apart like a house of cards!

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

Will India recognise a Taliban Government?

By TP Sreenivasan

Several lawyers and historians must be poring over legal tomes and official records to advise the government on what position we should take on the question of recognition of the new regime in Kabul.

The Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 with the recognition of just three States, but this time, it is believed that they are taking their time to form their government to make it respectable enough to secure recognition and, more importantly, development assistance.

There are signals not only from Pakistan and China, but also from Iran and Russia that they are ready to recognise the regime, whatever its composition. India has taken a flexible approach to the question of recognition and we have a range of models from Kampuchea to Burma to Fiji.

According to the federal department of foreign affairs of Switzerland, 'When a state recognizes a government, it acknowledges a group of persons as competent to act as an organ of the state in question and to represent it in terms of international law.'

'The only precondition for the recognition of a government under international law is its effective exercise of sovereign power (first and foremost, control of a substantial part of the territory and of the apparatus of administration).'

One doctrine holds that a government that has come to power by a coup or revolution should not be recognized or regarded as legitimate until it has received democratic confirmation (by referendum, for example).'

India has generally followed the policy of explicitly or implicitly recognising governments on the basis of the accepted criteria, but there have been cases where we have made exceptions to suit our interests.

For instance, we had held back the Vietnam-Soviet Union backed Kampuchea in 1979 in spite of tremendous pressure on us from the Soviet Union.

The foreign secretary of the time was held personally responsible for that decision and he came to grief when a new government took over in India.

Similarly, we were hostile to the government in Burma after it walked out of the Non-aligned Movement in 1979 and our sympathy was with Aung San Suu Kyi. Though the recognition issue was not there, when the readmission of Burma to NAM came up at a foreign ministers' meeting in Bali, we stopped the readmission as we conveyed to the Indonesians that we were against it. It is another matter that we established good relations with the military junta in Burma even before Aung San Suu Kyi joined them.

None of these decisions was taken by the lawyers, but by political leaders.

The series of actions taken by India against the military government in Fiji were exceptional and perhaps unprecedented.

As the Indian high commissioner to Fiji at the time of the military coup in Fiji in 1987, aimed at disenfranchising the Fiji Indian citizens of the country, I had not expected India to react strongly.

During the few days when I had no way of seeking instructions from New Delhi as all communication channels, basically a telephone and a teleprinter, were disconnected, I remained committed to our impartiality between the Fijians and the Fiji Indians and tried to bring about a reconciliation through a dialogue with the governor general as he was still in place.

But by the time I es-

tablished contact with the ministry of external affairs, there was a decision at the highest level not to recognise the military government and to impose trade sanctions against Fiji.

I thought that non-recognition would mean the closing down of the high commission, but I was only called back for consultations.

I was told that it was necessary to send a signal to all overseas Indians that India would stand by them if the local government took a confrontationalist position against them.

I tried to make the point that the majority of Fiji Indians would want reconciliation as they had already committed to concede political power to the Fijians in return for the freedom to do business and to get employment.

Moreover, the trade sanction would hurt the Fiji Indians more than the Fijians because most Indian imports were for the benefit of the Fiji Indians.

But the government of the day stood by its decision and asked me to return to Fiji and support the Fiji Indians in their fight for the restoration of their rights.

When I returned to Fiji, I had expected that I would not be permitted to remain as a high commissioner to a government we did not recognise, but Fiji took no note of my changed status and allowed me to function normally.

At a Commonwealth summit in Melbourne, the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi personally lobbied not to allow Fiji to return to the Commonwealth as it had abrogated the constitution and declared itself a republic. We also took a decision to change my designation to 'Head of Mission of India' and decided not to engage the ministers of the military government. I did not attend any state functions, but remained in touch with all communities, pleading for restoration of the 1970 constitution.

I did not know how long this situation would continue as it was quite an untenable situation for the mission to continue in the circumstances. India also raised the issue at the Human Rights Commission and other relevant UN and Commonwealth bodies, making it uncomfortable for Fiji to operate in multilateral institutions.

Fiji decided to redesignate all high commissioners as ambassadors and I became ambassador to a government we did not recognise, perhaps for the first time in the history of diplomatic relations. It continued for two years before Fiji decided to ask me to leave in 72 hours and asked the mission itself to be closed after six months or so.

Our position on Fiji, though not in accordance with diplomatic practice, led to the restoration of democracy in Fiji after ten years.

In the case of a new government in Afghanistan, with or without non-Taliban elements, we have several options to consider, depending on the decisions of the major powers.

Russia rather than the US could be taken as a model, considering our proximity to Afghanistan and our likely involvement in the development of the country.

We have been bold and innovative on recognition in the past and we do not need to rush into a particular model. As we have declared, we shall stand by the people of Afghanistan, whatever our relations with the new government may be.

(Ambassador T P Sreenivasan (IFS 1967) is a former Ambassador of India and Governor for India of the IAEA. He is also former member NSAB)

Letters to the Editor

Fee hike unreasonable!

Editor,
I write this letter as a distressed student of St. Anthony's College, Shillong. It is one of the most reputed educational institutions of the state. However, the fees seem to have been hiked probably to keep up this reputation. On the last week of August we received an e-mail from the Principal that we were to pay our fees latest by September 15, 2021. We were to use the latest app of the college which would lead us to a portal to pay the fees.

To start with, the app was faulty and full of bugs. Most importantly, however, the fee was ridiculous. Fifth and third semester arts students have to pay Rs 18,000 plus worth of fees and the science students almost Rs 22,000. When we first took admission in the college, the fees ranged from 15,000 - 20,000 plus per annum depending on the stream and subjects

taken. Now, it seems like they have suddenly hiked the fees to Rs. 18,000 plus per semester!

The "rich kids" have already paid the fees. However, I and most of my college mates belong to middle class families. We cannot afford to pay nearly Rs 20,000 at one go! The pandemic and many other circumstances have prevented us from paying such a fee. That too online! And we all know that government scholarships are not enough to cover the amount.

Also there is no transparency from the part of the college as to how the fees have been calculated. When checked through the portal, it just says 'your semester; and in the next box the exorbitant amount. There is no mention of tuition fees or anything related to the division of the fee.

Thus, through your esteemed daily I would like to plead to the Anthonian administration to understand the situation and circumstance and make the neces-

sary changes. St Anthony's College, we are truly grateful for your services and pray for an excellent NAAC rating next cycle.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Roads in pathetic condition

Editor,
Readers and patrons of this newspaper have often expressed their concern for the degrading environment be it from sand extraction to excavation of stone boulders to coal mining all in a way that has devastated the fragile beauty around. A balance between livelihoods and environment has to be kept in mind and this is where the local Dorbar Shonghs have to constitute their own guidelines putting a limit to certain things. Coming to the scene of important roads connecting tourist spots, I suggest the those who just

sit in their arm chairs in the Secretariat and talk of promoting tourism should pay a visit to Nongkhnum in West Khasi Hills with a warning that they should be prepared to hire a horse cart or an elephant lest they might end up in hospital with spondylitis. The national highway to Jowai these days resembles something like traveling on a jungle road and not to be classified as a highway! Perhaps the MLAs of Jaintia Hills should start making some noise in this coming Assembly session rather than just sitting and twiddling their thumbs.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,
Via email

40% of Indians by more than nine years. The report said that over 480 million people living in central, eastern and northern India including New Delhi, endure high pollution levels. The EPIC report said that air quality has consistently worsened in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

The EPIC report is indeed a wake-up call to us to change. Long-term exposure to outdoor and household air pollution contributed to over 1.67 million annual deaths from stroke, heart attack, diabetes, lung cancer, chronic lung diseases and neonatal diseases in India in 2019. In fact, air pollution has now become the largest risk factor for death among all health risks. Although the links between air pollution and COVID-19 are not yet known, it is a fact that exposure to high levels of air pollution could worsen the effects of COVID-19.

Worsening air pollution has been amongst India's most pressing problems in recent years. In spite of the initiatives launched by the

Worsening air pollution

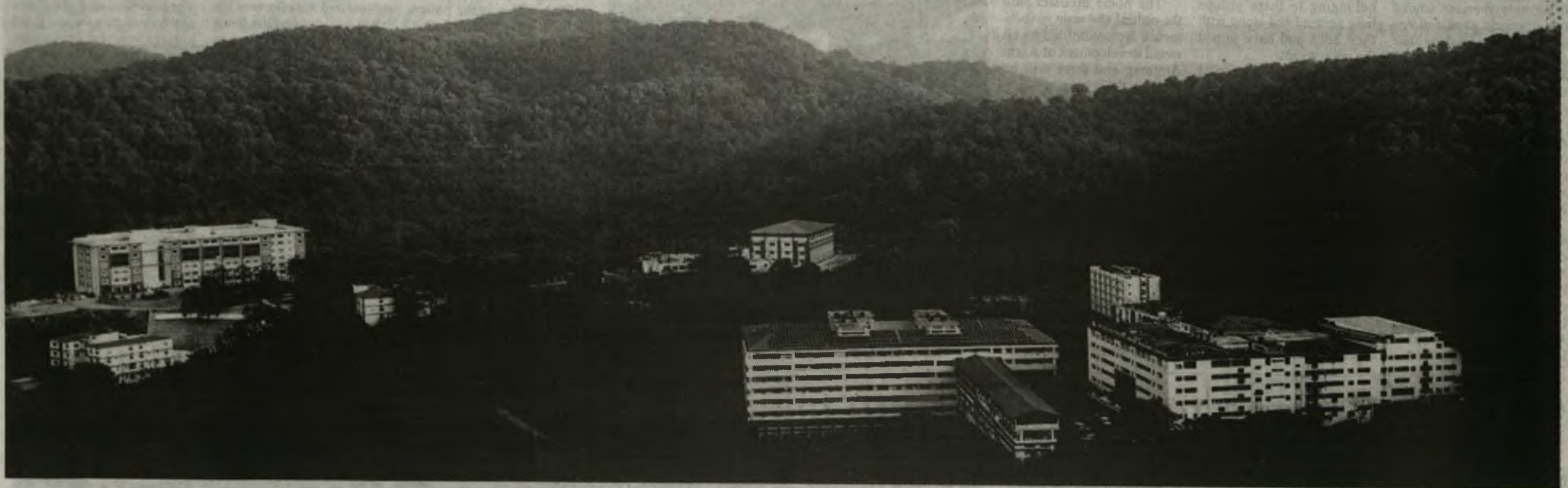
Editor,
According to a report prepared by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC), air pollution is likely to reduce the life expectancy of about

government, air pollution continues to be a burning problem. Toxic air is a hindrance to development and people's welfare. Apart from this, air pollution also leads to huge economic loss. There is a need for better and more effective ways to combat air pollution. It is important to ramp up technology. Over dependence on fossil fuels must be stopped. Fuels and energy from renewable sources must be employed. Private sector must be engaged to tackle the problem. The grassroots must be involved through initiatives. Disseminating proper information and a collective commitment to a future are also of great importance.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS
Kollam

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

Higher education in NE India sees uptick



By Siddhi Jain

As the education scenario post COVID changes drastically, students in India's Northeastern states are increasingly choosing a university or college closer to home. Stakeholders, ranging from parents to educators, say region-based universities have emerged as viable higher education contenders, as opposed to learners migrating to other states in the COVID era.

A BURGEONING EDUCATION HUB

"My daughter, Lilia, graduated from Delhi University but has recently moved back to her home state Assam. She is passionate about fashion designing and is currently pursuing a career in it from a top private institute in Guwahati. The college is well-equipped with modern amenities, just like any other college in India's metro cities, and the faculty is excellent and cooperative. She gets to showcase her creations and network with senior professionals in the industry, even as a fresher. Security-wise, she feels a lot safer here," says Manjari Kalita, a parent.

Quality, safety, and practicality, are the parameters prospective students weigh institutions on, and Kalita says local universities fit the bill. Education in North East India is coming of age, this is a shared opinion among the region's stakeholders. For Narayan Chandra Talukdar, Vice Chancellor of Assam down town University (AdtU) - a prestigious institution offering over 64 programmes and with over 8000 students from 10 Indian states as well as Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and as far as some African countries, the goal is to standardize the education system to meet global standards and compete favourably.

"North East India, especially Assam is fast emerging as a leading name in the field of higher education. Today it occupies an important place among the famous seats of higher educational institutions offering inclusive and equitable qual-

ity education leading to sustainable development and growth of the students. Assam has a number of management, medical and engineering colleges catering to the growing needs of the region and the country as a whole. Moreover, many reputed universities of the state have ushered in a new era of education in diverse disciplines providing rich career options to the students of the region. Young minds are encouraged to choose their area of study from the vast options available in our own region."

The North East Indian states of Assam, Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya have begun an educational resurgence geared towards building a system that works not just for the people of India, but for anyone across the globe seeking the requisite skill and international exposure required to function in today's world.

ATTRACTING FOREIGN STUDENTS

From regular programmes like BCA, BBA, Sericulture, Travel and Tourism, Environmental Science, among others, to several professional courses, these tertiary institutions are opening up new vistas for quality learning and research.

The cultural and natural diversity of the region exposes foreign students to a whole new experience.

Joint Director, SCERT, Assam, Dr Jayanta Kumar Sarmah observed that "the North East region has a natural setting with wide range of resources for real time learning." One of the biggest areas of potential is agricultural science with special focus on bio-technology and forestry. "The government needs to take the initiative to provide world-class facilities in the institutions to run one or two specific need-based courses, which will have a tremendous impact on socio-economic development. This will definitely entice students from other states and countries," he notes.

For Guwahati-based educator Randhir Gogoi,

the last decade has witnessed the emergence of North East India as a new educational hub with numerous state and non-state universities and colleges being established. "These institutions, both government and private, provide world class infrastructure and teaching are able to retain local students to a larger extent than ever before. Auxiliary services like new libraries, bookshops, recruitment fairs, even paying guests and private hostels have added to the educational infrastructure in the region, along with generating employment and new incomes for people."

ASSAM'S FOOTPRINTS

Assam has three universities — Tezpur University, Gauhati University, and Dibrugarh University — in the top 100 universities of India, according to the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) ranking. In the same vein, there are three Assamese institutions in the top 100 engineering colleges of India.

Nani Gopal Mahanta, Academic/Education Advisor to the Assam Government and Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science and Director of Global Studies Centre at Gauhati University says: "With the opening of Act East Policy, several opportunities have sprung up. The policy is not just related to trade and commerce, as is widely known, but also for people to people contact. We've had three batches of international students studying in our university so far."

Mahanta further adds that because of the COVID-19 situation, things are currently going slow, but he is quite hopeful that as the situation improves, more students from across the globe would show interest.

"While we're doing our best to promote our education and culture, the government needs to provide scholarship opportunities and perks to international students, like is done in other parts of India. When foreign students come and study in the North East region, they become ambassadors

for our culture. This way we could reach out to a wider mass," he said.

According to statistics, most of the foreign students come from Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Africa, Bhutan, Nigeria, Lao, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Iran, with many of them seeking the B-Tech engineering degree, and a large number of many others taking the BBA degrees. Other popular undergraduate courses for foreign students are Pharmacy, Medicine, Computer Applications, Fashion, Sociology, Dentistry and Nursing.

"I would prefer my kids studying here in Assam because in the present times our state is at par with the other states in terms of education and infrastructure. Many good names in the educational scenario offer courses from engineering to management, allied health sciences, humanities, medicine, law and more. The hostels have modern facilities and the overall development of students is a focus area. The placement records of the institutions give an insight to their profile. This makes it a lot easier for parents to choose the right place of education for their children. Above all, I feel that studying at one's own place saves unnecessary hassles caused by issues like travel, food, homesickness, and language problem," says Mr Roy, a parent of a student learning at Assam down town University.

"The consistent efforts of AdtU to be at par with the global standards in education has resulted in higher inflow of students from other states like Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Kashmir, Chennai, etc apart from the north eastern states to our university. AdtU offers world-class experience in terms of campus life, placements and industry exposure," added Narayan Chandra Talukdar, Vice Chancellor of Assam down town University.

As winds of change blow through institutions of higher learning in North East India, stakeholders stress on giving the region the attention it deserves to be transformed into a center for educational tourism. (IANS/ife)

'Burning Man' fest sans the burn



of fires other than a campfire, burning of structures, building of structures, possession and or use of lasers and aircraft landing, taking off, touch-and-go landings.

These restrictions provide that this year's 'non-event' will look much different than typical 'Burning Man' festivals, which are incredible spectacles of fire, lasers and ornate art installations and stage structures. 'Burning Man' usually also has an airstrip for on-site arrivals.

These restrictions aren't, however, deterring 'Free Burners' from trekking to the desert and people started arriving at Black Rock Desert for 'Free Burn' as early as August 20, according to Heather O' Hanlon, Public affairs specialist at Winnemucca District Office Bureau of Land Management.

While O' Hanlon notes that her organisation is preparing for 100,000 people to arrive to the site, she says this number "may change with the poor air quality the area is experiencing due to fires."

Beyond this challenge, with 'Burning Man' officially cancelling the 2021 event in April due to the pandemic (after considering requiring COVID-19 vaccinations for all attendees), this week's "non-event" will not have any of the infrastructure typically provided by the organisation, such as porto-potties, medical services and the roughly 10,000 volunteers who provide various modes of support.

For fans who prefer to stay home this year, 'Burning Man' is hosting its second annual 'Virtual Burn', featuring six different "virtual worlds" and a live stream. (IANS)

Teacher's Day reflections

By Prof. H. Srikanth

Every year on September 5 we celebrate Teachers' Day, in memory of Late S. Radhakrishnan, an eminent teacher and scholar in Indian Philosophy, who taught in many reputed universities in India and abroad, before he entered politics and became the second President of India. On this symbolic day, in different schools and colleges, the students organize programs to show their respect to the teachers. The people fondly remember their favourite teachers and get in touch with them on Teachers' Day. Teachers also look forward to this day, as it is the one day in a year, where they feel recognized and wanted by the rest of the society.

Being a student and also a teacher, I don't negate the relevance of celebrating Teachers' Day. However, while respecting the teachers and giving them their due, it is also necessary to interrogate the very idea of a teacher. In the English language, all those who teach in schools, colleges and universities are called teachers. Of course, at university level we now distinguish the teachers as Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors. But this distinction is based on years of experience as teachers and researchers. But in Sanskrit language, we have different names for different kinds of teachers, based on the kind of teaching and role that they perform. It does not view all teachers as 'Gurus'. Although the ancient Indian understanding and classification of teachers may not be fully applicable to modern conditions, we can still distinguish different kinds of teachers.

At basic level, we have teachers who teach us three Rs - Reading, Writing and Arithmetic at school level, and at little higher levels the ones who familiarise us with tools and technologies essential for earning a livelihood. It is from these teachers that we get to know the basic information or data about the world we live in. At a little higher level, we come across teachers who tell us not just about 'what' questions, but make us think about why and how of things and phenomena. The teachers at this level impart to us a critical and analytical mind to understand why the nature, society, or human mind work in particular ways, and make us

aware of the fact that what we see or experience is caused by different factors or events.

Such teachers are more likely to be professional in their approach, and able to separate their personal and professional ethics and values.

At a much higher level, we find teachers who enlighten us not only about what, why and how a thing or phenomena, but also direct us as to what one should aspire to be. They don't just stop showing the way to others, but they mould themselves as examples to others and lead others in the path of virtue. They make us aware of what is the right thing to do in life, and what we should make to make the society a better world to live in. Only such teachers are viewed as "Guru". It is true that all those working in the teaching profession are teachers, but all teachers are not necessarily "Gurus". True, some teachers in educational institutions can also become "Guru". But to become a "Guru", one need not be in a teaching profession.

The greatest "Gurus" that history produced, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Vivekananda, J.S. Mill, Karl Marx, to mention a few, none of them taught in any reputed educational institutions or universities. They not only explained the world, but also contributed to social change by influencing, organizing and inspiring the people.

All these three categories of teachers I have mentioned are ideal type teachers. In real life situations, we may be able to see teachers having the qualities of more than one ideal type. All teachers have their importance and relevance in our lives. We need to respect them for their contributions at different stages in our personal growth as human beings.

However, the convention practice of placing the teacher on a high pedestal and looking at the student as a passive recipient of knowledge imparted by the teacher deserves a relook. There cannot be a teacher without student, and student without teacher. Just as a good teacher facilitate the students' growth, the presence of curious, intelligent and rational students enables the teacher to perfect and enhance his / her knowledge. Dialectical relationship between teacher and students benefits both.

While appreciating the teachers' contributions, we should also keep in mind that how-

so-ever good and great they are, teachers are no Gods. They are human beings, products of their times and circumstances. They are influenced by ideas, ideologies and cultures of their times. Hence, they have their limitations as well. What they understood, believed in, taught and prescribed for others at one point of time and space may become inadequate in the changed circumstances. Sometimes at a given point of time in history, there can be teachers teaching different things differently. All their views may not be right. Hence, we need to take a critical look at teachers as well, and never believe them and follow them. We are witness to how many who claim the status as teachers or Gurus, created cults that thrived on blind obedience, which is injurious to individuals and the society.

A student looking for an ideal teacher should keep his or her eyes wide open. They can find teachers not only in educational institutions, but in every walk of life. To be a good student, one need not necessarily follow the teacher. Even the one who deviates from the teacher may also be a good student. Plato who followed Socrates was indeed a great teacher, so was Aristotle who differed with his teacher, Plato.

History is abundant with examples of how the students outshined their teachers. A good teacher should therefore never compel the students to take their words as gospel of truth, and not stop them from thinking differently. That was what even one of the greatest teachers, Buddha, taught us: "Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it."

To sum up, let Teachers' Day acknowledge the role that the teachers of different kinds have been playing in our lives. But let not our respect for teachers become a monotonous ritual, or end up as blind worship. No teacher is invincible. And every student has in himself or herself the potentiality to become a teacher, even a "Guru".

Tokyo2020: Does Paralympics empower the specially abled?

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympics are being used as a catalyst for a new global campaign aimed at removing discrimination faced by disabled people. Entitled We the 15, this new effort has been launched by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the International Disability Alliance along with a host of other sports, human rights and business organisations. The goal is to create more opportunities – and greater accessibility – for people with impairments.

Disability sport scholars like myself, however, question the extent to which the Paralympics can empower disabled people and create meaningful social change. Paralympians themselves are more likely to be empowered, in their view, than the wider public.

The stated vision of the IPC is to create a more inclusive society through the Paralympic Games. But can an elite sporting event that lasts two weeks, every four years, really achieve meaningful social change?

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Elite sport is by definition an exclusive domain, and the Paralympics are no exception. The classification system used to determine athletes' eligibility to compete is based on their impairment and how it influences their sporting performance. But only a narrow range of impairments are considered, and the wider process has been criticised by scholars as disempowering.

Some athletes have been reclassified into different categories without the reasoning behind the decision being made clear. Others have been deemed ineligible because their impairments are not listed in the IPC's eligibility criteria.

British wheelchair basketballer Oscar Knight is a case in point. Though a wheelchair user, he has been told, as he puts it, that he's



“not disabled enough”. The IPC rules do not list some chronic-pain conditions, including the one he experiences, as eligible. Like others, he has actually considered amputation of a limb in order to comply with the classification system.

Beyond the athletes themselves, the vast majority of disabled people will not see their impairment represented at the Paralympics. Paralympians are not representative of the everyday disabled person. Viewing disability through the lens of the Paralympics can therefore lead to a warped understanding of most disabled people's lived experience.

It is also possible the Paralympics may end up including disabled people who do not conform to the image of Paralympians. While some athletes, like Knight, are excluded for not being

disabled enough, others, research has argued, are being favoured for having impairments that are less severe, or that allow for technological enhancements.

Some see this as an attempt to make the sporting ability of Paralympians more accessible to a non-disabled audience. Indeed, research suggests the UK audience is now more likely to associate disability with technologically enhanced individuals.

For many disabled people, this diminishes even further the representative potential of the Paralympics, as the high cost and limited access to cutting-edge equipment puts it out of reach. And for athletes with more complex impairments, for which there are not the same technological enhancements available, this is also disempowering. They don't see role models to whom they can relate



among the Paralympian ranks.

THE SUPERHUMAN LABEL

Media coverage often portrays Paralympians as supercrips, achieving success in spite of their impairment. Scholars argue this can have a negative impact on disabled people, because it reinforces society's low expectations of what they can do. It also reinforces the idea that a hierarchy of impairments exists, with the supercrip image valued over complex and less understood impairments.

Equally, the supercrip idea can be a source of inspiration. Children and aspiring athletes can both find the exploits of Paralympians to be aspirational. The Rio 2016 gold medallist Ellie Robinson was inspired to take up

swimming after watching Paralympian swimmer Ellie Simmonds compete at London 2012.

Channel 4 has received mixed responses to its Paralympic marketing. The Meet the Superhumans ads, which ran ahead of the London 2012 Games, was named advertising campaign of the year for successfully shifting public attitudes to disability and disabled sports.

Research backs that up, showing that the broadcaster's coverage of the Paralympics since the London Games has helped change attitudes towards disability. And yet, as Canadian coach and former Paralympian Danielle Peers noted in 2012, that same marketing strategy was also seen to perpetuate disability stereotypes.

Similarly, in the run-up to the

Rio 2016 Paralympics, Channel 4's marketing campaign was praised for focusing on a broader range of impairments and activities. But the #yesican narrative of the promotion was criticised by some disabled people for ignoring the social and systemic barriers that often prevent disabled people from being active.

Ultimately the Paralympics is an elite – and fleeting – sporting mega-event. The day-to-day experience of many disabled people, however, is continued discrimination. Whatever role the Paralympics might have to play in achieving a fairer and more inclusive society should not detract from the wide-ranging social and systemic changes needed to ensure equal opportunities for disabled people. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambal

Sunday, SEPT 05, 2021

Mercury trine Saturn on your solar return chart and it will give wonderful results for the whole year. Your actions will change the course of your life. You will rise in your work and race ahead of others. You will take major decisions after giving a lot of thought. Even your close people will give you lot of support and encouragement. You need to work on your strengths. Decisions taken impulsively may yield moderate results. You will also have monetary gains. Your name and fame will rise. Your noble deeds will make you popular. You can get married to a person of your choice. Your family will support you. Any judicial matter in courts will be resolved gradually with someone's intervention. You will also make lot of new friends.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is a very favorable week. And you will value it too. You stand to gain a lot financially as well as emotionally too. You will start exploring new business avenues. A change is indicated. You will also get a new job offer much to your liking. You could also meet someone at a public place and begin liking that person. You will also be making new friends. Your professional relations too will bring benefits. You will impress one and all by your unselfish attitude. You will also deal with new plans, projects that were pending. It will give you lot of gains. You will have a good time with your family members. It is a great time for all kinds of partnerships. Happiness and peace will remain there.

Taurus: (April 21- May 21)

It is time to realize your dreams into reality. You will enjoy a wonderful time with your family and friends. You will also develop a special liking for your partner. It is time for you to get money. And your efforts will bring good results. You will also plan a new job. There will be some health concerns but you will cure the disease by doing yoga, meditation, diet and lifestyle changes instead of medicines. Students will do well. Keep preparing for exams / interviews. Your concerns about your children will be reasonable. You will also discuss something vital with your bosses. It is a week full of energy, ecstasy and enthusiasm. You will also plan to go on a picnic or retreat.

Gemini: (May 22- June 21)

You will plan to bring changes to your lifestyle. You will also keep away from risky tasks. Rising expenses are a cause of worry for you and you will like to bring it under control. You will also lead a simple life. It may upset your family members a bit but you will be able to convince. Your concern will be towards family and work. You will work hard to increase your income. You may also plan to take some part time job. Your decision making power will be strong. Your goodness will be your strongest point. You will also make best use of your communication skills and will be able to get your work done. You will also develop interest in music, arts, writing, cinema etc. All the work will be completed. You will get success and move forward.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Your name and fame will rise. Your respect will also be more. You will have financial gains. You will also make progress in your job. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will be able to win confidence of your bosses. Your colleagues will also support you. Your graph of popularity will also increase. You will have positive response in the economic perspective. Time will be in your favour. The financial condition will be stronger than before. You will take appropriate measures to increase your business. You will get benefit. Your position in the job will be strong. Money will be received. Time will be full of fun and entertainment. You will get time for yourself and will also enjoy the situation well.

Leo: (July 23- August 23)

The week will turn out to be pleasant. You will be kept busy. You will have monetary gains. A very charming person will come in your life all of a sudden leading to a warm and fulfilling relationship. You will enjoy this situation. Your contacts will also increase and you will increase your business. You will be helpful in making money acquisition plans too. You will be very happy. All of the tasks you have done will be liked. Concern of marriage of children, career etc. will end. You will also spend lavishly and buy new clothes. You will also spend time reading good books. You will be much loved.

Virgo: (August 24- September 22)

There will be job opportunities for you. You will also have gains in business. You will be conscious about your career. Those who are unmarried can get engaged. You will also come closer to your mate. Family members will have love and bonding. There will be a happy atmosphere at home. You will get a good news from somewhere. Elders will bless you. They may have minor health issues. You will meet your desires. You will also go on a business journey. You will also get victory in government related matters. Some religious work will be accomplished by you. You

will also meet an influential person. It will open the doors of progress for you.

Libra: (September 23- Libra 23)

You will develop spiritual inclinations. There will be sudden change in your personality. You will become a lot more wiser and level headed. You will also develop new interests and enjoy yourself. It is time to come closer to your loved ones. You will remain attached to your partner. You will have financial gains. Your business will continue to develop and flourish. You will have discussions with your bosses on some important matters. You will get results for your hard work now. The small worries regarding work will dispel. You could fall in love with a very charming person. After a lot of struggles you will finally succeed in getting a loan.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will have gains in your business/work. Your financial position is going to be strong and stable. Everything that you will touch will turn gold. You will also plan to buy jewelry or vehicle. But you need to pay attention to your health. You will also have strong romantic inclinations for a person whom you already know. You will spend only that much as you have in your pocket. Money will be spent on repairs of the house. There are strong chances of your official/work getting done, so make best use of this opportunity. There will be various activities in different directions. You will also have a difference of opinion with a colleague. Work related trip will keep you busy.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

The first few days of the week will be stupendous. You will get new job/business offer. Your elders will bless you. The relationship between daughter-in-law and mother in law will be cordial. You will be bestowed with good health. There will be rise in your financial fortunes. Your peers and superiors will support you a lot. At this time you will get money, fame and wealth. You will also get drawn to a spiritual Guru. You will achieve the heights of success. You will also get to see new places and meet new people. You will also spend time happily in the company of your family. Students will focus on studies. This is the right time to get the results of your hard work. Your name and fame will spread in all directions. You will be a guest somewhere and desire pleasure.

Capricorn: (December 22- January 20)

It will turn out to be a wonderful week for those who are looking for new jobs. You could also be elevated all of a sudden. Be careful in love matters. Some woman may deceive you. The position of your works will remain strong. You will also get a new contract. You will focus on your work with some seriousness. You are entering a very favorable phase in your romance. Housewives will learn new recipes. They will make best use of youtube and internet for this. You will also do some work for the welfare of the people. You will also have control over your business expenses. Your relationship will become stronger. You will have monetary gains. You will clearly reap for benefits.

Aquarius: (January 21- February 18)

It is a wonderful time period for you. You will fulfill your responsibilities with great aplomb. Additional responsibilities could be given to you. Your disputes will get resolved peacefully. You will have monetary gains. Your business will also flourish. The results of investments will be good. You will have wonderful bonding with your mate. It is a good time for love and romance. You will be over enthusiastic and finish your work in a hurry. You will be kept busy in official matters. The results of investments will be good. You will also have control over your expenses. You will be wiser in dealing with people. And will not take any risk in money related matters. Your relationship will become stronger. You will be emotionally strong. Money that was struck somewhere accrue to you.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

These are overall good days. You will clearly reap the benefits. You will be more influential in society. You will also come out unscathed from some difficult situation. You will also get a proposal for job or marriage. You will get unmet opportunities for employment and buy something new for the house. You will have setbacks, but if you will work hard to your potentials everything will be in your reach. You will feel that even in adverse circumstances, your entire family will be standing with you. Marital relations will be pleasant. You will get success in legal matters. A court verdict can come in your favor. You will feel a new energy inside you. You will also get the support of your colleagues. Business activities will keep you occupied.

Teaching as a Career in India

By Ranjan K Baruah



One of the noble professions anywhere in the world is none other than teaching. It is a profession which is respected by all as we are learned and educated because of our teachers. Today, being 5th September is important in India as we observe Teachers' Day all over the country. In India it is celebrated to commemorate the birth anniversary of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. He was a renowned scholar, recipient of Bharat Ratna, first Vice President, and second President of independent India. He was born on September 5, 1888. As an educationist, he was a supporter of teaching and was a distinguished envoy, academician, and above all a great teacher.

Whenever I conduct a career awareness programme then one of the common aims in life shared by students is to become a teacher. There are many reasons why students say that they want to become teachers and one of the reasons is they see more job security when they become government teachers. Though we need more passionate teachers, the interest amongst students is there to become teachers and we need to mentor them properly and try to make them aware of how to become successful teachers.

Let us explore how we can become teachers in India or abroad but more focus would be to become teachers in India. In India, one may be taught at the pre-primary, primary, upper primary or middle school, high school or secondary school or senior secondary, etc. Some of the many institutes you can seek employment with include - Play schools, Nursery schools, Primary/elementary schools, Secondary and Senior Secondary schools, Junior Colleges, Colleges, Universities, educational research institutes, tutorials and even special schools for special children.

One needs to have skills along with qualification. One must have patience, effective communication skills, in-depth knowledge about the subject, confidence, understanding children or students, etc. We know from our experiences that we always love to hear a few teachers more than others because of their style of teaching and way they communicate. A teacher should be initiative driven and passionate about the cause and role of teaching in the society and more importantly teachers must be like students so that they also learn continuously.

Teaching is the only profession where you need qualification and good marks. We need to be qualified so that we are confident when we deal with students. Apart from degrees there are special training and basic training courses which must be attained by the aspirants. Aspirants who are willing to work with special children should have special training or diploma or advance training programme which are offered by different institutes in the country.

Aspirants need to have Bachelors in Education (B.Ed) degree or they may also go for M.Ed degree which will give them more advantage with employability and promotion. In case we would like to teach in the primary section or nursery section then we may

undergo a few diplomas or other training courses. Basic Training Certificate, Diploma in Elementary Education and Teacher Training Certificate are other teaching courses in India that can help someone to get a teaching job for the initial stage like nursery or primary, etc. Similarly to become a teacher in colleges or universities we need more qualifications and pass a few entrance exams like National Eligibility Test or State Eligibility Test.

Most of the state conducts Teachers Eligibility Test for different levels. Similarly one can also appear for the Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET) conducted by the CBSE for appointment as a teacher for Classes I - VIII in government and state schools as well as unaided private schools that accept CTET scores. Apart from joining government institutes or private institutes, there are many NGOs working in the field of education and they also engage teachers. Young people may also start their career by joining fellowship programme like 'Teach for India' or similar initiatives.

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any further queries)

"Do not let making a living prevent you from making a life."

— John Wooden

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RSS and IT sector

IN all fairness, one of the few sectors where India made a stellar reputation in recent decades is the field of Information Technology – an endeavour that private entities like the Tata Consultancy Services started in Bombay and was taken forward by electronics engineers in Pune and Bengaluru in later years. A reason for its success which is the contribution of 7.7 per cent of the GDP – was that politicians and India's corrupt creed could not meddle with its affairs. The sector was free to fend for itself. Curiously, the first shot was fired on it now from the RSS, the ideological powerhouse for the ruling BJP. A cover story on its publication, Panchjanya has accused IT major Infosys of encouraging anti-national tendencies. More curiously, the article says it has no evidence to prove this allegation.

The straight reference in the article was to the way the system developed by Infosys for the filing of Income Tax returns – a contract it took up in 2019 – developed glitches; and to similar glitches in the systems for GST collections and the like. A question posed to Infosys was whether it would do such a "shoddy" job for a foreign client. Clearly, the attack was harsh. It is still time for India to put all its goodwill and nurture a field that has, over four decades, kept the nation's profile high and earned for the nation huge sums in foreign exchange via software export – which was of the order of USD 100 billion before the Covid pandemic set in. While much of these exports go to the US and domestic sales too are to the tune of USD 400 billion, there is more to explore in these times of uptick prompted also by the era of mobile phone-linked technologies.

This is the time for India to zealously safeguard the IT sector's reputation. Panchjanya has done the reverse – and without any evidence to cite. Had it been any other journal, it could have been pardoned. But the RSS link accords the journal a special responsibility to safeguard the reputation of India's principal pride in the export sector and one that gives direct employment to millions of youths. At the same time, it is also incumbent on the IT sector giants to put their house in order and, among other things, end the kind of exploitation they do on educated youths by extracting excessive working hours and unreasonably low pay packages to most of the staff. By giving huge salaries to some, a hype is created; and the rest are left underpaid. This breeds inequality.

Letters to the Editor

Insecure future for retired teachers

Editor,
Through your daily, I wish to draw the attention of the Government of Meghalaya to the demand of old-age security of Deficit School Teachers of Khasi Jaintia and Garo Hills.

Every year the school students get excited to celebrate 'Teachers Day' on September 5. Teachers Day is celebrated on the birth anniversary of the second President of India, Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Dr Radhakrishnan was a great teacher and a philosopher. On this day students sing, dance, make cards and gifts to express the love and gratitude for their teachers. Our Government also organises programs to honour the teachers with district and state level awards for their lifelong dedication to their profession as teachers and nation builders.

The teaching profession is different from any other job. A teacher has to constantly give shape to the lives of the young students; to prepare them to become worthy next generation citizens; citizens who would shoulder the responsibilities to run the nation in future. A teacher has students occupying chairs of responsibility right from the highest to the lowest position. All such people owe their success to

their teachers and no one can deny that.

Most of the other states of India have recognised their teachers' contribution by providing them with befitting remuneration and old-age security in the form of pension.

In 1987, the PA Sangma ministry which had sanctioned the present pay scale of the Deficit School teachers had assured to provide pension etc., in the next pay commission. After 1987, many more pay commissions have passed but none of the consecutive ministry could do justice to the woes of the Deficit School teachers by granting them pension for a dignified retired life.

I hereby appeal to our honourable Governor, Chief Minister, all the Cabinet ministers, all the MLAs and the other concerned fraternities to do justice to the Deficit School teachers of Meghalaya by providing them old-age security in this Golden Jubilee year of our statehood.

We must not forget that Right to Education is a primary need of each and every child and Right to Old-age security is a primary need of every teacher. It remains a great irony for teachers to kindle the light of a bright future for their pupils while they dread the dark and gloomy future of their own as they approach their retirement without pension.

On the occasion of Teach-

There was a hue and cry against the central government proposal - National Mission on Edible oils which identifies the North East region as an area for special focus. It is feared that the plan will have a drastic impact on the culture and the environment of the region. The central government in order to offset the loss of foreign exchange in importing palm oil from abroad, proposes to introduce palm oil tree plantations in the north eastern region of India. The government had even planned to make huge investments to see this project through but the question is what disastrous impact this plan will have on the state. Many have raised their objections against the project but the attempt in this write-up is to examine the impact of the existing monoculture plantation on the state and its people. As a matter of fact even without palm oil tree plantation, the forest and the environment had suffered immensely from various monoculture plantations in the state.

Pinus Kesiya plantation
There are at least three monoculture crops or plants that the farmers in Meghalaya cultivate in the different regions of the state. The monoculture plant that the farmers grow varies according to the climatic conditions of the area. For example the Pine trees or pinus kesiya occurs only in the higher altitudes and it does not grow in the slopes which have sub-tropical climatic conditions with prevalence of sub-tropical forest. The first and obvious impact that the pine tree cultivation has had is on the biodiversity of the area. Pine trees like to grow alone and there is no variety even in the kind of shrubs that grow underneath them. It is monoculture and there is no diversity wherever there is pine tree cultivation. The lack of varieties of plant species growing along with the plant, also affects the water retention of the soil. This was experienced by many farmers who have paddy fields below the hills. They confirmed that when the forest on the hills was replaced by pine trees, it drastically affected the water supply to the rice fields. Pine tree plantations also affect the water quality in the area and a test which was conducted found that water collected from the area is highly acidic.

Pine tree cultivation does not support biodiversity as pine trees do not attract ani-

mals or even different kinds of insects. One can hardly see birds using the tree. Only on rare occasions would one see a squirrel climbing up and down any pine tree. This happens despite the fact that pine trees which are also known as Pinus Kesiya are endemic to the state.

Broomstick Cultivation
Broomstick or broom grass is now a very important cash crop of farmers who live in different parts of the state. An interaction this writer had with one farmer will perhaps help readers understand the importance of this plant to them. The farmer does not have his own paddy field so he said that all the money he earned from selling the broomstick that he produces goes towards buying rice that is needed to feed his entire family for the whole year.



To fulfil his family's other daily needs he works as a daily labourer in the village for the remaining part of the year. Broomstick cultivation has become a primary livelihood activity of the farmers in many parts of the state.

Broom-grass is also a monoculture plantation and in the case of broomstick the farmers always ensure that the overgrowth below the plant is cleared. Not only does broom-grass not encourage other plants, but even the weed that grows along with the grass is removed. Broom-grass also consumes a lot of water and the soil where the plant is cultivated is dry and infertile. In this case the absence of overgrowth also affects the water retention of the land in the area. In some areas because weeding the overgrowth is a tedious pro-

cess, the farmers use herbicides to clear weeds. This in turn affects the fertility of the soil which is already affected by the lack of nutrients due to the absence of plant biodiversity in the area.

In many cases broom-grass cultivation is started by removing a standing forest and this also affects the forest cover in the state. In many areas where broom-grass cultivation is prevalent it was done so by removing the forest and this in turn destroys the biodiversity in the area.

Betelnut or Areca nut cultivation

Areca nut is another important cash crop in areas which experience subtropical climatic conditions. It is also a monoculture plantation and it is only in certain areas where pan leaf or betel leaves

and black pepper are planted alongside the betel-nut trees. The soil in the area where areca nut trees grow is always dry and it does not support plant biodiversity. Similarly in the case of areca nuts too, forests are cleared to make way for plantations.

In the case of areca nut and pine tree plantations, the plantation would be falsely considered as a forest when in fact it is not. Any monoculture plantation is not a forest because it does not support biodiversity and it was planted by removing existing forests in the first place. It is also worth noting that despite the fact that all these plants are endemic to the region yet, since they are monoculture crops which have a drastic impact on the environment. The fact that areca nut is endemic to the

state is drawn from the fact that eating the nut with betel leaves is considered a tradition and there are stories that go along with the plants; one of the most popular story is that of betel-nut, betel leaf lime and tobacco (U kwai, U tympew, ka shun bad u duma).

Delhi imposing its policy on the NE states

The plan to introduce palm oil tree plantation in the region is also another classic case of Delhi trying to impose mainland ideas on the tribals in the north east. It is also an attempt to not only introduce new plant species to the region but to also interfere with the culture and traditions of the people. The tribals of the north east live a unique way of life which has a close connection with nature and if palm oil tree plantation is introduced then it will definitely affect this profound relationship that has existed since time immemorial.

The mission is also in contravention of people's understanding of the land they live in. In the tribal context land is not looked upon as merely a means of production. People have a special relationship with the land where they live. In fact, nature is considered to be divine and their lives revolve around the environment that they live in. It supports their lives by supplying them wild edibles and even tribal medicines that they need to cure their ailments. More importantly they even worship some part of nature.

It is also said that palm oil tree cultivation is introduced to minimise the damage done by jhum cultivation, but jhum is not just a system of cultivation. Jhum cultivation is a tradition which retains biodiversity and in the War Jaitia area there is cultural practice which goes with it. It is called 'ka Longhai.' If the government goes ahead with the mission then the same will definitely have a huge impact on nature and the people's way of life. And since palm oil tree is a foreign species, it could also create imbalances such that insects, birds and animals will not be able to coexist with the new plant.

The state already has existing monoculture crops which in spite of being endemic to the state, have severely affected the environment. One may ask if it is prudent for the government to introduce another monoculture crop which is foreign to the area in the state.

(Email: hhmohrmen67@gmail.com)

School teachers underpaid, overworked

Editor,
Another Teacher's Day passes and this time on a Sunday. Teachers are the worst paid lot in India and private schools pay even worse. A time has come to rationalise the pay of all school, college and university teachers. It is ironic that while the future of each child is built in their formative years spent in pre-primary and primary school the salaries of this group of teachers is the worst when compared to college and university teachers who actually don't need to put in as much effort as teachers of small kids do. It is a very unfair proposition. Many time teachers have had to come out of their classrooms to demand their just dues. This is simply not acceptable if we want teachers to provide quality education to

our children.

Where teachers and nurses are the worst paid professions the outcome too will be likewise. These are the two professions that are very much respected abroad and teachers and nurses are paid very well. In India on the contrary bureaucrats, irrespective of their performance get a bulky pay packet. Some bureaucrats have worked for over two decades without being able to show any efficacy. In fact, if we care to look into the failure of the Government the reason is not always politicians. Bureaucrats sit on files and tie them with the red tape of delay and needless questioning. Even with the Education Department it is the bureaucrats who advise the minister on what decisions should be taken vis-à-vis the teachers salaries. In any case there are too many category of teachers in Meghalaya. The time has come to standardise all teachers as pre-primary, primary, middle school, high school and higher secondary school and their pay should be fixed accordingly. To do this requires thinking but no minister wants to disturb the hornet's nest. They prefer to leave things as they are knowing that teachers cannot do anything other than to protest and they cannot carry on with their agitation for too long a time.

It is also high time to evaluate teachers and to fix

their increment according to their performance. Unless this is done we will have mediocre individuals taking up a teaching "job" for want of anything better.

Yours etc.,
MK Kharnaor,
Via email

Khelo India sees differently-abled win laurels

Editor,
India's Para-athletes put up sparkling performance at Tokyo Paralympics finishing 24th in the overall medal tally winning 19 medals, thereby far surpassing the Tokyo Olympics contingent's tally of seven. When the 2020 Olympics ended, nobody expected that the high performance at the Olympics would go higher with the spectacular performance of India's Para-athletes.

The world's biggest sporting event for the disabled saw India excel than before. With five gold, eight silver and six bronze medals, our Para-athletes have demonstrated their sporting skills and expertise and proved that they have spirit and enthusiasm despite their physical deformities. It was a record-breaking campaign for India at the Paralympics. It must be noted that since making its first appearance at the Paralympics in 1968,

India had won 12 medals in total till the 2016 Rio edition. It has now significantly improved upon that number by 7 medals at the Tokyo Paralympics 2020 alone. It is a matter of pride that a bunch of indomitable Para-athletes have substantially increased the medal tally, outperforming their colleagues in the 2020 Olympics.

It must be admitted that the "Khelo India" scheme launched by the government in 2017 had provisions for promoting sports among disabled sportspersons. Although there are drawbacks in the scheme, differently-abled sportspersons have more access to more special facilities and coaching than before. More support from the private sector is required for the promotion of sports among the disabled. What makes the achievements of our Para-athletes so special is that they put up brilliant performances in spite of the hurdles in their path. Although there are millions of disabled people in India, there is a lack of proper public facilities for them. They must not be deprived of their rights.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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.

Mission Karmavogi launched to give Babus a new face

Antiquated bureaucracy derails Modi reforms

By Subrata Majumde

In a recent appraisal meeting with NHA, flagging the issue of delay in projects, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked Cabinet Secretary to prepare a dossier of babus who were responsible for the delay in projects. This unfolded Prime Minister's frustration with bureaucracy and a warning to deal with babus with iron hands who are engulfed by red tape, which caused his reforms to fail, denying windfalls to the people.

But, can Cabinet Secretary identify the blemished babus for delay in projects? Bureaucracy is protected by the Constitution under Article 311. Article says bureaucrats cannot be removed without enquiry. Incidentally, the procedures laid down in the enquiry is such that a babu can literally get away from the charge of incompetence, red tape and corruption, if they are committed according to procedures. The procedures are designed in such way that a large number of employees are involved and if they go wrong, no one can be held responsible for the outcome.

Realizing the bureaucracy is a major hindrance to the implementation of reforms and there has been no substantial progress in the performance

cover 4.6 million Central Government employees and thereafter it will be extended to 20 million government employees.

Even a simple thing is entangled by various levels of approvals. Any action, even in emergency, is approved only after the relevant files move from one table to another. Eventually, the significance of emergency is buried. Only the files move, the actual work is seldom done. Scarcity of oxygen concentrators during COVID pandemic is a case in point.

Five years ago, Prime Minister Modi simplified the bureaucracy by reducing various regulations and procedures, focusing online applications to curb the antiquated bureaucracy and red tape. But, they were yet to be put into work for growth. Most of the reforms were on papers. Civil servants were hobbling to turn Modi's strong and abruptly reforms in effective bureaucracy and generate fruitful results.

As a result, GDP growth could not keep pace with reforms. It slipped from 8 percent in 2016-17 to 4 percent in 2019-20 and was in contraction in 2020-21 for the first time in decades.

Attempts were made to

"Indian civil service, which was established in 1858, continued with similar ethos and work culture, without keeping pace with the reforms in the economy and social development in the country. One of the key objectives of the entire process is to test the competence of officials, unlike the present system where seniority counts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi forcibly retired many senior bureaucrats in his second term. He vented his ire against IAS officers in Parliament and chided civil servants, blaming them for making growth their hostage. He held them responsible for the despair of millions of hapless Indians."

of bureaucracy even after departmental training, the Government of India launched National Programme for Civil Service Capacity Building (NPCSCB), known as Mission Karmavogi in November 2020. The main objective is to shift from "Rule-based" to "Role-based" HR Management of civil servants. This will increase the scope for aligning work allocation of civil servants to the competence required for the post. Today, the highest bureaucrats in economic related ministries and departments are seldom positioned in the right slots irrespective of their academic backgrounds.

DOPT (Department of Personal and Training) has decided to design and develop FRAC (Framework of Roles, Activities and Competence) for civil servants under the Mission Karmavogi. The main aim is to give a new face to bureaucracy as the guardian of people's interests, unlike Rule-based functionary to appease Ministers and seniors.

Indian civil service, which was established in 1858, continued with similar ethos and work culture, without keeping pace with the reforms in the economy and social development in the country.

One of the key objectives of the entire process is to test the competence of officials, unlike the present system where seniority counts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi forcibly retired many senior bureaucrats in his second term. He vented his ire against IAS officers in Parliament and chided civil servants, blaming them for making growth their hostage. He held them responsible for the despair of millions of hapless Indians.

The project will initially

reform the bureaucracy from time to time. Almost all Government departments have their own training facilities. But they were hindered by lack of development of the mindsets. They failed to update their bureaucracy with modern thinking for less red tape governance. In 1986, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi launched a week's annual training for government employees. As incentive, he proposed 30 percent additional remuneration for all trainees. But, soon the initiative went in vain. Trainers said, "it was difficult to teach new tricks to old dogs". The Government was caught in controversy with seniors resenting the perk up in remuneration of their juniors.

A survey by Lokniti CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) revealed that majority of the respondents observed it was difficult to get work done at government offices without connections or bribes. Most of them expressed their distrust and dependence on government offices and preferred going to political parties for getting their work done.

Ironically, even the Economic Survey of India, a pre-budget official document, vented frustration over the bureaucracy. Manufacturing sector is embroiled in the nexus of multiple rules and procedures between Centre and States. It takes 18 days to start a business in India as compared to 8 days in China. A new manufacturing sector has to conform to 6,796 compliances. To open a restaurant in New Delhi, one needs 26 licenses, as compared to four in China. (IPA Service)

"The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them."

— Ernest Hemingway

The Shillong Times

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Congress needs rescue from dynasty

THE news that all important decisions in the Congress Party at the national level are being held at Rahul Gandhi's residence despite Sonia Gandhi wearing the mantle of the AICC President, a post for which elections are never held is troubling. The group of 23 senior Congressmen/women who had written to the Party for a rejuvenation plan and for elections right from the primary units to the topmost level – the AICC – to be held are out in the cold. Clearly the Nehru-Gandhi family is unwilling to let go of power and to resuscitate the Party which is today suffering from severe attrition, with members leaving it in frustration to join the BJP or TMC. This shows that Rahul and Sonia Gandhi only prefer to make intermittent noises against the BJP and Modi personally but are not ready to put their own house in order.

To say that senior leaders like Kapil Sibal, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Manish Tewari, Jairam Ramesh amongst others who have remained loyal followers of the Congress ideology, are today in despair is an understatement. They continue to hang on to the Congress because of their sharp ideological differences with the BJP. But some of the young Turks like Jyotiraditya Scindia have left because they feel that remaining in a moribund opposition is meaningless. They feel that the people they serve need development and being in the ruling party makes that easier. In time, perhaps Sachin Pilot and those of his generation too might leave when they see no real leadership emerging and them having to be apologists for the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.

Leaders like Himanta Biswa Sarma who have left the Congress and switched loyalties to the BJP have succeeded in concentrating on development rather than waste time in appeasing the Nehru-Gandhi family. It's a debilitating situation to be in. Breaking out of that situation has proved, in the case of Himanta Biswa Sarma that he is now rewarded by the BJP central leadership because he is able to deliver the public goods. Guwahati is now a transformed city because the Chief Minister spends his time following up on projects and has created a system of accountability among ministers. In Meghalaya, the Congress has just been re-energised by the appointment of Vincent Pala the 3-time Lok Sabha MP, as the MPCC President. Pala is known to amiably carry people along. But with the AICC unwilling to be oxygenated it remains to be seen how far the Meghalaya Congress can travel. A time has come for the members of the Meghalaya Congress to assert themselves and tell the AICC leadership what it needs to hear.

Needed: A separate budget for the Farm Sector

By KN Kumar

A recent survey informs us that 40% of the practicing farmers want to quit farming in India. Though disconcerting, this fact does not surprise some of us who observe the sector keenly. While the current generation of farmers is seeking to move out of farming, the younger ones are unwilling to step in, because they consider farming to be an unproductive and unremunerative drudgery. Though the factors contributing to this situation are complex and varied, and the sum of consequences is difficult to predict in the short-term, I think a long-term public policy response is necessary, given the imminent and impending agrarian distress in our state.

The importance of the primary sector to the state need

that the Government should henceforth start the process of presenting a Farm Budget to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly annually.

Though the department of Agriculture was re-named as the 'Department of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare' in 2018, not a single farmer welfare scheme has been formulated or sanctioned by the department, yet. A separate budget for the farm sector performance necessitates a farmer-centric approach and thereby, faith of the farming community on the government will be reinforced. The long-pending issues plaguing the sector viz., irrigation for the winter crop, appropriate technology development

2. A Farm Budget, being farmer-centric will break the bureaucratic silos. It will be a unified and need-based budgetary exercise to cover agriculture, animal husbandry, water resources, fisheries, dairying, agriculture credit, cooperation, agro-enterprises, food processing, agricultural markets, organic agriculture, etc. The bureaucracy too will be required to brace itself to the changed circumstances. The position of the Agriculture Production Commissioner would need to be revived and empowered sufficiently so that the entire farm budgetary process is well-coordinated among the departments. Such a sectoral planning exercise will

ies, Animal Husbandry, & Dairying are all state subjects in our Constitution, historically the Government of India invested far more money in these sectors than our state. This skew in our prioritizations must go.

7. Studies indicate that agricultural research gives the best Return on Investment (ROI). In a recently published book 'Supporting Indian Farms the Smart Way' it was brought out that every rupee spent on agricultural research and development, returns Rs. 11.2, while the same money spent on education returns Rs.0.97 and Roads (Rs.1.10). As a state, we hardly invest in agricultural research. I cannot recall many meaningful state research outcomes that reached the farmers over the last several decades that I



not be overstated, given the fact that direct and indirect dependence of our population on the primary sector is as high as 80%. Our food security situation is fragile as it is - Meghalaya's current food grain production can meet only 30% of our consumption requirement, while the rest is met either through imports from Andhra Pradesh or Tamil Nadu, or the PDS. How long can we depend upon other states for our own food is a question that remains unexplored. The urbanization process in India being so rapid, conversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural purposes is almost the norm in most parts of the country. Data indicate that India's cultivable land declined by 7,90,000 hectares between 2007-08 and 2010-11 - that is a third of the land area of Meghalaya. In other words, the country is losing agricultural land almost the size of Meghalaya every decade. Loss of agricultural land is a major factor behind food insecurity because it will reduce both food and employment. So, we need to shed some of our complacency that the country will be able to bail us out indefinitely. A contented soul, as someone observed, is a stagnant soul. If we lose the current skilled manpower, with no new entrants, the already fragile food security of the state will be further disrupted. So, it is in this background that I suggest

and induction, post-harvest management, regulating the exploitative markets, and emerging issues such as the changing climate, sustainable farming, depleting natural resources, FPOs, FPCs, natural farming etc. can all be addressed with greater precision and urgency. It is no longer going to be a business-as-usual approach.

Three progressive states of the country viz., Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have already started presenting Farm Budgets. The tradition of having an exclusive budget for agriculture was started by Karnataka in 2011-12, followed by Andhra Pradesh in 2013-14, and Tamil Nadu in 2021-22. Andhra Pradesh is being seen as a success story because the GVA (Gross Value Added) by Agriculture has gone up by 52 per cent from Rs 52,569 crore in 2012-13 to Rs 79,980 crore in 2018-19, much more than the sector's contribution at the national level. I see several additional advantages in introducing annual farm budgets in the Legislative Assembly, some of which I list here below:

1. To begin with, a separate farm budget will mean that the government is keen to enhance public investments in agriculture and allied sectors and thereby, commits to boost the growth rate of our state's primary sector which is and will continue to be our mainstay for several more decades.

be sharper and coherent, the programmatic interventions will be better conceptualized, and the wasteful and unproductive allocations will be weeded out.

3. Both the government and the legislators will get a holistic picture about the progress or otherwise, of the primary sector. Undeniably, the current system is opaque, disjointed, and incomprehensible, to most people, to say the least. A separate farm budgetary exercise will enable the legislators to get sufficient time to discuss the sector's concerns and examine the demands with greater attention.

4. The delivery system at the technical level will become far more accountable, agricultural credit and insurance will have been streamlined, the uncertainties of agriculture will be offset, and the efficiencies that result through better utilization of the public funds will enhance the overall productivity of the sector.

5. And, in the long run, Annual Farm Budgets will pave the way for holistic farmer-centric policies. A separate farm budget will not impose any additional burden on the exchequer, it will just ensure that the exercise is focussed, concerted, and better coordinated, with greater clarity and understanding of the complexities of the sector.

6. Though agriculture and agricultural research, Fisher-

have worked in the state. It is certainly not because we lack competent manpower, for I know that there are a few Ph.D. holders in the Department, who could have been productively deployed in the Research divisions of the Directorate of Research, Training and Technology Induction (RTTI) but they are not. If we were to achieve any quantum leaps in the primary sector, we will need to create new institutions and new approaches. We depend upon the ICAR because we do not have any state-specific research institution which is a serious opportunity loss. Fifty years of statehood, and not even an Institute for Research in Primary Sector. A separate farm budget will lead us to think in this direction.

A Farm Budget, if presented for the Financial Year 2022-23, will become a benchmark event in the developmental history of the state and will have the effect of transforming the state's primary sector. When done, Meghalaya will be the first state in the northeastern region to attempt such an exercise. Such a budget would allow greater stakeholder consultation between farmers, and the Government, and it will be a paradigm shift. I urge the citizens, intelligentsia, legislators as well as the government to consider this suggestion seriously for the overall growth of our state.

(The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission.)

The herd instincts of Indian business

By Jagdish Rattanani

After a firestorm over the article in the RSS-aligned Panchjanya magazine that called Infosys anti-national, the RSS has come out to formally disassociate itself from the remarks and added for good measure that the magazine is not its organ. Political messaging works best when it is straightforward and simple, so a blunt attack and a tactical retreat are as much in good stead as is the equally blunt counter from the Congress that calling Infosys anti-national (for delays and breakdowns in the income tax portal executed by Infosys) is in itself an anti-national act.

While this sparring goes on, no one needs miss the silence, even surrender, of what is euphemistically called India Inc., the one on whose shoulders the RSS-BJP have placed much hope to take the nation forward – from a would-be revolutionising of farmlands through the massive privatisation enabled by the new farm laws to the big "asset monetisation" that is now in the headlines. These corporate biggies, the government appears to believe, have the muscle, the money, the drive and the belief to put India on a bold new path, with the added advantage of having neither political ambition nor a protestor's voice. They are safe bets to rely on. They prefer, it seems, backrooms where deals are done, accommodation is provided and business flowers.

This is the not-so-pretty picture of business in India

"In India, it is the latter, as much in business as it is in the Indian way of life, and this puts its own brakes on what business models so fashioned can deliver at a time of intense, even unprecedented, change."

three decades after liberalisation, the so-called new dawn for a nation that broke away, at last, from the license-permit-quota Raj in 1991. How much really has changed, we may ask, from the time Nehru talked of the 'jhoot' press because it was largely linked to the then jute magnets and their narrow interests, to the time when Indira Gandhi perfected the art of collecting money and also putting businessmen in their place, to today when no one will dare speak up even when an iconic company and its iconic founders have been linked, well almost, to the so-called 'tukde-tukde' gang. The story then is Infosys is out to break the nation that other businesses have wowed to build. While the target this time is Infosys, let there be no doubt that they are in the same boat as others – silence is golden and the rest is business as usual!

The question to ask is can such a business sector provide the vigour, the vibrancy and the innovation required to make India a private sector-led powerhouse of the future. Surely, one important ingredient is developing the art and skill and courage of asking tough questions, and this is a package that is either encouraged or discouraged. In India, it is the latter, as much in business as it is in the Indian way of life, and this puts its own brakes on what business models so fashioned can deliver at a time of intense, even unprecedented, change. If this is the central make up of a leadership, then the entire eco-system is being led by not business leaders who can stand upright but a bunch of interests and money bags that are entrenched, familiar and familial, all equipped to play safe in their personal interests, not bold in the public interest.

In fact, while there are many honorable exceptions, the bulk of business is feared to be of the kind that actively discourages questioning within the business itself. Like it or not, many still run internally like the BJP of today! It is not surprising then that India with its largest sup-

ply of engineers in the world is (largely) a nation of testers and coders, world class even if they are, moving up the value chain only slowly, not a nation of innovators who can dazzle with their dream products and services.

This isn't the stuff tomorrow's businesses will be built of. It isn't the path to sustainable growth, to new models or to meeting the needs of India's vast majority, many of them still living in poor conditions and with meagre incomes. Not asking questions is but one side of the story of subservience. The other side is the bribery and chicanery we saw when controls went loose and deals of all manner were signed leading to short-term growth and a long-term crunch that left the banks with a pile of non-performing assets (NPAs) that at one point crossed Rs.10 lakh crores. For comparison, the current "asset monetisation" plan is touted to fetch Rs. 6 lakh crores. So, all in all, this paints a dismal picture of the state of our businesses. Not all are of this variety but the big picture would paint the entire class in some unfavourable light.

Of course, there is the case that this government is particularly vengeful and it is best not to speak out and land in trouble. There is merit in that argument, except that acquiescence, silence and mute spectatorship is the lot that has characterised business play across all governments in India, not

just this one and its sharper dictatorial bent.

This unfavourable image of business is seeping into the Indian mindset as well. Consider that farmers are protesting not to 'privatise' mandis, among other things, saying they have no faith in the private operator who is slated to take over. It is the same thinking that drives a section of Indians even today to prefer the safety of a government job, and the agitation for more caste-based reservations in government jobs, which, on the whole, should be declining if government is to hire less, become more efficient and the private sector is to truly blossom.

There is of course no doubt that the business class has played a part in the building of India. It will be required to play an even bigger part tomorrow. For this, we do not need businesses that dabble in politics or oppose elected governments but we do need businesses that stand up for something larger than self-aggrandisement. We do not need businesses that, as is historically recorded, "made their fortunes under Pax Britannica and there was a feeling of gratitude for the British" (Business & Politics in India: A Historical Perspective, quoting the business historian Dr. Gita Piramala) but we do need those who stand for the ideals of Gandhi and his vision for the poorest Indian.

It is also true that we need the firing of "animal spirits" that the finance minister Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman spoke of earlier in the year, inviting investments to drive India back to the path of high growth. Her call was for marching ahead, exploring and investing boldly based on intuition, optimism and the belief in India's destiny. But can bold moves come from someone with a bent spine? That is one reason why we may continue to live with herd instincts, not animal spirits.

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

Letters to the Editor

UDP's double standards

Editor,
For a change lets be frank and candid with each other and if truth be told the statements and antics of this generation of politicians, irrespective of the party they belong to and the posts they hold, at most times not only verge but glaringly intrude into the ridiculous and the bizarre. At the national level the entertainment provided by MPs and MLAs especially those belonging to the ruling BJP will no doubt someday make it to the Guinness Book of Records under the title, "The Most Preposterous Utterances by Elected Representatives." After such occurrences that make us the laughing stock of the world, most of us blush to be called Indians. However, not to be outdone Meghalaya has its own share of politicians who just love to toe the same path to infamy and outrage.
Jemino Mawthoh, the Secretary UDP was once considered by many as one of the few level headed members of this premier regional party of the state (UDP claim not mine) some-

times just cannot resist putting his foot where his mouth ought to be. He has charged the Congress party of the state with betraying itself about the trouble within that party. This perhaps might be true at the national level but to be honest, once the name of Vincent Pala as the new MPCC president was announced, reports on both social media and in the press seem to indicate that it has given the state GOP just the boost and adrenaline the party was looking for. Could this have given the non-performing and scam-ridden premier regional party the shakes and the shivers? Let's not forget that 2023 is not that far off and the lackadaisical and confused messages emanating from the UDP, will not be forgotten in a hurry.

Mawthoh has sarcastically questioned the return of Pala to state politics from the high octane and rarefied air of the National Capital. One fails to see how this can be termed as petty politics that does not behave the reputation of the Congress. One would have on the contrary expected the UDP to introspect within itself and question the political ethics of having the President

of the Party as Speaker of the House in a coalition Govt where the UDP is the key partner. Was this to ensure that none would be allowed to pull the plug from the sinking MDA boat? It's all so confusing to most of us who had taken Political Science in college and were reared on the belief that values and principles are important in ensuring that the Parliamentary form of Government we inherited from Whitehall survives. Apparently Indian conditions and especially the Meghalaya environment is hostile to such beliefs and we have made sure that our own desi version of Freedom, Liberty and Fraternity will finally triumph.

Yours etc.,
Maitshaphrang Khongsit,
Via email

State Commission for Women

Editor,
Meghalaya is known as one of the states which follows the matrilineal system where lineage is from the mother's clan line. Being from the state I'm proud of

this tradition. However, upon reading today's news in the paper, I was jolted out of my reverie to know that we still don't have anyone to head the State Women's Commission since the term expired last year. We have seen and read in the news about the rise in crimes against women and children because of the pandemic situation. If there is no government appointed agency in place, then how would such crimes be dealt with and the culprits be brought to justice. Our Chief Minister seems to have a lot on his plate but this is no excuse for not giving time to even complete the process of appointing a person to head the post of the Chairperson. He owes it to the people of the state especially the women who form an important part of any society.

So Mr Chief Minister if you're reading this, please ensure the safety and wellbeing of our women by constituting the Commission at the earliest. A year is too long to wait for. If we want a strong society we need a support system which will enable it to grow and that can only happen if our women folk feel safe, secure and represented.

Yours etc.,
Angela Lyngdoh,
Shillong -14

Normalcy returns courtesy vaccination

Editor,
The number of Covid deaths have reduced and so too the number of infected people. The vaccination has helped slow down the process of infection. In fact, every day when we watch the death tally we see that those who died are mostly unvaccinated. What will it take to convince people that the Covid vaccine like other vaccines before it that we give our kids for measles and the one we were given in childhood to fight smallpox are all gifts of science and medicine? Personally, I cannot imagine how people can find fault with the anti-Covid vaccine simply because, according to the anti-vaccination regime, it was discovered too quickly for their comfort. They argue that if a vaccine has not been found for HIV and AIDS then how could a vaccine for Covid be discovered so fast.

For those who call themselves Christians this is a case of not believing it when God answers prayers. Didn't we all pray for a cure since

March 2020? Then why is it that the same people that call themselves Christians preach against vaccines? Does God not work through humans? Is it not God who gives humans the wisdom and insights to come up with novel life-saving drugs and interventions? So why this scepticism about the Covid vaccine? Is it not true that this is a Christian right wing agenda coming from the western shores? Why are Christians in these hills so easily driven by such an agenda? Can't we have some originality? And usually, my observation is that it is the fringe groups among Christians that exhibit this scepticism for anything scientific. This dichotomy between science and religion has to end. We have to trust science to save human lives and as Christians we believe that such scientific wisdom can only come from God.

Yours etc.,
LM Shangpliang,
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.

"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery."

— Mark Van Doren

The Shillong Times

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Banerjee's Bhabanipur

CLEARING the air of suspicion whether the Centre will stall the by-election for Bhabanipur assembly seat, polling for which is scheduled for September 30 is important. For sure, the Election Commission is an autonomous body and cannot generally be influenced. The Covid pandemic has subsided and this can no longer be an excuse to hold back an election. Prima facie, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as TMC nominee is bound to have a cakewalk there, it being the family turf and base of her political leadership. But no election can be predicted with absolute confidence. No one had thought Banerjee would be mauled by her estranged associate Suwendu Adhikari in Nandigram this year.

With the kind of aura that Banerjee has among the women in the state, in particular the BJP fooled itself by targeting her beyond the normal in the last assembly polls. The Muslim consolidation added to Trinamool Congress' might there. In the end, she proved to be a giant. It is with this profile that she's entering the fray in Bhabanipur. However, this constituency is different from the rest of West Bengal. It has a large concentration of the mercantile community, the Gujaratis and Marwaris, and a stock of South Indians and Biharis as well. It is cosmopolitan in nature and yet essentially Bengali in its spirit by virtue also of the presence of the Kali shrine etc there. For Banerjee, who lives a stone's throw away from the shrine, this counterweight to the mix of other communities there cannot be wished away. She will now have to course through these two influences.

No one in their right senses would want to defeat the CM at this season of her glory, she having vanquished the BJP in the electoral arena with rare grit and determination even as she was wheel-chair-bound. It's this fighting spirit that keeps her going. A moot point is, whether such reckless fights with the Centre will ultimately do any good to West Bengal. What she tries to prove is that she's the principal alternative to Narendra Modi for the PM seat. Looking back, the Communists undercut Bengal's growth for over 30 years by aggressive trade unionism and constant struggle with the Congress-led central governments. Banerjee is doing the same with the BJP government at the Centre. Those who punch above their weight will often have a huge price to pay. So with West Bengal that has lost its high-profile status and reduced itself to the level of a poor state.

My categories of teachers

By Albert Thyriang

Last Sunday was Teachers' Day. Unfortunately, for the second year in a row, the usual colourful celebrations were missing. However, we need not suspend our reflections on the one of the noblest professions, teaching. The presentation might be in colloquial language, the sequence not orderly and the overall presentation negative but the Performance Grading Index (PGI) by the Union Education Ministry ranks Meghalaya among one of the worst performing states in the whole country. Teachers too cannot absolve themselves of the blame. My experience tells me of the following category of teachers:

Punctual and regular

Teachers of this category are there for sure. Names readily come to mind of teachers who arrive in school well before the school Assembly on a daily basis. They are in the campus to assist the school authorities to get students ready to stand in line for the traditional morning function. There are also examples of teachers who are regular beyond expectation. There was a teacher in Garo Hills, now retired, who would come to school, though literally shivering with malaria. In 2018 there was a teacher in West Karbi Anglong who was awarded for recording an exceptional 100% attendance.

While the above stories are unbelievable there are also those who also unpunctual and irregular teachers — teachers who reach the school always during or after the school assembly; teachers who make sure they exceed all the available leaves.

Excuse finders

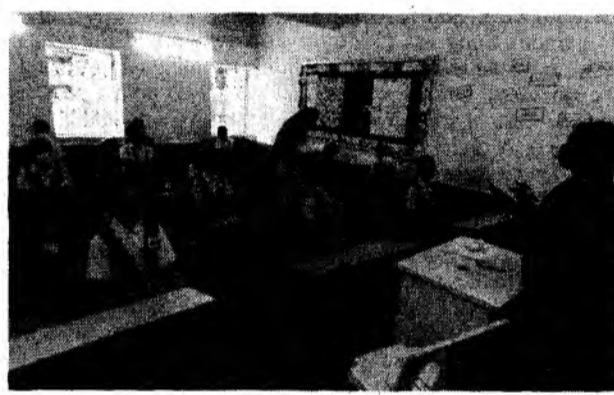
This group of teachers rarely fulfil their 'out of the classroom' responsibilities, rarely take initiatives and are averse to change. They find excuses for everything. When it is their turn to give Assembly talk they absent themselves on one pretext or the other or they come to you just when it is about time for the Assembly to commence with an excuse, 'today I have a bad cough.' When they are told to conduct online classes they come up with unlimited reasons for their reluctance, like network connectivity, limited number of students who have smart phones and SIM card. When they are asked to conduct online competitions the same excuses are thrown at you. They find arguments like, 'we have to begin somewhere, that even a 10% success rate is good enough to begin with' not compelling enough. They even refuse to see that online examinations, online applications are already in practice. Unless students are made aware and are taught the importance of the online world they will miss out on admissions and job op-

portunities. Employers have no consideration for those residing in areas with poor network connection.

Resistant to change

Linked to the last point are teachers who resist change. "The Only Constant in Life Is Change" says Heraclitus. The Greek philosopher who lived around 500 BCE also says, "You cannot jump into the same river twice." By the time you come up of the water you jumped into, it has already flown down a few meters away. Teachers prefer to continue to record attendance manually on the register rather than via thumb impression or facial recognition for obvious reasons — they can no longer manipulate. Their time of arrival and departure will be recorded.

Teachers who are supposed to facilitate change resist the same. Proposals for change are opposed on the argument 'things have been going this way for 20/30



years, why change now? Not even the suggestion to 'give it a try and reverse it to the old if the new is unsuccessful' is met with their approval. While statuses in Whatsapp and profiles in Facebook are constantly updated, schools are run the same way for years together. In most government schools, the classrooms have been the same for the last 40/50 years, only that the desks and benches, the windows and doors are broken and the floor is worn out. Forget about technological change like smart classrooms. These are out of the teachers' control but they can alter their teaching methods. They can update their notes. They can teach differently. The saying, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results" is credited to Albert Einstein.

Utilised training

Few teachers utilise their training. Take the simple example of those who have completed their B. Ed degree. They have learned to make lesson plans. But not many B. Ed holders make lesson-plans after joining a school. A few may do it for a few weeks or months into their job but soon the practice is abandoned never to be revisited. The same happens

with using teaching aids in the classroom. It meets the same fate. The same happens with the lower level training. Training is mainly to obtain a degree and to secure a job. Once on the job the training remains largely unutilised.

Unprofessionals in the work of professionals

Teaching is a profession which means teachers are professionals. But a large section of the teaching community has not done any professional teaching courses. It is a case of unprofessionals doing the work of professionals. If it happens in the field of medicine it is illegal. If it happens in engineering it is unlawful. But it is not illegal in education. In two church-run high/higher secondary institutions which have been in existence for more than 25 years it was a shock to discover that in one of them there was no teacher with B. Ed degree and in the other there is only one staff with the degree. In the

last 3/4 years most teachers completed the mandatory D.El.Ed course but the utility and effectiveness is highly questionable.

Professionals also constantly update themselves. Among teachers hardly anyone updates himself or herself. It is observed that many a teacher grows 'lethargic' with no new idea and zero creativity. They just move on. They are allowed to linger in the job because there is no challenge and no demand on performance. We are coming back to the point of doing things over and over again exactly the same way.

With the new National Education Policy (NEP) enabling students to learn new age subjects such as coding and computational thinking at the middle school level and can opt for subject courses, namely, arts, physical, and vocational education in secondary schools, one wonders whether teachers who have become sluggish can cope up with the demands.

The new NEP's proposal to promote teachers based purely on merit rather than on seniority and vertical reward for teachers with high-performance to be promoted to work at a district or state level may do the trick to keep teachers on their toes.

Salary an eternal issue

Pay is always an issue.

Every now and then we see and hear Ad-hoc, SSA and deficit school teachers hit the streets to demand for better pay. Private teachers bear their fate silently for they don't have much of a choice. The other day there were letters to the editor to draw the government's attention to the insecure future of retired deficit teachers and the underpaid and overworked teachers in lower classes. If deficit teachers face an uncertain future one can imagine the plight of private school teachers. The call for rationalisation of salary is a just demand but whether the government has the resources, is the question.

Permit me to stray a bit. We also recall a letter to this daily by a student of a premier college of the city. He identifies himself/herself as coming from a middle-class family but finds it difficult to clear the fees on time. If middle class families find it hard to pay the fees, it is easily inferred that the institution is out of bounds for the poor.

In his village the orphans that this writer personally knows are not in the deficit schools run by the Church. They are in other government aided schools that have much lesser fees. In Khasi-Jaintia Hills the Church runs many deficit schools. If the orphans and students from below poverty families are out of the Church's deficit run institutions then it is quite a sad story.

The story is much worse in unaided educational institutions run by the Church. Only those who can afford to pay the fees take admission in such schools. The poor are not in schools run by the Church. The other day this writer visited a family two kms away from the mission school. Two HSSLC passed children were there. On enquiry they revealed they studied in a government school. When asked 'why not in the mission school', they regretfully revealed 'our parents could not afford to put us in 'your' school'. The experience was quite devastating leaving the 'culprit' grasping for questions with no answers.

The balance between a reasonable fee and a good pay for teachers is a delicate task. The Church can charge high fees to pay teachers well. But in doing so the poor are left out. Even with the present scale the poorest are out of the Church's educational system. They are denied a good education, thereby perpetuating their condition. It is a tough balancing act. Teachers, of course, have every right to feel they are paid poorly.

This reflection does not paint all teachers with the same brush. You could say it is only one side of the story.

Email: albert.thyriang74@gmail.com

Where should the focus be? Meghalaya's NER SDG index

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The North Eastern Region District SDG Index published by NITI Aayog (2021) finds that Meghalaya is ranked at 7th position and only higher than Nagaland. Out of the 103 districts considered for ranking, the best performing district from Meghalaya is East Khasi Hills ranked at 57th position (best performing in NER is East Sikkim) and the worst performing is North Garo Hills at 98th position (worst performing in NER is Kiphire, Nagaland). All the 11 districts of Meghalaya were included in the assessment. Only East Khasi Hills is in the green (front-runner) whereas the remaining districts are in the yellow (performer). Well, do not be misled by the term 'performer' as it is more akin to 'below average'. Coming to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the state scored well in goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), goal 10 (reduced inequalities), goal 12 (responsible consumption and production) and goal 15 (life on land). It fared poorly in the more important goals such as no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, etc.

Now that it is established that Meghalaya fares poorly, where should the focus be? In the dynamics of development there are always 'underlying factors' that drive a society. These factors are responsible for the overall performance as concluded on the basis of certain parameters (such as SDGs). The argument here is that if we can focus on one or two factors, the rest will take care of themselves. One might say that no poverty and zero hunger are the most important factors. However, this is not entirely true as tackling poverty and hunger on a sustainable basis requires a focus on some other underlying factors. They are 'education' and 'will of the people'. In actuality, this is where the focus should be. This is where we have to direct our resources, time and energy.

To start with, the focus should be on education. This point is so common that it has become mundane for many. But education is really the solution. For things to effectively work out we must take education in its actual sense. The issue is that people are largely confused between education and literacy. In a practical sense, they are not one and the same. Being literate does not necessarily mean that one is educated. Literacy in today's world is measured in terms of a mark sheet that one possesses. A mark sheet is not a total reflection of a person's capabilities. But we give too much importance to it. On the contrary, an educated person may not have any impressive mark sheet, but he/she may be the one who contributes the most to development.

This should be the focus. To nurture educated people who are skillful, motivated and have the will power to bring change and progress. In an interaction with a young farmer at Laitkor (outskirts of Shillong city), what was striking was that his value as an educated person is more than the literates who hold very high literacy degrees. It was heart-warming to talk to him. Today, our worth is recognized not by how much we know, rather by how much we can do!

We have come across many educated youth who are now successful entrepreneurs. In the tourism sector, their initiatives and activities are just plain adorable. Here too, we can see how the educated ones (without high degrees) do very well. Once the Covid-19 pandemic subsides, we can expect to see more of the youth getting

involved. In addition to this, there are other promising areas too for the motivated. One such area is competitive examinations. It is the inherent nature of the tribal youth to not want to leave their hometown for work. The 'I will look for work only in my own city/town mentality' still prevails. It is time to reverse this trend. In fact, the ones from Khasi hills do not even want to go to Garo hills for work. This is mostly true vice versa too. This is one of the main reasons as to why most of our youth do not want to try for all India competitive examinations like the Staff Selection Commission (SSC). The fear of being posted outside the state poses a deterrent. This cannot continue. The youth must be educated and motivated right from an early age to vie for such examinations for better livelihood prospects.

For the above to work, there is a need for edupreneurs. In Shillong, a number of centers are providing coaching for competitive examinations. However, this market has a far wider potential. Like-minded people/organizations can come together and initiate coaching centers. Some might argue that in the age of IT enabled learning through Ed-Tech companies like BYJU's, there is no need for such centers. Nonetheless, nothing can replace physical classroom interaction. Today, a number of youth from Meghalaya are going to Guwahati for coaching. These centers have tie-ups with reputed coaching centers from New Delhi. The same 'value model' can be leveraged here too. It is time to act now else Meghalaya will see an irreparable explosion of unemployment within 10 years. Look at the teaching sector as an example. The colleges in Meghalaya are filled up with young teachers. This means that there will be no/less vacancy in this sector. Against this, hundreds of students with NET/PhD pass out every year. Where will they be employed? To add to the problem, the private sector is not robust and the advent of artificial intelligence will make the teacher redundant. A similar problem exists in the other sectors (like hotels, retail, trading, manufacturing, etc) too.

Truly, the buck starts and ends with the 'will of the people'. No, not the government! In Meghalaya we are habituated with looking at/ blaming the government for everything. This has to stop. The government will function to the extent it pleases. The real onus and responsibility for development lies with the common people. It is time to be counted. The starting point is a sense of dedication and hard work. I believe many of us would have come across the common saying of the newly employed that 'now that I have a secure job, my life is set and I can live in peace'. This is a wrong precept of one's responsibility. Criminal you might add. In fact, once you land yourself a job your responsibility towards the society increases 10-fold. It calls for dedication and sincerity to serve. Unless we realize this, the condition of our state will never improve. The people in positions of power and authority must do justice to their positions. Plus, there is no job classification as big or small. Things will change only if we have a transformational mindset towards work and not a transactional one.

What we do every day must contribute towards the transformation of society. This is where the focus should be, especially at the brink of 50 years of Meghalaya! (Email: benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in; the writer teaches at NEHU)

Letters to the Editor

Are we condoning corruption?

Editor,

Apropos of your front page news item "Saubhagya probe: Thy name is subterfuge" (ST Sep 1, 2021), as a reader of your newspaper for decades now, I congratulate you for your lonely and persistent expose on the various wrongdoings in our state. Frankly, I expected to see a lot of public reaction to the manipulation and graft in the implementation of the centrally sponsored scheme of Saubhagya which is the Prime Minister's flagship project to provide power supply to every household in the country. The project which should have cost Rs 300 crore but turned out to be a Rs 500 crore scheme, should have evoked strong public outrage. That after so many days no one in authority has refuted the serious allegations of contractor-minister nexus in subverting the system to drain out Rs 200 crore of tax payers' money, is astounding. Your

report reveals how the price of a bag of cement was pegged at Rs 857—more than double the prevailing market price. Your report further exposes that all other components and equipment required for the scheme were also over-priced. What can be a clearer evidence of a plot to circumvent the system than this! The plot becomes thicker now that your report suggests that the contractor is busy manipulating the "findings" of the investigation. This is an unbelievable attempt to cover it up.

The Public Notice published by Member Secretary of "Independent Enquiry Committee" (ST Sept 7) makes our worst fears come true. Firstly, the Public Notice makes it abundantly clear that the investigation is restricted to three broad heads: 1. Procurement 2. AT & C Losses and 3. Human Resource Management. Tell me where does Saubhagya scam figure in this probe? Yes, there is a mention of "Central Government sponsored scheme". On a careful reading it will be evident that it clearly restricts the

scope of investigation to "procurement" and the process of tendering etc. Do all these cover the Saubhagya scheme? To a lay person like me, it doesn't appear to be so since the Saubhagya scheme is essentially a turn-key project. The term turn-key provides the escape route. For, there is no direct procurement by the authorities whose actions are being investigated.

Under the contractual agreement under a turn-key project the firm engaged has to cover A to Z in completing the scheme. It is the firm's sole responsibility to procure equipment, engage labourers and hand it over in serviceable condition. Strictly speaking, there was no process of procurement by MeCEL or any of its subsidiaries involved in the Saubhagya scam. Therefore, your report of "subterfuge" is spot on.

In fine, I feel a little dismayed by the lack of public response to what I feel is one of the biggest scams of the state! What is happening to our politicians? The Opposition seems to be too preoccupied with destabilising the

government of the day and has no time for paying attention to such frauds being committed on our people. And what about the regional parties who are with the ruling coalition? They are so comfortable in their current political arrangement of you-scratch-my-back-and-I-will-scratch-yours! They are all sham protectors of the state. We the people of the state are unfortunate to be at the mercy of such a self-centred and shameless lot!

Yours etc.,
Pynshngain Jyrwa,
Via email

A disclaimer

Editor,

I am shocked to read in the Letters to the Editor column of your esteemed daily The Shillong Times, dated September 7, 2021 a letter captioned, "Normalcy returns courtesy vaccination" written by someone named L.M. Shangpliang blaming the Christian community as a whole for not taking Corona vaccination and casting aspersion on the Christian faith itself as being

the "agenda coming from the western shores". The person may have the same name as L.M. Shangpliang but I don't know who he/she is, as the full name has not been given. So, I want to make it clear that I have neither written the letter nor own any responsibility for the opinion expressed in that letter.

Yours etc.,
Lolita M. Shangpliang,
Via email

Needed a Farm Budget

Editor,

Apropos of the special article "Needed: A separate budget for the Farm Sector," by K.N.Kumar (ST September 7, 2021), given the high rate of our population depending on Agriculture and Allied activities vis-à-vis the fragile food security where Meghalaya food grain production can meet only 30% of its requirement as mentioned by Mr Kumar is timely. I fully agree with Mr Kumar, presently the Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers (Empowerment) Commission, that there is a

need for an exclusive Farm Budget when it does not entail any additional burden on the exchequer. Since the Rate of Return (ROI) on every rupee spent is highest on agricultural research when compared to education and roads, there is no reason why the Government of Meghalaya in 2022-23 should not present a Farm Budget as suggested by the writer. Such a budget should take care of all the requirements of Agriculture and Allied sectors in Meghalaya which contributes only Rs 6,419 crore to the State's economy which accounts for only 20% of the State Domestic Product at current prices 2020-21. Meghalaya should emulate the Southern States of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and have in place a Farm Budget that will benefit our rural population.

Yours etc,
V.K.Lyngdoh,
Via email

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

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

— Nelson Mandela

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.30 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

Orphaned constituencies

TWO MLAs died this year within a month of each other. While the Mawryngkneng MLA, David Nongrum passed away on February 2 this year, the Rajabala MLA Azad Zaman passed away on March 3, 2021. The constituencies of these two MLAs have remained orphaned with the Covid pandemic derailing attempts by the Election Commission to have bye-elections to the two constituencies. However, if the by-polls to the Bhabanipur Constituency in West Bengal can be held on September 30 next to enable Mamata Banerjee to contest so that she can legitimately hold the Chief Minister's post, why are the two constituencies in Meghalaya left out of the by-polls? Perhaps the Meghalaya State Election Commission has its own reasons to defer the by-polls. In July this year the State Election Commissioner had said that the ECI is waiting and watching the Covid situation before announcing the by-polls. West Bengal had a more severe Covid wave than Meghalaya yet the ECI has announced the by-polls for three constituencies of that State namely Bhabanipur, Jangipur and Samsanganj. Granted that Mamata Banerjee has to be elected from a constituency within six months of her assuming chief ministership since she had lost to Suwendu Adhikari in Nandigram constituency but the yardsticks adopted by the ECI should be the same for all.

Legislators have a major role to play not just in law-making but also in the development of their constituencies. They flag important issues related to the State in the legislature. People of the two constituencies have remained unrepresented for six months. A bye-election is the mandated process to fill a vacancy in the state legislatures or Parliament. The process derives its legitimacy from the Representation of Peoples' Act 1951. A vacancy arises in case of death, or resignation or removal from office or when individuals elected to two seats vacate one of the seats. Bye-elections are held regularly when a vacancy arises and except in cases where general elections are scheduled to be held within the next one year, the ECI almost always conducts the elections within six months of the seat falling vacant. It is rather curious therefore as to why the hemming and hawing about Meghalaya. Mawryngkneng constituency extends over a wide area beginning from Puriang which adjoins West Jaintia Hills and ends up to Mawkhanu adjoining Ri Bhoi district. These are also areas with the worst roads and development indices. Similar is the case with Rajabala which is affected by floods. People have been putting up with these problems in the hope that they will elect a new MLA who would set things right. Now that aspiration has to be kept on hold for reasons best known to the ECI.

Is Monetization another name for Privatization?

By H. Srikanth

Nirmala Sitharaman, the Union Finance Minister, in her last budget address hinted at monetization that would ensure additional mobilization of resources for enhancing and sustaining infrastructure finance and for creating new assets. Thereafter the government organized a series of conferences, workshops and consultations with different stakeholders. As a culmination of the efforts, recently the government officially announced the National Monetization Pipeline and came out with a road map explaining how different sectors and Ministries would carry out the monetization process. The pipeline proposed covers twelve Line Ministries and twenty plus government assets. Apart from the core sectors like railways, roadways and power, the policy will be extended to management of seaports, airports, petroleum, natural gas, warehousing, sports and urban real estate assets. The policy seeks to mobilize over six lakh crore rupees within next four years.

The idea behind the Monetization policy is the claim that the government has unutilized or under-utilized assets, which could be rented out to the private parties for a fixed number of years and allow them to manage the assets to generate more income. The proceeds emanating from it could be used to maintain and also to create new assets. This idea of Monetization is consistent with the neo-liberal idea that the government has no business in running businesses; the governments should at best play only a regulatory role, leaving the economy to market forces. This idea is not something invented today by the BJP led NDA government. It has been experimented in some sectors after India opted for the policy of liberalization and globalization in early 1990s. They may have differences in strategies, but there is no ideological difference between Congress and BJP as far the policy of liberalization and privatization are concerned. Many PSUs were handed over to private capitalists. When they were in government; both involved private actors in management of assets like railways, airports and roadways. What the Modi government has been doing today is to take the process to a higher level, involving almost all key economic sectors, and openly announcing it as a government policy.

The outright sale of PSUs

is resented and opposed by the trade unions and was resented by the majority of people. Understanding the public opposition to the policy of privatization, the Ministers and the bureaucrats are reiterating that the monetization policy that they have proposed does not intend to privatize the public assets. The ownership and control would still be with the government, and only the assets are handed over to the private partners for optimum use of the same, and for ensuring efficiency and growth. The monetization plan is tipped as an easy way to mobilize resources for nation building without imposing additional taxes, or taking loans from abroad. The Prime Minister justified the policy stating

"The government is now referring to the transfer of assets to private capital as privatization, whereas handing over the responsibility of administering the public assets as the monetization. This distinction between privatization and monetization is only pedantic."

that the proceedings emanating from Monetization would be utilized for financing the welfare policies for the poor. The opposition parties in India are however calling it an outright sale of India for the benefit of private interests. Notwithstanding what the Opposition says or does, in public interest, it is essential for all of us to have a comprehensive understanding of the nature and dynamics of India's political economy.

India is not the only country which has public sector enterprises. Many advanced capitalist countries also have them. Existence of PSUs per se will not make any country socialist. India went for building the public sector, not because it was socialist, but because on the eve of independence the private sector was still weak and averse to taking the risk of large-scale investments in capital intensive industries which require long gestation periods. The private sector which sought immediate profits therefore focussed then on consumer industries, and allowed the government to build public sector to create infrastructure and capital-intensive industries essential for the development of capitalism. In the name of nationalization, the government then took over the control of different loss-making

private industries, banks and insurance companies. It was by taxing the citizens of the country that the government could mobilize several lakhs and crores of rupees to build PSUs and create public assets in the form of industries, mining, roadways, railways, airports, etc. Far from affecting economic growth, the public sector in India facilitated the growth of the private sector by providing them capital goods and services and assets at subsidized rates.

As long as the private sector in India was weak, it accepted the existence and relevance of the public sector. But once the private monopoly capital started accumulating more and more profits, it found the public sector as an obstacle to its further

growth and development. It was at that point of time that a systematic campaign was carried on against the PSUs and the governments were forced to advocate liberalization and privatization as panacea for all ills affecting the Indian economy. Systematically, the private monopolies began to enter all sectors of the economy, including defence, which were previously assigned exclusively to the public sector. While some PSUs were outrightly sold to private parties at a throwaway price, in others the public equity was reduced considerably to facilitate the entry of the private capital. In sectors like railways, airports, etc., which continued to remain till date under the government control, private capital was encouraged in the name of providing efficient services. The government is now referring to the transfer of assets to private capital as privatization, whereas handing over the responsibility of administering the public assets as the monetization. This distinction between privatization and monetization is only pedantic.

It is true that the government is now in possession of several assets and that they need to be efficiently used. But here, there is a need here to distinguish between unutilized assets and already

utilized assets. If there are any unutilized assets and the government is not in a position to put them into use, involvement of private capital to mobilize additional income is justified. But the government is yet to come out with the list of such unutilized public assets. Much of the public assets are already in use in some forms. If the government proposes to monetize even these assets which are utilized, it should show in what ways the Monetization of the assets to private capital would bring more proceeds to the government exchequer, compared to what the governments have been generating because of the direct control of the same. Will the private businesses invest more in the assets when they know that they need to hand over the same to the government after a few years? Are all the private players philanthropists that they don't make use of the public assets for gaining maximum profits and instead contribute to the enhancement of the assets?

Further, what is the implication of the Monetization to the problem of unemployment? When the assets are directly managed by the government, the government is under compulsion to follow labour laws and implement policies such as the reservations and minimum wages. Is there any guarantee that the private players who take over the management of the public assets generate more jobs and strictly implement the labour laws? Does the government assure that it would not impose more taxes on the people, and allocate the proceeds from the Monetization for Health, Education and other essential needs?

Finally, over the last few years we have seen the manner in which the management of the seaports, airports and mines are handed over to select monopoly houses like the Ambanis and the Adanis close to the ruling regime, and how more competent and experienced private and public sector competitors were overlooked to benefit the chosen allies. Hence it is difficult to repose faith in the government's assurances that all Monetization transactions remain transparent and would be based on competitive bidding. The people therefore have every reason to believe that Monetization is only a sophisticated form of privatization entering through the backdoor.

The writer teaches Political Science in NEHU. email: hskant@gmail.com

Meghalaya needs to Introduce 'Climate Change' in school curriculum

By James Sangma

Coronavirus has changed the worldview of the world and extreme weather events from across the world have brought the erstwhile distant threat of climate change to our doorstep. Our consumption has exceeded the regenerative rate of the planet. Despite various sustainability strategies implemented across the globe, there's no escaping the 1.5 °C reality.

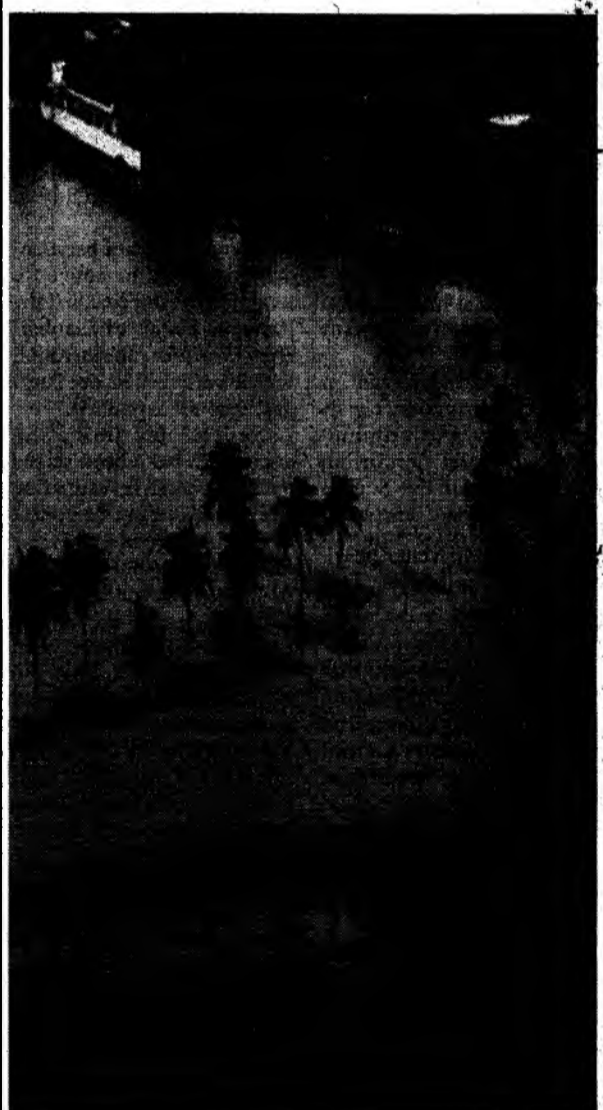
There is a tidal wave of strong public sentiment along with political pressure to treat nature as an asset in order to avert the civilization level challenge of climate change and it has been widely stated that the Governments have the opportunity and moral responsibility especially post Covid-19 to use their fiscal recovery programmes to reset the economy on a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable terms towards a nature positive economy.

The recent school strikes led by Greta Thunberg and millions of young students across the globe to protest the inaction by climate change

power people to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions: economic, environmental, and societal which will be in sync with the geo-economic shift towards bio and green economies of the future. Moreover, Meghalaya with its young demographic dividend-needs to aid in creating a human capital formation that is in sync with its fragile ecological existence and global green practices.

Progressive states like Odisha have just made disaster management a mandatory subject in schools and colleges and Italy has become the first country in the world to make the climate change subject mandatory in schools followed by New Zealand.

It is also important for our young population of Meghalaya to learn about their natural capital, indigenous environment and conservation protocols inscribed in our Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia ancestral conceptions and of course our biodiversity heritage to tackle to attain



and their uncertain human future across the world is a true reflection of the civic-minded generation of millennials and Gen Z attitudes towards the environmental future of our planet.

We need to think about intergenerational equity.

Meghalaya with its forest-based economy and nature-inspired spirituality embedded in its indigenous origins needs to lead an example for charting out a path towards regenerative and conservation-based economy through public education of climate change and conservation in order to shape our human capital/young demographic dividend towards 21st century ideals of a sustainable planet. It is critical for our young generation to be upgraded on the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed to build a green, low emission, and climate-resilient future.

Meghalaya has one of the highest forest cover in the country along with one of the most distinctive ecological heritage in the world and a State that is on the frontlines of climate change, it is critical for us to introduce and train our young generation towards the indigenous conservation approaches and build a cognition to adapt with the ever iterating climate change reality of the world through a curriculum of conservation and climate change in our education system.

The idea is to provide an education that will em-

to the reality of new bio-economies, green action and low carbon livelihood opportunities of the future and also to help the state in its transition towards positioning it as environmental leader on the lines of other forest-based economies in the world like Costa Rica.

Climate Change is a 'hyper-object' as stated by Timothy Morton - a multi-pronged problem that requires intervention and overhauling of economic and social structures and institutions along with mindset, it stretches from adapting to low carbon lifestyles to livelihoods, from energy usage to manufacturing and food habits. This is not a theoretical subject but should be clubbed with practical knowledge. Biodiversity Visits, Regenerative Agriculture classes, Bio-economy workforce development, and 'service hours' for the environment should also be a part of this initiative.

In essence, we need to build human and institutional capacities through education, values, and skills that are critical to jumpstart Green Frontier industries and models in our State and we have to remember that today's students are the stakeholders of tomorrow. Climate Change and Conservation as a school subject is the start of our transition towards an environment first state and ensuring intergenerational equity.

(The writer is Minister Forests & Environment, Government of Meghalaya)

Letters to the Editor

A spark neglected

Editor,
"A spark neglected burns the house," is an adage of the wise that has proven its correctness down the ages and is a saying that the wise pay heed to. A fool on the other hand will ignore such wisdom and plunge in regardless, without any thought of the consequences that his action or inaction might bring. Events post August 13 happening in and around Shillong which send a chill down one's spine if one only takes the trouble to imagine where such actions are likely to take the State and its people. Citizens seem to have lost all confidence on the credibility of the Government and the politicians who compose that Government. Youth has once again taken to the streets to voice their resentment and the Rule of Law seems to be an unfamiliar concept to both the Government and to the citizenry it is supposed to serve.

The uncalled for police encounter of Cheristerfield Thankhiew in Mawlai Kynnton Massar on August 13, last seems to have been the last straw on the camel's back for a public that has been seething for the last four years over Govt apathy to governance; the regular financial, coal and power scams

that have been tumbling out of the MDA cupboard; the perceived obsession of the NPP to suck Meghalaya dry simply to finance its national ambition; corruption at the highest echelons of governance and the seemingly impotence and helplessness of the coalition regional parties in the face of all the mal-governance that is going on. The youth have now once again taken to the streets and the rising crescendo of "Ka Sur ki Nongmawlai" seems to have caught the imagination of those who believe that only violence and agitations will make this Government wake up. Militancy or a call for its return seems to many as the only answer to the rampant misrule we are suffering from.

It's a dangerous trend and here I would like our aggrieved youth to pause and rethink; review and ponder wisely over the course of action they have charted for themselves and the jaitbyrnew. Let the events that recently took place in Kashmir be a reminder of the extent the Centre will tolerate any form of agitation or protest it perceives poses a threat to the security of this country. That I can safely say will not be tolerated and might lead to regretful decisions over which we will have no control over.

Having said the above one is also shocked and bewil-

dered by the total silence and indifference that the Government and its administration is treating the agitations going on in Mawlai. It's alarming to see the spread of the agitation to other places in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The DC of EKH has taken recourse to the law and she has simply acted as per her training and background as a bureaucrat and no one needs be surprised over this. The Mawlai movement is now taking a distinct political colour with a dash of militancy in it. One would expect experienced politicians and statesmen to step in and douse the fire that threatens to flare up. Yet none of this is happening. Where is the Home Minister? Does he know the responsibilities of his portfolio? Why has no positive and determined action or step been taken to quell these public protests? I hope the MDA and its major partner the UDP have not pinned their hopes on the wrong guy. So, as a Government, the MDA and its partners going to pretend that all's well and we have nothing to worry about? Sorry that's not what the public is seeing. From what one sees it seems Rymbui is not averse to ignore the spark that can bring down the whole house!

Yours etc.,
Jericho Lyngdoh,
Shillong-8

Who advised Govt to eliminate Cherister?

Editor,
The current NPP led-coalition seems to be buying time on how to deal with the public demand to drop the State Home Minister from his portfolio and to suspend the police personnel accused of a fake encounter against a surrendered militant on August 13 last. Why is this Government twiddling its thumbs when it should be taking firm action? First things first, the Home Department should have immediately placed those police officers leading the team that fateful day under suspension pending investigation and if proven guilty of overreach they should face punishment under the law of the land. Secondly, the Government that has been voted and elected to govern cannot take people's sentiments for granted and play with their emotions. Rather, the Government should heed public opinion and drop the Home Minister from the Cabinet. Mere statements and semantics used such as "issue is under examination" or "under consideration" shows the duplicity of the MDA government. With so many unproductive advisors around the Chief Minister only God knows who gave him such

an advice that allowed such a folly to occur.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin
Wankhar,
Shillong

Higher Education in a sorry state

Editor,
The pathetic state of Indian higher education is discernible in the fact that even the best Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) are not ranked high by international standards. It is worrisome that no Indian higher education institution appears in the top 200 globally in the latest Times Higher Education (THE) rankings. In fact, the rankings are not done based on the excellence in teaching, research or reputation. Times Higher Education considers parameters such as knowledge transfer that measures participation in exchange programmes and collaboration with other international universities and measuring progress against the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It must be noted that several Chinese universities figure among the top 100. In contrast, only three Indian institutions figure in the 300-400 category.

Criticism can be levelled against the parameters used for rankings but it must be

understood that institutions that wish to be globally competitive must strive for it. If India wants to be an academic superpower, it needs to do a lot. It is shocking to know that some reputed higher education institutions in India kept away from competing with global institutions. Those institutions that competed were left behind. While India's National Education Policy 2020 is considered a game changer, pathetic performance of higher education institutions is a matter of concern. It is ironic that even when the number of higher education institutions and PhD candidates has increased, the allocation for higher education in the central budget is very low. The NEP lays emphasis on research in the country. India must take a leaf out of the book of China and overcome the drawbacks in higher education.

Despite rapid expansion in the higher education sector, challenges remain. Low employability of students, poor quality of teaching, weak governance, insufficient funding and complex regulatory norms continue to plague the sector. One wonders how India would fulfil its wish of getting to the 50% GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) by 2030 from the current ratio without proper strategy and execution plan.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

"In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity."

— Erik Erikson

The Shillong Times

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Pawn in Pakistani hands

THE emerging power profile in Afghanistan was the least that India could have hoped for or anticipated. The proposed ministry principally has the Pakistani-ISI stamp and is infested with 'terrorists' — 18 of the 33 names announced by the Taliban being UN-designated 'global terrorists'. Fact is, even the United States could not have bargained for such a worse scenario. With the Indian government keeping a pregnant silence over the way things have ended up in a nation that was so close to it for many decades, it is a moot point whether the Modi government had any calculations at all about Kabul.

While segments of the Taliban leadership and even the Haqqani network repeatedly professed they were not at the beck and call of Pakistan, the ground realities are different. A top functionary of the Pakistani military intelligence, ISI, reaching Kabul and participating in ministry-formation talks and finally getting things done the way it desired is proof itself. Nor can the sidelining of those who manned the Doha political office, the likes of Abdul Ghani Baradar, or moderate faces like Mohammed Abbas Stanekzai a small matter. Looking at matters from the Indian point of view, the new Prime Minister designate, Mullah Hassan Akhund — the one who ordered the razing of Buddha statues during the Taliban's first innings in power between 1996 and 2001 — and interior (home) minister Sirajuddin Haqqani who had been out and out anti-Indian, together make a lethal mix.

India must be prepared to face considerable difficulties vis-à-vis the likely nurturing of terrorism under the Taliban rule there. The implications in relation to Kashmir Valley could be grim though Afghanistan and India do not share a border. Trained terrorists could be exported from Afghanistan to India via the Pakistani soil. The same holds true for the US too in the long run. For now, the Taliban cannot rub the US the wrong way. The billions in funds from the Afghan government parked in the US Federal Reserve, which has been frozen, is guarantee that the Taliban regime will play safe with the US. Alternatively, China has promised millions of dollars in financial support to the Taliban government. This alone is small comfort for a war-torn nation that will now have to build itself from scratch. The Taliban offensives there in the past three decades brought situations to such a pitiable low. There are no indications whatsoever that things will improve. Afghanistan could rather be a pawn in the hands of Pakistan's ISI.

Analysing the Khasi mindset in the 21st century

By Patricia Mukhim

Khasis are humans, much like other humans on this earth. They have neither special attributes nor collective fault-lines. To believe we are a special race is some kind of quixotic memory because all tribes — Nagas, Mizos, Karbis, Dimasas, Bodos believe they are a unique race with a unique history. Fact is we are all earthlings and suffer the same pangs of hunger, pain, love, hatred, passion and the other emotions. From what is apparent today, Khasis don't think much and nor do they allocate big chunks of time during the day when all they're doing is thinking. What's most worrying is that even the intellectual class populating our universities don't contribute to the intellectual capital of the society. Most universities and colleges with a majority of tribal teaching faculty score poorly for not producing enough articles in peer reviewed journals. And its not that these faculty have not done work; most of them have reams to document but don't get down to writing their learning experiences. Writing somehow seems to pose a monumental challenge. Perhaps that spirit of competition with others who produce books and articles regularly is absent. Sure, we are a society of oral traditions but that's not enough in the 21st century. People want to gauge the Khasi intellectual scale and whether they go deep enough into an issue before proposing a solution to any problem.

Khasi society is today buffeted by a number of social issues but we spend the large parts of our daily lives breathing, living and talking politics. We discuss what's wrong with the present political system and we do that nearly every day but it ends there. Trying to change the present crass, hugely corrupt political system requires more than talking about it and letting off steam until we meet another set of friends/acquaintances before we launch into another tirade against those ruling Meghalaya today and those who have held its reins in the past. Not once have I heard anyone giving a call for an honest conversation, without any finger-pointing and holier than thou attitude to sit across the table and to do some critical thinking. So what is critical thinking? Simply put critical thinking is a process of analysing facts, listening to contesting voices

and arriving at a point where we form a judgment. In short it means 'thinking about thinking.' We don't spend enough time to think even about our political struggles and what outcomes we desire from certain public actions.

On the Cherister Thangkiew killing the Mawlai public has shown that it will not take things lying down and has therefore come up with some creative strategies but with no outcomes. The Government of the day is unbending in its stand of not suspending the two IPS officers until a judicial inquiry finds them culpable of violating sections of the law in the post-midnight raid of Cherister's home leading to his being gunned down. The judicial inquiry is given three months to complete its task but like others before it, a judicial inquiry has no outer limit. It could take a year or more before all the facts are established and report is finally out. By then most people (the ones who are agitating today) would have

Let's not deceive ourselves and proclaim aloud that we are not legal tender and don't have a price on our loyalties and our choices. At the right price we are all prone to being bamboozled into toeing a certain line. Isn't there a price for keeping silent on the illegal coal trade and the coke units that are killing our own people through slow poisoning?

reached a point of compassion fatigue.

Politicians know us more than we know ourselves. They know our Achilles heel. They know how much we are worth and at what's the tipping point at which we can finally be silenced on critical issues. Let's not deceive ourselves and proclaim aloud that we are not legal tender and don't have a price on our loyalties and our choices. At the right price we are all prone to being bamboozled into toeing a certain line. Isn't there a price for keeping silent on the illegal coal trade and the coke units that are killing our own people through slow poisoning? Do we need to look too far?

As a people we are comfortable letting others fight our battles because we are too busy running our lives. But letting ourselves being swept along by the tidal wave of busyness is a sure way of making mistakes and

losing the big picture. Former President Obama once observed that 'making good decisions was at the core of good politics, and good decisions were the result of good thinking.' The question to ask our politicians here is "How much time do they set aside for thinking of the larger issues of public service and governance?" Do they actually even think critically about public issues without pushing forward their selfish business agenda? Do they care about the state considering they can afford to settle abroad if they choose to with the amounts they have earned from personal businesses and all under the brazen pretext of serving the people of Meghalaya?

Coming back to our capacity to think critically or the absence of it which has brought us to this abyss of philistinism let me inform those who think that surfing Google for all answers to life's problems does not even remotely resemble thinking. Cyber loitering does not qual-

because there are different approaches to solving a problem. Dissenting voices and disagreements do not need to turn people into enemies. But that's what has happened in Khasi society. If you disagree with the mainstream Khasi thought process then you are the enemy. Such pettiness is the anti-thesis of progressiveness which societies benefit from. To consider anyone who has a different viewpoint as the enemy reflects a deep sense of insecurity. Our political space is occupied by such insecure people — insecure about losing the next elections and what that will do to their long-term business plans!

Sadly, today even scholarship is reduced to scouring the internet for dissertation contents. Most of us engage in successive and quick horizontal searches that fail to do justice to complexity and nuance. Every society tends to behave in certain ways that are nuanced towards the cultural heritage and the baggage of history and memory that we carry. We cannot understand the complexities of Khasi society today by relying on what writers of the past have penned about us. Nearly all writers have extolled our virtues. None has had the courage to point to our societal flaws because we are slaves of oral tradition which usually tends to leave out unpleasant facets of our behaviours.

The fact that some aspiring writers translate the word 'Syiem' to mean king (in line with the British royals) shows how shallow our own understanding of our past is. The Khasi word syiem is equivalent to a chieftain or a village head that people looked up to, to provide leadership in a crisis or a conflict. The Khasis are not a hierarchical society and are not arranged that way. It was the British that brought in those elements of 'kingship' because it was easier for them to negotiate for land with that single entity than with a group of villagers. The British had a taste of how a particular meeting in a Khasi village lasted more than a day before the community could come to a final decision.

We have come a long way since then but are we any better in our thinking processes? It is imperative that we spend quality time to devote to thinking so that we have a pro-active plan instead of reacting all the time. We need a long term plan on how to handle a mercenary government.

Building South-Asian identity Role of India

By Dr DK Giri

On my visit to Islamabad, I was pleasantly surprised by the greetings and identity, the Pakistan youths were using. They would call themselves and Indians as South Asians! In India I was told by the students of Academy of International Politics, in New Delhi one of the teachers asked the students to identify themselves as South Asians. Very few did. It appears that while smaller countries want a South Asian identity, India does not seem so keen. Remember, the SAARC idea was mooted by Bangladesh.

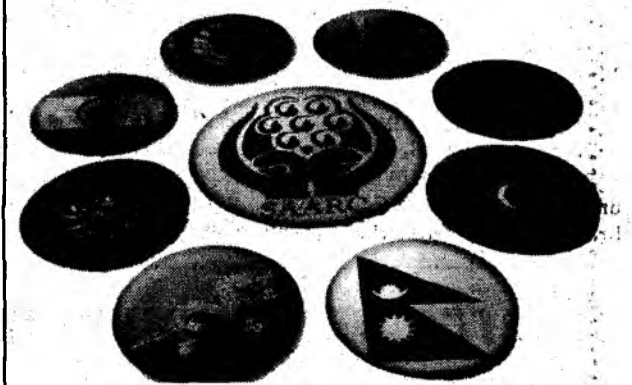
The questions probed here are two, whether we need a South Asian identity or an entity; and the other is what is India's role and inclination in building such an identity. The answer to the second question is easy and obvious. Observers of politics in the India-Pacific region have commented that with the recapture of Kabul by the Taliban with tacit support of Pakistan, the current ally of China, Beijing's 'String of Pearls' strategy is complete.

On Afghanistan, New Delhi has been isolated and the rest of South Asian countries too have been mute spectators to the appalling developments in that country. Only Pakistan has had an active role at the behest of Americans first and now Chinese, out of its vested interests. Quite unfortunate, as Afghanistan is an independent sovereign country, was non-aligned in the past,

tion of South Asia, which constitutes about 40% of the world population.

The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon had said, "The world is looking at India to advance peace, stability, and prosperity. A secure regional economic development will also help India reach its ambitions development goals." Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee while championing good neighbour policy had famously said, "You can change your friends, but you cannot change your neighbours". Implied in this sagacious saying is the strategy of staying at peace and in understanding with the neighbours.

How do we build a South-Asian identity? There are political, economic, security imperatives, which should help forge the South Asian solidarity. But they have not been enough to do so. India did not have the absolute and adequate economic strength to carry her South Asian neighbours at the times of their needs and to meet demands of their development. That is why, despite India's good intentions, her neighbours have turned to other economies mainly China, which is on the prowl to grab the countries into a debt-trap. As India's economy grows, and it must grow fast if the leaders are perceptive and visionary enough, then the burden of South Asian development can be borne by India.



and has been a member of SAARC since 2007. As a matter of fact, the situation in Afghanistan should goad New Delhi into building a South Asian identity strong enough to rebuff outside interventions.

Do we need a South Asian identity? Yes, certainly we do, for the following reasons. One, South Asia is quite integrated geographically, member country share borders. So from the security point of view, if one the South Asian countries faces security threats, internal or external, the other countries will feel the same as spill-over or snow-ball effect. Second, for trade and economic transactions, integration is an imperative. The SAFTA — South Asian Free Trade Area is a good development in this regard, it will be better if it is made more functional.

Third, after the demise of Marxism, cultural factors have re-emerged in a big way to constitute identity politics. The governments, politicians and statesmen will have to reckon with the identity formation and interaction in national and international politics. Hence, instead of allowing the identities to clash at home and abroad, it is wiser to transcend identities and create bigger ones that will subsume regional sub-identities.

Does India need a South Asian identity and how should New Delhi be more proactive in building it? To add to what was said before on India's stake in a South Asian identity, New Delhi must have friendly neighbours before it launches-on to the world stage. No doubt, India is on the cusp of being a world power. India has had all the ingredients to become one. It was just the laggard economy holding it back. Now it is the fifth largest, about to overtake Germany and Japan to become third. India occupies 72% of land surface and 77% of popula-

More important strategy in the interim is to revive the cultural identity of South Asia. It is easier to do. Out of eight countries in SAARC in the ancient past, except for Maldives, rest were one country, one culture defined in Sanatan Dharma. We have dealt with this in the last piece in this column. In modern history, three countries were one seven decades ago. India continues to share deep cultural links, religion, language etc. with three more — Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan. There are marital arrangements taking place between Indians and Nepalese, and Sri Lankans.

The way to go for retrieving and re-asserting the cultural identity is to re-interpret the history. Our historical texts still reflect the wounds and scars of the partitions, and ethnic differences. They should be rewritten to bring out the common past and common identities. That will recreate the sense of sameness and a South Asian identity.

In order to reinforce the cultural re-definition, the persisting border conflicts will have to be resolved. The Gujral Doctrine is one model to follow. The other is continuous dialogue between the governments. While New Delhi can think of a balance of power with China, India having security partners to match the Chinese might; it must initiate a dialogue with Pakistan. With confidence-building measures, bringing in the emotional dimension of divided families living in both countries, India and Pakistan can come together. Kashmir should be put on the table for discussion, not just the Indian part but the part in Pakistan as well. Let this be resolved through dialogue. A South Asian identity will be created by rebuilding the past, and co-creating the future. —INFA
(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JIMMC)

Letters to the Editor

Rejoinder

Editor,
My attention has been brought by my colleagues and peers to your report Smart Meters: Another scam in MeECL-ADB slams firm for faking completion certificate (ST Sep 9, 2021), where reference has been made to role of Advocate General in award of tender to one Satnam Global Infra-projects. It has been stated in the Article that "Advocate General had given green signal in awarding the tender."

The article gives incomplete information and gives the impression that the award of tender to any particular party was endorsed by me which is incorrect and scurrilous.
The opinion sought from me was on the issue that whether tender can be awarded in law, in case of a single eligible bidder. Neither was the name of the bidders or any other information relating to the smart meter tendering process before me. I examined the applicable laws including an O.M. No. FEG49/98/145 dated 5.4.2002 of Govt. of Meghalaya and also judgments of the Hon'ble courts, including of Delhi HC where it was observed that there is no legal bar in award of tender to a single bidder provided there exists justification for the same and provided that the eligibility

conditions are being met and the bid is not financially depressed. Therefore, I have only examined the legal position and provided my opinion thereon. There is no whisper of award of tender to a particular party in my opinion, nor were these facts before me.

By stating that I have given a green signal, the article gives incorrect impression and does so by selectively quoting the facts. This is neither proper nor legal and must be remedied immediately.

Yours etc.,
Amit Kumar,
Advocate General

Kongthong and other whistling cultures

Editor,
All of the prominent national dailies, apart from the Shillong Times, Sep 9, 2021, carried the news that Kongthong has been nominated as 'Best Tourism Village' by the Ministry of Tourism. This nomination has been submitted to the United Nations World Tourism Organization for the Best Tourism Village award. While we are justifiably proud of the unique tradition of Jingrwai lawbei, the village itself has an alluring natural beauty. The adoption of the village by Bihar Rajya Sabha MP

Rakesh Sinha helped place Kongthong on the national map, and the picture of him adorned with a knup has become an iconic image.

I recently learned about Silbo, the whistling language in the Canary Islands, located just off the coast of Morocco and south of Spain. With its terrain of high peaks and deep ravines, it takes a long time to walk up and down even over short distances and whistles carry and echo easily. Traditional shepherds still whistle to one another across mountain valleys that would take hours to cross.

The tuneful language has its own alphabet, vowels and consonants. Silbo has been a compulsory subject in schools since 1999. Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic has forced schools to limit the classes as students need to put fingers in their mouth and blow the whistles. This is difficult with masks and the need to limit respiratory spread.

Whistled speech is used in at least 80 languages around the world, especially in rugged, mountainous terrain or dense forest, where whistles carry much farther than ordinary speech or shouting. According to linguist Julien Meyer, whistled speech can be understood up to 10 times as far away as ordinary shouting can. A complex whistling language in Mexico, Chinantec, has seven tones (high, mid, low, falling high-low, falling

mid-low, rising low-mid and rising mid-high), and takes several months to learn. Some musicologists believe that fluency in a whistled language leads to better flute playing.

Whistled languages are probably an early form of speech, perhaps predating spoken languages. These early attempts at sound communication strengthened the voice box and the throat muscles to enable later speech. Other experts believe that whistling came after monotonal speech as a supplement, not a forerunner. Sadly, some whistled languages have become extinct such as the

Tepehua language in Mexico. Deforestation is one factor.

Perhaps a local linguist can make an audio documentation of the Kongthong whistles so that all of us locals and even interested tourists can learn this fascinating form of communication.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor,
Via email

Meghalaya & Khasi States' territory

Editor,
The territory of the States of Khasi (Khasi & Jaintia) has been defined by the Constitution (Seventh Amend-

ment Act of 1956 presently numbered 2 Assam(?) in the First Schedule referred by Article 1 as: The territories which immediately before the commencement of this Constitution were comprised in the Province of Assam, the Khasi States and the Assam Tribal Areas, but excluding the territories specified in the Schedule to the Assam (Alteration of Boundaries) Act, 1951.

Thus, the territory includes the area of the State of Meghalaya at present held by Assam, and, which is not de facto under Meghalaya's control.

Yours etc.,
Morning Star Sumer,
Shillong — 2

Advocating cashless transactions during pandemic

Editor,
In this age of digital era, payments have become easy. One can make payments conveniently sitting at home, while travelling in a car, sitting in a bar or restaurant, etc. If one so desires, one need not physically visit the particular office to make payments for mobile/landline bills, electricity bills, etc. Similarly, one can place order for delivery of one's favourite pizzas, other eateries/groceries and make

payments online. Internet banking has really made life easier as one can transfer funds through RTGS, NEFT and other mode of payments offered by financial institutions and companies approved by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)/Reserve Bank of India. All these are in line with the cashless transactions advocated by the Government of India.

The efforts made by MeECL in this regard is appreciable. One need not visit the MeECL office and stand in long queues to make payments of electricity bills as they have introduced an online payments system. However, other Government departments such as PHE, Municipal Boards in the State are yet to introduce online payments system. It is high time that these departments, especially the PHE Department take steps to introduce a digital payments system. This will not only save time and money for the public but also lessen the burden of visiting the department during this time of the pandemic.

Yours etc,
FR Marak
Tura

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"The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people."

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Shillong Times

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Stunning silence on corruption

MEGHALAYA'S critical human development indices have all gone south but its corruption levels have soared since 2018. Yet apart from the usual pressure groups that take up all issues from the Inner Line Permit to the extra-judicial killings the civil society is silent on most issues of corruption. There are no protests against the fact that a company from outside the state is walking away with several hundred crores disbursed by the Asian Development Bank — an international monetary agency as loan to Meghalaya with the purpose of strengthening the Power sector by modernizing the distribution network and improving the quality of power supplied to households, industries, and businesses here. That an amount granted as loan to a public sector undertaking which already has a loan burden of about Rs 3000 crore, is not judiciously utilized is going to have deleterious effects on the Power Corporation and might take it to the brink of disaster.

In a democracy, the media provides essential information so that the polity is kept informed about the manner in which they are governed and how public funds from the taxpayers' money is being deployed. Democracy can only thrive if the public raises questions on poor governance. This public is what is termed as "civil society." But if this civil society remains muted because of their vested interests then democracy is watered down. Like they say it exists only in name. In fact, in Meghalaya the ruling class are no better than an oligarch. They take offence when people raise questions on corruption and the poor state of development which is visible in our dilapidated roads and other infrastructure.

Corruption is corrosive and debilitating for the state and for the citizenry. In Meghalaya today there is a discernable lack of transparency in nearly every department. Attempts to seek information on various issues of public importance are met with a disdainful silence and an aversion to respond to queries. The Right to Information Act urges governments to make voluntary disclosures and put up all information in the departmental websites so that citizens can access information without running from pillar to post. But this is easier said than done. In fact, the RTI is sought to be watered down and every information is being treated as classified. In some cases bureaucrats have become compliant and dance to the tune of their political masters instead of bringing in checks and balances in governance by blowing the whistle when they see corruption happening upfront. In this respect Meghalaya is quickly turning into a poorly governed state as it reaches its 50th year.

An Indian August at the UNSC

By TP Sreenivasan

August was India's moment in the journey of the UN

Our man at the United Nations, Ambassador TS Tirumurti, was not very convinced when I told him as part of my official briefing as the head of the UN Division in the Ministry of External Affairs, that he would enjoy his forthcoming multilateral post in Geneva. He was then the desk officer for Bhutan, dealing with weighty matters of our neighbourhood and thought that his work in Geneva would not be half as important. But he took to multilateral diplomacy like fish to water and swam all the way to its pinnacle. More than that, he arrived in New York to take our seat at the horseshoe table and sat at its head for a month with dignity and aplomb. With him sharing the honour were the prime minister, the external affairs minister and the foreign secretary in a rare constellation.

Having been on the Security Council in 1992, including the month in which Ambassador Chinmaya Gharekhan was president, I know that the presidency of the Security Council has its perils. It is stressful, thankless and, at times, embarrassing. The rotational presidency is a feeble attempt at equalising permanent and non-permanent members in a highly discriminatory structure. The permanent members jealously guard their privileged position and drive the Security Council. The non-permanent member, who becomes the president, according to one of my colleagues who preceded me in the Council, is like a child who is permitted to hold the steering wheel for a while, as his father keeps control over the brake and the gears and also watches the road. The thrill of the child is immeasurable as he thinks that he is actually driving the car.

One example of the system during our presidency this time was that the UN Secretary General called a meeting of the permanent members alone to discuss Afghanistan precisely when the president of the Security Council was engaged in intense discussion with the Council members on the same subject. Very often, the permanent members meet separately and bring their decision to impose it on the Council with the threat of veto if their advice is not heeded. The non-permanent members have a collective veto as every resolution needs nine votes, but to pass any resolution, the affirmative votes of the five permanent members are required. Some resolutions get passed even with the abstentions of permanent members because

of a liberal interpretation of the UN Charter. I suspect that it was a collective decision of the permanent members to let the resolution be adopted with the abstentions of China and Russia. They could not have opposed Resolution 2593 (2021), which demanded that Afghan territory not be used to threaten or attack any country and reiterated the importance of combating terrorism in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, in fact, was not expected to explode during the Indian presidency as it was anticipated that the Afghan forces would resist the Taliban for some time. When the agenda of August was announced by the president, he mentioned only Syria (chemical weapons), Syria (political and humanitarian),

in their home countries for briefings on the forthcoming General Assembly session or holidaying in Europe, leaving their deputies to mind the store. When invitations went to other heads of government to participate in the session chaired by our prime minister, anxiety must have increased and ambassadors may have been asked to change their travel plans.

As the preparations were made quite in advance, Ambassador Tirumurti was able to announce at his first press conference as Council president that three important topics—maritime security, peacekeeping and counterterrorism—would be taken up during the month. He explained the rationale of bringing these ideas to

from each of the member states to spend hours, with no holds barred discussions trying to find consensus. The only compensation we offered to the delegates was Darjeeling tea. Ambassador Gharekhan also placed a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi in the president's chamber for a month.

An added peril that faces the mission is the high expectation raised in India about the Council presidency and its ability to reform the UN and make it effective in dealing with global issues. The fact that the position and its timing are determined by the alphabetical order is soon forgotten, as it coincided with our 75th Independence Day month. Many in India even expected that the world would be so impressed with our performance that India would be given a permanent seat in the Security Council straightaway.

The UN lives from moment to moment given its wide agenda and the fact that it means different things to different members, though assembled under a common roof. After every meeting, one set of delegates gives way to another and new concerns and issues take centre stage. Once a resolution is passed or the agenda item is deferred for further discussion, the players disappear and the documents are stored in the archives unless there are action-oriented resolutions, which are very rare. For this reason, the results of the debates are often nebulous and they are forgotten till the topic is raised again in an annual session, or some situation erupts in conflict.

When 9/11 shocked the world, many resolutions and proposals on terrorism suddenly came alive and it appeared as though drastic measures will be taken to eliminate terrorism. But soon the old concerns about the true definition of terrorism and the difference between terrorism and freedom struggle surfaced and the matter was shelved again.

The issues raised by India in August were debated before and our initiative served only to remind the world that no solutions had been found. Principles and concerns were expressed at the highest possible level, but the issues did not move much closer to a consensus.

August was India's moment in the journey of the UN to rid the world of the scourges of war, terrorism and insecurity of the oceans and it was for those who were part of the labours of August 2021 to cherish the moment and feel proud. Nothing more, nothing less.

(TP Sreenivasan is a former diplomat)



UNIFIL (UN Interim Force in Lebanon), Somalia, Yemen, Iraq and the Middle East (Israel-Palestine) monthly meeting, all perennials with little chance of change in a hurry. Besides, there were the three major items India was bringing to the Council on its own initiative. As it happened, India had to call a meeting of the Security Council on Afghanistan first

the Security Council under various agenda items and also informed the press that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would chair the session on maritime security, and that some other heads of Government might also attend in a virtual format.

It was, perhaps, as a compensation for the diplomats involved that the ambassador and his wife, Gouri, prepared

"It is unusual for Council presidents to take up issues on their initiative and they have to be presented as the collective wish of the Council.

It must have taken a lot of effort and time on the part of our mission to persuade other members to accept the additional items, particularly in the month of August, which is a holiday season in New York."

between on the request of the Ghani government, to which India was known to be sympathetic.

It is unusual for Council presidents to take up issues on their initiative and they have to be presented as the collective wish of the Council. It must have taken a lot of effort and time on the part of our mission to persuade other members to accept the additional items, particularly in the month of August, which is a holiday season in New York. Normally, the chiefs of mission would be

millet breakfast, including savoury murukku for them. Modi, a champion of millets as healthy food, tweeted: "Distinguished delegates were also served delicious millet murukku. This is one snack I also relish and urge all of you to try it as well."

In 1992, the Security Council was so preoccupied with the aftermath of the Gulf War that no other item could be taken up. There were tough negotiations in the Council, particularly in the Council consultations room, open only to two members

Yours etc.,
Marlin Diengdoh,
Via email

Learning gaps among school children

Editor,
A survey called School Children's Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL) conducted recently states that only eight per cent children in rural households in India attended regular online classes. The survey on

learning gaps was conducted after schools in the country remained closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey conducted on school children in underprivileged households in 15 states and UTs shows that 37 per cent of children are not studying at all and about a half are unable to read more than a few words.

The report paints a dismal picture of the state of school education caused by Covid-19 in rural areas in the country. The survey found that as the children did not attend schools for a prolonged period of time, there were great discrepancies in their learning levels. Nearly 42 per cent of children in classes 3-5 from rural household were unable to read a single word. 65 per cent of children in urban areas and 77 per cent in rural areas in Grade 2 were unable to read more than a few letters. Further, in both rural and urban areas, just over a half of the children in classes 6-8 are able to read fluently.

The report proves that

Covid-19 pandemic and extended lockouts have caused enormous harm to school education, especially in rural areas. A great deal of sustained effort is required to repair this damage. Given that most of the schools in the country are still remaining closed, setting the school education right is indeed a hard task. Once the schools are re-opened, the schooling system needs to go through a long transition period to enable children to catch up with the curriculum and to restore the different aspects of their development. Unless school classes, especially primary and middle-school are not resumed without further delay, it may be difficult to reverse learning gaps.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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Round the states

By Insaf

Innocent, Not Maoists

Damning, is to say the least. Eight innocent lives were killed, eight years ago in Chhattisgarh! A judicial inquiry report submitted to the Cabinet on Wednesday last should make the then governments in the State and the Centre hang their heads in shame. The report by a retired judge of Madhya Pradesh High Court into the gunning down of eight tribals, including four minors by security personnel in Edesmetta, Bijapur district, concluded that none of those killed had weapons nor were they Maoists, as was alleged at the time of the incident, night of May 17-18, 2013. They were 'unarmed and died in gunfire of 44 rounds, 18 of which were fired by a single constable of the COBRA unit of the CRPF'!

The report termed the incident as 'a mistake' saying the security personnel "may have opened fire in panic." Ironic as it may sound, the report says 25-30 people had gathered that night to celebrate Beej Pandum, a tribal festival 'to worship new life' in the form of seeds, when a 1000-strong security force showed up, claiming it was a Maoist hideout. The incident, adds the report, could have been avoided had the security forces been 'given enough gadgets for self-defence, if they had better intelligence from the ground and had they been careful'. The report has been adopted by the Cabinet. Not enough. North Block must read it and so should State governments. Every life matters.

Row Over 'Namaz' Room
Allotment of a 'Namaz' room in Jharkhand Assembly has stirred a hornets nest. The Opposition BJP

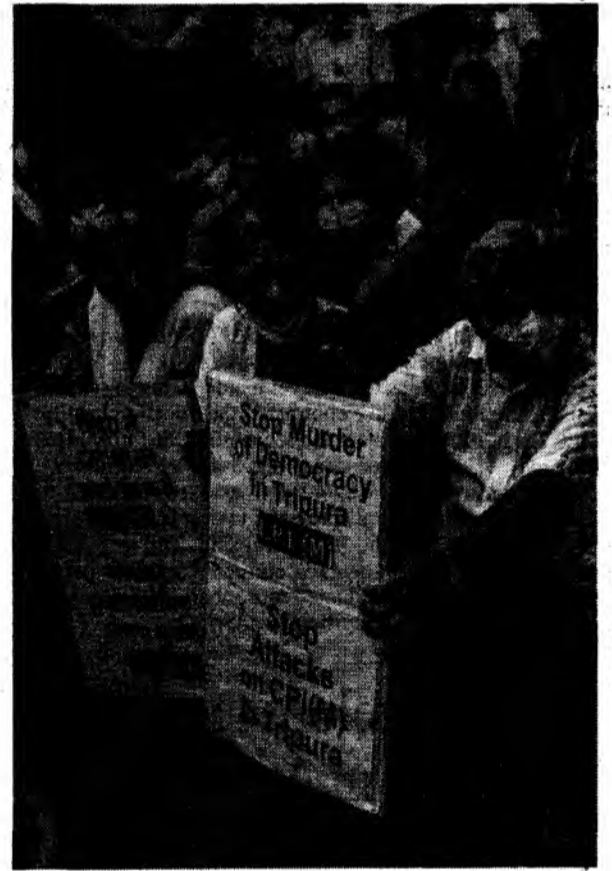
drawn. Time will tell.

Tripura Political Violence

Political rivalry between ruling BJP and Opposition CPM in Tripura takes an ugly and violent turn, forcing the latter to seek Prime Minister Modi's intervention. On Thursday last CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury shot off a letter to Modi complaining of 'pre-planned' attack by 'mobs of BJP men' with connivance of State government a day earlier. The clashes between party workers left 10 persons injured, two CPM party offices gutted, few others vandalised and vehicles burnt. CPM's state headquarters in Agartala was worst-hit among other district committee offices damaged or burnt down and 'houses of many party leaders and activists were attacked, ransacked or set on fire.' Even newspaper offices were not spared. 'Daily Desharkatha', CPM mouthpiece and Pratibadi Kalam were vandalised. Importantly, police confirmed most of the reports of arson, but the big question is where will it end. Using state power to suppress dissent is all too well-known. The police, present at many of the sites was a silent bystander and some CRPF jawans, present in front of state committee office were withdrawn an hour before the attack began. Denying charges, BJP accuses the CPM cadre of fuelling trouble and instigating violence for the past few days. Sadly, in this blame game it is democracy which suffers. But does anyone care?

In National Interest?

Watch your words, is a stern warning issued to faculty and members of staff of the Central University of Kerala. In a circular, the Registrar has asked them to



led protests both inside and outside the Assembly, before the monsoon session came to an end on Thursday last. The BJP accuses the ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha of 'appeasement politics' and demanded the "unconstitutional and undemocratic decision" be withdrawn immediately, as 'secularism means the State shouldn't profess and promote any particular faith.' Interestingly, in the same breath, a BJP MLA demanded a 'separate hall for reciting Hanuman Chalisa, in Bihar Legislature', which too has a separate hall for offering Namaaz since 1993. While JD(U), BJP and Hindustani Awam Morcha (S) didn't agree with the MLA's demand, the HAM (S) asked "What happens if people start demanding construction of a mosque in every police station just because most of it has temples." A notification "Allotment of room number TW 348 as Namaz Hall for offering Namaz in the new Assembly Building," was issued last week on Speaker's order. Following the developments, Speaker Mahto formed a 7-member, all-Party committee to examine the issue and submit a report within 45 days. The BJP is unwilling to accept it and insists they will protest till the notification is with-

abstain from giving any type of "provoking statements or lectures that are anti-national and against the interest of the nation". However, 'anti-national' hasn't been spelt out. The timing though gives ample hint, as it seems to be an upshot of the suspension of an Assistant Professor in Dept of International Relations and Politics who had allegedly described the Sangh Parivar and Modi government proto-fascist while teaching MA students on "fascism and Nazism" way back in April. He also is said to have slammed the Centre's decision to export Covid-19 vaccines, saying it was 'unpatriotic.' The Executive Council had termed his statements as 'anti-national'. Sadly, the term is oft-heard and being blatantly misused, with a clear intent to suppress dissent and criticism in these past few years, specially by BJP-ruled governments. Be it human rights activists, civil society organisations, journalists etc, the head count is ever-increasing. The circular, predictably has ruffled feathers among the academic community. Will it trigger protests, such as the one at Visva Bharati University, against what students call 'safroning' of the campus by the VC? Time will tell.—INFA

Letters to the Editor

On teachers and teaching

Editor,
Apropos of Albert Thyriang's article, "My categories of teachers" (ST Sep 8, 2021), I wish to thank the writer for his very insightful article. In fact, I am an ardent reader of all his articles as he does not vacillate but comes straight to the point. The problem with education in Meghalaya or in this country is that it has never been transformative. There are very few teachers who understand the meaning of the word teaching — which is not what teachers do by dispensing knowledge into empty heads as if the learner is completely devoid of any experience or learning coming from sources outside the classroom. Let me tell such teachers that often the students know more than their teachers in this world of virtual learning. Students are tech savvy while most teachers are not.

As an example, many of us adults and the elderly have to take the help of our younger members including children to fix our problems with technology. The biggest problem in classroom learning is that there is no space for interaction. Teachers don't have time to allot for questions from their students which they are expected to answer. The entire period of 40-45 minutes is wasted in a monologue which is the teaching practised in our country. Few if any teachers create space for interactive sessions. And yet it is through interaction that all of us learn best because we share ideas and learn from one another.

Another problem with our education system is that teachers continue in the same profession for about 25-30 years and yet their performance is never evaluated. Thyriang had written that teachers try and wriggle out of responsibilities on different pretexts. Some are perennially late and teachers are resistant to change. In the deficit school system where

teachers' salaries are paid by the government once a teacher is employed by any school that teacher continues in the same school doing the same job for decades. There is mental stagnation; the teacher loses the enthusiasm to grow and perform better because there is no system of monitoring his/her teaching methods. Students pass out and remember certain teachers and forget others who have made no dent in their lives. When students fail in a certain subject in large numbers, the fault cannot be that of students. It is the teacher who is the problem and who either does not know to teach the subject or is not a good communicator.

There are serious problems in education in Meghalaya where teachers are appointed based on their political leanings. Coming to higher education, when teachers of some colleges are openly aligned to political parties, how do we expect a liberal climate in the classroom. I sincerely hope there is a strong push to create a

group that believes in educational transformation and will push the government to implement progressive policies in education otherwise our younger generation is doomed.

And now after the pandemic when learning will have to begin almost from scratch one can only wait and watch to see if teachers can redeem what's lost in the past 18 months when students barely learned anything at all.

Imagine turns 50

"A deceptively simple ballad, a lasting emblem of hope"



1971 was a tumultuous year. The counter-cultural movement of the 60s was still being felt. Demonstrations were held opposing the Vietnam War and in August, Australia and New Zealand withdrew their troops.

Apollo 15 landed on the moon. Feminist Gloria Steinem made her first address to women in America. Switzerland held a referendum on women's suffrage. In New York, John Lennon sat down at a brown model Z upright piano and began to write what would become an inter-generational, transnational phenomenon — and perhaps the gentlest of protest songs — Imagine.

Imagine was recorded on May 27, at Lennon's new home studio.

The song was released to the world as part of the album of the same name (co-produced by Lennon, his wife Yoko Ono and Phil Spector), on September 9.

For three minutes and three seconds, the lyrics of this gentle ballad present a vision of unity and of hope. It is a space in which to dream of real change in the world.

As with all songs, the interpretations are as broad as the listeners. For many, it is a call for peace; for others it is a prayer.

The verse lyrics, partly based on poetry by Ono, remove all the central components that seem to separate us: violence, hate, borders, poverty, greed, governments, religion, consumerism and capitalism.

The final verse offers a vision of a unified world at peace.

*You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one*

Imagine would become Lennon's best-selling single of his solo career. In 2004, Rolling Stone labelled it third on its list of the greatest songs of all time, saying "we need it more than he ever dreamed".

Unpacking it musically
Imagine is often used to teach beginner music students, but it would be a mistake to think it is just a simple, soft rock, piano ballad.

This perception is due to Lennon's highly effective crafting. As a peace anthem, the song appears simple, but dig a little deeper, and you find layers of complexity and nuance.

Imagine was written in the key of C major, which has no sharps or flats, so it is melodically and harmonically playable and broadly accessible.

The melody is comprised of small intervals (the difference in pitch between two notes), and repeating small motives (a fragment of melody repeated, manipulated or re-positioned throughout the melody), all within a singable range of one octave.

The introduction to the song sets up a gentle sway between harmonic resolution and tension, like

waves on a beach.

The third, longer phrase ("Imagine all the people") steps into a passage of unresolved tension. This culminates in a harmonic state of balance, like a broom standing on end. It can fall either way — forward into resolution (the next verse) or back into tension (the chorus). This balance is intensified as the rhythm section pauses and Lennon sings in falsetto.

*Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us, only sky
Imagine all the people
Livin' for today*

The opening piano chords also create a sense of pushing into tension before falling back to resolution, linking to the dreamlike feeling of the lyrics. The third phrase, "imagine all the people" starts on the four chord and holds that tension until "living for today" lands on G, creating more stability.

Perhaps the most distinctive part of Imagine is the short piano riff between the vocal lines. This riff uses just three notes — A, A# and B — called "chromatic passing notes". Your ear thinks these notes will go up again, to the C chord. Instead, Lennon brings the listener's ear down to the G melody note, creating a gentle sense of unpredictability. Imagine transports the listener. The lyrics lift

the spirit. The easy rises and falls of the melody comfort. Lennon's familiar voice reassures.

A balm in times of crisis
Imagine has inspired an outstanding array of cover versions, sung by everyone from Elton John to Madonna. American singer Eva Cassidy's interpretation remains a particular favourite. Her expression and subtle reinterpretation of the melody, her note choices and phrasing, are breathtaking.

At times of crisis, people have often turned to this song. Queen covered Imagine the day after Lennon's death in 1980; Neil Young played it in the wake of 9/11.

After the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, people gathered on the streets as a man quietly played the song on a piano decorated with a peace symbol.

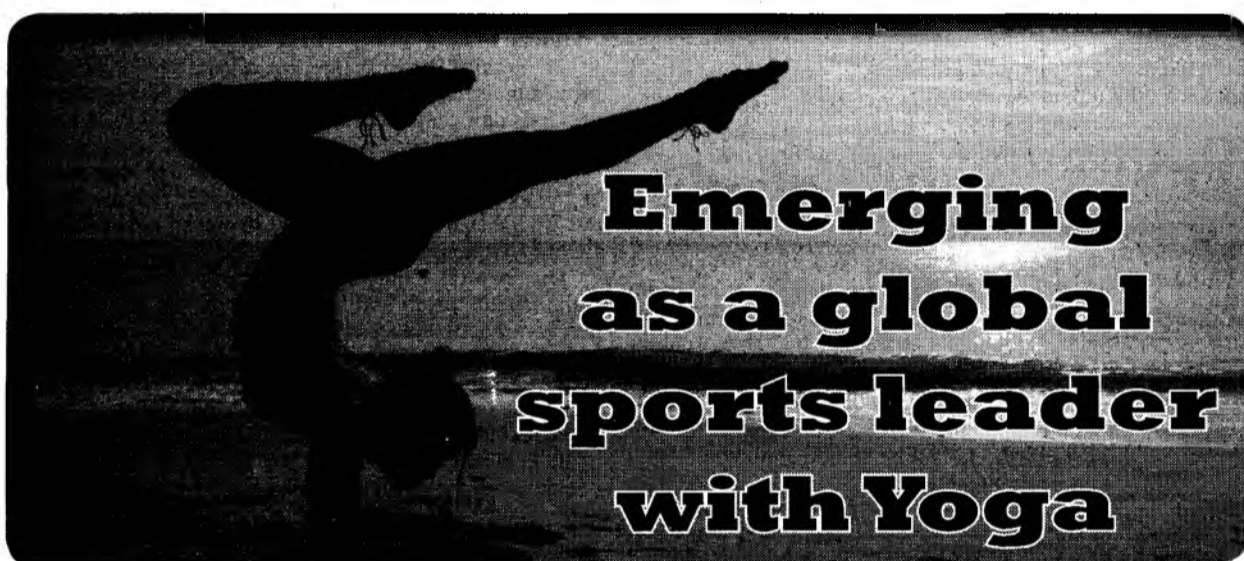
In March last year, at the beginning of the pandemic, Gal Gadot and other celebrities released a now ironically celebrated and much criticised version.

And last September, Melbourne students wrote their own version:

*Imagine there's no Corona
And we can see our friends*

Our interconnectedness and reliance on one another are our biggest strengths. 50 years after Lennon wrote the song, Imagine will accompany us along the way: a lasting emblem of hope.

(The Conversation)



Yoga is a time-honoured tradition in our country and with the worldwide celebration of International Yoga day, yogic practices have evolved from Indian to becoming global traditions. Over centuries of inheriting this practice, Yoga is a lifestyle routine in every Indian household, but it can go beyond daily health also be the means to superior athletic fitness, be it physical, mental or emotional.

Aspects within Yoga

With over 84 lakh asanas or body postures, one can perceive the level of the body's capacity through the practice of Yoga. There are 100s of pranayama techniques revealed, each having its own unique impact on the body and mind. Practices such as 'Khand Pranayama' are prominently upheld on mountainous terrain to help the body to adjust to depleting oxygen levels and still remain in peak functionality. Let's not forget the various meditation techniques that fine-tune the human brain and the emotional quotient of the practitioner.

Body toning and Posture

Each and every muscle within our body is harnessed in the practice of Asanas. These postures maneuver the human body in such ways that regular practice and steady progress bring about an

athletic physique. Complex postures not only work on the basic structural muscles but also balance the internal organ functioning thus, facilitating peak body performance. Asanas bring about perfection in body posture, what is known as the Yogic Spine is a critical output of these practices. A healthy posture or spine is not simply a physical attribute, it is the central channel for all nervous activity and is responsible for instinct and impulse movements which are essential commodities for athletics and sports.

Breathing pattern

The pranayama techniques of Yoga have scientific origins and have proven to have a great impact on the human body. Be it lung capacity, betterment of strength, stamina, improved blood circulation, hormonal stability, improved digestive process, the list of advantages are endless. Each pranayama technique has specific impacts on the body and mind. For any sport, breathing and breath management is crucial and pranayama is the key practice that is sure to bring about an unexpected result in athletes. Kapalhati, Brahmari and Khand pranayama are great techniques for athletes.

Pain management

An athlete is no stranger to

pain, sore, tired and strained muscles are commonplace. There are great practices in yoga such as Yoga Nidra which relax and rejuvenate. Yoga Nidra is a state of complete consciousness coupled with complete relaxation. It is a technique where each and every part of the body is concentrated on, the muscles relax and the nerves are calm. It is an experience that equals hours of sleep.

The mindset of an athlete

Competitive sports require an alternative mindset, both during and away from the sport. The field of competitive sports is a highly stressful one and meditation can bring about a calm, calculated thought process under any circumstance. It trains us to make split-second decisions and recover immediately to prepare for the next move. Sthiti Dhyaan and Aarambh Dhyaan are great practices one can start off with to aid the athletic mind.

Yoga is the unanticipated future of sports, athletics and superior body fitness and India is the ideal training ground. In the earliest parts of human history, we have accounts of Yoga being the practice used for moulding warriors. Today, Yoga can unravel the true capacity of Human physicality and mental capability.

(IANSLife with inputs shared by Grand Master Akshar)

Myths, legends, science around India's geography

In the North, a majestic mountain range emerges from a demon's tantrum. In the South, the avatar of a god gives a forest its name. In the East, a pirate king finds his plans foiled by a formidable force of nature. In the West, a sea keeps a city safely hidden in its deep waters.

Long ago, before science came up with explanations for the events that occurred in nature, people turned to stories to make sense of the wondrous workings of the natural world. And so, a life-giving stream became the gift of a goddess, a hot spring arose from the breath of a celestial snake and a heap of broken boulders served as a testament to a divine battle.

Zigzagging through myths, folklore, local history and geological theories, "Gods, Giants and the Geography of India" (Hachette), an extraordinary book, draws fascinating connections between ancient tales and the science behind the spectacular geography of India.

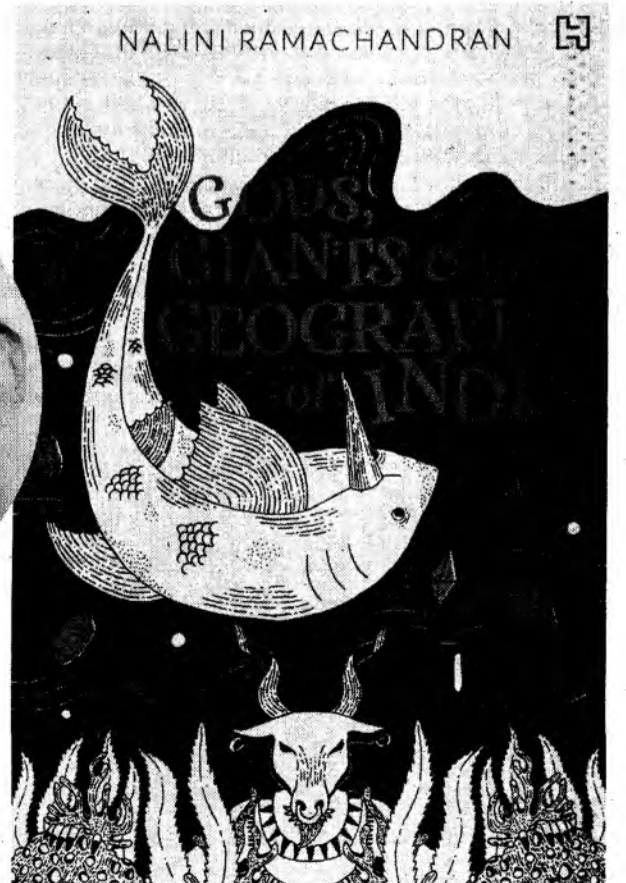
Join Nalini Ramachandran on a most unusual, adventure-filled expedition up, down and across the country's varied terrain!

Nalini Ramachandran is always looking for interesting stories to tell - of glorious goddesses, daunting demons, stealthy shapeshifters, gorgeous geographies, wondrous wildlife and ordinary objects. She began writing for children when working with India's only all-comics children's magazine, Tinkle.

Today, her short stories have appeared in anthologies such as Gifts of Teaching, Scary Tales, and Thank God It's Saturday!

She is the author of "Detective Sahasasimha:

The Case of the Disappearing Books", "APJ Abdul Kalam: One Man, Many Missions" (which won Multistory Learning Pvt. Ltd.'s 'Best of Indian Children's Writing - Contemporary Awards 2019' in the 'Comics/Graphic Novels' category), "Lore of the Land: Storytelling Traditions of India" and "Nava Durga: The Nine Forms of the Goddess". She also edits children's books and holds workshops on creative writing and storytelling. (IANS)



Decoding insect recipes from across the country

By Sukant Deepak

In 2018, while working at Rosie and Peter's Food Forest in Goa, learning how to grow food using regenerative and resilient systems, she was walking around in the garden one day when she noticed that the cacao fruit was being taken over by a colony of weaver ants.

"And we wanted the fruit. So as a means of integrated pest management if you will, we decided to eat the ants. There were four of us, one climbed the tree, the others were holding the garbage bag below the ant nest and finally, with a large pair of secateurs, we cut the nest into the bag, ran to the house and put it into the freezer for a couple of hours. Once they were dead, we made chutney, roasted them on a pan and dipped them in chocolate and even made a little ant-tea out of them. Weaver ants are really sour, and that's my favourite taste profile so I was ecstatic," smiles Tansha Vohra, a writer on food, culture and sustainability, who has been selected as one of the residents for the Serendipity Arts Residency in Culinary Arts.

Vohra remembers writing a story about the process and wondering why insects weren't a part of her regular diet. That followed research on who actually eats them regularly. Her research showed that there are several communities that eat insects in India today, but are historically excluded or are on the margins of the national identity for a number of reasons, and so their culture and tradition is not as accessible. "This sparked my curiosity about entomophagy in India and three years later, I get to study and do research first hand," she says.

In fact, according to the UN FAO document released in 2013, by 2050, there will be nine billion people on this planet with not



enough land to feed them all and the animals that they eat.

The report advocated for edible insects as very real future food, given the extensive sustainability metrics of rearing insects vs livestock.

"As I said earlier, a lot of the people who do eat insects in our country are marginalised, and their food is met with disgust or ambivalence. But it is these practices that display the principles of sustainability and regenerative food systems - and we have so much to learn from this," Vohra says.

Her project, 'Boochi', which she says is the most non-scientific classification of all 'crawley' things in Kannada, and the first word she learnt to refer to insects with, hopes to archive, document and decode insect recipes from

across the country.

Vohra feels that recipes are treasure troves of information as they tell us about taste preferences, seasonality, harvesting methods, gender roles, special equipment/utensils developed, among other things.

"I hope to record this information to help us create resilient food systems for the future. My recipe collaborators are also people who have eaten insects growing up, and I hope that my project gets to give them the mic and let them tell their story and share information with me. I'm just here to ask the questions," she says.

She hopes to get about 20-30 people to cook with an insect at their own home, share the meal with someone and record the experience.

This will not only serve as a qualitative data point, but also enable each of these people to become agents in this conversation about future food.

"Lastly, I hope to have conversations with insect eaters, chefs, innovators, farmers and thinkers about the place of insects on the Indian plate and palate in the future. Simply, my objective is to really explore how entomophagy can lend itself as a sustainable and resilient source of food for the future," she adds.

Considering human beings have always eaten insects as there is archaeological evidence of insect foraging tools in South Africa that date back 1.7 million years, Vohra feels that considering the immense nutritional value of doing the same, government agencies need to come forward to propagate the same.

"Absolutely. It is not about eating insects as a delicacy or something 'crazy' for your Instagram. This is about providing sufficient nutrition to millions of people in a way that is accessible, equitable and safe. A top-down approach is of the essence here," she says.

Asked how people in general react when she talks about entomophagy, and Vohra says with laugh, "For the most part, it's received with very wide eyes. It's been rather mixed -- I've got 'ew, gross, cool, yum' -- the whole spectrum. But now I'm finding more and more people who respond with a 'hmm... interesting'."

"Maybe this says more about the people I'm interacting with than the subject itself, but I think there is a real opportunity right now to talk about 'why insects?'"

Vohra also wants to study urban design and be able to create systems for an urban landscape that considers food, health, safety and happiness to enable cities to be the best version of themselves.

Waiting for Turtles

A story from Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Children's publishing house Karadi Tales has brought out an illustrated book to raise awareness about the oldest group of reptiles, turtles through a story happening on the ecologically fragile Andaman & Nicobar Islands (A&NI).

Authored by Pankaj Sekhsaria, a long time researcher of the A&NI, the book also enlightens readers about the Islands and the various environmental issues surrounding turtles through its informative back matter, a release from Karadi Tales said.

The story is illustrated exquisitely by Vipin Sketchplore, it said.

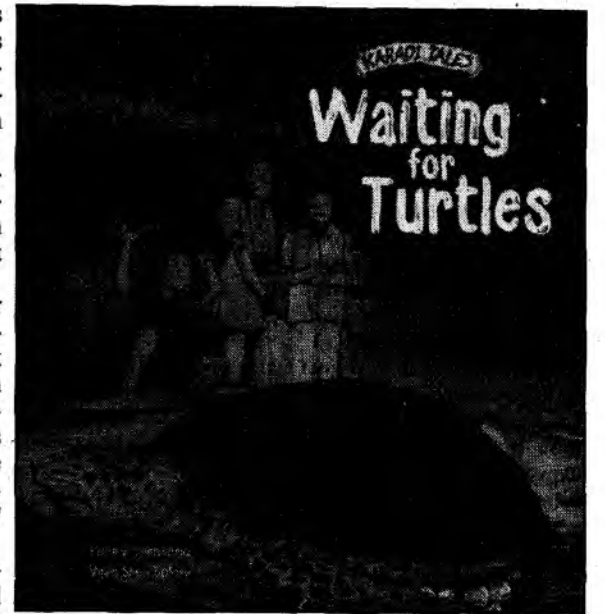
'Waiting for Turtles' is Sekhsaria's first book for children. An environmental researcher, he has earlier written 'The Last Wave' and 'Islands in the Flux' among others.

"The story unfolds on the small island of Tarmugli in the Mahatma Gandhi National Park in the Andamans. Protagonist Samrat is accompanying Seema, his turtle researcher mother, in the hope of seeing his first nesting Green sea turtle that nests on the beaches here. There is disappointment for Samrat but there is also a surprise..." the release said.

Through the story, the book sets out to raise awareness about the oldest group of reptiles, turtles.

It also enlightens readers about the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the various environmental issues surrounding turtles through the informative back matter, the release said.

"The book beautifully captures Samrat's excitement about the magic of turtle nesting and will inspire children to think of studying and working in this field of science. The illustrations on



every page take you to the shores of Tarmugli Island, where you can almost see the stars and feel the breeze. This is experiencing nature vicariously. A must-read for every child!" said Director, Environment Education, WWF-India, Radhika Suri.

It has also been published in translation in Hindi by Karadi Tales with support of the Dakshin Foundation and in Telugu by Manchi Pustakam. (IANS)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPT 12, 2021

Moon sextile Mars on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results for the whole year. You will look for long term goals and want to have stability in your life. Your financial position will get better. You will also plan to get married to a person of your liking. You will also have secret plans and it will be difficult to guess what goes inside your mind. You will also buy a car or a flat. Your enemies will be unable to defeat you. You will achieve miraculous success in certain tasks. As a result, your popularity will peak at the right moment. You will form successful situation in your work to earn profits. Your capabilities and value will be appreciated. Your health is going to pose no major problems.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You will become very popular. People will begin recognizing you and your hard work will start giving good results. Your bosses will also acknowledge your contribution towards your organization. And you could get promoted too. You will also have financial gains and you will spend money on yourself. You will plan to buy clothes and jewelry for yourself. Finally you have started paying attention to your needs too. Your personality will bloom and your name and fame will spread far and wide. Students will work hard and also get good results for their efforts. You will share amazing bonding with your mate/spouse. And will pay attention to their needs. And you could get upset. Even than you need to control your tongue. It is just a passing phase.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

The week will be spent in a happy mood. You could get interested in a person and fall in love. It is beginning of a wonderful period of bliss and joy. Both of you will enjoy each other's company. But do not make any matter a prestige issue with your mate. He/she loves you a lot and cares for you too. Work will proceed at a normal pace. You will get support of your colleagues. You will keep on working hard and get wonderful results. You can also attend a marriage function too. If you are a boss or leader in your organizational set-up, your subordinates will listen to you and obey your orders. You will have financial gains. You will also manage to keep everyone happy.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You will plan to bring changes to your lifestyle. You will also keep away from risky tasks. Rising expenses are a cause of worry for you and you will like to bring it under control. You will also lead a simple life. It may upset your family members a bit but you will be able to convince. Your concern will be towards family and work. You will work hard to increase your income. You will also plan to take some part time job. Your decision making power will be strong. Your goodness will be your strongest point. You will also make best use of your communication skills and will be able to get your work done.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

These are good days. You will get profits in business. New job opportunities will be there for you and you need to grab them. You will be happy and cheerful throughout the week. You will also have a wonderful time with your spouse/partner. It is a very good time for love and romance. If you want to tell your family about your marriage plan it is an ideal time to do so. You will also have monetary gains. But keep your budget under control. You will also plan to buy a new vehicle or house. You will also interact a lot with people on one to one basis. And exchange your thoughts with them. In the process, lot of misconceptions will get removed. You will also take part in various activities. And your name and fame will rise. You will also have new plans in business and they will get executed too.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

It is time to give time to your family now. You need to listen to the problems of your family members. They need your support and guidance. You will prove to be a good friend. But you need also to keep a control over yourself and not impose your views. You will also have financial gains. You will also be able to influence people and will be sociable too. It is a good time from all angles. Your strong personality will be impressive and your boss will support you fully. As a parent, you will be aware of your children's needs. You will be aware of who and what is important in your life. You will avoid being egotistic and will be able to complete your work with the cooperation of others. The placement of Jupiter and Saturn will yield important results for you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

All your worries will get over. Your seniors will adopt a helpful attitude towards you. Even your family members and friends will give you lots of support. You will be enjoying your marital life and have amazing bonding with your partner. You will have monetary gains. Your work will get lot of praise and this will make you become enthusiastic. There will be spring in your steps. You will be a hurry to finish off your work. But you need to exercise lot of

caution. Your meeting with an influential person will open the doors of progress for you. You will also take proper care of your health and diet. You will also plan about your future.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

Your actions will bring happiness and people will come close to you. You will be trust worthy and people will believe in your words. But you will face tough competition from your competitors. The objectives that you have planned for your future and career will get achieved. You will be lucky in love and romance. The movements of the stars will change your destiny. Your name and fame will rise. There will be success and big changes in your daily activities. Your elders will bless you. And your children will listen to you. You will brilliantly carry out all your responsibilities and duties. You will also be busy in financial matters. And will be able to balance your family life and professional life.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

The stars are in your favor. You may fall in love with someone and will have a wonderful time. People will also remain in your favor and you will get a very good response from them. You will also be able to complete your tasks with ease. Your financial position will be good. And your bosses and peers will help you a lot. You will get attracted to religion and spiritualism in a big way. Your health will also improve. You will be busy in business activities. Some persons may conspire against you but will be unable to harm you in anyway. Due to the blessings and grace of God you will be able to overcome all hurdles.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

A chance meeting with an influential person will open the doors of success for you. Your financial condition will keep getting better. You will also pay lot of attention to improve your personality. You will become more easy going. As a result, your relations will improve. You should also pay attention to even the little requirements of your family and house. You need to take careful steps in love relations. You need to be aware of realities that you may be made to face. Students will get success in competitive exams and interviews. You need to show foresight otherwise your almost complete tasks will get stuck due to your overexcitement and haste. Your office related matters will also get solved.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

All the tasks that you think will get completed with ease. You will get full cooperation from your colleagues. Your zest and zeal will remain unmatched and you will be committed. You can also enjoy a beautiful relation with your spouse/partner. Both of you will come closer. You will also meet an influential politician or officer. You will have financial gains. And you will buy something new for your house. Avoid any hot exchange of words with a close person. You will face a sudden problem at your workplace but will be able to overcome it with your tact and wisdom. Read all legal documents carefully before signing it. You will help people a lot and will completely devote yourself into a task but the result will be in your favor.

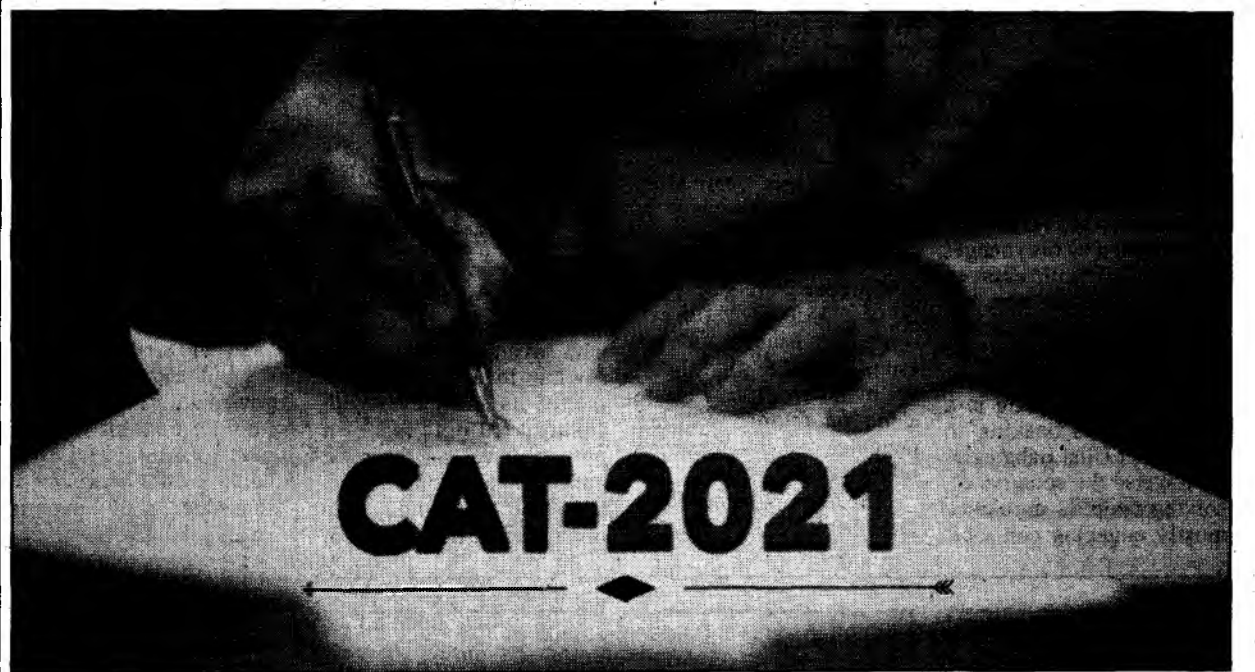
Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will be busy in your business/professional activities. A lot is in stake for you but you will rise to the challenge. You will work with dedication and sincerity. The atmosphere at your workplace will be favorable. You will also be occupied in your daily activities for the whole week. Your romantic life is going to be fascinating and you will enjoy amazing bonding with your mate. You will have belief in your abilities and there will be an increase in your self-confidence. You will interact with people on one to one basis. With the help of your self confidence and capabilities you continue to shine in your work field. Avoid taking any emotional decision in a hurry. Your doubts and misunderstandings will get resolved. Your enemies and opponents will obviously be a cause of stress for you but will be unable to harm you in anyway.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You will have success in professional activities. Even politicians and media person will shine. You will also plan for higher education of your children. You will have favorable atmosphere at your workplace. You will also have new ideas and will be willing to implement them. You will also receive rewards for your efforts and hard work. Your entire focus will be on your targets. In between, you will also get time to spend with your family. You will enjoy joy and warmth in family relations. You will also finalize a business deal. You will also get interested in listening to music, songs and watch movies in free time. Your health will be perfect. The chances of monetary gains are obvious but you need to check your rising expenses. Elders will bless you. And you will look after your parents well.

Understanding CAT



By Ranjan K Baruah

Many students want to get engaged in a profession where they can earn money and support their families and also live a healthy lifestyle. One of the areas of study which may give a quick job is none other than management. The best institutes in India to study courses related to are the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) which have campuses across different parts of the country. There is no doubt that IIMs are considered India's premier national institutes providing quality management education and research. IIMs primarily offer post graduate, doctoral and executive education programmes.

Admission to the two year post graduate programmes in IIMs is based on merit and involves a rigorous selection process consisting of a Personal Interview, Written Ability Test/Group Discussions, and scores in the Common Admission Test which is commonly known as CAT. CAT is a management aptitude test conducted by the IIMs primarily to evaluate and shortlist candidates for the post graduate programme. It is a computer-based exam and a candidate has to follow the due process of registering in order to appear for this exam conducted

once a year. IIMs are leading institutions providing management education in India with the older IIMs having been established more than 50 years ago. Today, there are 20 IIMs established in different parts of India.

Bachelors from different fields may appear for the CAT. The candidate must hold a Bachelor's Degree, with at least 50% marks or equivalent CGPA [45% in case of candidates belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Persons with Disability (PwD) categories], awarded by any University or educational institution as incorporated by an Act of Parliament or State legislature in India or declared to be deemed as a University under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956, or possess an equivalent qualification recognised by the Ministry of HRD, Government of India. The percentage of marks would be calculated based on the practice as followed by the respective University/Institution.

As per the legal requirements, 15% of the seats are reserved for Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates, 7.5% for Scheduled Tribe (ST) candidates, 27% for Other Backward Classes candidates belonging to the "Non-Creamy" layer (NC-OBC), up to 10% for

Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) candidates and 5% for Persons with Benchmark Disabilities (PwD). CAT will be conducted in centres spread across around 158 test cities. Test cities will be mentioned in the CAT website and the name of the test centre will be indicated in the Admit Card. Registration for CAT 2021 opened on Wednesday, August 04 at 10.00 am and closed on Wednesday, September 15, 2021 at 5.00 pm.

CAT 2021 will be conducted on November 28, 2021 (Sunday) in three sessions. The duration of the test will be 120 minutes and there will be three sections which include Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension; Data Interpretation and Logical Reasoning and Quantitative Ability. Candidates will be allotted exactly 40 minutes for answering questions in each section and they will not be allowed to switch from one section to another while answering questions in a section. Candidates are advised to regularly check the CAT website for the latest information.

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at bkrnanjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for further queries)

"When a thing is true, there is no need to use any arguments to substantiate it."

— Vinoba Bhawe

The Shillong Times

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BJP and faceless CMs

THE BJP, having emerged as the largest political establishment in recent years, is yet to form itself into a strong, cohesive force. It worked in the past on the charms of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which is an old story now. Proof of the party's ills is also the manner in which it is changing its chief ministers. In a matter of about two months, it has changed three chief ministers perhaps because they failed to win the confidence of the people. There could be other factors at work too. Ruefully, the party is failing to ensure political stability even as it held majority support in assemblies and parliament.

Gujarat CM Vijay Rupani is asked to step down when elections are a little more than a year away. Karnataka's Yeddyurappa was replaced midway through the government's term; Uttar Pradesh saw a change of two CMs in a short span of a few months. One who is unassailable is Yogi Adityanath of Uttar Pradesh, who has a strong public profile. Most of the rest look up to Delhi for their sustenance. Clearly, change of CMs midway through the five-year term affects the smooth functioning of a government. In Gujarat, hints are that the assembly polls there could be advanced to have it held simultaneously with the polls in UP and a string of other states where elections are due early next year. Significantly, the BJP could no longer wait even for a few more months with Rupani as the head of government.

The chief minister is the principal face of the ruling party. But most BJP chief ministers have no face at all. It was proven that Prime Minister Narendra Modi cannot charm the people and get their votes for the BJP in assembly polls. The lack of a strong leader in the Opposition ranks helps the Modi show going at the Centre. This is not the case with most states where heavyweights are leading the Opposition parties. Fact is, other than in UP, no BJP state government has been able to create positive vibes. Not so the non-BJP governments. Mamata Banerjee proved the huge support she enjoys in the assembly polls this year. In Tamil Nadu, MK Stalin as chief minister is making waves by initiating several new schemes; so too with the YSRC government in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and the KCR government in Telangana. Amarinder Singh as chief minister in Punjab and Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi stand out with their leadership qualities. What of the BJP, in this respect, is worth a loud thought!

Challenge to Khasi Pnar Matrilineal System

By HH Mohrmen

Certain pockets of the Khasi Pnar society question the relevance of the matrilineal family system that the majority of the tribal people in the state are following. The general criticism is that the family system that people follow is the cause of the disconcerting state of affairs in the community. In fact much of the wrong that is happening in the society is blamed on the matrilineal family system. People arrived at the conclusion by comparing matrilineality with patriarchy and the recent NITI AYOOG report which established that matrilineal system does not necessarily guarantee gender equality.

Blame on the matrilineal family system

Critics of the family system had identified many elements in the system which they consider are threat to the jaidbyrniew. 1. The one and principal cause for the downfall of the society are the inter-racial marriages particularly between a Hynfiew Trep woman to a male from another race. However inter-racial marriages between Hynfiew Trep male and non-Hynfiew Trep female is permitted by performing a tradition call 'ka tang jait.' Ironically there however is no 'tang jait' tradition in the Pnar society. 2. Matrilineal system is not in favour of a male member of the society as his status is inferior to a woman. This is why he is irresponsible and have a lackadaisical attitude towards his family it is alleged. He is also a non-entity in both his mother's as well in his spouse's house. 3. The Matrilineal system is also blamed for the increasing number of single-parent/mother families in the community. Again, only women and not men are blamed for the sad state of affairs. 4. People not doing well in business also blame the family system. It is alleged that businesses fail because inheritance passes from a mother to the daughter and hence businesses do not last beyond one generation. 5. Women have more powers than men because not only the lineage passes from a mother to the children but the family property also passes to the female, in particular the youngest daughter of the family.

Traditional concept of marriage in the society
Traditionally in the Pnar

society marriage rituals proceed with the maternal uncle of the woman approaching the maternal uncle of the man to ask for his hand in marriage to the niece and vice versa. The tradition is called "ka li kyllad kurim" but love marriages were also prevalent in the past. It is also important to note that the idea that marriage is forever or that marriage are "till death do us part" is an influence of the western culture. There is a tradition of divorce in the society called "ka e thnem/ chipiah or ka pylleit kurim" in the Pnar tradition or ka "pyllait san shyieng" in the Khasi tradition. And up to our grandmother's generation, at least in my family, they married multiple times but the marriages were not polygamous.

Weddings were only for those who can afford them and were arranged according to "ka kyllad kurim". It was then followed by "ka e ka synjat ka later" engagement or betrothal and then the penultimate ceremony is "ka lam lutang" or the wedding. The majority of the marriages either follow the tradition of "pyneche kurim" when the Kur (clan) of both sides of the family meet to legitimise the marriage but there is a large section also believes in cohabitation (a couple decide to live together)

The status of maternal uncle in the society

The foundation of the Hynfiew Trep society is the clan and his/her life revolves around the clan which is led by the maternal uncle. In the matrilineal society the maternal uncle is the main functionary of the clan and he is responsible not only to guide but also to officiate as the priest of the family. He is responsible for performing the rites and passages of all the member of the Kur. The uncle is the head of the Kur but decision is always made in consultation with all the members of the family including the female members. The "ka kmai tung/lungblai" the clan's main house is at the same time the sanctuary where all the rites of passages are held and is the meeting place of the Kur. The question is how can a family be more democratic than this?

The growing number of single parent family

The main cause of this social conundrum is because ka Kur is not as close-knit as it used to be. It has ceased to be the social security on which a clan member can fall back in times of need. Ka Kur now exists as an umbrella organisation only. The idea of "ka longing longsem" has changed from a collection of families which belongs to the same Kur (joint family) to a nuclear family. Divorce was prevalent in the past too but the Kur looked after its own. As pointed in previous articles, orphanages, old-age homes and homes for destitute women were unheard of in the past because the Kur took care of its own members. Till date there are very few Khasi Pnar beggars because it is a shame for the clan if one of their own has to beg to survive.

Success of a business is not on the family system

The matrilineal system is still thriving among the section of the society where people are still following the Niamtre religion. It is in such societies that the tradition where the maternal uncle is responsible for the Kur still prevails. In such Kur the family business also flourishes because the management of the business passes from the uncle to his nephew. On the other hand questions may also be asked if business is a guaranteed success in the patriarchal society. Businesses fail because of many factors but the matrilineal system is not one of them.

Gender equality in the society

There is no denying the fact that the status of a woman or a girl is much better in the matrilineal society than in other traditions. One of the factors is that lineage is taken from the mother; this however turns out to be a burden in the case of a single parent family. With regards to family property she is merely a custodian of the same and with growing population of landless families in the community; the tradition is of no use to them. By tradition, women have a very insignificant role in the function of the Dorbar Shnong, the Raid and the Hima. In the traditional religion she has a role in some aspects of the religion but mostly subordinate to her male counterpart. The status

of women in Christianity is of no surprise either because it is oriented around patriarchy. Perhaps the NITI AYOOG report is based on these factors hence it concluded that gender equality is still a distant dream in the society.

Is there a perfect family system?

It is argued that the matrilineal system is irrelevant now but are alternatives free from flaws? What is the status of a female member of the society in such a tradition? Is there no dowry system or favour for a boy child in the patriarchal society? Is it not true that there is huge gender inequalities in such a society? What about divorce rates? Is it not true that divorce rate is highest in the western culture which follows patriarchal society?

It is ironic that while we claim that we want to protect our identity but at the same time we want to do away with the only aspect of tradition that distinguishes us from the others. We want to protect ourselves but we are giving up on our culture and our tradition, and we want to follow the tradition of our adversaries. What is it that we are protecting? Are we not a confused lot?

Matrilineal system is not perfect

The matrilineal system may be an imperfect system but it is the only system which suits the jaidbyrniew because it was their way of life since time immemorial. It is an intrinsic part of their unique tribal way of life and it connects them to every aspect of their lives and to nature.

What are we without the matrilineal system? It is the foundation of our relationship with each other. Without the matrilineal family system the clan system will also collapse and people's understanding of relationships will also crumble. The cardinal principle of 'tip kur tip kha' will be redundant then.

Way forward

The next step forward is to accept changes and evolve with time. Here the respective Seng Kur (clan association) has a big role in taking the community forward. The effort should be to repair aspects which require mending and improve the existing system.

Hhmohrmen67@gmail.com

CPI(M) and rejuvenated TMC. Congress in combative mood

Tripura BJP resorting to terror against opposition

By Arun Srivastava

The chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, Arun Mishra, who has shown extreme alacrity in announcing a probe in the post poll violence and constituting a BJP controlled probe panel has intriguingly been maintaining a passive attitude towards the brutal assault and reign of terror let loose by the BJP and RSS cadres in Tripura.

The political situation in Tripura has turned quite volatile with the BJP goons and cadres not only targeting the TMC, but also attacking the CPI(M) cadres and setting on fire their offices. Bhanu Smriti Bhavan – the CPM state headquarters – and Dasarath Bhavan were set ablaze, while several vehicles outside were also torched. At least 10 persons were injured, two party offices destroyed and at least six vehicles set ablaze, amid the clashes.

A few local newspapers like Pratibadi Kalam and Daily Desher Katha, as well as PB24, a local TV channel, were also reportedly attacked; and journalists injured general secretary of the CPIU(M), Sitaram Yechuri has written to the prime minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention to stop the "pre-planned" violence targeting party offices in Tripura by "mobs of BJP men".

Describing the attack on the state committee office in Agartala as the most brazen, Yechuri said "In a pre-planned fashion, scores of offices of the CPI(M), including the state headquarters, were attacked by mobs of BJP men. Among the offices which were damaged or burnt down are the Udaipur sub-divisional office, Gomati district committee office, Sepahjala district committee office, Bishalgarh sub-divisional committee office, Santar Bazar sub-divisional office, West Tripura district committee office and the Sadar sub-divisional committee office".

The party chief described the attack on the state committee office in Agartala as the most brazen. "They have ransacked the ground and first floors of the office, burnt two office cars and broken the bust of Dasarath Deb, a revered leader of the people of Tripura," Yechuri said, adding that the houses of many CPM leaders and activists were also attacked, ransacked or set on fire. Yechuri claimed police and the CRPF took no action.

Yechuri appealed to the Prime Minister: "We strongly urge you to intervene without any delay to stop these violent attacks against the CPI(M) and the Left Front", he also said; "The impunity with which the attackers operated shows the connivance of the state government".

In an ubiquitous manner the BJP justified its attack on the CPI(M) by alleging that the TMC has a "secret pact" with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which had ruled Tripura for nearly 25 years till 2018. Shocking indeed CPI(M) joining hands with TMC gives the BJP the authority to attack the CPI(M) cadres and set on fire its offices. Strange are the arguments. It simply implies that we are not leaving in a democratic country and any political party will have to take the permission of the BJP-RSS leaders to undertake their normal political activities.

Last week, the TMC had claimed that two of its youth leaders from West Bengal sustained injuries after being attacked by BJP workers in Tripura's Dhalai district. CPI-M offices were allegedly attacked by activists of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after violent clashes erupted between the two parties, in different parts of Tripura and in capital Agartala, on Wednesday, 8 September.

In a significant develop-

ment the former CPI(M) leader Ritabrata Banerjee who recently joined the TMC has appealed to the 'leftists' in Tripura to back Mamata Banerjee & 'save Red Flag'. He said that the TMC would never vandalise opposition party offices or destroy Lenin's statues after they come into power in the state. He called out the Left supporters in Tripura to support Mamata Banerjee. He also appealed to the Left party supporters in the north-eastern state to "strengthen Mamata Banerjee's hand" if they really wished to "save the red flag". He hit out at the Tripura government and said that the TMC would never wrong the people of Tripura.

Banerjee came out with the statement after the BJP-IPFT dispensation bulldozed a statue of Vladimir Lenin in Belonia town, and demolished many CPI(M) party offices in the state. The government had carried out the demolitions claiming that the establishments were illegally set up over government land. The TMC had unseated the Left Front in West Bengal in 2011 after 34-years in power. The CPM claimed that they have been facing similar attacks from the BJP in Tripura for the last four years. The northeastern state of Tripura witnessed violent clashes between activists of the ruling BJP and the principal opposition, CPM on Wednesday.

These clashes were preceded by an earlier round of violence on Monday between workers of the two parties, when former Tripura chief minister Manik Sarkar was allegedly prevented from proceeding to Dhanpur.

It is widely perceived that the situation would favour Trinamool Congress to make a head way in the state politics ahead of the polls in 2023. Already Mamata and her party leaders have decided to catch the bull by horns. The Trinamool party, encouraged by its landslide victory in the Bengal Assembly elections has set eyes on the two BJP-ruled states in the Northeast - Assam and Tripura.

Persistent attacks on the visiting TMC leaders by the BJP activists has already started having adverse impact on the BJP as a large number of the political activists are joining TMC. BJP's aggressive posture towards the Tripura is proving to be counterproductive for the state's ruling party. The party which was once described as an insignificant force and a non-threat in Tripura is gradually becoming a pivot of all anti-Biplab (chief minister Biplab Deb) forces in the state.

Sushmita Dev joining TMC is also proving to be a major gain. Her father late Santosh Mohan Dev was a two-time MP from Tripura and was instrumental in helping the Congress to win the 1988 Assembly elections. Sushmita Dev had visited Tripura several times in the past and is a known face in the state. The CPI (M) meanwhile took out a rally headed by former minister Manik Dey in the state capital Agartala. "I strongly condemned the murder of democracy by BJP in Tripura," said Dey. He alleged that the BJP attacked CPM in "a barbaric way" in Tripura. Ransacking party offices across the state, burning offices, are a "murder of democracy".

The stage is set in Tripura for a bitter fight among the three principal contenders BJP, CPI(M) and Trinamool for the state assembly elections slated in 2023. The political situation will further hot up as the TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee visits Tripura shortly to discuss the political strategy with her state cadres. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

What's win-win about oil palm cultivation?

Editor,

It baffles me to read that Conrad Sangma (*Shillong Times*, September 8, 2021) is still toying with the idea of introducing palm oil cultivation to Meghalaya especially after his brother James (*Shillong Times*, 31st August 2021) and his sister Agatha have expressed their opposition to the idea (*Shillong Times*, August 28th 2021).

Agatha Sangma's protest is clear and unambiguous. She rightly points out such plantations would lead to 'loss of forest cover', loss of habitat for endangered wildlife, while 'the large-scale adoption of a foreign species of plant entailing water-intensive harvest will cause irreparable ecological imbalance besides depleting the groundwater table'.

If pointing out the above environmental hazards were not enough, she also spells out how cultural identity in the North East springs from a symbiotic link with the land. 'Ownership of land is a centrality of any tribal society [and] widespread plantation for commercial gain in all possibility will detach the tribesman from his prized possession of land and wreak havoc on the social fabric'. Not that this loss of identity and a sense of exile from their roots is not already

experienced by countless inhabitants of the state.

Where is Conrad Sangma's 'win-win' situation in such a bleak scenario? He talks about utilising 'barren land' and 'non-forested areas', but does he query why land is barren or non-forested or is that too uncomfortable? Of course, like so many of those who hold political power, he knows full well that indiscriminate tree felling and exhaustive mining practices have degraded the land, so why would anyone want to add to the desertification by introducing palm oil plantations? But as is the trend in Meghalaya, so long as these 'commercial' projects go ahead and continue to benefit the chosen few within and outside the state, who cares about the landless and the voiceless or the silent cries of the patient earth? Have our representatives drifted so far away from their native roots that they no longer empathise with those who still live on and in sympathy for the land? Do they not realise that by dancing to Delhi's tune we are forging an identity dictated by the rules of the outsider? Is that what we want? It is certainly not what I want.

Finally examine Agatha Sangma's other observation that 'The plantation areas selected are the north-eastern region and the Andaman Islands both of which are biodiversity hotspots and ecologically fragile'. Yes,

why choose these areas? Is it because we are so far away from the seat of 'real' power that we are regarded as wilderness waiting to be tamed and civilised (i.e. exploited), or is it because we are seen as mere 'dependencies' and therefore our compliance is all but guaranteed? This ignorant, patronising, don't-care colonial attitude has to be challenged and we can only do it if we the citizens of Meghalaya protest, and rise up to protect the ecological fragility of our homeland failing which, we will forever lose the sacred privilege of living in a biodiversity hotspot and the right to call ourselves a tribal community with a distinctive heritage.

Use the ballot box wisely.
Yours etc.,
Janet Hujon,
Via email

Obeying His Master's Voice

Editor,
Despite condemnation and disapproval from almost all quarters, be it from the NPP MP from Tura, Agatha Sangma, the Meghalaya Environment and Forest Minister, James Sangma, environmentalists, subject matter specialists, social activists, and concerned citizens, Conrad Sangma the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, has apparently decided to turn a deaf ear to calls of caution

as far as the introduction of Palm oil cultivation in Meghalaya is concerned. Alone he seems determined to stand out as the only champion for the introduction of the NDA's National Mission on Edible Oils - Palm Oil scheme for NE India. His latest argument is that Govt will ensure a balance before taking any decision on the matter (ST Sept 9, 2021). Now which Govt does he mean, for neither the one in the Centre nor the State find much credibility with the public here. Again this argument, the need for a balance, only strengthens the conviction that the Palm Oil proposal is dangerous and detrimental to the interest of the state and hence the Govt's need to come up with a compromise. The question that immediately springs to mind is where and in which aspects do we need to compromise?

If the balance required is in the realm of environmental degradation, then needless to say there is very little scope for a compromise in that field. The CM has stated that it will be a win-win situation for the state if it can utilise barren and non forested areas. Now there is very little barren area in Meghalaya and if there is it is found only in the plateau area which has cold frosty winters unsuitable for palm oil. So barren area utilisation as claimed is out.

Does Meghalaya have non forested areas? Here we enter into uncertain territory

as some have defined jhum fallows areas as non forest. But are they? Jhum fallows are actually areas left undisturbed for a period of time for the rejuvenation of forests. Once they rejuvenate people return to them for reconducting their jhum activities. This is termed as the jhum cycle, a practice that allows temporarily cultivated hillsides to revert back to their original forest status. Introduction of permanent mono-cropping in the form of palm oil plantations in Jhum fallows will actually result in preventing forests from rejuvenating themselves. Jhum fields will then give way to permanent crop plantation which in turn will adversely impact on the food security situation of the local people involved. In reality palm oil mono cropping in these hills is a manmade recipe for the environmental disaster we all seek to prevent. Any compromise is thus misplaced.

The CM has also claimed that palm oil cultivation will enhance livelihoods and income. Now this is a powerful argument in favour of palm oil but can it stand the test of time? Ground reality might be just the opposite. Whose income will it enhance? Palm oil cultivation will require large plantations otherwise it is uneconomical. So if forests are to be spared then on whose lands will the plantations take place? It will only mean contract farming, which in the absence of an MSP for

our farm products, can only result in distress sales for our farmers or for the takeover of large tracts of cultivable land by corporates which in turn will result in loss of land and livelihoods for our rural poor. Yet if the Centre and the State Govt is really concerned about promotion of edible oils why don't we go in for enhanced production of oilseeds such as Mustard, groundnut, soybean and sunflower. These are crops our farmers are comfortable with; can be cultivated in the small holdings of our poor and marginalised upland farmers and their promotion is unlikely to adversely affect the environment, the land tenure system of the state nor the livelihoods of our farmers.

In view of the above I sincerely believe that there is a lot more sense in adhering to the age-old proven system of retaining and promoting forest related farming systems for our mountain areas than to simply blindly obey His Master's Voice from Delhi. To plunge in simply to please the corny capitalistic concepts of Modi and Co might simply lead our poor cultivators into a trap they might have great difficulty getting out of.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah
Via email

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

"Tomorrow hopes we have learned
something from yesterday."

— John Wayne

The Shillong Times

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Vaccination resistance

THAT a sitting MLA died of Covid without being vaccinated or taking treatment despite showing symptoms of the disease should raise some very fundamental questions about Meghalaya's vaccination status. The daily statistics of deaths due to Covid show that nearly all of those who have died so far were not vaccinated. But that fact does not seem to bother those who are congenitally averse to the vaccination. The Health Department has used all the known strategies to convince people about the efficacy of the Covid vaccine and how it can prevent a severe attack of the disease even if one were to contract it.

There are many who question why they still have to wear masks and strictly follow Covid-19 protocols even after being vaccinated with both doses. Its important for health workers and influencers to be upfront about vaccine efficiency. Medical experts aver those vaccines offer strong protection, but that protection takes time to build. They say people must take all the required doses of a vaccine to build full immunity. For two-dose vaccines, vaccines only give partial protection after the first dose, and the second dose increases that protection. It takes time before protection reaches its maximum level a few weeks after the second dose. For a one-dose vaccine, people will have built maximum immunity against Covid-19 a few weeks after getting vaccinated. However, health scientists have all said that the vaccine does in no way guarantee that those who are vaccinated will not contract the Covid-19 virus. All they say is that the vaccine can prevent a severe outbreak of the disease which would require hospitalization and an ICU bed or oxygen support. They say vaccination ensures that the virus is weakened and hence people would recover with little or no medical intervention.

Normally, it is expected that elected representatives would be the first to take the lead in taking the vaccine so that they can then convince their people to be vaccinated. And they should do that by publicly demonstrating their vaccination status. But in Meghalaya there are different categories of societal leaders that openly propagate that vaccination is counter productive and has some serious effects in the long run; this despite scientific evidence to the contrary. So far only less than 50% of Meghalaya's population have received both doses of the vaccine, thereby leaving a huge chunk still vulnerable to severe Covid-19 infection. This challenge has to be overcome through incentives as adopted by Bihar and other states where the unvaccinated don't get their rations.

Create space for the youth

Meghalaya's farm mechanization

By KN Kumar

Agricultural labour is both scarce and expensive in Meghalaya, particularly so, when the farmers need them the most - so much that even mobilizing labour is a challenge to them during the peak agricultural season. Most farm activities are time-bound, so labour shortages during the critical phases of cropping season and the consequent higher wage burden create both managerial and financial stress to the farmers. When agriculture becomes unviable, small, and marginal farmers (who hold 83% of our land holding) slowly move out of agriculture, unable to bear the persistent losses. Some farmers do use their own family labour and continue farming, but at a very basic subsistence level. One way to pull the farmers out of this mire is to make appropriate farm machinery available to them. The more a farmer deploys agricultural machinery during a crop cycle the less will be his cost of cultivation and therefore, better returns accrue on the capital employed. Appropriate and timely usage of agricultural machinery reportedly increases the productivity up to 30% and reduces the cost of cultivation by 20%. To my mind, one key handle to accomplish the stated desire of the Prime Minister to double the farmers' incomes by 2022 is to lower the cost of cultivation through farm mechanization.

Half of India's population would be urban by 2050 and therefore the percentage of agricultural workers in the total work force will drop from the present 41.49% to 25.7% by 2050. That means about 2 crore labourers will move away from agriculture in 30 years. Declining availability of manual labour is an an-going national phenomenon, but the situation is far more acute in hilly and low population-density states like Meghalaya. The 2011 Census report informs us that the percentage of agricultural labourers in Meghalaya is a very low 16.7% (as against the national availability of 41.49%) - which is as it is, far lower than what India would have by 2050, or later. One can imagine how acute the labour shortages are, in our state.

High labour wages de-

termine the viability of our agriculture because most important cereal crop of Meghalaya is also the most labour-intensive one. A hectare of paddy will need at least 100 man-days of labour. From land preparation to the final milling, there are at least dozen stages of the crop when manual labour will be required, therefore, a farmer spends a minimum of Rs. 45,000/- per hectare, on labour alone. (Meghalaya's market wages being about Rs.450/- per day). The average yield of Paddy is about 2.6 M.T. per hectare and at an MSP of Rs.18680/- per tonne (2020-21), the price realization is Rs.48,568/- per hectare while the cost of cultivation (all inputs included) of Paddy per hectare is more than Rs.85,000/-). With such economics, who on earth would do farming?

Now let us consider where we are, as a state in farm mechanization. NABARD reports that only 40-45% of Indian agriculture is mechanized. 95% of the USA's agriculture is mechanized. In India, the north-eastern region is the least mechanized, and Meghalaya is even below Tripura and Assam in terms of farm power availability. While the all-India average is 2.2 Kw/Ha our state's per hectare farm availability is just 0.8938 Kw/Ha. which is not just low but is also growing slowly. At a bi-annual growth rate of 0.0152 Kw/ha the state will take at least 125 years just to reach the national average. Who has that kind of time?

Then what have we been doing all these years? To begin with, there are only two state schemes - (1) Supply of subsidized agricultural machinery for the farmers to buy and, (2) Government Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs), to lend machinery to farmers who cannot afford to buy. The former scheme is limited only to power tillers, but the scheme is constrained for funds. We must increase the allocations ten-fold under this scheme annually. The subsidised hiring charges being attractive to the small and marginal farmers, they flock to the CHCs. The state has only 7 CHCs in the old

districts. The proposals to establish new CHCs in the four new districts have not yet been approved, despite the repetitive requests made by the Directorate for nearly four years now.

The Commission took stock of the available machinery in the CHCs and their deployment to the farmers over a three-year period. In all, there were only 139 power tillers, 8 tractors, 46 Power Paddy reapers, and 3 Excavators. While the number of requests for power tillers by the farmers during 2020-21 was 1474, the actual allocation was limited only to 333. In other words, only 22% of the farmers who intended for power tillers have been provided with them. The availability over demand was 58% in 2018-19, 21% in 2019-20, and 22% in 2020-21 - a declining trend. Power Tillers are the most in demand and 70-80% of the total revenues of the Mechanical Wing are generated by the Power Tillers alone.

Another point of concern here. Most agricultural machinery currently being provided by the Mechanical Wing is cereal-centric, more specifically Paddy-centric. Commodity processing machinery viz., Turmeric Slicers, Dehydrators, Expellers for Oil Seeds, Millet de-hullers, or plantation crop machinery like the Arecanut Tree Climbing Scooters, or micro irrigation machinery viz., zero energy pumps, micro irrigation pumps etc. are not on its radar. The Mechanical Wing has essentially limited itself to the very basic functions of processing paperwork relating to the tried and tested machinery and not experimenting with new machinery for newer crops, nor is it mandated to procure next generation machinery. Artificial Intelligence in Agriculture, Drones in Agriculture, and Blockchain technologies - are not even on the table. I am certain that this is no reflection on the field engineers because they are doing their best within the mandated framework. This is not an operational slip-up; it is a conceptual failure. The Agriculture Department should examine all these is-

suess deeply to re-orient the approach. Undeniably, the Mechanical Wing has the best potential to serve the farmers of the state and it should live up to its full potential.

The Government of India tried to establish private custom hiring centres in the past, through its Agri-Clinics and Agri-business Centres Scheme (ACABC) in 2002 for the unemployed agricultural graduates. However, there were not many takers at that time in the state because (1) unemployed agricultural graduates were fewer at that time (2) non-agricultural graduates were not considered and (3) The viability of the scheme was suspect because ours was still a low-volume agriculture at that time. However, the times have changed and a fresh effort to give space to the private sector is now needed. The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund launched by the Government of India creates a perfect enabling ecosystem and an amount of Rs.190 crore earmarked for the state remains unutilized.

So, I suggest that the state department conceptualizes a scheme for the participation of the unemployed and educated graduates of the state by grounding a at least eleven Agribusiness & Technology Solution Garages (ATSGs) in each of the districts of our state. An investment of Rs 25 lakh per unit on a 10:40:50 ratio - 10% being the beneficiary's contribution, 40% being the subsidy support and 50% loan will be reasonable enough to move forward. The net results: (1) the burden on the government is minimized (2) youth will be productively engaged (3) the farmer's needs will have been met and (4) agriculture becomes more productive, and the farmer incomes will improve.

To cut to the chase - the state must intensify its investments in farm mechanization by ten-fold annually if it does not want to disrupt its food security. Launching a Farm Mechanization Mission with a one-time investment of Rs 100 crore will bring a radical change. Is Anyone listening?

(The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission. Email : upoindia@gmail.com)

MSME sector

A beacon of hope for our economy

By Gary Marbaniang

Had it not been because of the insistence of my mother, sister and brothers, I would have left Shillong one month ago and I would have been working in a Micro, Small and Medium enterprise (MSME) office way down south by now. My decision was touch-and-go and in the end considering everything that's going on in the world right now and the poor health of my ageing parents, I decided to stay back.

The MSME sector in India is like a sleeping giant. When it finally wakes up from its deep slumber, it will put India in a position where it aspires to be. The MSME sector in Meghalaya on the other hand has not even taken off yet; it is still trying to find its wings. This is the sad reality of the manufacturing sector in Meghalaya. Interestingly I read a news article where our current Chief Minister spoke about the importance of the MSME sector in augmenting economic growth and development in 2018.

(SMEs) in Germany in 2018. About 99 percent of all firms in Germany belong to the SME sector. Most of them started out as family units and they have been around for generations. They specialise in a few products. This is what sets the German economy apart. Apprenticeship is provided by the SME sector itself and most of the young apprentices end up working for the enterprise that gives them the training when they've finally attained the necessary skill-sets. Approximately 82 percent of apprentices get their vocational training in an SME. German workers are well paid too, they work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. Germany has carved a niche for its products in the international market. Most of its export products are generated from its vibrant and robust SME sector.

Like I mentioned earlier, most of the SME units in Germany started out as family units. Our tribal society where kinship is still strong can easily take a cue from



He said, and I quote, "The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) are not getting the required attention of investors, despite being the real drivers of the economy."

I'm privileged to have struck a friendship with a woman who has the know-how, skill-set and who is tailor-made to be an entrepreneur and a torch bearer for the next generation. I've learned a lot from her. She knew what she wanted since she was in school. So as soon as she finished school, she decided to further polish her skill-set by pursuing a field of study that was in line with her ability and aspiration. Now she's living her dream and she's also providing a platform for other young people to follow their dreams. We need more independent thinking women like her in society. What made her realise her dream is also to a large degree due to the unwavering support of her parents. There are many equally talented people in our State but sadly for them, they don't have the support system to stand on their own two feet because to begin a start-up or a business venture they need to take those first baby steps and someone needs to be there for them morally and financially in the initial stages, either in the form of parental support or governmental hand-holding. Unfortunately for most, the kind of support they need to spread their wings is found wanting.

The German economy should be a model economy for a small state like ours. According to the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy of Germany, the Small, Medium Enterprise (SME) in Germany known as "Mittelstand" contributes about half of the total economic output and almost 60 percent of the jobs. These are really impressive numbers. According to Statista, there are more than 2.52 million Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

the German SME model. Our traditional products are unique too. Our policy makers with the help of the Central Government can carve a niche for our traditional products in the international market.

Recently I saw a news item where the "jainsem," the traditional attire for Khasi women, was displayed in a fashion show in London. There's obviously an interest in our culture and traditional products in the international market and if we could give a platform for our entrepreneurs to showcase their products in the international market, then it bodes well for the future of the micro, small and medium enterprises in our State in particular and the manufacturing sector in general. The nature of our tribal society is tailor made for small and medium enterprises.

Last year when the pandemic started, the women in our family including my mother and my sisters out of the blue started making hand-made masks. They don't have any formal training. Tailoring is a hobby for most Khasi women. One can only imagine the goods they'll produce if most of them are given formal vocational training.

Our young people need governmental support and a platform to showcase their talents. My friend who I mentioned earlier is now given an opportunity to other young people to hone their skill-set. Hopefully they'll also do the same when they become masters of their crafts. From what I know, the State government is doing its bit to promote and support our talented young people but more needs to be done to tap the hidden talents of our youth. If we can create a multiplier effect in the MSME sector in our State, then the future looks bright for an otherwise bleak and struggling economy.

(The writer can be contacted at gary.marbaniang@yahoo.in)

Letters to the Editor

A sincere politician

Editor,
I was saddened to hear the news of the untimely demise of Er. S K Sunn, a vibrant and lovely personality. He joined MeSEB sometime in the early 1980s as Assistant Engineer, at Kyrdemkulai Power Station for a brief period. Subsequently he shifted to the PHE. In the late 80's he was involved in operation and maintenance of Greater Shillong Water Supply (GSWS) installation at Mawphlang. Because of some inherent inadequacy in the pumps there and irregular management of power supply in the NE Region, the pumps there were unable to maintain adequate water supply to Shillong. Sunn was constantly coordinating with MeSEB for arrangement of standard quality of power to GSWS. Unlike the present discipline in the management of Power Utilities, in those days, there was very poor regulation of demand vs. generation, resulting in, at times, lower than the standard frequency, for which the Mawphlang pumps were unable to deliver. I was elated when one night at 2 am he came from Mawphlang to my house at Sumer, 28 Km from Shillong, to request me to improve the frequency by shedding some load for a while. Such was his sense of responsibility! We have lost a good leader.

Yours etc.,
B. C. Biswas,
Guwahati.

Poor mobile network in the digital era

Editor,
Cell phones and internet connectivity are an integral part of our lives today. One cannot imagine life without a cell phone or internet connectivity. Every household depends on internet for work, study, or communication with their loved ones especially during this pandemic where one has to work from home or attend online classes or make important calls. As of late, there is an ongoing network problem in the Dawki-Shnongpdeng. Often the mobile network in this area goes off not just for 1 or 2 hours a day but sometimes for the entire day itself. This has caused a lot of hardship and inconvenience for everyone who depends on the internet whether for work or studies. Airtel and Jio are the two main network providers in this area. Both these network providers have disappointed their customers but Jio network disappoints us much more as its service frequently gets cut off.

If this continues, those in the tourism sector as well, will be highly affected as tourist who want to book a place to stay cannot call for bookings and tourists who depend on Google maps won't be able to reach the correct destination without proper GPS.

I request these network providers to kindly look into this matter for the well-being

of the public in this area.
Yours etc.,
Lemuel G Lymba,
Via email

Penalty for dumping garbage in drains

Editor,
Dumping garbage in the open drains is not an offence in our city but it is a matter of serious concern. It has far-reaching health and environmental consequences. A few days ago, when a boy protested against the dumping of the garbage into an open drain near Garikhana, he was nearly slapped. The boy who recently passed his SSLC is both gentle and intelligent. As an onlooker, this incident deeply hurt me. I immediately jumped to the boy's rescue. But even I had a tough time explaining that the adult defaulter basic civic sense and the environmental hazards of such an action. With a cell phone in one hand, that gentleman defiantly argued that if every resident in the locality can dump garbage in drains and have done so for ages, there is nothing wrong. What that man was correct. Perhaps the authorities have never strictly warned the people around that they should not throw their household trash in the drain. Therefore, besides bio-degradable waste, even hard plastic tables, pots, leather bags, shoes, bundles of old clothes stuffed in

poly bags are also thrown into drains and streams with nonchalance. Now who should be held responsible for this? Is our complacency not blameworthy? Look at, how our rivers, streams and drains that pass through the city have accumulated heaps of garbage which give out a stench when they rot. This pollutes the environment around. The non-biodegradable waste makes the situation still worse. They result in clogged drains. In case of heavy rainfall, that hard waste gets just washed away. But where do they all go? Unquestionably to the Umiam lake - the main water reservoir that generates electricity for Shillong and beyond. This sorry state of affairs will soon leave us all grasping in the dark! The depth of the Umiam river is decreasing every year. Any environmentalist will confirm this. Why are we keeping mum and keep this ominous reality under wraps? We love to imitate the West, but why do we not try to match up with their cleanliness as well?

Through this letter I request the concerned authorities to give serious thought to this hazardous practice that is clogging the environment. One strongly feels that the Municipality should come down heavily on those irresponsible people who pose a threat to our fragile environment. The administration must take a hard line and impose a hefty fine as penalty on the polluters. We can also help by secretly taking the pictures of the

offenders that hurt our environment. That photos/videos clippings should be shared with the Deputy Commissioner, Shillong Municipal Board and Pollution Board in confidence. Those photo clippings may be put up on the notice board and on the official websites apart from the monetary penalty. I hope this will act as a 'big deterrent,' to polluters. We can live tomorrow only if we do not let others mess with the environment today.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwalhi,
Shillong

Remembering 9/11 attacks

Editor,
The 9/11 terror attacks in America are permanently etched in public memory. That was the first time the US had been attacked by an outside force since 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbour. The boldness and careful planning by Al Qaeda showed the vulnerability of the security system of all countries. There is no denying the fact that no country is invulnerable to terrorism.

Vigilance is the key to stop any crime including terrorism. It is ironic that the hijackers of the plane that crashed on to the Pentagon were routinely screened and given clearance to board the plane in the US which was known to frisk the high and the mighty. Although the CIA had given warnings about terrorist attacks in the US, the state agencies

ignored them. The 9/11 terror attacks exemplify that political instability in a country breeds terror. Extraordinary political instability existed in the US before the terror attacks. The political infighting at that time in the US was unheard of. Further, coordination among the government machinery failed. As a consequence, about 3,000 people lost their lives.

Another important lesson to be learned from these attacks is that the fight against terrorism is far from over. It must be understood that over 100 countries in the world are victims of terrorism. The most important lesson to be learned is that the national and global security agencies must not lower their guard at any point of time. Given that terrorists need only a loophole to kill humanity, these agencies must always be on the alert and infallible.

The US has completed the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan. The Taliban announced a new government and declared it an Islamic emirate. On the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, al-Qaida may be defeated, but it is clear that jihadism and the desire to recreate a caliphate will remain.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."

— Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times

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Giving a chance to Taliban

WITH an interim government in place in Afghanistan, the uncertainties past the US exit from there a fortnight ago are dissipating to an extent. The present dispensation headed by Mullah Akhund as Prime Minister is a stop-gap arrangement to manage the daily affairs. It is not "inclusive" of all interest groups as had been promised by the Taliban in its agreement that facilitated the US exit by August 31. While the US kept up the promise of exit, the Taliban is duty-bound to implement the promises it made to the US and the international community in relation to two principal clauses — namely the "inclusiveness" of the government and a commitment to neutralize the terrorist outfits.

The new dispensation must be given a chance to perform if only for the good of Afghanistan. Such a sentiment was reflected in a speech by Indian external affairs minister S Jaishankar at the virtual meet held by the UN. He said not only the neighbours but the world community too should come to Afghanistan's aid. He made a reference to the goodwill that India has earned among sections of the Afghans in the past 20 years and the historic ties that the two nations maintained all along. The US at best was an occupation force and it did not have the locus standi to remain there indefinitely. Nor should Americans usurp others' lands. Even in Iraq, they installed a native government and tried to promote democracy as they did in Afghanistan.

Be this as it may, Afghanistan is bound to pass through critical times in the months ahead. There is no money to even run the government. Worse, the various Taliban factions might work at cross-purposes. The Haqqani network acted in a crude manner in government formation with Pakistani patronage. There are misgivings about the fate of Mullah Baradar, the interim deputy PM, as rumours spread that he was killed in a fight at the presidential palace. The Taliban has denied it and released a voice message. Iran has objected to the Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan and sections of Afghans have their own misgivings about the Pakistanis meddling there. How the dominant Haqqani clan in the Taliban will respond to the ISIS terrorist threat will be keenly watched by all. The scenario will remain fluid for some time and it will take so much more to settle things there and to arrive at some kind of stability. Under the circumstances, understandably, India's responses are positive yet guarded in nature.

Letters to the Editor

Total and shameful misuse of power

Editor,
There is an old hit by Ernie Ford titled "16 tons". I believe many old timers will remember it. The 2nd stanza of the song if changed a bit would have fitted the current political scenario of Meghalaya like a glove. The song should have been something like this - "You got 40 MLAs, what do you get/ An MDA Govt, and deeper in debt/St Peters don't you call me cause I can't come/ I owe my soul to a business oriented scam".

I mean just look at the direction this coalition Government is heading towards in pursuit of its non-existent Common Minimum Programme. In just three years it has become quite apparent that the common minimum goal of most of the MDA ministers is how to get rich at the expense of the state. First there was the illegal mining of coal. Members of this Government made crores by simply turning a blind eye to

the unlawful transportation of this banned mineral and if those in the know are to be believed, the Meghalaya Police, from top to bottom are largely being deployed to collect on behalf of the political masters.

Then came the ADB loan for smart meters where millions of dollars of ADB loan have been siphoned off. If reports are to be believed money is paid for non-activated smart meters. Now who will repay this loan and how will it be repaid if it is being deliberately misused. The burden of repaying the bad loan will now fall on the shoulders of our children. (another day older and deeper in debt).

Then comes the Social Welfare scam on Mid-Day meal cereals being diverted to private warehouses in Assam. It seems people have already forgotten about it. The guilty will never be found since the Minister in Charge of Social Welfare has claimed ignorance of the whole outrage. Now who will ever question the integrity of our Ministers? Both the police and the bureau-

In Meghalaya we are, in one way or the other, affected by pressure groups and their activities of strikes, protests and agitations. What defines these 'Sengbhalang' (common welfare groups)?

The first attribute of pressure groups is male dominance. A vast majority of these groups are run by men. All the office bearers or executive members of central bodies and units are men. There are hardly any women. All speakers in rallies and agitations are men. Women do cheer in the crowds. "Ka Sur Ki 'Nong Mawlai'" (The Voice of Mawlai People) is an all-male conglomerate group. In its protest rallies against the alleged 'cold blooded' killing of the former HNLC leader, Cheristerfield Thangkiew on August 13, the male dominance is for the world to see. All the speakers who lambasted the 'government' are men. The very pedestals they stand on while they attack ministers are meant for men. They stand atop vehicles to raise catchy slogans. Women, certainly will feel uncomfortable climbing these high platforms. Why have suitable stands when all 'climbers' are men?

A women's group has emerged from Mawlai to lend its support to "Ka Sur Ki 'Nong Mawlai'". Only after more than a fortnight is there space for women; that too separately and not in the main organisation! Why? Is it because of the male syndrome that ideas come only from men? That planning is to be done by men? That discussion and deliberation is the prerogative of male leaders? That women are only to listen and agree with whatever men propose? Do we still carry the mentality that women have no place in 'dorbars' (councils)? Were women a part of the decision to form "Ka Sur Ki 'Nong Mawlai'"? Were women folk taken into confidence? Were women consulted to chalk out the different programmes of the 'Voice'? Pressure groups in our state are male-centric.

Women perhaps feel obliged to stand by their male counterparts. A lady speaker tried to be even better than men. She referred to the Home Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui as ugly in person and character. Is that civil? She also demanded that the Home Minister hand over policemen involved in shooting Thangkiew to the group. Is this not street justice? Is this the rule of law? She even communalised the shooting episode.

A couple of NGOs are run by women. Leaders are educated and informed. They are doing the actual work. They have made the government uncomfortable in the illegal mining and transportation of coal and the 'siphoning' of pandemic funds meant for the poor. They have a different approach from the 'confron-

tational' pressure groups.

One has been impressed by the creativity of "Ka Sur Ki 'Nong Mawlai'". The very name is brilliant. Soon it inspired 'Ka Sur Ki Nong West', 'Ka Sur Ki Nong Malki', 'Ka Sur Lewrynghep' and others to emerge for the same cause. The knife-rendering rally and dumping of the traditional tools at the entrance of the Secretariat is an innovation.

Soon after the unfortunate incident in Mawlai Kynnton Massar the 11 groups met to 'decide the course of action' as a united front. They came up with a sustained action plan for the government to take notice.

But have pressure groups met together to discuss other issues confronting the state? Have they gathered in a venue against the blatant illegal coal business? Have they brained-stormed on the rice scam and the scams in MeECL (a new one, the smart meters project scam has come to light)? Have pressure groups deliberated on the poor education in the state? Do they have any solutions to offer? Are they aware of the causes of the pathetic education scenario? Is it a concern for them? They have probably met multiple times on ILP? ILP may be important. What will happen after its implementation? Will it serve any purpose if the state is a den of illegality and scams and if education is



stagnant? ILP is no saviour. Perhaps, the pressure groups do not want an enlightened, educated and thinking citizenry or else all the masses might no longer follow them. If the mob mentality disappears it may be bad news.

Everyone agrees that justice should be delivered, that culprits should be punished, that the inquiry should be impartial. That point has been made crystal clear. Now that a judicial probe headed by the head of the state's Human Rights Commission has been ordered it is best to wait for its outcome. Why adamantly demand for the suspension of the 'involved' police officers? What if they only followed orders? Then why should the order givers (say politicians) roam free during the probe period while the subordinates are humiliated? Where is justice?

This takes us to the next

point, which is that pressure groups are by and large confrontational. The six organisers of "Ka Sur Ki 'Nong Mawlai'" have even dared not to reply to the show-cause notice issued to them by the East Khasi Hills Deputy Commissioner (DC). Can an ordinary citizen have the courage to ignore a DC's show-cause notice? The person will probably face imminent arrest. We have to wait and watch what the DC does to these pressure group leaders who have challenged the lawful authority.

Pressure groups have mushroomed in recent years. Some groups have been formed by members who were in another group. On April 27 this year a writer of a letter to the editor bluntly stated that ex-members of a group formed another group for 'personal gratification, media attention, power, money and their attempt to control the former group'. No one has a problem if groups are founded. But it must be noted that while these groups plead for unity from the 'Jaitbynriew' (Khasi Society) they themselves liberally split over mundane issues for personal interests. They can't work together.

The same letter also revealed the clandestine affairs between some pressure groups and the government of the day. These groups are a proxy of the govern-

ment to get favours. They aligned with the previous government earlier and now with the MDA government to counter their rivals. The writer named ministers and the groups who had long secret meetings. There was no denial. It might have been true. The unsuccessful Peace Committee formed by the government post the August 15 violence including some groups and excluding others is a reiteration of the point in place. No wonder no pressure group has spoken against the wrong-doings of the government.

Pressure groups exploit the emotions of the people pleading they stand for the 'Jaitbynriew'. That's how they appeal to the people. They exaggerate the 'outsider' issue, ILP, dangers of uranium, dangers from railways, border disputes, etc. It must be made clear. They

have not been mandated to decide for the people. Even an elected government does not represent the whole state. The Opposition also is a representative of the people. The Modi government with an overwhelming majority got the mandate only from 31 percent of the population. So the insistence of pressure groups to represent the 'Jaitbynriew' is hollow.

Unfortunately for the pressure groups it is often either their way or the highway. Others have no alternative but to accept their decisions. So, public hearings on cement factories in East Jaintia Hills District were forcefully disrupted. Not that one propagates for these hazardous factories but the views of others should also be heard. Railway machineries were vandalised in Bymihat to stop construction of railway lines without respecting the views of those who favour the coming of trains to Ri Bhoi. The two lane Nongstoin-Ranikor road was physically stalled without scant respect for the majority who wanted the project.

It is learned that a TV channel is initiating a discussion on the leadership crisis in the state that was cruelly exposed during the Shillong (Mawlai) violence recently. The government displayed little leadership role. The Home Minister, the captain became a recluse, and tamely offered to quit. Ministers, former minister, opposition leaders, Rangbah Shong (village headmen) and the intellectuals seemed to agree with pressure groups. Religious leaders said nothing. The majority of us were mute spectators. Does no one have better ideas?

More serious is that no one condemned the violence. Not against the stone pelters, not against the arson committers, not against those who petrol-bombed the Chief Minister's residence; not those that attacked the governor's convoy; not even against the gun-snatchers and vehicle burners. The majority of us were mere mute spectators. Silence is complicity to crimes.

Populist leadership was on display in the current Assembly session. Stunningly Saleng Sangma requested political parties not to put up anyone against late SK Surn's family in the bye-election. The NCP leader is unaware of the implications of such undemocratic precedence. Does it mean that whenever an MLA passes away, a direct entry of a kin to the Assembly is assured? His suggestion should be expunged.

Pressure groups are not untouchable. They have a role to play. But they are not the sole custodians of 'Ka Jaitbynriew'. We need not surrender our thoughts to anyone.

Email: albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com

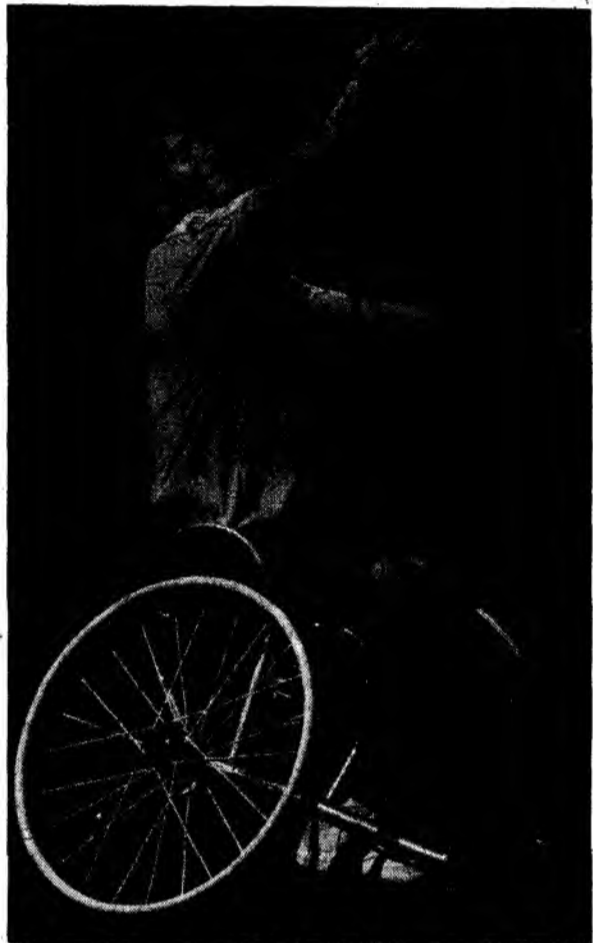
Aftermath of the pandemic on differently-abled children

By F. Pdianghunlin Nongbri

In March 2020, the World Health Organisation reported more than 118,000 cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) worldwide and declared the situation a pandemic. After health campaigns recommending preventive measures and social distancing, lockdowns etc., were established in numerous countries to limit the spread of the infection. Over 3.4 billion people were confined worldwide on March 31. In this unprecedented situation, schools were closed, the possibilities of going out were limited, direct contact with friends and other family members was stopped, and rehabilitation and medical follow-up were interrupted.

the parental sensation of helplessness. Children with physical disabilities have a higher risk of sedentarism and its consequences than other children. As was found for children without disability, the results of the present survey showed that during the lockdown, the level of physical activity of children with disabilities reduced considerably. Furthermore, these children are likely to experience a loss of motor skills because motor capacity is related to physical activity and sedentary time negatively affects motor skills.

The most frequent parental concern is the lack of rehabilitation during the



This exceptional situation abruptly changed the daily lives of children with disabilities and their families.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic extends beyond the children with increased susceptibility to the virus. Many rehabilitation centres shut down along with the rest of the world, leaving them without a way to get critical therapy. Dr Pavone notes in addition to the increased physical risks, children also had to deal with decreasing endurance, tighter muscles, and potential weight gain. The issues could present even more difficulties for children as they return to their therapeutic routine and physical mobility. "The delay of non-emergent surgeries caused some children with cerebral palsy to suffer while waiting for hospitals to be opened again to perform these operations," Dr McLaughlin states. Many patients faced delays when trying to get wheelchairs, bathing aids, and other therapeutic equipment. Parents have had to do more of the therapy exercises with their children, while also trying to do distance learning, manage their household, and for many, work from home.

Several surveys highlighted the negative effects of the lockdown on the children's wellbeing and their mental and social health (morale, behaviour, social interaction and physical activity), similar to a recent report on children without disabilities. The psychological effects of the lockdown, including post-traumatic stress symptoms, confusion and anger have been reported in the general population and are related to the duration of the lockdown. Children with physical disabilities have an increased risk of mental health symptoms, which could exacerbate during the pandemic. The lack of social interaction may not only affect their morale but may also lead to a regression in their communication ability. Moreover, the development or worsening of behavioural disorders could further affect their wellbeing and increase

lockdown. The purpose of regular rehabilitation is to maintain or monitor the progress of motor skills and to prevent complications that could further alter mobility and increase difficulties in daily life, such as orthopaedic deformities or physical deconditioning. Therefore, the interruption or modification of medical care and rehabilitation could inevitably deteriorate the child's physical status and functional ability.

A cross sectional, mixed-methods approach, using a purposive snowballing technique was adopted to study the impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities in India. The article has been authored by Murthy GVS, Kamalakannan S, Lewis MG, Sadanand S and Tetali S. Among the 17% needing rehabilitation services, 59.4% failed to access the same. Reported difficulties in access were same across the different groups of disability, thereby highlighting that the concerns of persons with disabilities are similar across disabilities. Mental health concerns of caregivers for persons with disabilities were also ascertained and important leads were observed. Half of them felt moderately stressed caring for children or other family members with disability. 58.2% were unhappy that the therapy sessions for their child with disability had ceased during the lockdown. Our main concern as rehabilitation professionals is to examine and recreate possibilities regarding the present situation in order to bring a balanced psychosocial and physical health to the children. As Late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said, 'Children are the reflection of our society as they show the thought and mentality of society. They are the purest souls and take shape in the way we nurture them'.

(The writer is Occupational therapist at Meghalaya Institute of Mental Health and Neurological Science (MIMHANS). She can be reached at pdianghunlin@gmail.com)

oil plantation. It seems the MDA has gone totally blind and deaf to the environmental threats the proposed Palm Oil plantations pose for Meghalaya. So what if anything happens; it will happen only 20-30 years down the line. Again, it's our children who will pay for our recklessness. Political power is sought simply to enhance business and not to serve the people and from media reports one of the polluting coke factories at Sutnga is in the name of another minister of this Government. No wonder the State Pollution Control Board has acted more like a State Pollution Enhancing Board. So much for political power and for governance. Well, truly we all owe our souls to business-oriented scums.

Yours etc.,
Charming Lyngdoh,
Via email

Tamil Nadu drops NEET exam

Editor,
The Tamil Nadu Government has passed Anti-NEET

Bill 2021 in the state assembly to ban NEET exam in the state. The decision to pass the bill was taken in the wake of the death of a medical aspirant. With the passing of the bill, students would get admission to under-graduate medical degree courses based on the qualifying HSC +2 marks or class 12 marks. Tamil Nadu has been in strong opposition to NEET since its recommendation in 2013.

The Tamil Nadu government's move to ban the exam raises questions about the suitability of it for admission to medical courses. Strong arguments have been put forward against the need of conducting NEET. One, NEET is an assault on the autonomy of private, unaided institutions. Two, it is an example for over-centralisation of education. Three, the rights of unaided, private and minority institutions are violated. Four, with the introduction of NEET, and similar national exams, coaching institutions have prospered. As most of them are in cities

and the fees are very high, poorer students from rural areas face a disadvantage. Five, there are variations in the syllabus of CBSE and state boards. Six, leaking of NEET paper twice raises doubts about its fairness and transparency. Seven, errors creep into NEET translation questions. Eight, as NEET does not guarantee competition and equality of opportunities, it does not promote merit.

Considering all these facts, it is of great importance to arrive at a decision whether the imposition of NEET is fair. If all state governments conduct admission to medical courses in fair and transparent ways, the imposition of NEET would be unreasonable.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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"Rather fail with honor than
succeed by fraud."

— Sophocles

The Shillong Times

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Inquiry Commissions an eyewash
JUSTICE K Chandroo, retired judge of Madras High Court, in an article captioned, "Whither Commissions of Enquiry," in DT Next (May 27, 2018), categorically stated that an inquiry ordered under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 is an eyewash. The Commission is a toothless tiger, which is most often appointed to ward off public protests. Noted statesman and lawyer C Rajagopalachari, also remarked, "When you want to delay a matter or to keep it pending, appoint a commission of inquiry. State governments have faithfully followed that in all their inquiry commission appointments, involving extraordinary expenditure of public funds for such a wasteful extravaganza."

When matters arise that require investigation, and if an investigation is not done expeditiously and honestly by an impartial agency, the outcome will be hampered and the issue will fizzle out, Justice Chandroo had observed. But governments have consistently stonewalled inquiries by an impartial investigating agency and adopted dilatory tactics. JB Monteiro wrote way back in 1964 in the Economic Weekly about the limitations of investigations conducted under the Commissions of Inquiry Act. First, the initiative in the appointment of a commission of inquiry rests entirely with the executive. It is a no brainer that the executive will not institute an inquiry into its own actions—that is what most inquiries are—unless forced to do so by strong outside pressure. Second, it is open to the executive to define the terms of reference of a Commission in such a manner as to defeat, to the maximum extent possible, the purpose of the inquiry. Further, under the Commissions of Inquiry Act the executive is not obliged to make public the findings of Inquiry Commissions. Nor are the findings binding on the executive.

The executive's response may vary from outright rejection of an inquiry report to slack corrective action—taking advantage of the shortness of public memory. This is a serious limitation. Can the executive be allowed to set the terms on which it is to be judged? Accepting that it is the function of the executive to act in these matters, cannot some device be thought of whereby an inquiry into some matter of vital public importance is begun with fairly rational terms of reference? Also, the report when it is finally submitted by the judge appointed to head the Commission goes to the government which can tamper with it to suit its interests. It is in this context that Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's reference to the judicial enquiry, as something sacrosanct, each time the matter of suspension of the top police officials is demanded by pressure groups and the Opposition Congress, sounds trite. The public must realise that a judicial enquiry is an eyewash. Period.

Letters to the Editor

The fraudulent complex

Editor,

We live at a time when there are many impostors amongst the political class. While their actions may not literally reflect such a character but they have definitely taken all of us for a ride with their false persona. People of Meghalaya at the moment are a disenfranchised lot, not for lack of leaders but because we have too many leaders. What we really lack are personalities that befit a public representative, in the actual sense of the word.

Everything around us in in disarray; there is no vision to take the state forward, let alone the character required to achieve that. A few days ago, as I was driving with my wife in tow, we struck a casual conversation as we reached Polo, which was otherwise a quiet journey all along, but the thoughts that triggered this conversation started from the time we came across the unfinished Crowborough building. Then as we circled around Jail road, the sight of the failed Marriot project couldn't escape us and finally the proposed times square like MUDA building in Polo. She said, "Why are all government projects in limbo?" I could not answer her in my capacity but somehow managed to just laugh it off for the rest of our journey home. That question stuck with me for a long time after that.

What is wrong with the present crop of politicians? Is it related to how they have been groomed by past leaders or is it just a matter of perspectives alone? How else does one explain their actions when elected leaders of the State still behave more like leaders of a particular party? They seem to have forgotten they actually represent the whole state of Meghalaya. Even more stark is the behaviour of the Rajya Sabha MP who is now becoming more vocal about state politics when he should have reserved that noise for the "Council of States!"

The ignominy of corruption and scam headlines that have wreaked havoc to the public exchequer, have shocked us ever since the Power Department was caught on the wrong foot. Having educated and learned leaders in the top echelons of government, one believed that things would improve if not in development but at least in providing the very basic needs of the common man.

But far from it, we now witness a far more complex situation from this educated lot. No one is questioning, simply because those with the voice are leading a comfortable lifestyle but the ones that have to bear the brunt are the voiceless. Yes, it is wrong to put all the blame on the present dispensation; they have also inherited the misdeeds of past governments. But to push everything under the carpet

Many politicians, academicians, social leaders and practising lawyers express discontent with Paragraph 12A in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, in its applicability to the State of Meghalaya. Even the youth who can hardly understand what the Sixth Schedule is all about, echo the demand for the deletion of Para 12A from the Sixth Schedule. It has been argued that by giving over-riding powers to State Government laws, over the laws made by the District Councils, the provision has eroded the autonomy of the Councils even on subjects entrusted to them. Some political parties even made it an issue in their election manifestos. Even the S.K. Dutta Commission of Inquiry on Autonomous District Administration in the State of Meghalaya recommended for the deletion of Paragraph 12A.

Formerly, all the Tribal Areas specified in paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule were Autonomous Districts governed by Autonomous Councils under the State of Assam. But the leaders of these Autonomous Districts were dissatisfied as they felt that the Autonomous Councils under the Sixth Schedule could not fully satisfy the aspirations of the tribal people. So the movement for the separation of the Tribal Areas from Assam, and the creation of a separate Hills State for the Tribals started. But ultimately, the Assam Re-Organisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 created the Autonomous State of Meghalaya covering only the United Khasi Jaintia, and the Garo Hills Autonomous Districts. But again, the leaders of the Hills State movement were not satisfied with an autonomous State within the State of Assam. Hence they demanded for a full-fledged State. Their persistent demand saw the light of day when The North-Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971 was passed by the Parliament and the full-fledged State of Meghalaya was created.

Article 244 (2) of the Constitution, deals with the administration of Tribal Areas in North East India. In 1969, Article 224A was inserted in the Constitution to confer the necessary legislative powers on Parliament to enact a law for constituting the Autonomous State of Meghalaya which covers the Sixth Schedule areas. But no special Article was provided for Meghalaya in the Constitution, like Article 371 for the States of Nagaland and Mizoram. The State of Meghalaya was thus presumed to be a Tribal State and exists under the constitutional protection of the Sixth Schedule besides its plenary power to make laws as a full-fledged State in the Union of India.

and point only to previous governments' mistakes too, is wrong. The fact that you are in government today is because people expect better from you. Why else would they give you an opportunity if your delivery in governance is no different from those of past governments?

There are those who did show more mettle though. The funeral of (L) S.K. Suman reflected the legacy he has left behind as far as his constituency is concerned. But how do we measure the accomplishments of this government at the helm? There is not much to talk about what the present government has delivered thus far, apart from regular social media posts. But perhaps they still have another two years to come up with something concrete and viable for people to remember.

There has always been an outcry for good leaders to enter the political scene, but the present crop of politicians have dragged this career option to such a level that even those with good intentions shun politics. The youth of today do not have a state political icon to look up to, except that politics today has taught them that it is a quick-fix business opportunity to become rich. No wonder there is lack of quality at the moment. As a seasoned politician once mentioned, if only the present political class would realign their priorities right viz. the state, the constitu-

By Fabian Lyngdoh

Paragraph 12 of the Sixth Schedule provides that no Act of the Legislature of the State in respect of any matters specified in Paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule shall apply to any autonomous district in the State unless the District Council, by public notification, so directs, subject to such exceptions or modifications as it thinks fit. However, except clauses (g) the appointment of Chiefs or Headmen; (h) the inheritance of property; and (j) social customs, of sub-paragraph (1), all the subjects provided in the Paragraph 3 are also included in the State List of the 7th Schedule to the Constitution. In the 7th Schedule the State Legislature is authorised to make laws over 60 items under the State List and 52 items under the Concurrent List. On the other hand, the Sixth Schedule protects only the collective cultural rights of a community, but it is not beyond the scope of fundamental human rights as provided in the Constitution of India. Always, Fundamental Human Rights stand above Indigenous Peoples' Rights. Former Chief Justice of India, M. Hidayatullah's statement that the Sixth Schedule is "A Constitution within a Constitution" can be interpreted in this light. The Constitution of India covers everything from fundamental human rights to reserved cultural rights; but the Sixth Schedule concerns only with tribe-specific cultural rights. The Sixth Schedule is within the Constitution, and it cannot stand alone apart from the Constitution. Likewise, an autonomous district can only exist within a State; it cannot exist as a stand-alone territorial entity apart from the State. If it stands alone as a territorial entity apart from the State, then it becomes a Union Territory. Hence, the District Council cannot exercise powers as a Union Territory's Legislature within a State. The District Councils are concerned only with reserved cultural rights, but the Legislature of Meghalaya is concerned with reserved cultural rights as well as with fundamental human rights. If the District Council makes a law that exceeds its mandate or intrudes into the domain of fundamental human rights, then it is the responsibility of the State Legislature to set things right.

For this reason, Paragraph 12A was inserted in the Sixth Schedule by the Act of 1971, which says that if any provision of a law made by the District Council in the State of Meghalaya with respect to any matter specified in sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 3, or any provision of any regulation made by the District Council under paragraph 8 or paragraph 10 of

the Sixth Schedule, is repugnant to any provision of a law made by the Legislature of the State with respect to that matter, then the law made by the District Council shall to the extent of repugnancy, be void and the law made by the Legislature of the State shall prevail.

Paragraph 12A is not applicable in the State of Assam because the populations of Karbis, Dimasas, and Bodos, add up to a very small percentage of the total population of Assam. According to Census 2011, the population of all tribal people in Assam, including the above three tribes, is only 12.45 per cent of the total population. Moreover, there are only 16 reserved MLA seats for scheduled tribes in the Assam legislative Assembly out of 126 members. There are only four MLAs representing the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District, and only one MLA representing the Dima Hasao Autonomous District in the Assam Legislative Assembly. In this scenario, there is likelihood that the Autonomous Territorial Councils which represent only 12.45 per cent tribals might be oppressed by the State Legislature which mainly represents the majority non-tribals in Assam. It is for this reason that with regard to the Autonomous Territorial Councils in Assam, the Governor has more discretionary powers because his position is more like the representative of the President of India to protect the interests of tribals from the oppressive actions of the State Legislature. In Assam, the laws made by the Autonomous Territorial Councils relating to any matter specified in List III of the 7th Schedule, the paragraph 3A and paragraph 3B of the Sixth Schedule, require the Governor to reserve such laws for the consideration of the President. For laws which do not relate to the said List III, the Governor grants assent in his personal discretion in view of the provisions contained in paragraph 20 BA of the Sixth Schedule, though in doing so he is required to consult the Council of Ministers.

On the other hand the tribal population in Meghalaya constitutes 86.15 per cent of the population, and in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly of 60 members, especially in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, practically all the MLA seats are occupied by indigenous tribals. Hence, considering the ground realities, the Governor of Meghalaya does not stand as the representative of the President with regards to the District Councils, and he has no discretionary powers to protect the interests of the District Councils which represent the 86.15 per cent

tribals from the oppressive actions of the State Legislature which also represents the same 86.15 per cent tribals; the concept itself is absurd. Thus the position of the Governor with regard to the Autonomous Districts in Meghalaya is more that of the head of the State who has to act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers of the State as provided in Article 163(1) of the Constitution.

If paragraph 12A was not inserted in the Sixth Schedule, then it would mean that the Meghalaya State Legislature has no authority to make laws on a wide range of subjects without the approval of the District Councils, or that the tribal MLAs cannot make laws on a wide range of subjects without the approval of the tribal MDCs. The leaders of the Hills State movement understood the inadequacy of the District Councils for protecting the tribes, and hence fought for a full-fledged State. It is said that when Meghalaya was created the leaders discussed whether to abolish or to retain the District Councils. Captain Williamson Sangma suggested that the District Councils would be retained as training grounds for those who aspire to be MLAs to the State Legislature. But now it seems that the people are afraid of the powers of their own State, and the District Councils want independent right to make laws directly under the Central Government. The crux of the problem does not lie in any discrepancy of the Law, but lies deep in the collective feeling of insecurity generated by factors beyond the scope of the legislation process. This sense of insecurity is fanned, magnified and kept alive by the self interests of some section of the people. Moreover, as the S.K. Dutta Commission of Inquiry has reported, the District Councils seem to devote their time and thought to development rather than to the enactment of laws for the protection of healthy customs and usages. So the conflict between the State's laws and the District Councils' laws are more on matters of development rather than on customs and usages.

What do the District Councils really want? Do they want to be under Assam again as Autonomous Territorial Councils sans paragraph 12A? Do they want the Autonomous Districts to be transformed into Union Territories directly under the Parliament? Isn't it better to be Autonomous District Councils of the Khasi-Jaintias and Garos under a State ruled by Khasi-Jaintias and Garos in spite of the discrepancy? The answers are in the questions.

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ency, the party and the self, in that order, maybe our state wouldn't have been at this crossroad.

The need of the hour for Meghalaya is not so much a business manager but just a simple leader who would do the right things and restore the confidence of the people. As Peter Drucker says, "Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things."

Yours etc.,
Lawrence Pherliam Sumer,
Via email

In support of farm mechanisation

Editor,

I read with interest an article in The Shillong Times dated Sept 14, 2021 on high cost of agricultural labour and the consequent impact it has on the cost of cultivation making it non-remunerative for the farmers of the State written by Mr KN Kumar, Chairman of Meghalaya Farmers' Commission. He has pointed out that during the peak agriculture season, labour is not available in the State in adequate numbers. There could be many reasons for non-availability of agriculture labourers adequately during the peak season. Let us leave it at that for the time being. What is interesting to note here is that the farm mechanisation policy in the State as pointed out by him and

rightly so, is mostly limited to distribution of power tillers.

Considering the hilly terrain, preference of farmers in the State, is for power tillers rather than medium or large sized farm machineries like tractors because power tillers are easier to handle, transport and operate in the hills. It is also suitable for small and fragmented land holdings. The land holding pattern in Meghalaya shows that majority of the farmers own lands less than 2 ha. Small and marginal holdings account for 75% of the total number of holdings in the State. That being the case, power tillers are preferred by the majority of the farmers in the State. This does not mean, we should neglect the needs and aspirations of the big farmers, however small, their numbers are. Having said that, there is a need for farm machineries and components of farm machineries/equipment required to increase the farm output and reduce the costs of cultivation, to be carefully chosen and made available to the farmers in time and adequately to the extent possible.

Looking at the farm machineries we have now in the State as mentioned by the writer (reproduced here for easy reference—139 power tillers, 8 tractors, 46 power paddy reapers and 3 excavators) are grossly inadequate. The State's farm power availability is a meagre 0.8938 Kw/ha. On the other hand, agricultural labourers constitute only 16.7% of the

total workers' population in the State as per 2011 census, far below the national average of 41%, which is going to decline in the coming years due to non-remunerative agriculture, thereby leading to migration of workforce to towns/cities in search of better job opportunities. It is, therefore, imperative to increase farm mechanisation to tide over the shortage of labour and improve efficiency in agricultural operations.

Available data indicates that 70% of Meghalaya's population depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. However, the contribution of this sector to the State's economy is low at 16% (2017-18) of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). Low investments in agriculture over time leading to less capital formation in the sector has stagnated the pace of agricultural productivity in the State. Therefore, there is an urgent need for increasing investments in agriculture since the growth of other sectors and of the overall economy rests on the performance of agriculture.

Yours etc;
F.R. Marak
Tura

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Better planning required for smooth transition

Clean energy imperative to transform India

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

Vagaries of climate change have tremendously increased clean energy needs for India that needs a paradigm shift in its overall energy policy. It will ultimately change almost all aspects of human development. To make the transition smooth, India will have to devise a better plan for changing the present mix of unclean and clean energy to achieve net-zero emission level, preferably by 2050.

In 2020, Indian Industries were using 53 per cent fossil fuel, 31 per cent biofuels and waste, 16 per cent electricity, as against 64, 16, and 20 per cent respectively in 2018. Transports were using 98 per cent fossil fuel, and 2 per cent electricity in 2020, as against 97 and 2 per cent respectively in 2018, while 1 per cent biofuels were also being used. The buildings were using 15 per cent of fossil fuels, 79 per cent biofuels, and 6 per cent electricity in 2020 as against 21, 61, and 18 per cent respectively in 2018. Such a fast-paced change in the pattern of energy consumption has been witnessed only in two years, and is likely to change dramatically in near future. India needs to come to a conclusion as to what should

and the growing penetration of electric vehicles is an important such activity.

China is leading the world in terms of battery-operated electric vehicles (BEVs). Global BEV stock in 2019 was 4.79 million of which 54 per cent was in China. Further, of the total world plug-in hybrid electric vehicle stock of 2.38 million in 2019, about one-third were in China.

In India, 380,000 units of electric vehicles were sold during 2019-2020. According to a study, in the base case scenario, the electric vehicle market in India is expected to grow at an average growth rate of 44 per cent between 2020-2027, and the annual sales are expected to reach 6.34 million units by 2027. There were also improvements in the fuel economy of vehicles in the region, and in Southeast Asia, where vehicle ownership has tripled in two years, the fuel economy of the car fleet had improved by more than 30 per cent. The pattern may be replicated in other regions and countries, including South Asia and India.

In the building sector, the share of electricity had increased during the period

be the right energy mix from now onwards for the three sectors and the three types of fuels in use.

The share of renewable energy in total primary energy supply is going to change dramatically, since it is still at a very low level in India. Though between 2018 and 2020, the recently published ADB publication titled "Financing Clean Energy in Developing Asia" says, the share of renewable energy has been experiencing a rise, it needs to be substantially increased. During 2017-2020, the average growth rate in share was 6 per cent in China, while in India it was only 4.2 per cent. For South Asia, it was only 3.4 per cent.

There is also a role of renewable energy in electricity generation. The share of renewables in electricity generation has increased for almost all countries and subregions in Asia. In India it grew from 14 per cent to 19 per cent. However, in South Asia, the share decreased from 25 per cent in 2017 to 22 per cent in 2020, mainly due to increased coal consumption for electricity production in Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

India will need to fine-tune the share of fossil fuel in the industrial sector which showed an increase during the two years under consideration. The share of other renewables, such as solar, wind, and bioenergy, was negligible or nil in the industry sector in all parts of Asia and the Pacific, and it is the same also in India.

The transport sector has been increasingly electrified during 2018-2020 in the Asia and Pacific region. The use of biofuels in this sector, although very small, mostly around 1 per cent of the sector's total energy consumption in 2018, seems to be taking place in most subregions also. Significant developments are taking place in the transport sector to improve energy efficiency,

under consideration in the whole region except West Asia. In India also, there is going to be a major shift with completion of electrification of all villages and hamlets. Clean energy usage in households, both in urban and rural areas, is likely to transform lifestyles.

All these would need considerable investment. Investment in renewable energy in India has already increased from \$8 billion to \$11 billion showing average growth rate of 4 per cent during the last decade. In the case of China it grew at 9 per cent, while for the whole Asia Pacific region, it grew by 11 per cent.

India and China obviously need more investment to match their requirements, but they have not been performing well. Investment in renewable energy exhibited a declining trend both in China and India in recent years. In China, the government announced a suspension of the financial support for solar PV in 2018 causing the PV market to freeze. The Indian decline in investment was mainly due to project financing delays resulting from problems with electricity distribution companies.

India will need to invest more on energy efficiency improvements, since it is at a very low level. In 2016, the country invested only \$7 billion, which accounted for only 0.28 per cent of its GDP. China invested \$62 billion in the same year which was 0.66% of its GDP.

The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that the Asia and Pacific will need to invest under the planned energy scenario a total of \$825 billion annually on renewable energy and energy efficiency improvements between 2016 and 2050. In the transformative energy scenario, i.e. in the low carbon emission scenario, the corresponding investment needed would be \$1.22 trillion for the region. (IPA Service)

"Logic is like the sword - those who appeal to it, shall perish by it."

— Samuel Butler

The Shillong Times

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Terrorism, Pakistan

THE route to terrorism in India starts from Pakistan -- and this is a well-documented saga. The arrest of six members of a module from Delhi and nearby states this week by a special cell of the Delhi Police and their interrogation showed they were unleashed by the D-Company with backing from ISI, the notorious Pakistani military intelligence. Their assignment was to cause blasts and attacks during the Hindu festival season in the national capital and also in UP and Maharashtra. If these were to happen, the situation would be tailor-made for a huge communal flare-up across the northern parts of India and elsewhere too.

The police and intelligence establishment deserve praise for their professionalism vis-à-vis checking terrorist attacks in the country in recent years. Outside of Kashmir Valley, terrorist attacks are rare now and several modules attempting such outrage have been busted. The central government deserves praise for the alert it maintains in this respect. Notably, however, India's response to Pakistani machinations of this kind -- happening repeatedly and most prominently in the attacks on military establishments in Pathankot and Uri; and not to go farther to the serial Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008 -- has been disastrous. The Pulwama attack in which large numbers of CRPF personnel were killed was neither here nor there. The highly publicized military retaliation in Balakot had been a tame affair; and Pakistan claimed only some pine trees were lost for them at the bombing spot. There was no response at all from India to the Mumbai attacks. The involvement of the D-Company of Dawood Ibrahim is well-established as also of the Jaish in several of these attacks. The family that hijacked the Indian Airlines plane to Kandahar, took huge ransom money, unloaded it in Dubai and later reached it to further anti-India terror acts from the Pakistani soil, remains well-entrenched in the Islamic nation.

None of India's efforts through normal channels paid any dividends in terms of bringing such men to book, though entities like Interpol are in existence. But they are of no use even to the US in this respect. This apart, the "unprovoked" border firings from the Pakistani army along the LoC and international border along Kashmir were a common occurrence all through the Modi terms, with some let-up of late. Now, as per information obtained from the arrested men in Delhi, several Bangladeshis too had been trained in Pakistan and sent to India for terrorist acts during the festival season. They are at large. This is time for high alert.

State of Governance in Meghalaya today: Conform or perish

By Patricia Mukhim

Meghalaya gets caught in this spiral of deceit and corruption which gets worse with each incoming government. We now exist in a rolling trauma which is exhausting and unrelenting. Here is a state whose people lived on homilies that we are on this earth to earn justice and we do that by playing fair. And people's natural default is towards truth and good because the alternative is untenable. It will lead to moral anarchy. Alas! The alternative is upon us and the killing of Cheristfield Thangkiew has only consolidated the outrage. And outrage has become the order of the day. The stillness of stability is shattered. These are hard days of coarse language -- of catcalls that appeal to the worst in us, not the best. But verbal attacks, fair or unfair are the stock-in-trade of politics.

Interestingly amidst this psycho-babble and while the MDA Government is countering outside forces, it is trying to consolidate its internal dynamics by appointing yet another advisor to the Chief Minister. The public has lost count of the number of advisors that CM Conrad Sangma has in his armoury. The question is whether any of them are advising him and what do they advise since they are from different political parties? Is this the reason why the MDA Government is schizophrenic?

Have the advisors ever told the CM that what is happening in the Power Sector is wrong and that debts are piling up on the already ramshackle-debt-ridden Power Corporation? Obviously, those running the MDA Government are unlikely to return in 2023 and therefore their profligacy will not haunt them. It is the next government of whatever political hue which will carry the debt-burden. And considering that the Government of India is monetizing a plethora of PSUs which will include power generating corporations, there will be no way that the MeECL can carry on with its debt weight.

The Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which was to have been passed during the monsoon session this year was shelved due to the pandemic created by the Opposition over the Pegasus spyware. But knowing Prime Minister Modi and his indomitable nature, this Bill

will be passed sooner than later. The Bill empowers consumers to choose their power suppliers, and like it did with the Telecom industry, private players would bring down cost and provide better service to the public. This will not be a bad deal for a state like Meghalaya where power generation and distribution are largely state-controlled (the Power Corporation in Meghalaya would collapse in a day if the Government pulls



out the financial plug). The Bill envisages to bring private players to reduce costs related to overhead lines and load-shedding. Better supply would induce better demand, resulting in better profits. Economists believe this could be a major milestone in India's economic history, perhaps the most important reform ever. The Modi Government expects the private sector to own up 100% of electricity distribution in all urban areas in coming years and about 74% in rural-urban mixed areas. That being so, MeECL might soon see itself in a new avatar.

Let me now skip to an important point in the MDA regime. The UDP which is the MDA's closest ally had demanded that the Home Department be taken away from James Sangma for all the malfeasance that was allowed to carry on such as illegal transportation of coal amongst others. A man from the UDP was appointed Home Minister. The illegal mining and transportation of coal has not stopped. The UDP is silent today. There was some noise about stripping James Sangma of the Power portfolio too for all the mess and corruption in the MeECL vis-à-vis the Saubhagya scheme and the smart meter project. This has suddenly died down because AL Hek of the BJP who was the biggest internal critic of the MDA govern-

ment found himself stripped of his ministerial post. The PDF and HSPDP are too insignificant to raise their voices. They are content to remain with the MDA as petty players as long as they are in power. The game of political convenience has been overlaid by these regional parties. The same parties that cry hoarse about saving the 'jaidbyrniew' don't care a hoot what happens to that jaidbyrniew under a corrupt

sole interest is in cornering all businesses related to construction of roads, bridges, buildings and what have you. They never speak in the Assembly; they are never in the limelight and nor are they under the media scanner. They quietly go about their work putting pressure on the Government to put money on construction work. In fact, their entry into politics and the Government is a diligently worked out revenue model and they cannot go wrong. And people talk about them in hushed tones almost as if they are afraid of offending them.

All this sleaze has survived and is growing with each new government, because we, the articulate class have supported that style by our own incestuous preoccupations. Most of us are silent bystanders and could not care what happens to the state if our own lives are made. But this incestuous silence will cost us heavily. Now coming to the point of governance -- it takes both politicians and the bureaucracy to govern the state and the country. In Meghalaya most bureaucrats have learnt that it is best to conform because the alternative is to perish. The adage "perform or perish," does not work for the bureaucracy here. Most are conformists. The few non-conformists survive because they are indispensable. Others who feel stifled by having to dance to the tune of politicians have long since left the state and are doing well for themselves in central ministries. The non-conformists who remain in the state find it tough to survive. The eco-system here does not support transparency, honesty or efficiency. The state would prefer to have bureaucrats that toe the political line. It's easier for all concerned. In any case the general style of governance in Meghalaya irrespective of party has supported greed and smugness. But with time and the exposure of new scams, some ministers in this cabinet would have had so much egg on their faces that they can go on having them for breakfast until Feb 2023, which is just 16 months away. In politics time flies.

One hopes that in 2023 the people of Meghalaya will vote for parties that try and show us a future we can invest in rather than rebranding a failed but hoary past. Amen!

There are ministers in the MDA Government who make no bones about owning business enterprises. Their regime that steals what is due to the people. Interestingly, the Home Minister, a UDP man, is seen on TV giving a tutorial to legislators about what the role of the police is and what they can and cannot do. He was replying to questions raised by the Opposition on the encounter killing of the former militant -- Cheristfield Thangkiew. The Home Minister's demeanour as he listed out stuff from the Police manual looked like a strange mix of Monalisa and the Artful Dodger. The Congress walked out on Wednesday after being disallowed by the Speaker to discuss the Thangkiew episode. The Congress was told the matter is sub-judice. A judicial enquiry is not supervised by a court of law, hence there is nothing sub-judice about the matter. In any case all enquiries in this country and our own state are an eyewash to acquit the Government of the day, so please don't even tell us that anything is going to come out of a judicial or any other inquiry. Often the amount paid to supreme court lawyers employed by the state to defend it from itself has made the price of investigation and justice as expensive as the offence itself.

That the Pollution Control Board is oblivious to the pollution and contamination of water bodies around us. There is no monitoring, checking of vehicles or industries that emits fumes and smoke or discharge of toxic effluent and hence there is no question of issuance of No Objection Certificate. One can witness the emission of black fumes and smoke from vehicles especially along the highways. Many believe that the fruit bearing trees in and around the city of Shillong are infected with insects due to vehicular pollution. It is high time for the Board to pull up its socks, utilise its resources and perform its duties and responsibilities for the betterment of the environment and its habitat.

Yours etc.,
Albert Andrew Nongrum,
Via email

Kudos Tamil Nadu!

Editor, Apropos the letter, 'Tamil Nadu drops NEET exam', by Venu GS (ST Sep15, 2021), I wish to congratulate the Tamil Nadu government for this step. NEET was authorised by the Supreme Court so if it to be done away with it will require that the Centre passes a Bill against NEET. Only then will the whole country be free from the NEET. Education is on the concurrent list of the Constitution and as far as admission

to colleges are concerned, the Centre and the states have joint responsibility. If NEET is done away with, we will be back to the old method of selecting children for medical studies based on their performance in Physics, Chemistry and Biology in their state boards, CBSE or ICSE. The Directors of Health Service of the states would accept all the applicants based on their marks and their two choices of a college (in order of preference). The State Department would publish the results in the media and this would be visible to all.

It would be a matter of great relief for our state of Meghalaya in particular. Let me tell readers that since the NEET took over the mantle in 2019 to examine our students, even those toppers in State boards fail to qualify despite ST concessions. One vital question to be answered is, "If poor, meritorious students having scored 96% in Physics, Chemistry and Biology after hard work still need to be tested by NEET, this is not justified at all. Lakhs of poor, meritorious students in our country never qualify as they could not be spoon-fed by these NEET coaching centres which are known to deviate from standard procedure of conceptual methods of teaching. For Tamil Nadu in particular, it was a sad experience as last year thirteen girls died of suicide days before the Sept 13, 2020, as they

lost all hopes of qualifying for NEET. This year, one girl died of suicide a day before the examination and on Sept 14 another girl also died of suicide after sitting for the examination because she had no hope of qualifying. This year with online classes things have been devastating. We who scrutinise these papers could find that none of the questions from CBSE texts have been set. CBSE has 8 solved problems for every topic and around 60 unsolved (expected as class work to be guided by teachers if need be). To set objectives hidden among the 'made easy or bazaar' notes is devastating for even the brightest students. And more surprising is the fact that with such tough objectives quite a good number score 720 out of 720 in the 3 subjects. Is this possible? The Covid year had disadvantaged our poor, who could not afford costly online classes. Google classes (free) are in plenty, but these guide the students to understand the concept of the subject, which can be better explained. "Teach a man to fish, and you will not have to bother to give him fish everyday"

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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Stalin initiates new phase in formulating centre-state relations Tamil Nadu legislation delinking state from NEET a big step

By K S Chalam

Tamil Nadu government has passed an Act delinking the state from NEET ushering successive litigations on two important issues in contemporary India. One, this brings to public domain the Emergency era Constitutional amendment removing education from the state list. Two, the present BJP government's overreach in usurping the powers of the state to conduct tests and admit students of the state not only in their Medical and other professional colleges, but also implementing social justice clauses of each state as per the proportion of the populations of the identified SC, ST, OBC and EBC groups. In this context, Tamil Nadu legislation and the initiative taken by Stalin government brings in a new epoch in centre-state relations.

The upward mobility of certain social groups in the Madras presidency during the first quarter of the last century was attributed to Dravidian ethos echoed not only in social reform but also through democratization of education. This is considered by the author as 'Dravidian Marvel' in a book published in 2002 in terms of Human Development Indicators estimated for All India and the four South Indian states. It is now in limelight once again in achieving reservations for Other Backward Classes in NEET after a protracted fight with the centre.

The credit must go to the present Tamil Nadu government for its perseverance and intelligent manoeuvring in getting all the parties together in asking for the legitimate share. It is in this backdrop that we need to look at the progress achieved by the present Five South Indian states that were once part of Madras presidency minus Telangana and other princely states. Education particularly higher education is considered today not as a preparation for life but is an essential condition to be part of a civilized society. Higher education in terms of content and process of the last century is different from the twenty first century.

There is knowledge explosion and the corresponding methods of converting it in to educational programmes and skill sets have undergone a change. The states or regions that had an advantage of early beginning with the preparation for university education with the establishment of three modern universities in 1857 at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay expected to gain from this historical advantage. But, the data show that it is South India particularly Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and the combined state of Andhra Pradesh that have marched ahead of other states in the Country.

The All India Survey on Higher Education for the year 2019-20 has presented gross enrolment ratios (18-23 age groups) for different states show that Tamil Nadu crossed the 50 per cent mark being the first state to cross the mark (excepting small state of Sikkim, 75 per cent). Interestingly the ratio for Tamil Nadu is 51.4 per cent almost double the size of national average (27.1 per cent). Enrolment ratios in Tamil Nadu, Kerala (38.8 per cent), Telangana (35.6 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (35.2 per cent) and Karnataka (32.0 per cent) that are found to be not only higher than national average but also have exceeded some rich states in the country.

This magnificent journey of the South is found both in higher education and also in several development indicators making it unique

compared to states whose per capita GDP is relatively high. This seems to be a paradox, but is an empirical reality made possible by the innovative and intelligent manipulation of the opportunities captured by the enlightened Edpreneurs (Educational Entrepreneurs) of the South during late 1990s. It is noticed that out of 3.8 crore enrolment in higher education at different levels, fifty per cent are in six states that included Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and U.P. Tamil Nadu is in the forefront in making use of the scheme of deemed to be universities having maximum of 26 (the highest number in the country), followed by Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The lead is also noted in the number of engineering colleges at 455 followed by Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. It is not only getting more number of Engineering colleges but also slowly establishing institutions in diversified fields of study. It is quite natural that Tamil Nadu led the movement for OBC quota in NEET as it has the highest number of 42 Medical colleges in the state followed by Karnataka 39, Telangana 22 where the OBC reservation has been implemented from the 1960s and before.

The quantitative expansion of higher education is reflected in the number of colleges per lakh of population at 59 in Telangana, Karnataka 53, AP 48, Kerala 44 and Tamil Nadu 38 and the national average being 30. Interestingly the highest number of colleges in a city is recorded at 1043 in Bangalore. The quality and prestige of the system of education can be assessed roughly in terms of number of foreign students enrolled in a state.

Again, South India excels. Out of 49348 students; 10261 are enrolled in Karnataka followed by UP, 5189; Maharashtra, 4599; Tamil Nadu, 4461 and Andhra; 4356. It means almost 60 per cent are enrolled in these five states alone. The issue of equity in education as a quality parameter can be ascertained in terms of enrolment ratios for Scheduled castes, tribes and women. After all one of the objectives of providing higher education is to create a genuine civilized population that respects equity and democratic space. We can notice that the ratios for SC at the national level were 13.5 per cent while the average was 19.4 in 2010. The gap was 5.9. The gap has come down to 3.7 by 2019 where the national average is 27.1 per cent and SC is 23.4 per cent.

The corresponding figures for Scheduled Tribes are disappointing as the gap has widened during the period. The Gender parity index is positive at 1.01 for all categories and SC is 1.05 while it is 0.97 for ST category. The enrolment ratio for SC is highest at 39.6 per cent in Tamil Nadu during 2019, replacing Maharashtra from the first rank in 2010. All the South Indian states have excelled in the gross enrolment ratios of Scheduled Castes in terms of national average. However, the quality and the content of education imparted to these sections need to be probed as IIT, Madras has excelled in the negative sense where the drop-out rates for scheduled castes are higher compared to other institutions indicating the counter revolution in higher education. The sooner the government addresses this problem, the sooner better days are awaited for South India to celebrate. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Spare a thought for unvaccinated students!

Editor, As a parent of a Higher Secondary student, I would like to bring to your attention certain points regarding the re-opening of schools by the government.

First of all, many Higher Secondary students have not attained the age of 18 years and as such they are not qualified to receive the Covid vaccine. What is worrying is that in some schools, these unvaccinated students now have to attend off-line classes because online classes have been largely discontinued. My question is, is it safe for these unvaccinated students to attend off-line classes? Let us not forget that we are still in the middle of a pandemic despite the easing of all protocols.

Some of these unvaccinated students are genuinely afraid to attend off-line classes because they had seen it was impossible to follow all the SOPs issued by the government in the last school re-opening. We know the infrastructure of our schools and the challenges of practising social distancing in the classrooms. As a parent, I would like to know if the government is checking and monitoring schools to see that all protocols are

followed. I understand our children's education has suffered tremendously since last year and I know online teaching cannot replace classroom teaching. However, our children's health and mental well-being must come first and we must remember that they have their own fears and opinions. I would therefore request the government to come out with a clear directive regarding online classes and to conduct regular checks on schools to see that all SOPs are maintained.

Yours etc,
A Khryiem,
Via email

Pollution in Meghalaya

Editor, Pollution of Air and Water which is directly connected to Climate Change is the most discussed and debated subject in recent times the world over. Floods, forest fires and melting of the ice caps for instance pose a serious threat to the very survival of Mother Earth.

Pollution laws have become very stringent in view of the changes in the climate and negative impact on health and wellbeing of the environment and the natural habitat.

In India, there are three main laws governing the monitoring, prevention and control of pollution.

The Air (Prevention and

Control of Pollution) Act 1981.

The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1974.

The Environment (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1986.

These Acts provide Central and State Boards for the Prevention and Control of pollution for air, water and the overall environment. Polluting industries particularly, have to comply with certain norms and standards to prevent the spread of pollution, be it air or water. The industries have to obtain a No Objection Certificate from the Pollution Control Board which is valid for a specific time period on fulfilment of the norms and rules of the Acts. Non-compliance of the rules under these Acts is an offence and can lead to the closure of the industrial units. The person in charge of the unit can be criminally charged and appropriate penalty imposed as per the law.

Pollution and Climate Change has become a very important issue globally and policy makers and politicians are struggling to find the right balance to frame policies around this subject. The Paris Agreement 2015 which was signed in 2016 provides guidelines and timelines to achieve the objectives of controlling, reducing pollution and better manage climate change. India is one of the signatories to the Paris Agreement 2015.

In Meghalaya, it appears

"Trust brings a higher level of communication and a higher level of commitment and accountability."

— Bruce Ariens

The Shillong Times

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Farmers' plight in Meghalaya

CONGRESS legislator HS Shangpliang speaks for everyone when he rued that the Agriculture Minister has been missing from the Assembly session this time and in the previous session too. When the whole world is connected in virtual mode, the least that the Minister could have done was to join the session virtually, which is not an impossible task if he is concerned about the Department he holds. It has become clear that some Ministers in this Government find themselves out of depth in the House when they are asked complex questions regarding their Departments. Very often, the Chief Minister has to rise and field questions on their behalf. Granted that quite a few MLAs struggle with the English language although they may explain things in-depth in Khasi or Garo. It is incumbent on the Speaker to allow discussions to be held in these two vernaculars with simultaneous translations as is done in Parliament. Simultaneous translations are not impossible provided some investments are made by the Assembly to help overcome communication bottlenecks in the House.

A farmers' group recently stated their grievances to Governor Satya Pal Malik and requested him to take up the matter with the seriousness it deserves. Farmers are held captive by middle-men/women who charge 10% from them as transaction costs. The Chairman, Farmers' Commission has been pointing out the problems faced by the farming community in Meghalaya and their diminishing interests in this occupation because the per capita investment by Government in this sector is far too low for the sector to take off the way it should. Meghalaya is soon touching 50 years but there is not a single cold storage in the State which could have assisted the farmers in stocking their products until they get a remunerative price for them. Producing crops and livestock is one thing but marketing them is quite another. In Meghalaya most farmers are forced to grow and also find the markets for their products, since there is no seamless system in place to take care of both the branding and marketing.

Non-government sectors like the Kolkata-based India Grameen Services had tried to create farmers' cooperatives but other than a few in Garo Hills they could not succeed in their venture. Farmers' cooperatives provide a cutting edge to farmers to decide the price of the crops and vegetables without being pressured by the market to sell them at depressed rates. If nearly 80% of the people of Meghalaya are in the agricultural sector then whoever is the Agriculture Minister has to be serious with his Department and not treat his job like a hobby.

NEP 2020 and Higher Education in the Northeast

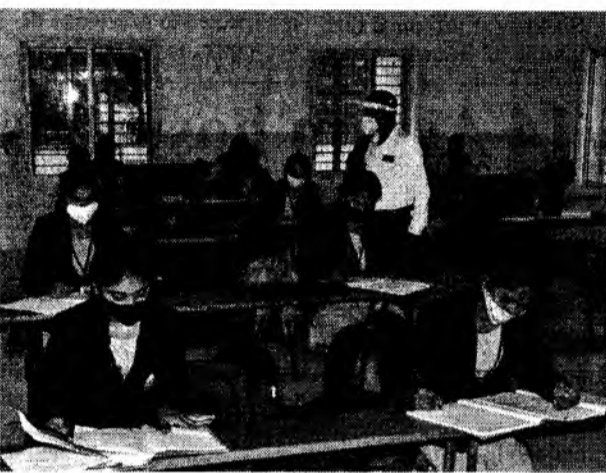
By H. Srikanth

The stakeholders are clearly divided on whether or not to accept the New Education Policy. Its supporters argue that NEP 2020 accurately addresses the problems of stagnation, inefficiency and rigidities associated with the education system; encourages interdisciplinary education, ensures multiple choices of entry and exit, promises education in mother tongues, and all that. They welcome the policy recommendation that talks about spending a minimum of 6 percent of GDP on education and increasing the access to higher education. In contrast, its critics point out that the Policy is a poor imitation of the American model of education, tuned to the needs of the Indian and foreign educational entrepreneurs who want to make education a commodity in the market, and turn students as consumers and teachers as mere service providers. They express the fear that the NEP furthers commercialization, commodification and communalization of education in India. They criticize the reduction of central government's allocation for education, and argue that the entry of private sector or foreign universities may help the rich, but will not do any good to the masses, as the fee in these institutions is not affordable to the majority of the Indians anyway. They also point out that even before the Policy is discussed and passed by the Parliament and the state assemblies, the Union government, against the spirit of democracy and federalism, is forcing the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to implement the same. Let our political representatives, teachers' associations and student organizations debate over the veracity of these contrasting arguments. On my part, in this piece, let me focus only on the implications of the NEP for universities and HEIs in the northeast.

In a country like India where educational standards and access vary from region to region, and community to community, it does not always make sense to enforce a uniform admission policy in all HEIs. Unlike the universities like JNU, UoH, Delhi University, etc., which cater to all India needs, the central and state universities in the north-eastern states are created to address basically to the educational and economic needs of the disadvantaged communities and the backward regions

of the northeast. Here the universities offer different types of official and unofficial preferential policies for the local students in the admission. Universities like NEHU may find it difficult to go for all India entrance tests for that admission, as it may not be perceived as advantageous to the locals.

As Education is in the Concurrent List, unless the NEP becomes an Act, it is not binding on state governments to accept its recommendations. Many proposals made



in the NEP for the UG cannot be implemented unless the colleges under the state government are roped in. For example, whether a central university like NEHU should have one year PG, or a two-year PG depends on whether the colleges would prefer to offer a three-year degree or a four-year degree. It needs a larger consultation with the state government, the college managements and also the general public. Similarly, teaching PG courses in local languages is unthinkable in multilingual north-eastern states.

The NEP insists on making all HEIs multidisciplinary. For the idea to become a reality, it is essential to design appropriate courses, fill up all vacant faculty positions, and even make a provision in the University Regulations enabling appointment of teachers from other disciplines. NEHU has been experimenting with the CBCS system at PG level with some success. But there are problems in implementing the CBCS at UG level. Some resource-rich colleges in Shillong and Tura may be in a position to implement CBCS to some extent, but most colleges in the city and in semi-urban areas will not be in a position to run the CBCS. Further, we don't need to be excited

about entry and exit options that the NEP proposes, for, a degree is viewed as a minimum qualification for most jobs. The students have little to gain if they drop out after one year or two years with a certificate or diploma.

Teaching and research are integral parts of any University or HEIs. Ignoring this aspect, NEP proposes into Research Universities and Teaching universities. Given that the teachers in NEHU and other universities in the northeast publish

equipped studio for recording, preserving and uploading our lectures and talks. At any time, or anywhere, the students, scholars and teachers should be able to access the library sources through the internet. While creating facilities for online teaching, it is necessary to keep in mind that the online teaching should be supplementary, never as an alternative to offline teaching. Healthy, humane and cordial one to one relationship between the student and teacher is essential for overall growth of the students. There is really no joy in sitting and talking in front of a laptop, and giving lectures without knowing whether the audience is really listening and enjoying our lectures, or sleeping and whining during our lectures. The governments should not be allowed to use online teaching as an excuse to reduce the number or the significance of teachers.

Some proposals that the NEP makes are good, and it is possible to implement them. The NEP proposes that pedagogy should be taught as a paper for scholars pursuing Ph.D. programs. The MHRD is also insisting on making ethical considerations a part of the research course for Ph.D. Such recommendations can be implemented without much difficulty. NEP also talks about academic leadership. The document says, "Leaders of an HEI will demonstrate strong alignment to Constitutional values and the overall vision of the institution, along with attributes such as a strong social commitment, belief in teamwork, pluralism, ability to work with diverse people, and a positive outlook." However, given the nature of politics and the continuing feudal values and practices in universities / HEIs, one only hopes these ideas would indeed become a reality one day.

To sum up, the state governments, the universities and the people in the northeast should take a selective look at the NEP, and decide what is good for the people and the region in the long run. There is no need to be unduly sceptical, but at the same time one should not be in a hurry to accept everything without understanding the consequences of uncritical acceptance. Let all stakeholders understand, discuss and debate, and choose the best options that would increase the reach and improve the quality of HEIs in north-eastern states.

(The writer teaches Political Science in NEHU; email hskant@gmail.com)

Few corporate groups will corner public sector assets Centre's monetisation programme will lead to wealth concentration

By Krishna Jha

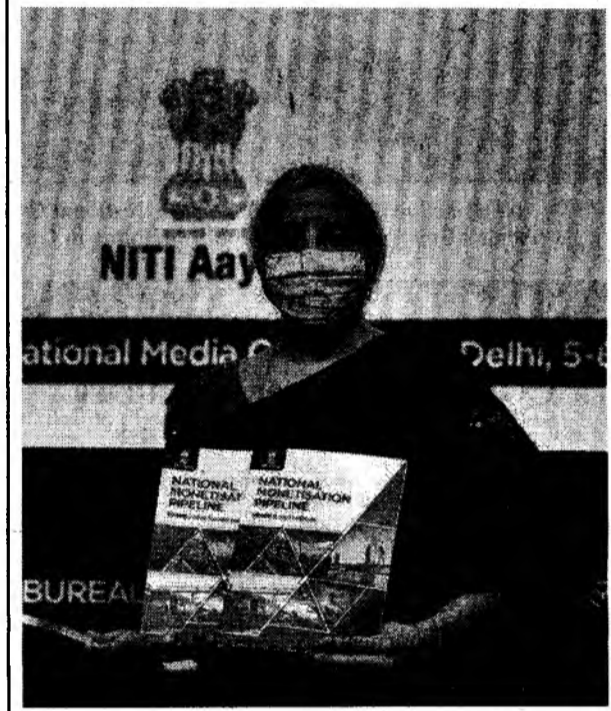
Monetisation, a recent step by the government, aims at the dilution of public sector units. Each of the units is on sale. In the last seven decades, these industrial units were founded to develop the country's infrastructure, to cater to the basic needs to evolve the economy. With public money, the basics of industrial development were built. The tax money of the vast masses was spent to build roads, improve the power sector, energy sector, health services, education, airports, railways, and many such initiatives.

The selling of these basics means fragmentation of the economy itself. It does not stop there. With each sale, the government intends to usurp the entire revenue also. The assets, built up in decades, with public contributions of the hard earned money, are transformed into cash. Each of them is sold to private buyers, at prices

science and technology, and to build the heavy industries could be facilitated only because there were the public sector units

But with the privatisation spree, the evolution of science and technology has also been facing the guillotine. The buck does not stop here. It still has to go through generations, as the government itself has appropriated even the future earnings that are yet to come. There is the ominous graveyard silence so far as clarity is concerned. The total absence of any explanation about the massive monetisation of public assets makes it even more difficult to get the answer to the most plaguing issue, that is how the government plans to compensate subsequent generations if it appropriates all their future earnings today?

So far as implementation is concerned, the financialised capital keeps moving



that do not match, nor is there any guarantee for further investment. Its present and future, both have been privatised, in the name of giving them on lease, for 30 to 50 years.

The government claims that the units would be under its rule for the entire lease period, but the money that is exchanged between the two does not leave any scope for such optimism. The process is named monetisation. In scientific terms, it is the emerging supremacy of financial capital. Government is selling the infrastructure and plans to raise six lakh crore in the coming four years.

The sectors that face the bullet are airports, railways, roads, power, gas pipeline, mining and telecom, banks, each one imperative for building the industrial basics of economy. The resources are public money, collected in taxes during the last seven decades. Now the private players have got them on lease spread over decades. It is obvious that the units would be totally depreciated to zero value at the end. As the government is leasing out the units, it is also taking away the entire bulk of rental value now itself. In fact it is the intended appropriation of all the future money that is to be earned by the assets. It is also not surprising that the terms of return of the money invested, or the compensation to the taxpayer is still kept illusive.

Illusive is also any strategy to be evolved for the all out progress of the country, where economy plays a major role. Nation building is missing from the agenda, so is the creation of infrastructure. Public sector units were taken up to facilitate the process. To fight against unemployment, to provide inputs for basic development, like energy, power, mining, transport were made possible basically because there were the public sector units. The development of

away from production. It is aimed at speculation and the stock market, typical for financialization of capital. It influences the quality of the product too. The reality is every asset in the country is up for sale. The public assets are transferred to a separate unit that are to be financed by various trusts almost like the mutual funds with global and local funds shares

There are certain issues with the global funds that do not want any imposition from the public sector management, and thus getting into conflicts. For fossil fuel like coal mines and hydro thermal generation plants, there hardly would be long term investors. But it is also a fact that irrespective of social rejection or ecological adversities, global finance would not hesitate to take up projects that would help financialization of capital.

In a situation when the split between investment and financialization is getting deeper as the power begins shifting through monetisation, there could be only few corporate groups with access to bank loans, to bid for the sell out of airports, coal mines, power generation projects with long term lease. This may lead to concentration of wealth in a few hands. The role of government in this lease period could be only negligible.

Thus the public sector assets could get concentrated in a few hands that could even monopolise them at the end. With the role of the government getting feeble, the question of its stability too arises. There must not arise a situation when the future governments could take advantage of precedence. Hence in the struggle to rein in the devastating process, of which selling out is only the beginning, there has to be a consensus from all parties, including opposition and the trade unions to forge unity. In fact there is no alternative to it. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Speakers Removal: Defects in 10th Schedule

Editor,

The motion of no-confidence against the Speaker or Deputy Speaker of Parliament or State Assemblies or any elected bodies arises only during extra-ordinary situations, warranting removal of the Speaker of the House, who is found guilty in flagrant violation of rules and procedures of conducting the proceedings of the House or when he is found transparently taking sides with any person or group of persons or parties in his performance as a non-partisan umpire inside the House.

At least in two previous occasions, such incidents in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly have gone on record, due to defects in the 10th Schedule, para-5, (a) providing exemption from disqualification of an elected member who has been elected as Speaker or Deputy Speaker, "If he..... voluntarily gives up the membership of the political party to which he belonged, immediately before such election....." This vital legislation, to me, should leave no room for choice or ambiguity, but should be clearly

mandatory for those elected to such non-partisan offices, to vacate or resign as member of their political parties, immediately within 24 hours after such election.

Paragraph 5 (b) protects them to rejoin their parties whenever they cease to occupy the above offices. Metbah Lyngdoh the present Speaker and all other Speakers continue to be members of their respective political parties due to the above glaring defects in the Constitution, which should be rectified through amendment at the earliest.

In 1991, the then Speaker, Mr PR Kyndiah in his understanding of Para 7 of this Schedule, which says ".....no court shall have any jurisdiction in respect of any matter connected with the disqualification of a member of a House under this Schedule," disqualified 5 Independent members of the House, under paragraph 2 (2) of the Schedule ibid.

Another order of the then Speaker E D Marak in December 2001, which was clearly prejudicial to Constitutional obligations, was his denial of opportunity to the then Chief Minister, E K Mawlong, to reply to the No-Confidence Motion tabled by the Opposition Congress against him, on allotment of contract to AHLIC for construction works in Meghalaya House, Russell

Street, Kolkata.

The No-Confidence motion tabled by the Opposition against the Speaker this time has baffled many, since no specific reason was mentioned, although after revising their stand it appears they have retracted the No-confidence motion. Even this has gone on record.

Yours etc.,
BM Lanong,
Via email

Superficial concerns & opportunistic politics

Editor,

The recent massive public outcry and protests against the blatant violation by coke plants in and around Elaka Sutnga is an indicator that they could continue to operate with the "blessings" of those sitting on their political chairs in the Secretariat and this has once again portrayed how so-called Christian values that they preach in public functions seem to go down the drain. Every religion teaches one to respect, preserve and enrich nature which is God given. Unfortunately, those loaded to the brim have least concern for others and the greatest sin is not hating

another fellow being but showing total indifference to their needs. None of the MLAs from Jaintia Hills have dared to raise the plight of the those having to suffer. It is unfortunate that they shamelessly call themselves public representatives when they do not voice the concerns of people. Only time will tell whether they still deserve another chance.

Another "shocking" message sent by the ruling NPP to the detractors of the MDA Government is that loyalists will be rewarded. The appointment of Ernest Mawrie - a vocal critic of the NPP over corruption - as yet another advisor to the Chief Minister means that the BJP now is totally compromised. Politics indeed makes strange bedfellows and this has been reflected by the opportunistic politics played by the State BJP President. From the time Mawrie assumed charge he has been speaking out against all the misdeeds of the MDA coalition. We now know he did all this because he wanted power. He has achieved his aspirations. The BJP will now need a new calling card to rename itself. Wearing the mantle of advisor in the list of areas given makes every one wonder how Mawrie has suddenly become an "expert" in tourism and other areas of governance. Of course, the CM always has the last

laugh. The BJP's fake claims about clean and good governance is a now well and truly exposed.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Shillong

India's non-committal climate commitment

Editor,

It is not right to pressurize a developing country like India to commit to a net zero goal. This is because developing and poor nations cannot afford to sacrifice poverty-alleviating growth. Also, the West is not willing to fund climate-friendly growth in these countries. This is the context in which the US special presidential envoy for climate, John Kerry expressed his opinion about India's commitment on net zero. When asked about India's commitments on raising climate ambitions, John Kerry said, "No one said no, but no one said yes."

In fact, the US does not want to pressure India to commit to a net zero goal. India has not yet given a commitment date for achieving carbon neutrality or net zero. In contrast, about 130 countries have set or are

considering a target of net zero by 2050, including the US. Another five have set later dates. China, the world's largest emitter has set 2060 as its date for carbon neutrality.

Kerry said that the US will assist India in hitting 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030. Climate cooperation between India and the US will help in technology development and implementation partnership between the two countries. Every country does not have to do what the developed countries are doing. On the other hand, every country has to lay out a plan on what their energy sector is going to be and how it can be net zero. India is expected to make big announcements before the Glasgow summit.

The US must adopt a give and take approach to climate action. In fact, the US needs to give more than take. It must make investments in developing countries for climate action and green energy transition.

Yours etc.,
Venu, GS,
Kollam

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Of People, Spaces and in-betweens...



By Sukant Deepak

Through the lens, she sees her friends in the little worlds they have created. She says she wanted it to be like a page in her diary -- a little something about them in the spaces they inhabit. It was last year that photographer and former model Sheetal Mallar along with Savio Jon thought about 'Sheetal-Savio Diaries', created during the pandemic.

While Savio wanted to shoot his collection, Mallar wanted to make intimate photo essays. The work is being exhibited online at Art Musings.

"Savio and I go back a long way. We know each other from our fashion days. I shot this series in Goa since both of us love the place. I feel the earthiness of Goa and what it evokes in me, are intertwined in the work I make here. It has been wonderful experience doing this with Savio. Such harmonious collaborations make the journey all the more meaningful," Mallar says.

Stressing that the last year made her reevaluate many choices, the photographer says that it made her realise the importance of living in a community that one feels connected to.

"Being a city girl and a traveller, I had not realised the importance of ones' neighbourhood and had not invested time in building interpersonal relationships with the people living close to me. The pandemic has made me rethink about the things that really matter," she feels.

"The environment you choose



to live in and what it can offer has taken on a new meaning. The activities you do to feel fulfilled, also becomes something to think about. This got me thinking again of a feeling that has been with me in the last few years, of being a part of a community that would be meaningful. Why do we choose to live where we live? Where do I need to be to be happy? Creating work that reflects these feelings feels more relevant now, than before."

Talking about her journey from front to the back of the camera, Mallar remembers being drawn to the visual medium from early on.

She says that had always enjoyed movies, works of artists, graphic artists, graffiti, animation etc.

"I have also been painting ever since I was a kid. My first career as a model that started in my teens made me travel extensively. I always had a sketchbook and a small camera with me, and loved the idea of recording memories. So the romance with the camera had started way before I consciously realised it," she remembers.

Adding that much later, when she transitioned into the second phase of her life around eleven

years ago, it felt natural to continue exploring the medium of photography.

"As the journey progressed I knew I had chosen the right path."

For someone who mostly documents stories that move her and the experiences she wants to have, Mallar says she is always drawn to sub-cultural stories of spaces, people in their spaces and the relationship they have with it.

"If it's stories of friends, then it depends what the story is and what am I conveying. There is a level of sincerity and vulnerability that comes through with friends and people you know that's special and unique. Saying these kinds of stories about friendships and feeling home is what I feel drawn to right now."

However, spaces devoid of people, that give a sense of their absence is as evocative to this photographer.

She says in stories of friends who have moved away, she is interested in why they choose to live in one place and not the other.

"I am intrigued by the choice of their spaces they want to call home and their families that follow them. The way we are always looking for communities to be

part of. These are probably some of the questions I am seeking for answers myself. The work becomes part of those questions and my pursuit for the answers. I am interested in revealing these layers that form the familiar ground between us."

Mallar feels that there are multiple reasons why artists across the country are deciding to call Goa home. Besides a very eclectic artistic community, she feels the coastal state allows one the space to have a home/studio.

"It doesn't cost as much as the cities do. The pace of life is slower and so if you are in the right state of mind it can be a space of peace and a place to be very productive. There is a sense of community which is so important to feel inspired and stay inspired. An exchange of ideas, getting feedback, encouraging each other all becomes part of it. I have always been drawn to Goa and have stayed here for months at times. Some day, I would like to have a home here."

Currently working on a photo-book revolving around her relationship with her grandmother, she says, "This is something I had started ten years ago. It has a collection of photos, sketches, and writing."

Resistance band workouts are everywhere - but do they work?

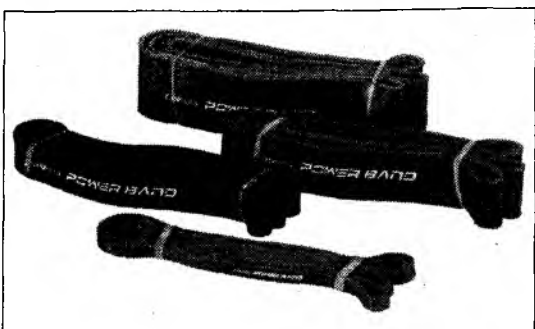
Resistance-band exercises have been all over social media during the pandemic. In case you aren't familiar with them, resistance bands are similar to an elastic band, usually made from a synthetic fibre like latex or rubber. You can loop them around your legs or arms, for example, which helps create more tension while you work out. This tension makes it more difficult to do movements, and engages more muscles, which some claim will help you build strength and muscle.

Many of us know that strength training is important. Not only can it help us build strength, it can slow muscle deterioration as we get older, while increasing muscle mass can also increase metabolism. While you can build some strength through bodyweight-only exercises like squats or lunges, often the key to building a greater amount of strength is by creating resistance.

This is often done using weights or weight machines. But in recent years - especially at the height of the pandemic - resistance bands have become a popular way of creating this resistance to build strength. This means you can get the benefits of extra strength without needing to spend hours in the gym lifting weights.

Resistance bands can be used easily at home, don't take up much room and are cheap, which may be some of the reasons they're so popular. Different bands also have different levels of resistance - such as light or heavy - which work your muscles with different degrees of difficulty, making them suitable for people of all different fitness levels.

Research shows that strength gains from using elastic resistance bands are similar to training with dumbbells or weight machines, benefiting not only the average person but also benefit athletes. Resistance-band training can even increase the stabiliser muscles to a greater extent than weight training. This muscle group is important as it supports our



larger muscles and joints during movement, and helps us from getting injured. Strengthening them can improve movement and stability, and is why resistance bands are often used for rehabilitation.

Meanwhile, older people can benefit from using resistance bands where using free weights is not always practical - perhaps because they can't easily get to a gym, for ex-

ample. Not only is exercising with resistance bands safe for older adults, it can help reduce frailty. Resistance bands can also improve balance, flexibility and body composition (less body fat and more muscle).

PROS AND CONS

It's thought that around half of those who start weight training using traditional weights give up within one year due to the logistical difficulties and financial costs. Resistance bands may be an easier way to build strength and may encourage people to use them long-term.

All the same, they have their drawbacks. You only reach the maximum resistance when the band is extended as far as it can go. But with free weights, resistance is consistent throughout the movement. You can also easily add more resistance (by lifting a heavier weight) or remove resistance (decreasing the weight you're lifting). Though you can use a band that has greater resistance to get more strength gains, these gains may not be as great as with using weights.

So while the strength gains from doing exercises with the resistance bands are similar to conventional methods such as free weights a review, you can work against greater resistances with free weights, so in this instance you will gain greater strength. There is some support for using resistance bands in conjunction with free weights to maximise strength gains: with the fixed resistance from the free weight and the varied resistance from the resistance band.

But while it's important to understand these limitations with resistance bands, they can still be an effective way to build muscle and strength. Given that they're cheap and easy to access, they may be a good option for people getting started with exercising or who don't want to pay for a gym membership. This means almost everyone can get the benefits of strength training without needing to lift heavy weights. (*The Conversation*)

Books & Literature

Autumn Thrillers

As the nights draw in and we spend more time indoors, autumn can be a good time to get stuck into the literary world's latest murder mysteries. And the last few months have seen the publication of major new works by some of the genre's most respected authors.

So here are a few recommendations that might help to keep you warm - or at least offer the homeliest of chills - on an evening in.

London Bridge is Falling Down by Christopher Fowler

Long trailed as the final outing for Christopher Fowler's duo of decrepit detectives, Arthur Bryant and John May, the 20th book in a saga that started in 2004 answers a lot of the series' unanswered (and unasked) questions.

Fowler has recently hinted that this might not be quite the end for these stalwarts of London's Peculiar Crimes Unit, whose adventures the series follows from the Blitz to the present day, through an extraordinarily erudite exploration of the mythic geography of the metropolis. Let's pray there's a little more life to be drawn out of these enthralling creations of Fowler's absurdly fertile imagination.



A Line to Kill by Anthony Horowitz

This third novel in Anthony Horowitz's chronicles of the adventures of private investigator, Daniel Hawthorne, again sees a fictionalised version of the author himself play biographer to the enigmatic consulting detective. He is Watson to Hawthorne's Holmes, although he likes him rather less: while Hawthorne's self-assured brilliance enchants others, it constantly infuriates Horowitz himself.

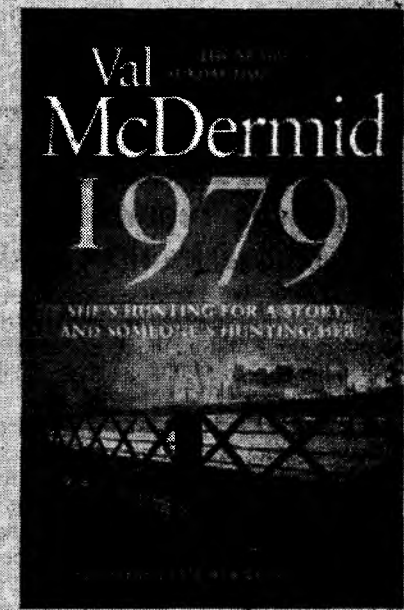
Set on the island of Alderney, Horowitz's witty and crafty narrative is as evocative of the detachment and claustrophobia of rural isolation as last year's *Moonflower Murders*: "The road didn't seem to go anywhere. In the distance, a hillside rose steeply, blocking anything that might tell me which century I was actually in". Use putdownable stuff.

1979 by Val McDermid

Late revisions to Val McDermid's previous novel, published last August, brought us extraordinarily up to date with a Scotland teetering on the verge of the pandemic. By contrast, her latest work harks back to four decades before COVID-19. Her tale of dodgy dealings in 1970s Glasgow, set against a backdrop of familiarly fervent independence controversies, introduces her latest heroine, the bright and determined young reporter Allie Burns.

Burns is a breath of fresh air, from her first appearance on a snowbound train returning to the city from a family Christmas, she is eminently sympathetic, engaging and likeable. And she doesn't yet bear the baggage of McDermid's long-running protagonists Carol Jordan and Karen Pirie (at least not to begin with).

McDermid invokes the shoddy, gloomy zeitgeist of the late seventies with her characteristic deftness of touch: "blizzards, strikes, unburied bodies, power cuts, terrorist threats and Showaddywaddy's Greatest Hits topping the album charts; 1979 was a cascade of catastrophe".



The Man Who Died Twice by Richard Osman

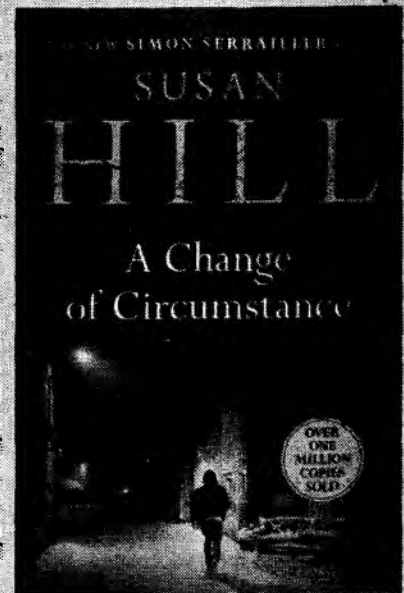
Richard Osman's debut novel, *The Thursday Murder Club*, was the publishing phenomenon of 2020. That book was both clever and funny, but more importantly it was reassuringly parochial: a conundrum worthy of the golden age of detective fiction, investigated by an emphatically charming group of residents of a retirement community.

Osman's writing is reminiscent, in its tone and textual economy, of Sophie Hannah's splendid reboot of Hercule Poirot (as ingenious as Christie but rather more nuanced and progressive). His sequel, a tale of stolen diamonds, involving the Mafia, MI5 and multiple murders, all kicked off by "an invitation from a dead man", has just come out, and will likely send Penguin's printing presses into overdrive.

A Change of Circumstance by Susan Hill

October sees the publication of the 11th book in Susan Hill's series of Simon Serrailier novels. Hill's elegant provincial cop may be the most rounded of today's fictional detectives. As with P. D. James's Adam Dalgleish, it seems the author herself is a little enamoured of her dashing but troubled hero - romantically misguided and prone to a perhaps unnecessary degree of listlessness.

As she drags him onto another emotional rollercoaster, her readers surely cannot fail to share that bittersweet attachment. Approaching her 80th birthday in February next year, Hill's writing has lost none of its immediate relevance and urgency - this time focusing upon the impacts of county lines drug-running networks. Fans of the series will find the prospect of an update on the lives of its central characters absolutely irresistible.



Birdman by Mo Hayder

In July, British fiction suffered the loss of one of its most compelling and commanding voices. If there is to be any consolation from Mo Hayder's death, at the age of 59, then let it be that it might draw a new generation of readers to her work.

The best place to start is her stunning breakthrough novel, the justly celebrated *Birdman*, published at the turn of the millennium. The opening ordeal for her problematic protagonist, Detective Inspector Jack Caffery, offers readers a gripping ride - one that makes the darkest of Nordic noir look decidedly beige by comparison. Hayder's work will take you through autumn, to winter and beyond.

Impact of the pandemic on art

By Siddhi Jain

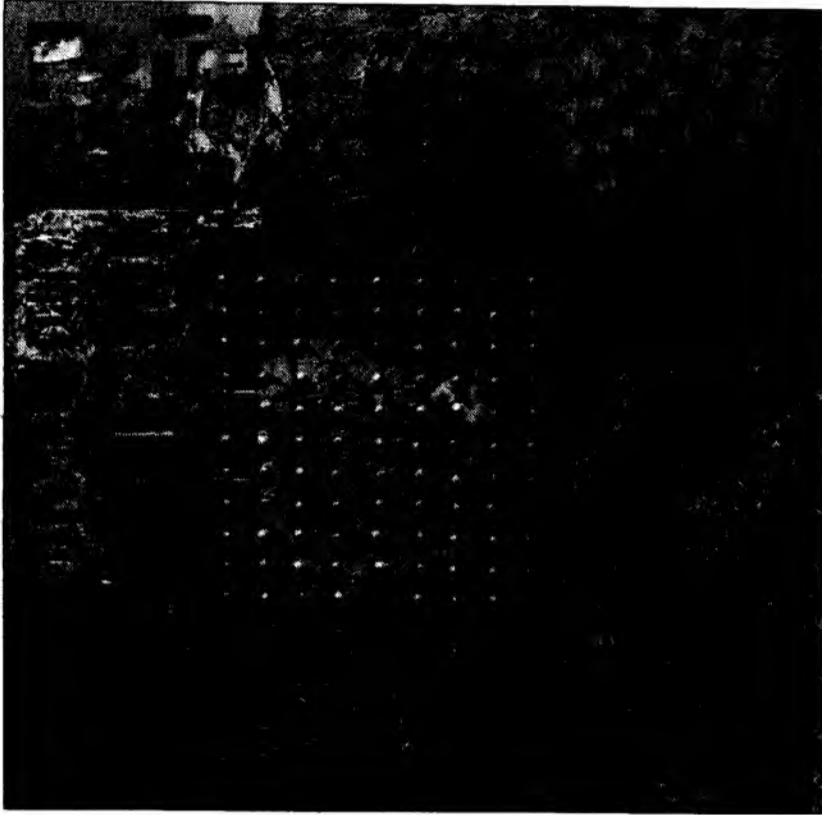
The pandemic has transformed the art landscape in India, driving art exhibitions to the digital medium and an influx of pandemic-inspired themes on the canvas. How has the art landscape in India changed from 2019 to now? Is there a specific impact of the pandemic on women artists? Four Indian female artists assess its tangible impacts on the art world.

Santosh Jain

Viewing of art on digital platforms gained almost sudden popularity after 2019. Indian artists took to social media to share their works, form artist groups and even tag peers in art challenges. It was as if the artist community had come together; this was inspiring. One could see works of artists one hadn't come across earlier, and virtual interactions helped support each other during the lockdown. But the ease of posting and over one year of just digitally viewing art also led to 'art fatigue' and a dilution in quality! Art galleries and museums have reopened in the last 2 months. And even though there are strict guidelines on admissions, timings, etc., it feels great to see art lovers step out to experience art.

I know women bore a disproportionate share of the burden during the pandemic. But I cannot comment on how that affected their practice. Instead, I can speak about myself and how the pandemic impacted me as a woman artist.

The pandemic affected me quite badly. I felt pressed down with so much dread around... updates on tv, ambulance sirens, eerie silence and WhatsApp messages bearing sad news. Fear and uncertainty haunted me day and night. My art helped me express my inner concerns and come to terms with the new 'normal'. I created works across

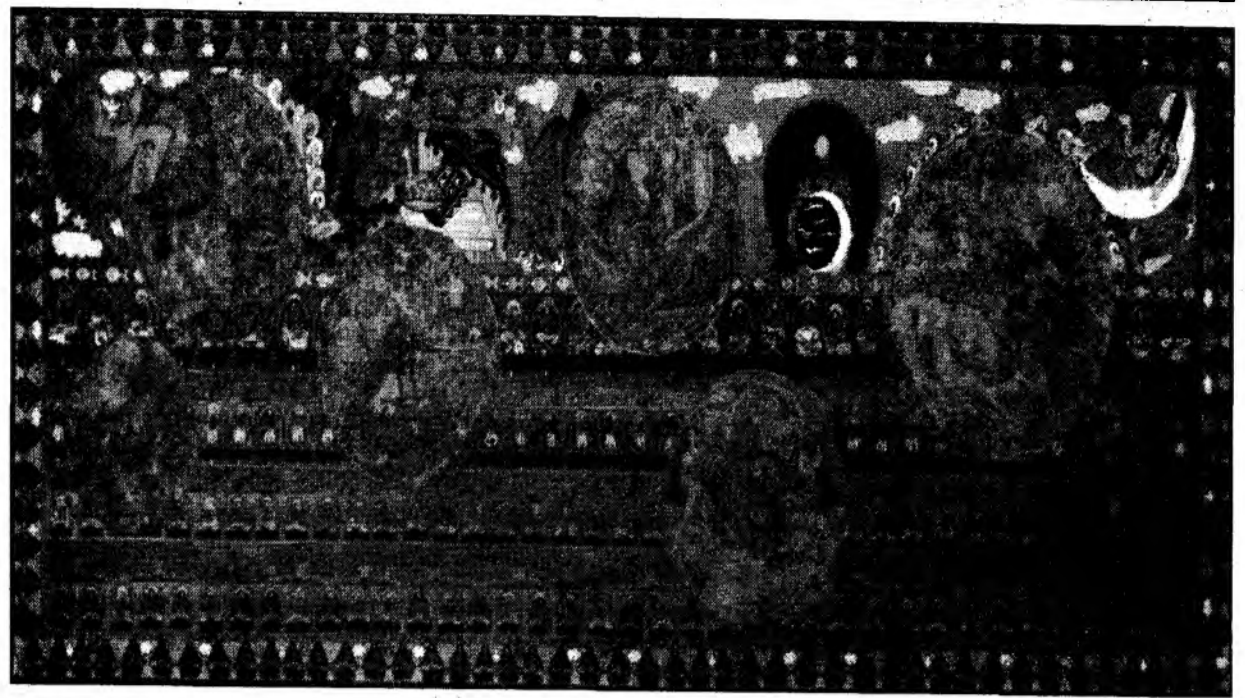


mediums almost daily - Multi Media works, Digital Paintings and even Linocuts in 2020-21. For The Lockdown Series, I experimented with 'art material' that was available at home -- bills from home deliveries, kitchen foil, laundry strips, coffee, old cards, etc.. My colour palette turned gloomy during the second wave. I also explored the concept of 'shadows' in The Languish Series. I feel no one stays with us forever except our shadow. In good times, in bad times and even in death.

Sonali Chaudhari

The years 2019 to 2021 have seen significant changes in each and every sphere. The Covid-19 pandemic has had lasting implications on every level of society. Art

forms of any period are a reflection of that era. Needless to say, much of the art created during these years will remind us of these difficult times for generations to come. Furthermore, locked in the confines of their homes, people have become more conscious of the impact of art in their lives. Instead of being something elitist, art also has a vital role in stress relief and mental health. More and more online exhibitions made art easily accessible to all people. As an artist, I have seen many people approach me for art that they can identify with and uplift them. During the prolonged lockdowns, my studio was my sanctuary. It gave me much time for self-reflection and exploring various facets of my work in ways that are impossible



without complete solitude.

The pandemic has affected every single person and has had an impact on women artists too. However, as in all cases, the level of that impact varies from person to person, based on their socio-economic background. So one cannot generalise in this case. We have all been through the same storm but in different boats.

Seema Kohli

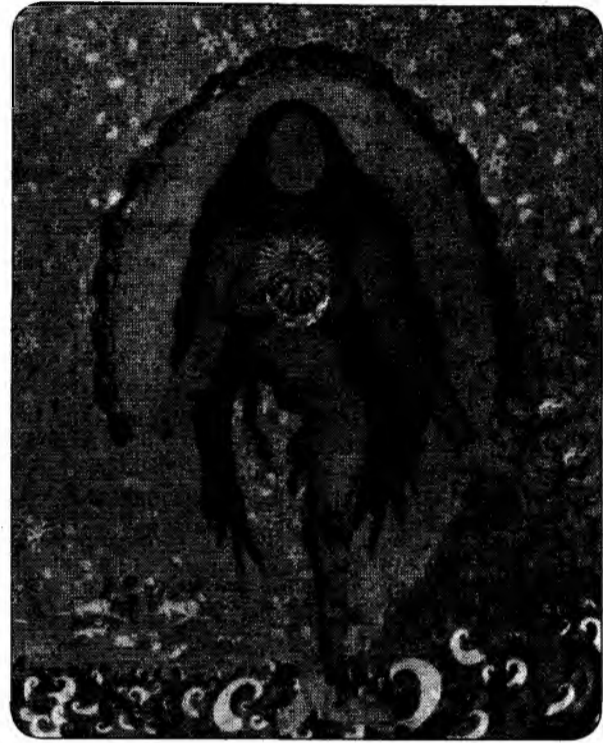
Post the pandemic, art became much more accessible and easier to procure. People had the time to virtually explore art. Most established art galleries already had online presence. The pandemic allowed them to gear up the virtual experience with enhanced technology such as online viewing rooms, artist talks and so on. I think, in spite of the fact that the pandemic had lot of lows, there was room for people to sort of alter their lives and move into different spaces online.

I see myself as an artist first and then as a woman artist! On the whole, the impact on the artist community was more of an emotional set back, despite having all the time to themselves to create art. Most of us felt that it was time when we could in-

trospect, sit-down, experiment and work a lot more than otherwise. I think there was no social compulsion which also made it easier for us all to work in our own space and embark on our own journey.

posting their best work on social media, especially women artists. I have spent a fair amount of time dabbling in different art experiments. More for my enjoyment and pleasure rather than thinking about the future of art in terms of a career. The shift has been fairly satisfying. The works are brighter than ever as times maybe uncertain and grim. I have always been inspired by my travel but now I am looking at other things. Looking inwards rather than outwards. Being creative can have the best results for women ... be it in their kitchen or it could be pursuing online courses.

Art is a form of meditation. Colour is therapy! I try to lead a normal life and keep myself busy. I miss a few things like meeting people and travelling but there are other things to keep me going. I have recently begun travelling again - I was in Ladakh last week where the landscape was spectacular, and hope to travel to new places. The rainy weather outside my window is awesome and Mumbai as a city inspires me a lot as do the people of Mumbai who go on with their lives and deal with every issue and survive so well. (LANSIfe)



Brinda Miller

I wouldn't say that the current art landscape has been a reason for artists to make time for introspection and I find a lot of artists

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPT 19, 2021

Moon line Venus on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results for the whole year. You will be rewarded for your efforts. And will receive acclaim and appreciation of your peers and superiors. Your pet projects will get completed. And you will work with focus and determination. You will be goal oriented and will work in team spirit. You will take people along with you. You will also be very positive in your relations with mate. He/she will provide all support and help you need in difficult situation. And will prove able companion. Financially you will have no major worries. You can invest in shares, mutual funds, debentures and bonds. And will make good profit. Your business income too will rise. Students will get success in exams and interview. Your faith in God will increase and you will attend religious gathering and also visit holy places. Business trips will keep you busy. And you will interact with a number of people.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
It is going to be a great week for you. You will be having financial gains. You will also take up new tasks and face challenges with confidence. You will also get the expected help and assistance from friends and colleagues. You will face some challenges to begin with but eventually victory will be yours. You will also spend a lot of your time with your family members. You will also take out some time for fun, entertainment and relaxation. You will also have plans to buy and sell property. You will complete your work with utmost dedication and sincerity. Your business plans will also be successful. You will take some work to complete with a planned approach.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
It is turning out to be a great time period for you, you will meet your lover and do every work as a mission. He/she will be impressed a lot with you. The results of examination will be in your favor. Your hard work will finally pay off. You will also extend a helping hand to those in need. You will be busy in business related activities. You will also take business related trips. Gains are indicated in your profession. Your professional attitude will also win you lot of admirers. You will have financial gains the planetary situation is very favorable. You will also be inspired by people and will have new ideas.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
You will be having new plans. You will also make lot of money. Your social circle will increase. You will take some concrete decisions in business/work. Whatever work you will think of will get done. Planetary situation is in your favor. You will discharge all your responsibilities well and your financial side will be strong. Your family problems will get resolved. In your office, the atmosphere will remain congenial. Do not take any decision by being emotional. Your love life is going to be amazing and you will share amazing bonding with your mate. Property disputes between brothers will get resolved. Visitors/ guests will drop in and you will remain busy welcoming them.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
You will take lot of interest in constructive work. Your colleagues and family members will help you a lot. Your influence and fame will also increase. You will also undertake new projects. You could also fall in love with an unknown person whom you will meet by chance. You will relish these moments spent with your partner. You will have no financial worries. You will keep yourself limited to your own affairs and won't muddle in the affairs of others. Your parents will be happy with you. Your differences with brothers will also get resolved. Matters in courts will come in your favor. People will pay attention to what you say.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
It is time to give time to your family now. You need to listen to the problems of your family members. They need your support and guidance. You will prove to be a good friend. But you need also to keep a control over yourself and not impose your views. You will also have financial gains. You will also be able to influence people and will be sociable too. You will be aware of who and what is important in your life. Instead of taking a big risk, you will wait for a favorable time to come. You will also plan to travel abroad due to your work. You will face no problems in your official matters. There are scopes of expansion of your business. You will also defeat your opponents with ease. Your time will be spent on discussions, however something good will come out of it. All troubles regarding marriage will end. You will also meet a lot of people. Your interactions with others will turn out to be useful. You will take right decisions at right time. You will also look after your parents and children.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
All your worries will get over. Your seniors will adopt a helpful attitude towards you. Even your family members and friends will give you lots of support. You will be enjoying your marital life and have amazing bonding with your partner. You will have mon-

etary gains. Your work will get lot of praise and this will make you become enthusiastic. There will be spring in your steps. You will be a hurry to finish off your work. But you need to exercise lot of caution. Your meeting with an influential person will open the doors of progress for you. You will also take proper care of your health and diet. You will also plan about your future.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)
Your actions will bring happiness and people will come close to you. You will be trust worthy and people will believe in your words. But you will face tough competition from your competitors. The objectives that you have planned for your future and career will get achieved. You will be lucky in love and romance. The movements of the stars will change your destiny. Your name and fame will rise. There will be success and big changes in your daily activities. Your elders will bless you. And your children will listen to you. You will brilliantly carry out all your responsibilities and duties. You will also be busy in financial matters. And will be able to balance your family life and professional life.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
The stars are in your favor. You may fall in love with someone and will have a wonderful time. People will also remain in your favor and you will get a very good response from them. You will also be able to complete your tasks with ease. Your financial position will be good. And your bosses and peers will help you a lot. You will get attracted to religion and spiritualism in a big way. Your health will also improve. You will be busy in business activities. Some persons may conspire against you but will be unable to harm you in anyway. Due to the blessings and grace of God you will be able to overcome all hurdles.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)
A chance meeting with an influential person will open the doors of success for you. Your financial condition will keep getting better. You will also pay lot of attention to improve your personality. You will become more easy going. As a result, your relations will improve. You should also pay attention to even the little requirements of your family and house. You need to take careful steps in love relations. You need to be aware of realities that you may be made to face. Students will get success in competitive exams and interviews. You need to show foresight otherwise your almost complete tasks will get struck due to your overcommitment and haste. Your office related matters will also get solved.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
All the tasks that you think will get completed with ease. You will get full cooperation from your colleagues. Your zest and zeal will remain unmatched and you will be committed. You can also enjoy a beautiful relation with your spouse/partner. Both of you will come closer. You will also meet an influential politician or officer. You will have financial gains. And you will buy something new for your house. You will face a sudden problem at your workplace but will be able to overcome it with your tact and wisdom. Read all legal documents carefully before signing it. You will help people a lot and will completely devote yourself into a task but the result will be in your favor.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
You will be busy in your business/professional activities. A lot is in stake for you but you will rise to the challenge. You will work with dedication and sincerity. The atmosphere at your workplace will be favorable. You will also be occupied in your daily activities for the whole week. Your romantic life is going to be fascinating and you will enjoy amazing bonding with your mate. You will have belief in your abilities and there will be an increase in your self-confidence. You will interact with people on one to one basis. With the help of your self confidence and capabilities you continue to shine in your work field. Avoid taking any emotional decision in a hurry. Your doubts and misunderstandings will get resolved. Your enemies and opponents will obviously be a cause of stress for you but will be unable to harm you in anyway.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
It is high time to look after your needs now. You will set new goals and will be conscious about your career. You will have no financial problems. Money will keep coming. Those who are unemployed will get new job opportunities. Unmarried persons are expected to get engaged. There will be a good news from somewhere. There will be a happy and joyous atmosphere at home. You will enjoy the cooperation of people around you. You will also fulfill your hobbies. You will not keep any work pending. You will also make profits. Your health will be at its peak. You will also manage to keep your relatives happy. You will be successful in competitive exams.

National Security Guards in India



By Ranjan K Baruah

I have come across several times where students ask me about NSG and how to join this prestigious organisation. Well, let us understand about NSG and its formation. National Security Guard is the Federal Contingency Guard Class Zero Error Force to deal with anti-terrorist activities in all its manifestation. The NSG force is a force specially equipped and trained to deal with specific situations and is therefore, to be used only in exceptional circumstances to thwart serious acts of terrorism. We have seen many incidents where personnel from NSG have shown exemplary roles and made all of us proud. Many officers have sacrificed for all of us and for our better tomorrow. Aspirants may join defence forces like Indian Army or CAPF and later join NSG through deputation if they are selected.

The Union Cabinet in 1984 took a decision to create a Federal Contingency Force comprising of personnel who are highly motivated, specially equipped and well trained to tackle the various manifestations of terrorism. The NSG was modeled on the pattern of the SAS of the UK and CSG-9 of Germany. It is a task oriented Force and has two complementary elements in the form of the Special Action Group (SAG) comprising Army personnel and the Special

Ranger Groups (SRG) comprising personnel drawn from the Central Armed Police Forces / State Police Forces. Sri R S Mooshahary, IPS, Kerala Cadre was former Director General of NSG who hails from Assam and was also former Governor of Meghalaya. Sri Mooshahary was DG of NSG from 13/02/2002 to 07/02/2005. Details about NSG can be read from the official website.

EXAM UPDATE

A Combined Limited Departmental Competitive Examination for additions in the Select Lists for the Section Officers' Grade and Stenographers' Grade 'B'/ Grade I will be held by the Union Public Service Commission commencing on the 11th December. The selection test would be held in two parts which includes a written examination and also a short hand in Hindi or English. The topics for the objective type examination include General Studies & General Knowledge of Constitution of India and Machinery of Government, Practice and Procedures in Parliament and Knowledge of RTI Act, 2005.

Procedure and Practice in the Govt. of India Secretariat and attached offices and General Financial and Service Rules duly taking into account the requirement of relevant categories of services while subjective includes noting and drafting, precise writing, etc.

SCHOLARSHIPS / FELLOWSHIPS UPDATES

□ Legrand Scholarship program is to encourage meritorious girl students to pursue a career in Engineering and Architecture. Aspirants must have passed Class 12 in 2021 and should have scored minimum 75% marks in Class 10 and Class 12 board exams and must have a total family income of less than INR 5 Lakh from all sources. Aspirants may apply before 30th September.

□ Kotak Kanya Scholarship 2021 is open for girl students across India and meritorious girl students who have secured admission to first year graduation programme from institutes of repute (NAAC/NBA/UGC accredited) for professional academic pursuits such as professional graduate courses like Engineering, Medicine, Architecture, Designing, Specialised Commerce, Finance and Computer courses or professional courses pursued alongside graduation like CA, CS, CFA, CWA, LLB. Applicant's annual family income must be Rs 3 lakh (Rupees Three lakh) or less. Interested girls may apply before 30th September.

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at bkranjian@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any further query)

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

— Nelson Mandela

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 41 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

Smooth transition in Punjab

IT looks like the Congress party has executed a smooth leadership transition in Punjab. The exit of Captain Amarinder Singh and arrival of Charanjit Singh Channi are happening at a time when the state is five months away from assembly polls. The Congress high command treaded carefully through claims from rival sides after it got the Captain to quit the post on Saturday. The lot fell on a youthful leader from the Dalit community, who functioned as technical education and tourism minister in the Congress government and has of late been a critic of Captain Singh. The Congress party gave due weight to the sentiments of the Captain by not according the CM post to Navjot Singh Sidhu who led the fight against the CM. When Sidhu was divested of a portfolio, he intensified the fight against the CM; and when he was given the state PCC chief post, he went overboard. Sidhu let down the party as the high command's intention behind giving him the PCC chief post was to facilitate unity in the party. Chances now are that the influential yet ageing Captain will stay with the Congress. In the process, the claims of powerful Jat Sikhs too for CM's post went unheard at the high command level. The decision to name Channi as CM was obviously also prompted by the rise in popularity of the AAP among this section of the Sikhs, as a recent opinion poll showed.

Channi takes charge as CM on Monday. The installation of a leader from the Sikh community, yet again, is in the order of things. This is the state where Sikhs and Hindus are, population-wise, on a 60:40 ratio. The Sikh community's contributions to fields like military service, agriculture and business are exemplary. The community, spread worldwide and having built a major base in Canada in recent decades, has its moorings and spiritual abode in Punjab. The Blue Star operations and the Delhi riots that followed the killing of Indira Gandhi in 1984 had hurt their feelings. It is important that they be treated with respect and given the prominence the community deserves. How the election scenario will pan out in Punjab will be unpredictable. The Shiromani Akali Dal, which led the SAD-BJP coalition government for two terms is no longer in the reckoning; nor is its associate the BJP there. The AAP's plans to grab power in the state might now face serious odds. Yet, if the Congress remains a divided house, that is bound to reflect in the election results.

Bioproducts : Make In Meghalaya

By K.N.Kumar

The Government of India (GoI) wants that the entire north-eastern region becomes organic by 2030. The roadmap laid by the GoI sets very stiff targets for our State — within the next nine years, the State must (1) establish 94 Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs), (2) expand the area under organic agriculture to one lakh hectares (a third of Meghalaya's cultivable area) (3) set up 5 Residue Testing labs, and (4) work out the export protocols for individual crops, etc. Even as the department is seized of the issue, we will be required to take stock of where we are and how best we can achieve this seemingly arduous task within the time frame.

India is the second-largest consumer of chemical fertilizers after China, consuming about 61.4 million M.T. annually (2020). Undeniably, chemical fertilizers and pesticides have played a role in increasing the agricultural production of our country. Still, it is now realized that indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides pose a severe threat to human and animal health. Meghalaya is in specific danger because scientific studies confirm that the fragile ecosystems of hilly states are far more vulnerable to the rampant use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. As of now, however, we appear to be better placed than many other states because our State's per hectare consumption of fertilizers is 19 Kg - much less than even Nagaland (34.71 Kg/ha.) and Mizoram (22.88 Kg/ha). We know where we stand when we compare ourselves with a state like Punjab, whose consumption is 190 Kg/ha, against a national average of 88.2 Kg/ha. Punjab consumes about 9% of the total fertilizers in India. Our farmers seem wiser than those in other states!

In its pursuit of becoming organic, the Government of Meghalaya decided to stop subsidizing chemical fertilizers and pesticides in 2014. This laudable decision reduced the State's chemical fertilizer consumption by 56.69% since 2014. It has also gradually led to increased demand and usage of bio-fertilizers in the State of Meghalaya, a redeeming feature of our policy. Kerala, the most advanced State in our country, too made a similar effort to reduce its chemical fertilizer consumption and reported a decline from 87 Kg/ha. (2015-16) to 36.49 Kg/ha. In 2019-20. Even the reduced level of Kerala is higher than that of Meghalaya (19Kg/ha).

Meanwhile, the area under organic farming increased from 1.7 million to 4.72

million hectares in India over the last decade. The ever-increasing consumer demand for residue-free agricultural products is perhaps driving organic agriculture in our country, stimulating the scope, market, and use of bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides. The demand for Biofertilizers is quite tremendous and far exceeds the present national production levels. The need for bio-fertilizers is 6.27 lakh tonnes, while the current production meets only about 11% of this demand. The production occurs in the southern and western regions, while the eastern and north-eastern regions lag - both in production and consumption.

In 2019-20, the State government mobilized funds from the Department of Biotechnology through the Bio-Resources Development Centre, Shillong (BRDC), to establish a 150 Tonne/year Bio-fertilizer Unit. The BRDC has since transferred the funds to the Agriculture

Department to install the Bio-fertilizer unit adjacent to the current Bio-control lab in upper Shillong. The agriculture department will make the unit ready in about 3-4 months, and the 150 M.T./year capacity bio-fertilizer unit should hopefully be ready by the end of the year, 2021.



Now let us review the status of bio-pesticide production in our State. Globally, between 20% and 40% of the crop is lost every year due to pests and diseases. In our State, cereal crops such as Rice and Maize, vegetable crops like Cauliflower and Cabbage, fruit crops - Peaches, oranges, plums, and plantation crops like Areca Nut suffer losses due to pests and diseases. Therefore, we do need sustainable protection of these crops to help both the farmers and consumers. The consensus

magnitude of the task ahead of us, considering that we will have to produce enough to cater to one lakh hectares in nine years.

The State needs to increase the current production base by 100 times to meet bio-products' current and future requirements. And it will be impossible for the State to create infrastructure to meet the ever-growing demand, hence the private sector has to get involved in this area. Young people with Agriculture, Microbiology, and Bio-Technology degrees do not have too many options for jobs in the present context. They are academically prepared to establish bio-pesticide multiplication units. An EOI (Expression of Interest) recently issued by the Farmers' Commission elicited responses from sixty-seven educated youth, and

the Commission shortlisted 18 candidates for the next level of diligence. Some of them hold Ph.Ds in Microbiology and related academic disciplines. While the Bio-control labs at Shillong and Tura and the upcoming Bio-fertilizer unit can function as the 'Mother Units,' the entrepreneurs can establish 'Multiplier units,' with partial government support. Ideally, we will need at least one such multiplier unit in each of the districts. Given that the overall thrust of the department is to make Meghalaya organic, the case for erecting a manufacturing base in bioproducts is both important and urgent.

The Government of India has been promoting Biofertilizers through grants, extension work with varying degrees of focus and emphasis. In addition, to create a demand for the bioproducts, the Government of India has also launched several centrally sponsored schemes viz., NMSA (National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture), Organic and INM component of the Soil Health Management (SHM/PKVY (Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana), RKVY, National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP), NFSM, all of which promote the widespread usage of biofertilizers. So, I do not see any difficulty in finding markets for the bioproducts of Meghalaya.

The Government of Meghalaya has already developed a scheme - 'PRIME,' to channel, mentor, and handhold the youth toward entrepreneurship. Therefore, it would be an excellent opportunity to stream the youth toward the bioproducts sector. Necessary capacity building, handholding, branding, and disseminating the technology to the farmers could be jointly managed by the Directorates of Agriculture, Horticulture, RTTI, KVKs, MIE, Labour Department, and the Farmers' Commission. This approach, if acted upon, will meet the farmer's demand for inorganic fertilizers and pesticides, reduce the cost of cultivation, generate employment, create a pool of 'Made in Meghalaya' products and expand the GDP of the State. In addition, the Meghalaya State Public-Private Partnership Policy, 2021, and the Meghalaya Youth Policy 2021 have created a policy ecosystem.

Since we have invested in their education, the youth would want to pay back to the country. All that they will seek is a hand to hold at the right time. And the time is now!

(The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Employment) Commission. Email: upoindia@gmail.com)

High fuel taxes an incurable addiction for govts

By K. Raveendran

Earning cash through fuel taxes has become an addiction for our governments. Like any addiction, this one is also not amenable to any easy cure. Only shock treatments can do that.

Both the Centre and the states have been playing hide and seek with the people on the highly sensitive issue of moving petroleum products into the GST system. When the Modi government adopted the new tax regime in the most dramatic fashion through a midnight parliament session, with the golden promise of 'one nation, one tax', everything was moved to the new system, but the petroleum products were left out, primarily because it would have robbed the government of a tax resource that helped to mop up any amount of money at will.

The run-up to the 45th GST Council meeting, con-

now be reported back to the court.

It is a different matter that opposition political parties have been shedding crocodile tears about the high fuel prices, which are at record levels despite a recent softening and using the problem to score brownie points in their political campaigns against the BJP. But even these parties, when they are in the government, close their ranks against any move to cut fuel taxes. The states are asking the Centre to reduce its excise duty, which of course accounts for a very high component of the high prices. The state governments have been laughing away to glory every time petrol and diesel prices because it brings them more revenue, irrespective of the pain it causes to their own people.

The decisions of the latest



cluded the other day in Lucknow, had raised fond hopes among people about a likely shift for the petroleum products, and as a result a possible steep reduction in the fuel prices, which currently are a heavy load on household budgets. It is not just the public that is complaining about this, even the Reserve Bank of India has expressed concern over the high prices of petrol and diesel and the inflationary pressure that these exerted on the national economy, apart from throwing household budgets out of gear.

But as both the Centre and state governments knew pretty well and in advance, the Council meeting decided to put off the discussion to a future date, on which there is no clarity now, just as it won't be there for any time in future.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman appeared particularly happy to announce that the meeting felt that the time was not yet ripe for bringing petroleum products under GST as both the Centre and the states, including Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh ruled by BJP, opposed such an action as it would lead to huge revenue losses. Opposition-ruled states like Kerala had anyway declared beforehand that there was no way they could agree to such a decision.

While the need to bring petroleum products under the GST regime has dominated the public debate over quite some time, there was no move to bring the issue up out of turn, but for the fact that a directive by the Kerala High Court had forced the subject on the Council's agenda. In fact, Nirmala Sitharaman even clarified that the meeting took up the issue purely at the 'behest of the court' and that the decision would

GST Council meeting have positive take-aways for the Modi government, which is bound to put the blame on the state governments, particularly in view of the crucial round of assembly elections that lies ahead. That the Uttar Pradesh government also opposed the move is not likely to act as a deterrent for the BJP in this regard.

Fossil fuels have been a significant contributor to the overall revenue of central and state governments, which have traditionally depended heavily on taxes from petrol and diesel, as demonstrated by the recent increases in excise and VAT. As on January 1, 2021, 62 percent and 58 percent of the final prices of petrol and diesel respectively are made up of taxes in Delhi.

A summary of the public revenue accruing from the energy sector to the Centre and states in FY2018-19 and FY2019-20. Showed the total earnings from the energy sector at around Rs 6.6 lakh crores, which represented 14.8 percent and 13.4 percent of the total government revenue in 2018-19 and 2019-20 respectively. The Centre was more dependent on these revenues than states, as the share of the energy sector to its revenues over the two years was 20.3 percent and 18.8 percent respectively. The corresponding values for states over the two years were 11 percent and 9.8 percent respectively.

The petroleum sector is by far the largest contributor to the overall tax revenue, with the Centre depending on it for 21 percent of its tax revenue and many states being dependent on it to a significant extent. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Covid19: Its psychological impact in rural areas

Editor,
Humans are social and psychological beings. Since the last two years of this Covid 19 pandemic many lost their precious lives and the economic condition of the people has fallen drastically. As a citizen of the state I do appreciate the self-sacrifice of the health workers in controlling this pandemic. I also acknowledge the generosity of many individuals in fighting against Covid 19. Unfortunately, with the passage of time Covid has taken the turn of a psychological sickness rather than a physical one in the rural areas. Many people are afraid to go for the test because of various reasons. The indifference of the Health Department to those that tested positive is also a reason why people refuse to be tested.

In fact, when people are tested positive they are sent for home quarantine without any help or treatment. 'They told me to go for home quarantine although I have no symptoms at all during my quarantine,' says one of the villagers. 'When I was tested positive, I was psychologically down, though I was physically strong without

any symptoms, but the worst part was when people began to socially ostracise me just because I was tested positive,' said another villager. Personally, I am fully vaccinated and have no doubt in my mind that the virus is real and a killer. However, to see villagers suffering more from psychological disorders rather than the sickness itself is unacceptable. The Health Department must take extra care of the villagers. It is unfortunate that in the past there were failures and mistakes in announcing the Covid test results. Perhaps, these errors resulted in lack of trust of the villagers who refuse to be tested, not to speak of being vaccinated. Because of the failures of the Health Department the sickness has created a sort of psychological trauma that's more destructive than the real illness itself.

Yours etc.,
Aiborlang Nongsiej
Mawkyrwat

The New York Times & our PM

Editor,
A recent news article in the New York Times, about the Covid-19 situation in India and the position taken by ICMR, must have rattled the Indian Government, es-

pecially with the impending visit of the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, to the USA. Government officials have come out, all guns blazing, in defence of the PM, and have practically condemned the newspaper. However, we should bear in mind that very few in India have access to the newspaper, and its readers are primarily based in the US. Still the defence trotted out to counter the news report in Indian publications have highlighted contents of the news article, and are in favour of the newspaper. The NYT has backed up its claim that ICMR had tweaked data to favour the Indian PM politically, whereas ICMR should have gone by scientific data and science. Many who were associated with the ICMR had lent their voices in support of the contents of the news article.

Many in the western world had always doubted the Indian statistics and data on Covid-19, specially the second wave. Unlike what has been claimed, the strict lockdown in March - April 2020 had only delayed the peak of the pandemic.

The moot point here is that we as a nation should be strong enough to face criticism, rather than brushing them aside. Opinions are formed when reputed publications like NYT publish something like this with evidence, no matter what our

stand is. US President, Joe Biden has withstood fierce criticism of his handling of Afghanistan crisis, but his government has never tried to defend itself or to condemn anyone for their criticism. This is the hallmark of true leadership, especially in democratic and open societies.

Yours etc.,
D Bhutia,
Guwahati

Stop vendors from occupying footpaths

Editor,
Kudos to the Deputy Commissioner West Jaintia Hills for not allowing the vegetable vendors to sell their goods on the footpath of lawmsiang beginning Dec 15, 2021. Time And again, they were removed by the authorities concerned, yet they start their businesses at the usual place which is a nuisance to passers-by and inconvenient for the pedestrian who are forced to walk on the road because the footpaths are all occupied by the vendors. That this should happen at lawmsiang, which is the heart of the town is not acceptable. In a way, we as buyers are also to blame. Nowadays, the schools have re-opened and students have no choice but to walk in the middle of the road which is a cause for danger. Lawmsiang

is congested with these roadside vendors which makes the whole place an ugly sight to look at. Tympang Club, which owns a lot of the areas of lawmsiang, successfully removed these roadside vendors months ago which was much appreciated. Now I appeal to the Tympang Club to unite again and let these vendors not resume their business on the footpath for good. As such, lawmsiang will not only be a spacious place but a little bit cleaner than when there is congestion. In Mynthong, within the vicinity of the Deputy Commissioner's residence, vehicles are randomly parked. For this, I would appeal to the Jowai Traffic Police to take strict action, otherwise Mynthong which was once a spacious place will start to be congested by these vehicles which are haphazardly parked.

Yours etc.,
Omarda Laloo,
Jowai

Assault on freedom

Editor,
It pains me to write this email, especially as it comes as an afterthought to the present situation in Shillong. Once again, young boys were assaulted by masked goons, leaving them with grievous bodily injuries. Having been born and raised in Shillong

and being proud of the glorious cosmopolitan legacy of the great city, it pains me to see such cowardly manifestations of xenophobia being brazenly displayed and not being condemned by the majority population, all of whom owe it to the rest of the population.

In this interconnected world, where I can access news of the city, sitting here in a hotel in Brussels, no one can afford to stay cocooned in a small city thinking that they do not need to mingle with the rest of the country. Our smart hardworking young boys and girls from Shillong who are out there in big cities in the country need to feel one amongst everyone else.

If these acts of violence continue unabated, without as much as a small act of condemnation from the civil society, then what message are we sending across? Are we telling them that they should continue to feel alienated and constantly be treated as outsiders? Perhaps it is time for soul searching within instead of looking for answers without.

Yours etc.,
Sumit Kar
Brussels

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

"It is not our differences that divide us.
It is our inability to recognize, accept,
and celebrate those differences."

— Audre Lorde

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Meghalaya Congress: The divide deepens

THE early days of jubilation after Vincent Pala was nominated as Meghalaya Congress President now appear to have created a wedge between the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo members of the Party. This of course is triggered by the Congress High Command which does not believe in internal democracy. Why should the post of the State Congress President not be subjected to the democratic process of voting? Let party workers from the primary unit upwards vote for whoever they believe can best serve the interests of the Party and lead it to the next Assembly elections in 2023. Politics dictates that there are no permanent friends or enemies. But the deep-seated rivalry between the Sangmas (Mukul Sangma of the Congress and Conrad and James Sangma of the NPP) is almost impossible to mend. For Congressman Vincent Pala, the NPP and its leaders are not untouchable. Herein lies the solution for the Congress if it is unable to get an absolute majority in 2023. Vincent Pala has friendly equations with the regional political parties and he will be a newcomer to state politics with no history behind him to arouse any suspicions of being a disruptor.

But what cannot be missed is the string pulling by the dynasty in Delhi. With the eccentric Rahul Gandhi taking important decisions such as the one to remove Captain Amarinder Singh as Punjab CM without as much as informing him why the decision to remove him was important to rejuvenate the Party, has triggered trouble for the Congress in Punjab. A pacified Amarinder Singh is better than an embittered one. And Navjot Singh Sidhu his beta-noire is not known to be a team player.

The same modus operandi was executed by the Congress High Command. Vincent Pala was anointed head of the State Congress without taking the views of the former Chief Minister into consideration. The decision did not go down well with Dr Mukul Sangma and his loyalists. And now that the rift is out in the open the High Command has summoned both personalities to Delhi to work out a rapprochement. If things were that simple and the irritants of difficult political equations was subservient to Party dominance and electoral goals, there would be smooth sailing for the Congress. But such is not the case. The Congress Party or any Party for that matter is the location of many human aspirations, some of which are barely hidden. Pala's return to state politics is not without significance. He is also an aspiring CM. That's where the rub lies.

What Mukul didn't say

By Albert Thyrniang

On a Sunday evening in 1992 we were returning from Rongram to Rongkhon (near Tura) on foot. On the way a group of young men (picnickers) in the scenic Ganol river were on the road waiting for public transport (Those were years when means of public transport were sparse). They asked us where we were proceeding to. When we revealed our destination they offered to join us. As darkness set in and since they were a bit tipsy we were apprehensive. We were three, they were five. But anyway, we agreed. As we started our march the conversation started, "From where are you?" inquired one. "From Shillong" was our answer. "Oh! We are friends because we are all Meghalayans," was the unexpected response while placing their hands over our shoulders. Our fear turned into a joyful stroll in the 8 km stretch as we joked and laughed all along the way till we finally bid farewell to each other.

Recently, the former Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma was almost in tears lamenting the persistent division among the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes. "I am telling this based on my observation all throughout my career and innings as a politician" the two-time Chief Minister was quoted as saying. The current leader of Opposition blames the elected representatives and people with allegiance to different political parties for the failure to unite the three major tribes of Meghalaya. According to the veteran politician, people whisper, "Why should a Garo or a Khasi be the CM?" pointing that 'Meghalaya will prosper only if we unite and act as citizens of the state instead of confining our thinking to the community we belong to.' The leader who manifests religiosity on occasions sought divine intervention for unity, urging the electorate to rise above ethnic and regional considerations and look beyond their 'locality, neighbourhood and constituency' while exercising their franchise in 2023.

The Ampati strongman who now represents Song-sak in East Garo Hills was perhaps denied the chance to become Chief Minister for the third time in a row in 2018 due to the 'disunity' factor. Senior Khasi-Jaintia leaders left him just before the polls. They probably did not want to see him make the record because he hails from another part of the state. The expressed reason was that their former boss was 'dictatorial' and a one man army. The motivation was

different. A Chief Minister hopeful was heard praising his former superior as the best Chief Minister ever because his constituency was upgraded into a C & RD Block only to ditch his ex-colleague soon after. It is learned that ministers who jumped ship were incompetent during the Meghalaya United Alliance (MUA) government. They could not keep pace with the leadership of the physician-turned-politician. In a casual conversation the then Chief Minister lamented that even the top bureaucrats could not take forward his vision for the state. Some ministers were also allegedly negligent of their duties. Sangma even complained to the press that his then power minister and other ministers were frequenting Kolkata for unknown reasons. For stepping in, during their absence he was branded as an autocratic leader. They abandoned the 'capable' leader to thwart his march. Very hurt Sangma might have been.

The tribal divide aside, Sangma was also probably done in by the perception that he was over-concentrating on his constituency, Ampati. Allegedly developmental activities were directed to South West Garo Hills. If one visits Ampati one sees good road networks besides fresh infrastructure in health, education and sports. Though other MLAs should emulate him but being Chief Minister he carried the leverage which no one could. Privately, even MLAs from Garo Hills murmured they were not able to get any road sanctioned in certain financial years during Sangma's tenure as Chief Minister.

The statement of the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) leader came against the background of the appointment of Vincent Pala as Meghalaya Congress chief. Mukul Sangma and all MLAs from Garo Hills skipped the taking-over function in Shillong on September 18 and a couple of days later stayed away from the 'homecoming' gathering for R.G. Lyngdoh and P.N. Syiem, Sangma's known adversaries. The senior leader from Garo Hills might not have been consulted in the appointment process. The undisputed leader in Garo Hills might also have his grudge against the Shillong MP. In the February 2013 elections Pala allegedly supported some candidates against the official Congress ticket holders. A couple of them came out victorious. The three-time Lok Sabha MP probably

nurtures the ambition of replacing Sangma as Chief Minister. If one were a mind reader Sangma sees Pala's elevation as a challenge to the Chief Ministerial post and the re-induction of his antagonists as stumbling blocks in the game of thrones in 2023.

Mukul Sangma obviously has valid reasons to be displeased with the whole affair, but 'boycotting' the aforementioned functions has actually widened the tribal divide. Notwithstanding his sentiments if he were to put them aside he would have bridged the gap. He would have won hearts in Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Now 'selfish' comments have already appeared on social media. When he himself does not walk the talk, whom does he blame? Sangma's sentiments, however, are real. Except for belonging to the same state there is little emotional connection between people of Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. Hardly any effort has been made to bond the prominent tribes together. It is granted that culturally and linguistically there is not much in common. But it does not mean we can't appreciate each other.

The other day an upset member of a pressure group shouted near the Legislative Assembly 'Conrad Sangma, go back to Garo Hills' after being denied entry into the guest gallery during the Autumn Session. Why would Conrad go anywhere? He is the Chief Minister of the state? Another pressure group speaker recently raved 'We are under the rule of a Garo'. These utterances based on tribal identity are a disrespect to the democratic and constitutional provisions, but more questionable is the mentality that looks down on others because they think they are superior to others. On social media name calling is common and the terms used are indecent. We are a 'Christian' state. The Bible says all are 'created in the image and likeness of God'. 'God is the Father. All are his children.' Even if we are irreligious, respect for other cultures is a human value.

This writer is fortunate to have been in Garo Hills for 14 years. One must honestly confess that one faced absolutely no issues while working there. One did not face any barrier. Language was a barricade initially. But that was purely in terms of verbal communication. There was nothing in relation to ethnic differences. A feeling of

acceptance prevails. A sense of gratitude overwhelms. The Garo Hills experience is enriching. The great Balpakram national park, the Nokrek peak, Siso Bibra tourist spot, the host of Pa Togan memorial and Rombagre picnic spots with the fish sanctuaries on the mighty Simsang river are nostalgic. The initial apprehension was totally unfounded.

The bias surfaces when one crosses the home-bound boundary. For many, the 14 years are unimaginable in 'that' area. Some ask sarcastic questions that subtly depict chauvinism. Being part of the schools there the contact number of this writer appeared in advertisements for teaching jobs. Convincing candidates from Khasi and Jaintia Hills to submit their applications and appear for interviews, particularly for posts where there was likelihood of non-availability of local candidates, was near impossible. Misperception reigns supreme. They literally switch off the moment they hear about Garo Hills.

Who will unite the people of this state? Mukul Sangma indirectly puts the onus on politicians and political parties. Let us make an observation. The HSPDP, the oldest indigenous party today, is a Khasi-Jaintia Hills party. It envisages a separate Khasi-Jaintia state. KHAM falls within the same parenthesis. The GNC, presently with zero MLA, envisions a Garo state. The UDP is firmly a Khasi-Jaintia Hills centric party. The NPP was, till recently, seen as a Garo Hills party. The Congress is the only pan-Meghalaya political party but it is locked in infighting.

I have met a couple who attended exchange programmes or integration camps in Garo Hills in their youth. They have a better positive attitude. Similarly those who were in Garo Hills for their B. Ed studies and nursing courses have altered their perceptions as a result of their educational sojourn. The government can think of more social and academic exchanges to overturn the gulf.

Let us direct some questions to the elected representatives. How many MLAs from Khasi-Jaintia Hills have visited Garo Hills? Have Garo MLAs ventured out of Shillong? Sohra may be. Other than these? Have any guided tours been organised for legislators of the two regions to see the 'other side'? How many MLAs are bilingual? How many MLAs have a working knowledge of Khasi and Garo languages? If rulers don't lead by example tears won't work!

Email: albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com

Congress faces major organisational challenges after Amarinder's exit as CM

By Arun Srivastava

If BJP can replace its chief ministers just ahead of the assembly elections, why can't Congress do the same? This is the catchphrase put forward in the public domain to rationalise the leadership's action to remove Capt Amarinder Singh from office.

Charanjit Singh Channi, the Dalit face of the party has 4 months to revive governance and find backing from faction-ridden party with ambitious leaders. Surprisingly it took four years and eight months for Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi to realise that Amarinder is disconnected with the electorate and legislators, that governance in Punjab is a failure, and that Dalits may need to be empowered by offering high public office.

Nonetheless Zora Singh Nasrali, president of Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union, has pricked the Congress clarification; "It is merely an election stunt. Channi is a Dalit as well as a Sikh. Punjab will go to the polls in another four-five months and code of conduct will be imposed 40 days before the elections. So what can the new face do? He will just say I am a new person, trying to understand things".

There is no doubt the strongest bastion of the Congress is facing strain under the pressure of the fanciful desires of the leadership. What a coincidence the move came a day after the NCP chief Sharad Pawar teased that the Congress is like an impoverished landlord who cannot look after his house anymore and its leaders are very "sensitive" and not open to any suggestions. How far the sacking exercise will bolster the electoral prospect of the Congress is not yet clear but one

thing is certain - this has exposed the impulsiveness of the leadership. Removing Amarinder is the internal matter of the Congress, but any political action must have rationale. The Congress is already in shambles and has been consistently losing ground. In this backdrop the move to remove the person who had endured the onslaught of Narendra Modi and Akali Dal and ensured the victory of the Congress is quite intriguing.

This is no doubt the classic case of obliviousness and detachment from the ground reality. What has really come as a shock is the leadership preferring to subscribe to the allegation of Sidhu against Captain. Only a couple of days back, Sidhu had alleged that Captain was not sympathetic to the agitating farmers. To substantiate his charge he cited filing of two FIRs against them as proof.

The Punjab development simply reinforces the belief that Rahul is determined to rely on young faces irrespective of its disastrous consequences. But it is a fact that his young friends nurse more lust for power and material gains than the old satraps. The young faces handpicked by him have deserted the party in search for greener pastures.

There is no denying that Rahul is not the person with organisational skills. He would not have resigned as the president, if he had assimilated with the organisation. He owes his political survival to the tweets which no doubt embarrass Narendra Modi. But his tweets in no way add strength to the party. His tweets do not even pose a serious challenge to Modi. His tweets also do not enthrone the rank and file.

He and his party comrades are angry with the Trinamool Congress leaders for their remark that Rahul

Gandhi has failed to take on the BJP. The TMC leaders could not be faulted for this. Right from political workers to intellectuals, academics and social activists, everyone has been urging Rahul to organise the Congress and activate it to take Modi head on. Instead he preferred to keep confined to writing tweets and issuing some stray statements. Let Rahul come out and clarify what substantial contributions he has made to rejuvenate the party in the Hindi heartland which controls the political system and institution of India.

The Congress accused the Trinamool leaders of undermining the leadership of the grand old party and said its attack on Rahul Gandhi was "unwarranted and in poor taste". Nevertheless the fact remains that Rahul has failed to emerge as the potential challenger to Modi. It is Mamata who after the Bengal assembly has catapulted herself as the contender. She even took the first step in that direction by calling for the meeting of the anti-BJP opposition p-arties to combat Narendra Modi in 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

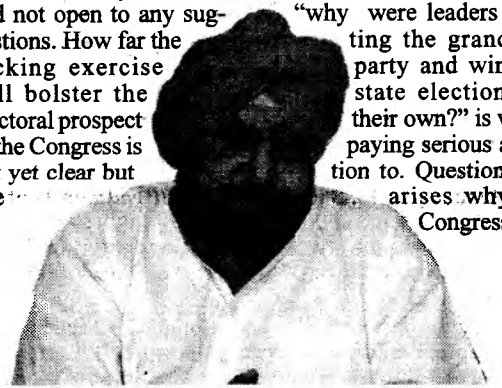
None can deny that Congress should play a major and more significant role in forging unity of the opposition. Nonetheless it is the passive attitude of the party that has been causing much consternation. The opposition nurses the feeling that Congress is not willing to give space to other leaders. In this backdrop the observation of the NCP, spokesperson Nawab Malik, "why were leaders quitting the grand old party and winning state elections on their own?" is worth paying serious attention to. Question also arises why the Congress is

not playing a proactive role for uniting the opposition parties against the BJP. What is the follow up of the August 20 opposition meeting?

NCP supremo Sharad Pawar had also said, "There was a time when the Congress had presence from Kashmir to Kanyakumari... we agree. But that is not the situation now. A Zamindar (landlord) in Uttar Pradesh once owned huge tracts of land and a Haveli (mansion). Then he lost most of the land...the Haveli stands but he can't repair it...he says all that land belonged to me, but it is in the past".

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the opposition has let down the people of the country. They are ready to rise and protest. But they do not find a challenger to Modi. Sad enough the Congress is waiting for the tide to start. Tweets are like letting out wind. They are not signs of a healthy body. Rahul must connect the Congress with the aspirations and expectations of the common people, as Mamata has been trying to. Bengal election proved to be the Waterloo for the BJP as she connected with the people notwithstanding severe repressions let loose by the Modi government and the BJP. Gandhi-Godse relation is an old story and it would not have any impact on the bhakts and urban middle class who are his devotees. Rahul must correlate with economic issues and try to build a nationwide movement. Simply hurling jibes and accusing Modi of selling India will have no effect on the people.

Beating the old track of Godse is also not going to help. The Congress must evolve a new agenda and strategy. Hindutva versus economic issues are going to be the dominant narrative in the ensuing elections in Uttar Pradesh and in 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Congress must channelize the anger of the people. (IPA Service)



Letters to the Editor

NEIGRIHMS gets permanent Director..but

Editor,

The million-dollar question is whether this Director can reverse the course on which this institution is going for quite a while, especially in the last few years where the interest of a few individuals is paramount. For the information of the reader, NEIGRIHMS is no more a National Institute but a regional one. With the setting up of AIIMS Guwahati as a national institute; with the pro active role of the Assam Government and the present Chief Minister; it was decided that there will be only one National Institute in the region and that will be AIIMS Guwahati. Though no official document is available as of now, the post of NEIGRIHMS Director had been degraded to that of a regional Director very recently. When the last Director Prof D.M. Thapa was repatriated to his own institute without completing his tenure, this institute was under the care of the senior most prof in the institute who

has tried to get appointed as a full fletch Director but found not competent or unsuitable by the selection committee.

In the absence of a permanent Director, by default the senior-most was given charge and the gentleman has really confirmed the Selection Committee right. The moment he took charge as an in-charge Director, he promoted a culture of autocracy in the organisation where whoever has an opinion other than his will be side-lined and a new junior of his choice will be appointed. He is surrounded by 'yes men.' I recollect what Sam Manekshaw once said, "A 'Yes man' is a dangerous man. He is a menace. He will go very far. He can become a minister, a secretary or a field marshal but he can never become a leader nor ever be respected. He will be used by his superiors, disliked by his colleagues and despised by his subordinates." NEIGRIHMS had lost 2 faculty to AIIMS Guwahati and in fact the in-charge Director advertised himself as an executive Director to AIIMS Guwahati and even gave a farewell party to his Department but eventually it seems that dream did not mate-

rialise. As one senior faculty said, the only thing which progresses in this institute is 'PURCHASE' and with Covid in the last 2 years, this will be remembered as the golden era of purchase in the Institute. Contractors and Suppliers are so powerful that even lower rank officials are afraid of them because of their proximity to the higher ups.

Recently an interview for the post of Systems Analyst was conducted and as per the notice given, it was to be conducted virtually through video conferencing. All candidates did as instructed but the candidate who is well known to the Director-in-charge came personally for the interview with a 99.9 chance to get the post. With the situation in which this Institute is at, many times the outcome of interviews and winners of contracts and supplies are easily forecast. Committees are constituted with 'Yes Men' to be able to have prefixed results. With no rationale it is already decided that there will be only one party to set up eateries, restaurants, catering, run the hostel mess and even provide meals to patients in the hospital. Giving meals to patients is considered a

specialised service where a full-fledged department under the Chief Dietician who operates as a supplement to treatment with hygiene is considered a priority. This is also a pre-determined job to be given to a particular entity since many will be rejected during evaluation due to lack of experience.

The taste of money and power sometimes makes people mad to the point that they don't want to retire. The same is happening in this case. The Director-in-charge is supposed to retire next month which many feel would be good for the newly joined Director and the Institute as a whole. But he still wants to be around by creating a situation where he may be asked to continue due to shortage of man-power. This has been going on in the last few months where only Resident Doctors from his own Department are allowed to leave the Institute whereas others are not allowed to leave even though they had completed their tenure. The excuse is Covid emergency.

As someone who wants to see this Institute progress in the right direction, I wish that the new Director will be able to take the Institute to greater heights together with

the cooperation of all and in an atmosphere where the resources of this Institute can be used for the benefit of the people in general, not for the interests of a few officials. I request that this message be taken in the right spirit. Forget about the messenger who only has good intentions and best wishes for the Institute.

Yours etc.,
Anderson Rani,
Via email

Online recruitment exam a disaster!

Editor,

In the recently concluded examination of Meghalaya Society for Social Audit and Transparency (MSSAT) for the post of Junior Consultant held on the September 18, 2021 at Don Bosco Youth Centre, the exam was scheduled for 11:00 AM, but due to some technical error the same started around 12 noon. Nearly one hour was lost in fixing how to start the examination because the supervisors who were in the

room had no clue how to tackle the Google form mode of online examination. Much of the time was wasted in calling and communicating over phone with the technical experts. Even then, when the examination started and after a little progress, another glitch appeared on the computer screen. Candidates by then were restless and impatient; some even tried to figure out how to resolve the problems on their own. After some time we were able to resume. I must mention that the Centre did not carry out prior or proper technical trials before the examination and there were no experts to assist on the day. I am not sure if I will pass or fail in the examination or if any of my answers were being recorded in the Google form, going by the way the examination was conducted which was a complete failure.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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"We grow a little every time we do not take advantage of somebody's weakness."

— Bernard Williams

The Shillong Times

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India on reverse drive

THE system, as Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya states, is the problem; not individuals. The experience the Health Minister had at the Safdarjung Hospital in the national capital is, by now, well-known. Reaching the nation's largest central government hospital incognito this past week, he was roughed up by security personnel and abused when he tried to sit on a bench there. It is rarely ever that ministers make such attempts to find out the ground scenario other than going to spots for inspections with all the official paraphernalia. In the days the royals ran princely states, several of them moved around their provinces now and then, unannounced and alone, to find out what was happening around. Today, netas have neither the inclination nor the interest to do so. Many of them make hay for themselves when they sit in positions of power. Their hands are in the honeypot.

The system's progressive erosion of strengths is the big problem. The British had left for us the world's best administrative system. Progressively over the years, people's leaders have rubbished it. Bureaucrats took the cue and went overboard. Together, they made a mess of the systems not only in states, but starkly at the central edifice too. Corruption is widespread. Good leaders concentrate less on talk and more on action. Action requires a vision for the future. What helped first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru to lay a firm foundation for Independent India was his exposure to the outside world as a student in London which, in the post Industrial Revolution era, was the epicentre of global growth. Nehru's vision helped India build a strong base. The steel plants promoted industrialization; dams and irrigation canals fed the agricultural growth. The decades thereafter were wasted years.

On one side, democracy was itself rubbished with demand for more freedom to individuals and this was matched only by a sense of irresponsibility on everyone's part. With politicians and bureaucrats embarking on outright loot, and public sector banks becoming sitting ducks for crafty rich men to grease the system with bribes and loot their funds, the system collapse in India is near-complete. Cosmetic surgeries will not help. The first wave of Covid19 was warning enough; yet, there was no preparation for the anticipated second wave. Deaths were one too many due to lack of oxygen and ICU support. With the systems' strengths getting eroded progressively, lawlessness is the result. A rudderless scene is a prescription for disaster. The nations that progressed are those that maintained good systems. India is on a reverse drive.

When Olympic winners are appropriated by leaders

By Rajdeep Sardesai

Strongmen populist leaders have a penchant for aligning sporting achievement to their personality cult. Fidel Castro of Cuba is a great example: the 'revolutionary' Cuban leader used his country's success in the boxing ring and on the baseball field to instil a sense of national pride, especially when taking on his familiar American 'enemy'. Other erstwhile Soviet bloc leaders too were quick to use sports success as a symbol of their larger ideological battles. So, it should come as no surprise that Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's relentless image management media machine has clambered onto the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics medallist bandwagon. Modi's self-image as a muscular nationalist leader is boosted when seen in the company of sports heroes. But are the photo-ops and well-choreographed events just fine optics or is India on the cusp of finally being seen as an Olympic nation of substance?

To be fair, the prime minister and the sports ministry can legitimately claim that they have done more than previous governments in building an Olympic medal momentum. The Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) launched by the sports ministry in 2014 has played an important role, especially post the 2016 Rio Olympics, in identifying and supporting elite Olympic and Paralympic athletes. In particular, after initially Olympic silver medallist Rajyavardhan Rathore and then the youthful Kiren Rijiju took charge of the sports ministry, there was a visible change in the planning and preparedness for mission Tokyo. With the support of private trusts and foundations like Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ), JSW sports, GoSports, there was a genuine attempt to create an eco-system where athletes could actually aspire to go for gold.

Contrast this with the previous UPA government where the sports ministry was seen as marginal and routinely rotated between several ministers. In the ten years from 2004 to 2014, the

country had as many as six sports ministers, with an average tenure of less than two years. There were even sports ministers like Mani Shankar Aiyar who were openly disdainful of the attempts being made to bid for the Asian and Commonwealth Games while a Sunil Dutt too seemed clearly unhappy with what was seen as a 'junior' portfolio. It is therefore to the credit of the Modi government that they have tried to give a more vibrant 'Khelo

sports' culture in the country had as many as six sports ministers, with an average tenure of less than two years. There were even sports ministers like Mani Shankar Aiyar who were openly disdainful of the attempts being made to bid for the Asian and Commonwealth Games while a Sunil Dutt too seemed clearly unhappy with what was seen as a 'junior' portfolio. It is therefore to the credit of the Modi government that they have tried to give a more vibrant 'Khelo



India' profile to a ministry that desperately needed fresh ideas and zest.

The final tally at the Tokyo Olympics may seem a little underwhelming: seven medals, just one more than London 2012, were clearly well below the double-digit tally that was widely anticipated but there were enough signs that the Indian contingent was now truly competitive. The Paralympic performance is simply spectacular: 19 medals are more than the combined total of what India has won in all previous Paralympic Games. Which is why the celebrations are not entirely misplaced. For a generation which grew up on the limited ambition of a hockey medal, Tokyo 2020 must be seen as a breakthrough event. A 'new' younger India now has inspirational figures like Neeraj Chopra to allow their ambitions to soar like a flying javelin into a glittering golden sky.

And yet, the euphoria needs to be tempered by certain ground realities. The medallists may be feted but there is still a yawning gap between elite athlete performance and the overall standard of Olympic sport in the country. How many

with global spectacles like the Olympics.

The Naveen Patnaik-led Odisha government's involvement with hockey is a good example of what is possible if a progressive political leadership embraces an Olympic sport with total commitment without an eye on instant rewards. Odisha backed hockey when the rest of the country and potential sponsors had almost given up on the sport, making the state's investment in the sport even more heart-warming. With Astro-turf grounds now planned in every district headquarters of Odisha, ensuring a worthy grassroots model that should be emulated.

The struggles of our disabled sportspersons also need a reality check. Our para-athlete medallists are being honoured but when it comes to inclusion and accessibility, people with disabilities still struggle to have their voices heard. How many of our sports facilities across the country provide equal opportunity for the disabled by ensuring easy access? And how many institutions recognise the physically handicapped as deserving citizens and not just as 'bechara' 'objects'

of charity? Workforce participation for the disabled in India is still below the global average and despite rights legislation, disability activists have to fight long and lonely battles to get justice. Even in a popular sport like cricket, it has been the herculean efforts of individuals like Bengaluru's GK Mahantesh of Samarthan Foundation that has almost forced the BCCI to now recognise the disabled cricketers as deserving of their patronage.

At the heart of the future challenge is the lop-sided governance structure for sports. For decades, sports has been terribly governed in the country: most sports federations are run like personal fiefdoms by politicians and their cronies. It is only now when private trusts have sought to fill the gap through enlightened corporate social responsibility that there is a belief that the monopoly of the neta-babu culture in our sports is finally being broken. But unless the governance standards are significantly raised, sports federations are likely to be looked at with suspicion. Look at the manner in which wrestling federation chief, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a six-time MP now with the BJP, has warned wrestlers who are associated with private, not for profit trusts that they will not be considered for selection going ahead. Like many other federation bosses, Singh too wants to bully players into submission. Maybe, next time the prime minister has an on-camera interaction with Olympians, he could also have a stern word with his fellow BJP MP. It may prove more rewarding than a made for TV eyeball grabbing event.

Post-script: With the once in four years Olympic extravaganza over, the focus shifts back to cricket with the IPL and World T 20 on the horizon. The question which we must all answer, including as media-persons, will we still track the inspirational stories of our Olympic heroes, or will we be back soon enough to being a one sport nation? (The writer is senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeepsardesai52@gmail.com)

Change in Punjab CM will impact other Congress-ruled states

Rahul and Priyanka real power centre; Sonia sidelined

By Kalyani Shankar

After months of suspense, Punjab chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh has been replaced with Dalit leader Charanjit Singh Channi who took his oath as the Chief Minister on Monday. Punjab being a border state affected by militancy in the eighties, anything happening there is sensitive. The change could have been smooth, but the high command in its wisdom decided to change guard just five months before the Assembly elections.

While three months ago, it was a sure shot that Congress would win Punjab because of the weak opposition, the Captain's exit might change the situation. The new chief minister has many challenges before him and he is only a stop-gap chief minister. The problems are not over in Punjab as there are many loose ends to tie up.

One of the prominent practices that Indira Gandhi conceived and practiced throughout her leadership was the 'High Command' institution at the party level. During Jawaharlal Nehru's time, Congress had no high

of Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The Punjab example is likely to raise the hope of other rebels who have been demanding the ouster of their respective chief ministers for some time.

For instance, the Rajasthan drama has been going on for more than a year. The family' openly supported the rebel faction headed by Sachin Pilot, but chief minister Ashok Gehlot had dug in his heels. Pilot was temporarily pacified, but his supporters are getting impatient and demand that Gehlot be replaced. In Chhattisgarh, Rahul Gandhi had agreed to power-sharing between chief minister Bhupesh Baghel and the rebel leader T. S. Singh Deo. After two and a half years, Deo is demanding that he should replace Baghel.

Why is the Congress high command not as powerful as it used to be? The simple answer is that the times have changed and power equations have changed, and Congress is just living in its past glory. Sadly, the Gandhis have not realized that the power of the high com-



command. There were also solid national leaders like Patel and G.B. Pant.

Indira Gandhi installed or removed her party men in influential positions as and when she wished. An old Congress leader recalls how she would call the chief minister she intends to sack and convey her decision, saying, 'There is no hurry, you may resign today or tomorrow. Take your time 'indicating

mand has been shrinking. The Congress party faces a leadership crisis at the national level, with Sonia Gandhi acting as an interim president. Rahul Gandhi is the de facto ruler of the party, even after resigning his presidency in 2019. Priyanka Gandhi is also emerging as a power centre, as is seen from the Punjab decision. The story of Punjab is the story of ascending power of the two Gandhis who persuaded

The Congress party faces a leadership crisis at the national level, with Sonia Gandhi acting as an interim president. Rahul Gandhi is the de facto ruler of the party, even after resigning his presidency in 2019. Priyanka Gandhi is also emerging as a power centre, as is seen from the Punjab decision. The story of Punjab is the story of ascending power of the two Gandhis who persuaded

that he had to quit.

Rajiv Gandhi too followed the high command culture, but the party was strong then. Even during the UPA regime, Sonia Gandhi followed this tradition.

One might wonder why Congress would want to destabilize few states where it is comfortably placed? Both Rahul and Priyanka think that they can emulate their grandmother in dealing with the party. The party is not in power either at the centre or in many states. In such a situation, the Congress high command needs to protect what is left of its turf. Indira Gandhi's style of functioning will not work now. Rahul and Priyanka are impatient to change the old guard and replace them with younger faces loyal to them. Strangely, they openly side with the rebels in all the three Congress-ruled states seeking change. The result is more splits, more rebellion, indiscipline, and erosion in the party.

Solving one problem in Punjab has created other problems. The echo of rebellion is also heard from two other Congress-ruled states

their mother to change the Captain and replace him with a weak leader. It is they who promoted the ambitious Sidhu who aimed to replace the Captain. The story is not over as Sidhu is still dreaming of becoming chief minister. The Congress gamble may or may not work in Punjab. The moral of the story is that high command culture can be a success so long as the leadership is strong. It might have clicked with Indira Gandhi, but the present leadership comes nowhere near her political acumen. The same medicine does not work at all times.

The BJP, too, has changed with the party adopting the high command culture. For instance, the BJP has changed three chief ministers in Karnataka, Uttarakhand, and Gujarat in the past few months. Today Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Home Minister Amit Shah are all-powerful. The BJP's tactics are similar to the Indira Gandhi era. Ultimately it is the vote catcher who matters in any political party, which is why they succeed. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Mukul and the ensuing assembly polls

Editor, Apropos of the news item, "Congress at crossroads as Mukul weighs his options", (ST, Sep 21, 2021), the former CM, Dr Mukul Sangma will throw a major surprise that is going to astound one and all prior to the next assembly polls. Visibly at loggerheads with Vincent H Pala, the political drama in the run-up to the 2023 assembly elections has started to unfold here and speculations are rife that Mukul may well switch sides with the saffron brigade. The re-induction of the former Home Minister, RG Lyngdoh besides other local political party leaders into the Congress fold may well seem to be in favour of Pala but that may not be enough to cut the ice in the next elections with the saffron party gearing up to form its own majority government in the state. Well, that may seem unachievable now, but in politics, as in cricket, the audience may never know how the game changes. A full-fledged BJP-led government in Meghalaya may rest much on how, also, Mukul responds to the political game plan as there is an aura of dissatisfaction when it comes to the NPP government here headed by Conrad Sangma. This first time CM has not been able to handle any issue on expected lines and many have even rated him as being one of the "disastrous CMs," Meghalaya has ever seen. Another term

for him seems unlikely at the moment but much may also depend upon how Garo Hills reacts to him in his next show. His governance, so far, has been more or less being centered on that part of the state and one may argue that this is alright since successive CMs of the state have only neglected that region. Nonetheless, I would prefer not to put my money on the re-inducted lot into the Congress.

Yours etc. BC Paul Shillong - 4

Link PAN with Aadhar supposedly by Sep 30

Editor, The Central Govt. has recently warned that Bank clientele that fail to link their PAN (Permanent Account Number) with their Aadhar Card by the deadline of September 30, 2021 would find their life-long bank become inoperative. Furthermore, it has been reported that a penalty of no-less than rupees one thousand would be levied from defaulters post the target date. Incidentally, the Govt. has been dithering on the specific deadline from one time to another for reasons best known to it. Out of the blue, I have been informed that this date-mark of September 30 next has been re-scheduled to March 31, 2022. Such inexplicable deferment of those at the helm tells its own story! We will recall that when Aadhar Scheme was initially

launched it was spelled out that Meghalaya, Assam and erstwhile State of Jammu & Kashmir were exempted from its purview. Thus, indubitably it was a sigh of relief for the tribals of Meghalaya as they are being unshackled from the income tax net. Coincidentally, it may be pertinent to reiterate that way back one of my letters entitled: "The Dark Aspects of Aadhar" (ST July 11, 2017) had figured in these columns where I had elaborately focused on how Aadhar enrolment by way of letting one's fingerprints imprinted and scanning of iris on a mechanical device is actually compromising our Right to Privacy of which the Hon'ble Apex Court has upheld as a Fundamental Right. To make matters worse, Aadhar enrolment, I had stated would metaphorically turn us into a dog under an electronic leash.

Hence, the assertion of Anurag Thakur, Union Minister of State for Finance that September 30 shall be the deadline for the Bank's account holders to link their PAN and Aadhar to their respective account numbers has thrown all concerned into a welter of inexorable confusion, especially the indigenous tribals of Meghalaya who have not yet included themselves under the Aadhar regimentation. Arguably, I hope that the residents of Meghalaya are exempted from the purview of this deadline in question, provided the initial notification that Meghalaya was out of the loop of Aadhar architecture is still operative.

Diya Singh Jerome K Diengdoh Via email

Why allow public gatherings in front of Civil Hospital?

Editor, The state capital witnessed a series of demonstrations post the August 13, 2021 incident. In fact, a large number of organisations have mushroomed, each echoing the same call - suspension of the police officials involved in the alleged encounter killing of former HNLG general secretary- Chheristerfield Thangkiew. Yes, granted that it is every citizen's right to express themselves as long as they do not create a law and order situation and disrupt lives, however the recent sit-in at the U Kiang Nangbah statue a few meters away from the Civil Hospital saw a large gathering of people accompanied with a lot of noise with speaker after speaker delivering their speeches while those gathered there were cheering them at the top of their voices. The road alongside any hospital is normally a "NO HORN ZONE" in order to provide some quiet and tranquility to the ailing patients. If only those in the sit-in had been sensitive and considerate enough towards the patients of Civil Hospital and had taken their protests elsewhere and spared the patients from the ruckus outside the hospital it would have shown their courtesy towards those inmates. Surprisingly the Government did not prohibit the gathering around a hospital zone. Why is the Government so compliant? Henceforth, we as citizens expect the Gov-

ernment to prohibit such public gatherings especially at places where there is need for silence and sanctity such hospitals, schools and colleges and places of worship.

Yours etc., Jennifer Dkhar, Via email

Taliban's oppressive rule

Editor, Contrary to the expectations of a moderate government after a long period of oppression, the plans put forward by the Taliban government in Afghanistan give an indication that its policies will not be much different from that of the previous Taliban regime. As for college education, women students will be allowed to study in universities but with tough restrictions. They will have to comply with Islamic dress and code and there will be segregation between men and women. It is indeed reassuring that women are allowed to study in universities. However, the conditions attached to the grant of permission to women students indicate the hollowness of the Taliban's talk about transformation. Women are not allowed to go to work either. It should be recalled that women demonstrators were recently assaulted in Kabul. All these indicate that the new Taliban regime is likely to implement regressive policies. Their approach to women and girls have not softened.

As for school education, girls were excluded from returning to secondary schools. The Taliban regime allowed

boys and male teachers to attend the secondary school classes. There has been no mention of girls or women teachers. Even if girls are allowed to attend schools, there will be segregation by sex. In the primary schools, boys and girls are attending separate classes. Reports reveal that many boys have refrained from going to school in solidarity with Afghan school girls.

An interesting feature of the Taliban's education policy is that female students will be taught by women and classrooms will remain separated as per the rules of the Islamic "sharia." When required, men will be allowed to teach women, but in accordance with the "sharia." It is ironic that education that transforms minds and promotes progressive ideas is being imparted to Afghan students in an oppressive and stifling atmosphere. It seems that the Taliban government is concerned more with the gender of the teachers than with their academic achievements. It may be recalled that the new Taliban government formed consists of only men. All these exemplify the Taliban's male patriarchal oppression and discrimination against women. Amid great curiosity about how far the Taliban has changed, it is reassuring that education will be allowed, though there are restrictions.

Yours etc., Venu GS, Kollam

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"Do not let making a living prevent you from making a life."

— John Wooden

The Shillong Times

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Congress in a quandary

MEGHALAYA will be going to the polls in February-March 2023. All political parties are gearing up for this once-in-five-year contest which can make or break businesses and overturn political fortunes. Naturally, the Congress as the principle opposition party is gearing up for the 2023n polls to take on the NPP-led MDA Government which has been in the eye of the storm for a series of alleged corrupt deals especially in the State Power Corporation. But it appears from the turn of events that the Congress is likely to split with former Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma looking at other alternatives. Dr Sangma has reasons to be miffed at the manner in which the Pradesh Congress President was named without him being consulted despite being a senior leader. But that has been the modus-operandi of Rahul Gandhi, the ad-hoc President of the All India Congress Committee (AICC). Rahul had stepped aside as Congress President in 2019 after the party suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the BJP. Sonia Gandhi has been wearing that mantle but of late the Nehru-Gandhi siblings seem to be taking all decisions; including that of changing Chief Ministers halfway as had happened in Punjab.

Naturally Congress MLAs and party workers are watching the events unfolding in Punjab with some consternation. Rahul Gandhi has no locus standi to decide things for the AICC since he is not officially the President. Priyanka Gandhi who is lending her weight to her brother can hardly help build the fortunes of the Party, since she is in charge of Uttar Pradesh and has no role to play in Punjab or elsewhere. But the Nehru-Gandhi siblings are now taking arbitrary decisions. The only alternative to the BJP right now seems to be the TMC and it is no surprise why senior politicians from the Congress here are veering towards it. As of now the Congress is in no position to give the BJP a run for its money. It was Mamata Banerjee who stood like a rock against the intimidatory tactics of the BJP in the Bengal elections. Also, it has been amply demonstrated that the Congress will not be able to move out of the dynastic mould. The TMC provides that alternative to non-BJP parties to fight a united battle in 2024 but as of now the TMC-Congress alliance is on a slippery slope. For now, it's a game of wait and watch. But for aspirants in Meghalaya there's not much time left to decide which party to throw their weight behind in 2023.

Sustainable development goals & Palm oil cultivation: A paradox

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

On the 26th August, 2021 NITI Aayog released the 'North Eastern Region: District SDG Index, Report and Dashboard Baseline Report 2021-2022'. The report was a damning indictment of Meghalaya's performance in terms of its progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Realizing that development is a multi-dimensional concept and extends beyond GDP measurement which does not consider issues of inequality, fairness, environmental externalities, and sustainability, the United Nations General Assembly identified 17 global goals to provide the "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" by the year 2030 and track the progress in achieving them.

In terms of ranking, the Report placed Meghalaya second from the bottom in the North East, with only Nagaland faring worst. Out of the 103 districts, the highest rank from the State was achieved by East Khasi Hills which came at 57th rank. At the national level, the State was among the bottom five states. The SDG report is not a perfect document. Arguments can be made as to the choice of indicators and whether those chosen can help assess the progress towards the SDGs. However, there is no doubt that the indicators do bring out many gaps in the state of our development. We are indeed at the bottom of the ladder. But should we take the SDG report seriously? Is the Union Government of India serious about the whole exercise? I feel there is a lot of ambiguity around this. The best example of this is the recent announcement of the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) Scheme with a special focus on the North East region and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The whole push towards the attainment of SDGs stands in complete contrast with the goals of the proposed Scheme.

The Indian Institute of Oil Palm Research estimates the country's oil palm cultivation potential at 28 lakh hectares (ha). Palm oil is already grown in the country with Mizoram containing 78% of the total land under palm oil cultivation in North East India. The Scheme is aimed at covering an additional 6.5 lakh ha area under oil palm cultivation by 2025-26 to touch 10 lakh ha, mainly in the North-East region and Andaman and the Nicobar Islands which includes Meghalaya as well. For North

East, the area earmarked for the Scheme is substantial considering the region makes up just over 5% of the total area of the country but will make up almost 30% of the total area under the Scheme. Meghalaya which has been identified as one of the potential sites has a total area of just over 22 lakh hectares. So, the area under the Scheme is substantial and will have a massive impact on the State. In this regard, Meghalaya's progress towards SDGs, especially the three SDGs viz., SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production; SDG 13 - Climate Action; SDG 15 - Life on Land, is going to be severely threatened by this Scheme.

SDG 12 emphasizes "doing more with less" thus promoting efficiency, green economies, and sustainable infrastructure. It focuses on

"The SDG report is not a perfect document. Arguments can be made as to the choice of indicators and whether those chosen can help assess the progress towards the SDGs. However, there is no doubt that the indicators do bring out many gaps in the state of our development."

reducing degradation and pollution and minimizing waste. The high input-intensive nature of the plantation system is in complete opposition to the goal. In their article, 'Mizoram's balancing act with palm oil's ecological impact and economic benefits' Bhattacharya, Talukdar and Guha have discussed in detail the impacts of palm oil on the local ecology which includes a negative effect on soil biology and depletion of local water resources. They have quoted C. Zohming-sangi, a doctoral researcher at Mizoram University reporting that nutrients, enzymes and carbon are found in a much lower percentage in the soil after palm oil trees are introduced. With palm oil also requiring around 40,000 to 50,000 litres of water per hectare per day, it puts great pressure on the local water table as well. Water shortage is in fact already being reported from several areas surrounded by palm oil groves. In Meghalaya, the runoff ratio ranges from 60% to 100%, i.e., more than half of the rainfall that the State receives is lost through surface flow without recharging the water table. It is for this reason that areas like Sohra (receiving one of the highest rainfalls in the world) are

infamously termed as a 'wet desert' because of the water shortage problem faced by the community. Palm oil plantations will only exacerbate the problem. With the inevitable degradation of soil and water resources, it will be impossible for Meghalaya to achieve SDG 12.

SDG 13 is aimed at integrating climate change measures, disaster risk measures and sustainable natural resource management into national development strategies. Palm oil will require a substantial change in land use; from evergreen and semi-evergreen tropical and sub-tropical forests to be replaced by monoculture, hallmark of industrial agriculture. The article 'Measuring Carbon Emissions from Tropical Deforestation: An Overview' by Gregory P Asner has reported that

deforestation, especially in tropical areas, contributes to about 20% of annual global greenhouse gas (GHG). Furthermore, according to the note 'Agriculture and Climate Change: Towards Sustainable, Productive and Climate-Friendly Agricultural Systems' published by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), agriculture (especially fossil fuel driven industrial agriculture) contributes a significant share of the GHG emissions - 17% directly through agricultural activities and an additional 7-14% through land-use changes, i.e., more than 20%. It is difficult to see how a Scheme that will increase the State's greenhouse gas emissions by a minimum of 20% will help it achieve SDG 13.

Finally, SDG 15 is aimed at protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable management of forests, combating desertification and halting and reversing land degradation in conjunction with integrating ecosystems and biodiversity into national and local planning. According to the Meghalaya Biodiversity Board, Meghalaya is situated in the North East India Biogeo-

graphic zone (along with Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura) which is a significant region as it represents a transition zone between the Indian, Indo-Malayan, Indo-Chinese biogeographic regions as well as a meeting place of Himalayan mountains with that of Peninsular India. The State also represents an important part of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot which is one of the 4 biodiversity hotspots present in India and 34 in the world. As a result of all this, Meghalaya has been identified as a key area for biodiversity conservation due to its high species diversity and high level of endemism. How will a monoculture, no less of an exotic species, contribute to this rich biodiversity, is difficult to understand? Will the replacement of natural forest by a monoculture be able to recreate the same level of interactions between the local species or destroy it altogether? The answer is not very difficult to guess.

The impact of the palm oil plantation on the SDG 12, 13 and 15 is very straightforward. But the Scheme will also have an adverse impact on SDG 1 - No Poverty; SDG 2 - Zero Hunger; SDG 3 - Good Health and Well Being; and SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities. This will take place through intrusion into the traditional land tenure system and the weakening of the Indigenous Food Systems (which is organic by default and a cherished goal of the Union Government of India - another paradox). Discussions on these will happen in future submissions. But the impact on SDG 12, 13 and 15 is so obvious it baffles why the NITI Aayog report and the announcement of the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) happened almost simultaneously. Maybe the whole SDGs exercise is an eyewash and Meghalaya should not feel bad at being among the worst performers because it doesn't really matter. In that case, we should not take any serious note of future SDGs reports but instead focus on how much greenhouse gases we can emit into the atmosphere, how much biodiversity we can destroy and how much of our land and water resources we can degrade. That will be a much more worthwhile endeavour.

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Per capita means of survival in rural India becoming scarce

By Dr Gyan Pathak

The latest situation assessment of agricultural households and land holdings of other households in rural India made by the NSS 77th round has revealed that per capita means of survival in rural India is dwindling fast and both farm and non-farm households are in great distress. It was the situation in 2019, which the COVID-19 induced lockdowns and containment measures further exacerbated.

For the last several decades people from rural India have been migrating to urban areas for jobs, but the COVID-19 crisis had reversed this trend since the announcement of the general lockdown of the country on March 24, 2020. Business and industries in the urban areas shut down and the migrant workers were forced to return to their villages. It has further increased the burden on the rural areas, which was already not in a position to support the rural populace enforcing them to migrate. The returned migrant labours in millions have just increased the burden on both the agricultural and non-agricultural households.

The survey has estimated that there were 172.4 million families in rural India out of which 93.09 million were agricultural and 79.3 million were non-agricultural households, ie their percentage share in the rural population were 54 and 46 per cent respectively. However, 70.4 per cent agricultural households had less than one hectare land. This percentage was much higher at 98.9 per cent for non-agricultural households. Only 0.2 per cent rural households possessed more than 10 ha land, among them agricultural households were only 0.4 per cent while non-agricultural households were almost zero per cent.

Not all land holdings are operational. Estimated number of operational holdings in rural India is only 101.9 million, and average area per operational holding is 0.913 ha, while average area operated is used for agricultural activities per operational holding was 0.833 ha. For agricultural households the number of operational holding was 89.5 million, and for non-agricultural household it was a meagre 12.3 millions. When we compare it with total holdings, it presents an alarming situation.

This small landholding had made their lives miserable although, among the self-employed, 68.9 per cent of agricultural households were engaged in crop production. About 2.3 per cent were in livestock farming, 0.6 per cent in other agricultural activities and 4.8 per cent in non-agricultural enterprise. Only 7.7 per cent were in regular waged or salaried employment, while 14.2 per cent were casual labourer.

Non-agricultural households were much worse. Among the self-employed, only 14 per cent were engaged in non-agricultural enterprise, 6.1 per cent in crop production, 0.6 per cent in livestock farming, and only 1.1 per cent in other agricultural activities.

How precarious their conditions were can be imagined on the basis of this fact that average area owned per agricultural household was only 0.876 ha for agricultural household, while 2.6 per cent of them have become landless. Average area owned per non-agricultural household was only 0.086 ha, while 14.8 per cent had become landless. Thus average landholding per household in rural areas was only 0.512 ha, while 8.2 per cent had become landless.

The situation had worsened also due to marginal ownership of the majority, ie the people who had a landholding between 0.002 ha to one hectare. They were 76.5 per cent in the rural areas while only 0.1 per cent had large ownership, ie over 10ha of landholding. Agricultural households in marginal ownership were 70.4 per cent, and 83.7 per cent of non-agricultural households were in this category. Only 0.2 per cent agricultural households have large ownership, while

non-agricultural households in this category were zero per cent. Marginal category operational holding was 72.6 per cent but operated area was only 31.7 per cent. The large category operational holding was only 0.3 per cent but the share of the operated area was 5.4 per cent. The percentage of tenant holding was 17.3 per cent while of area leased-in was 13 per cent. No one can fail to see the disturbing huge gap.

Average area owned by ST household was only 0.586 ha. SC households were far worse and they were owning only 0.242 ha. OBC households owned on an average 0.543 ha. Others were owning 0.677 ha, though more than any other social group, it is really too small a holding to maintain a family. Among total agricultural households STs were 14.2 per cent, SCs 15.9 per cent, OBCs 45.8 per cent and others 24.1 per cent.

When situation worsens, poor rural households lease out their land. From July to December 2018, 3.2 per cent of households had reported leasing out their land, which increased to 3.7 per cent during the next six months from January to June 2019. Average area leased out per household were 0.694 ha and 0.686 ha during the respective periods. About 5.5 million people lease out their land during the first six-months period which increased to 6.4 million in the second six-months period. The people deriving benefit of such miserable conditions by leasing were 13.9 per cent and 13.3 per cent respectively during the period against consideration. They leased in 0.481 ha and 0.476 ha respectively.

About 84 per cent of land was used only for crop production, 0.6 per cent only for farming of animals, 6 per cent for both, 0.7 per cent for other agricultural purposes, and 8.7 per cent for non-agricultural purposes. Percentage of households reporting owning cattle were - milk 16.4 per cent, young stock 19.6 per cent, and others 12.5 per cent, while for buffalo these figures were 10.7, 11.7, and 5.4 per cent respectively. In-milk cattle per 100 household was only 22, and buffalo 15. About 10.7 per cent households reported owning poultry birds, and average number per 100 household was 134. Percentage of households reporting owning bovine and other mammals were 21.9 per cent, and their average number per 100 families were 189.

And if this anomaly was not enough, only 48.7 per cent agricultural households could access technical advice during July-December 2018, which even reduced to 42.2 per cent in during the next six months in the first half of 2019. Average monthly income per agricultural household was only Rs 10,218 per month which included, income from wages Rs 4,063, from leasing out land Rs 134, from non-farm business Rs 641, from crop Rs 3,798, and from farming of animals Rs 1,582. "Since this level of expenditure and earning was not sustainable, 50.2 per cent of agricultural households had become indebted, and their average outstanding loan was Rs 74,121. Unfortunately, only 69.6 per cent of their loan was institutional, and the rest was taken from market at much higher rates of interest. Even the rates of institutional loans for them are higher than many other sectors, especially that is applicable for big industries.

The tribulations of the rural people, both agricultural and non-agricultural households, are numerous. PM Modi had promised them "good days" in 2014, but their conditions worsened by the time of the survey in 2019. It has further deteriorated in 2020 and 2021. The data speak for themselves and no argument is needed to prove the dismal performance of the Modi government. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

School violates Govt regulations

Through your esteemed daily I would like to bring to the notice of all concerned the blatant violation of the Notification No. EDN.40/2020/69 dated 26th August, 2021 regarding school reopening issued by the Education Department by the Ramakrishna UP/LP School, Umsohsun, Shillong. As per the said notification, in urban areas, where this school is located, only online classes have been mandated for students of class I to V and school visit for students of class VI to VIII. But this school is conducting regular offline classes for student right from class Nursery to class VIII from 6th September, 2021 thereby putting the lives of young children at grave risk. Such total disregard of Government's order should not be brushed aside, instead exemplary punishment should be meted out to all the teachers and the management of the school under the relevant provisions of Disaster Management Act, 2005 as was taken against a marriage party by the East Khasi Hills District Administration last year for violating COVID-19 protocols.

Yours sincerely,
N K Kehar
Shillong-3

Direct & indirect Govt funding to NGOs should stop

Editor,
Survey once conducted by students and alumnae of institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Delhi University (DU) and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) on government-funded organisations that claimed to be working for public welfare revealed widespread and systemic abuse.

Earlier also Intelligence Bureau report indicated about misuse of Indian NGOs for anti-national agenda by foreign-contributors where it was revealed that India GDP has been adversely affected to big extent of 2-3 percent through such foreign-funded NGOs. Many NGOs are said to have been funded for cultural evasion in India. Foreign-funded NGOs spend in rupees and receive funds in dollars by sending these foreign-contributors exaggerated photos and videos of events to get huge foreign-funding. Many NGOs are tools to divert foreign-funds of individuals. It may be some foreign powers may be funding Indian NGOs

with aim of disruption in governance to destabilise the country.

Siphoning of government-funds for NGOs run by influential ones in political and bureaucratic circles in name of their family-members should be prevented by stopping any kind of direct or indirect funding of NGOs at public-expense including from funds at discretion of Parliamentarians and state-legislators. These NGOs pay lucrative salaries and perks to its officers who are either relation to power-filled politicians and bureaucrats, or of persons running these NGOs. Buildings built on land allotted on concessional rates to NGOs should become government-property because of large-scale funding already done to these NGOs by the government. According to a study-report, India has an NGO for every 400 citizens, where NGOs are mainly used as some business-shops by those owning these. Any provision of tax-exemption for donations made to NGOs should be abolished. However in the meanwhile all NGOs should be under purview of Right-To-Information (RTI) Act and also of Lokpal.

Yours etc.,
Subhash Chandra
Agrawal,
(Guinness Record Holder
& RTI Consultant)
Delhi - 6

Congress in reset mode

Editor,
The appointment of Vincent H.Pala as the MPCC President was an expected outcome considering his proximity to the echelons in the AICC and moreover his stint as an MP of Lok Sabha. Everyone had their eyes on other possible nominations but politics is a strange subject of wit and strategy. The absence of CLP leader Dr. Mukul Sangma does not bode well to the extent of him not being part of the inauguration ceremony of the new MPCC President. Should we say that the feeling of not being given "importance" was the reason or is the feeling of not being in control the real reason? Without the support of Dr Mukul's detractors it would be difficult for the Congress in Garo Hills to have an easy cakewalk. However having said that a lot depends on the strategy that could build up in an unlikely coalition between the Congress along with regional allies. Alternatively an arranged political "marriage" with an upcoming party like the TMC is a speculation we need to watch out for.

Speaking of A L Hek a former BJP Cabinet Minister who was sidelined to give way to his party colleague, Sanbor Shullai and later to his 'bete noire' Ernest Maw-

rie as a political advisor was bound to lead to a break-up within the BJP camp sooner than later. How things will fall into place is something to wait and watch.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin
Wankhar
Shillong.

Smart city requires a smart citizenry

Editor,
Apropos of Jenniefer Dkhar's letter in The Shillong Times (ST Sep 22, 2021) I would like to add the following:

The cacophony we witness along the road adjoining Shillong Civil Hospital, on a daily basis, is testimony to how far down we have collectively regressed in terms of civic sense and common courtesy. We have all kinds of vehicles with modified silencers, each trying to outdo the other in achieving higher decibel readings, thundering up and down this road through all waking hours of the day. Then we have drivers honking impatiently while trying to manoeuvre their way through the endless lines of traffic—the array of sounds in this department alone is astounding, the loudest being the famous air-horns declared illegal so

many, many years ago.

There was a time, a long, long time ago it seems, when you would fail your driving test by simply honking (those simple outdated car horns of those days) around this area. Nowadays, no one cares. Not the public—they are too concerned with manoeuvring their vehicles, jumping lanes every now and then, trying to overtake the vehicle in front and honking aggressively to achieve this end. No one needs a driving test nowadays, anyway. Neither do the traffic cops - they are already overworked as it is and don't need this headache to add to their plate of daily misery - unless some bright mind decides to really enforce the law and empower them to impose hefty spot-penalties on every violator.

I guess the very fact that a hospital is right there next to the road very conveniently fails to register in our senses. I guess if some people try to establish their equal and democratic right to be part of the cacophony, we can't do anything to stop them, can we? As we all look forward to Shillong being transformed into a 'Smart City', would it be too much to ask of ourselves if we don't need to transform ourselves first?

Yours etc.,
Donboklang Dohling,
Via email

"Great leaders are willing to sacrifice the numbers to save the people. Poor leaders sacrifice the people to save the numbers."

— Simon Sinek

The Shillong Times

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India in the US

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's three-day US visit has three principal components, namely his meetings with President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris; two, his meetings with business honchos to explore or fix new deals; and three, the PM's address of the UN General Assembly in New York, which is no more than a routine exercise. Visiting the US for the seventh time in as many years, the PM would have extensive discussions at the highest level of the US administration to try and re-establish the close ties he had maintained with the former US administration of Donald Trump.

India might look for assurances in relation to the Taliban governance in Afghanistan and its implications on terrorist forays in the geopolitical region. From what Biden has stated the other day, his policy is to eschew military offensives and concentrate more on dialogue in solving issues between the US and other nations. It implies that the US under his governance would look more inward. In reality, the world needed a big brother; and Americans in the past nearly a century held that role. The US strength is diminishing and China is on the ascendant. The approaches of the US and China on global matters were, and will in future be, vastly different. A high sense of responsibility is, frankly, not in the Chinese DNA.

India's own relations with the US have not been very strong. For many years in the past, India sided with the Russians. The end of the Cold War created a situation in which neither Russia wanted India nor India sought out Russia. India edged closer to the US through successive governments since the 1990s. The warming up was slow because the traditional regional ally for the US, namely Pakistan, remained the fly in the ointment. The US cannot turn its back on Pakistan to side with a hesitant ally like India. India is too cautious to do the US bidding or to play American games against neighbour China. Pakistan, on the other hand, showed a rare smartness in having one leg in the US boat and the other in the Chinese. India has no strong foreign policy initiatives after the era of the Non-Aligned Movement, which too was more pro-Moscow in its nature. The end of the Cold War also spelled the end of the NAM. Now, it is the season of drift. What India gets from the US in the present visit of the PM is still worth a watch.

Letters to the Editor

Congress back in the news

Editor,
From two simple functions - the induction of RG Lyngdoh, PN Syiem, Fenela Lyngdoh Nonglait, Mosjo R. Wanswett and Adrian Lambert Chyne Myllem into the Congress party and the installation of Vincent H. Pala as the new MPCC president, the Congress in Meghalaya is back in the limelight, which otherwise remained subdued during the last few years. These two events brought into the open that all is not well within the party in the state. It revealed that the top leaders of the party, the CLP leader and the President, are ill at ease with each other and have deep-rooted differences if not enmities between them while the second rank leaders are in a quandary. This may not bode well for the prominent party which has the closest chance of replacing the NPP, to claim the majority to form the government in 2023. If the Congress Party in Jaintia and Khasi Hills are intact under Pala

and Garo Hills under Mukul and if they both are united, the Congress will definitely reach the ultimate goal. As to who will be the CLP in 2023 the winning Congress legislators will decide then. For the MDA, return to power in 2023 is very doubtful because its performance is almost nil and it does not instil any confidence among the voters of Meghalaya for its performance is smeared by corruption everywhere, inefficiency, alienated from the people and with no relief to the farming community; no sops for the poor who are suffering from the onslaught and impact of the pandemic. There are no visible developmental activities on the ground and above all its abatement in pollution of the most valuable environment is a crime.

However, success of individual MLAs of the MDA in 2023 will depend on their individual performance during the present term in their respective constituencies and depending on their individual capacity to financially invest in procuring votes. But their parties cannot help them because to ensure their return in 2023 their parties have not

Time to redefine "Leadership" in Meghalaya

MLA not necessarily a Leader..

By Patricia Mukhim

Leadership is not about winning elections by paying money or various inducements to voters. How many of those who won the elections in 2018 did so without spending lakhs and crores of rupees? A person who wishes to serve the constituents, provides them a vision and leads them into achieving that vision. That is true leadership. Here in Meghalaya and a few other states too where greedy voters have subverted the very system of voting, we don't have leaders. The very idea of a leader is massacred. Leaders are not self-serving; they are not there to enrich themselves while the voters sink into the rat-hole of poverty and destitution. The simple point is, that having money does not make one a leader. A wise electorate should first ask where that money has come from. Of course, that's idealism; it's asking for too much from a population softened by money once in five years. In fact, we deserve the Government we get and it serves us right when all indicators show that our kids are stunted and wasted and their cognitive abilities are such that they are defined as cretins.

Have we heard any leader in this Government ever regretting the poor scores that Meghalaya gets in terms of health care, education, nutrition and under-development? No. Every survey done of Meghalaya whether by NSSO or NITI Aayog has seen the state sliding down and our "mis-defined" leaders have never said a word. No explanations; no regrets as long their wealth acquisition programmes are not disrupted. And we the people continue to patronise these self-propagating 'leaders' for the once-in-five-year money we get which is not more than Rs 5000-10,000. And we sell our souls to the highest bidder for the next five years while this person diverts all public funds to his/her private bank accounts. And let me say this out loud. No party, not even the holier-than-thou BJP is free from corruption in Meghalaya. Its leaders are all birds of a feather. It's almost as if the BJP does not care a hoot about quality so long as it gets quantity.

The large majority that join politics do so for personal motives. In Meghalaya, it has become the fastest money-making route. Just go back to the antecedents of our politicians. They came from humble backgrounds with not much education. Look at where they are today in terms of wealth ranking. Most live in mansions and move around in the latest, most expensive cars from the

Jeep, to the Audi to BMWs, Mercedes and what have you! And we the voters, including the rational and thinking population of the state don't ever ask questions. We prefer not to burn our bridges; so we continue to flirt with these politicians just in case we need to use them at some point of time. And when it comes to writing, there are so few willing to stick their necks out except for the usual suspects who have no axes to grind.

Leaders are supposed to be strategists, not for themselves but for their people. They are to tell us the voters where we are as a state; why we are where we are and

people with no intellectual and social capital call themselves leaders? Can these leaders we have elected today barring four or five from across the political spectrum, who are qualified, engage in an intellectual debate? An intellectual discourse is not some meaningless drivel; it means something that triggers a new thought, new ideas and makes people think. Has anyone ever had a discussion with any of our legislators and come out wiser? Not since the time of Martin Narayan Majaw, PA Sangma, BB Lyngdoh, SL Marbaniang, PG Marbaniang have we heard words of wisdom from the Assembly. It has



where we should be heading. But do these self-styled leaders ever have conversations with their constituents? Don't they talk down to people? Don't they treat them like doormats especially if they are poor and voiceless? We have seen it all and it is depressing.

And this is a state where people always but always vote for those that have been in pressure groups of one type or another. So far, we have not seen even one of such leaders of pressure groups showing

become a space for sparring matches where we don't even learn a single new word to add to our vocabulary, except four-lettered abuse! That's how low we have sunk. Paul Lyngdoh used to be a witty soul both with the written and spoken words. Now he too has gone silent. The intellectual capital has been given a quiet rest.

Leaders are never insecure about training and mentoring other younger leaders. In fact, real leaders build the next generation

"Leaders are never insecure about training and mentoring other younger leaders. In fact, real leaders build the next generation of human capital which is a scarce commodity in this state. Leaders seek out young talent and engage with them so that they can take the baton forward. It is tiring to hear banal speeches that the youth are our future."

spunk and dynamism in the Assembly. Their ballooned egos seem to have burst the moment they enter the Assembly where they remain quiet as a mouse and have to wait for the Chief Minister to answer questions on their behalf in the House. How can

of human capital which is a scarce commodity in this state. Leaders seek out young talent and engage with them so that they can take the baton forward. It is tiring to hear banal speeches that the youth are our future. Other than those meaningless speeches

how have we empowered our youth to stand out and speak up what they believe in? Have we had sessions on building integrity and trust? Who will take such sessions since 'integrity' and 'trust' are words that don't define our present set of legislators?

We have several political parties here. Has anyone of them had a special political training for their youth wings? If any political party has had such trainings, I would be happy to be educated as to what sort of transformation they have undergone? Have they been trained to not become blind followers of their leaders? Have they been trained to be accountable for every penny they spend? Is it not true that the youth wings of most political parties also include youth that want to get into politics because of the power and pelf it promises? Where is that one youth who stands out from any political party today? Does anyone dare not follow the Master at the top of the pyramid? Or call out his acts of omission and commission? Why must the youth wing of a political party defend corruption or remain silent in the face of blatant venality? Is the corruption happening today not eating into the future resources of the state? Are they not part of the same state? Or do they live in a different universe?

Can you call any person a leader when he remains silent on seeing so many coke plants being set up in his constituency which poison the air and cause health problems to people living there? Does a leader own a company that has no qualms about dumping sand and debris into a river system? Yet this is the leadership we have in Meghalaya's Assembly. And why is it so? Because political parties dump their candidates on us. We The People cannot choose who we want as our legislators. They are foisted on us? Is this Democracy? In the next election do we dare tell political parties to take a chill pill if they force a candidate on us that we know has no vision, no strategy on job creation, no inclination to build second rung leadership and above all who is there to do business through politics? Already we have quite a few business families sharpening their knives for 2023 where they want to bring in their brothers, sisters, wives, cousins so that together they can create a Private Ltd Company out of Meghalaya. Should We The People of Meghalaya allow this to happen with our eyes wide open? Was this why Meghalaya was created? Ask ourselves this question and also answer them.

Rewriting history

Scholarly not political use

By Dr. S. Saraswathi

Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu referring to the findings in the excavations going on in Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu, which have revealed remnants of over 3,000 years old Tamirabarani Civilization, has endorsed the views of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin that Indian history must be rewritten. He said this has to be done "with an Indian perspective and not through a colonial lens".

Revising history textbooks is very much on the agenda of the BJP. The need for rewriting Indian history and recasting the syllabus and textbooks in history is being repeatedly urged by some historians, scholars, political and social leaders in recent years. While pre-independence books were loaded with colonial bias, post-independence researches with rare exceptions are biased in their coverage. Contributions of some areas and some people are highlighted and several others omitted. The result is partial and distorted knowledge of our own past, even among the highly educated.

Home Minister Amit Shah, speaking at a seminar in the Banaras Hindu University two years ago, called for rewriting history - an idea that always evokes quick response from both supporters and opponents from academics and others. There seems to be differences even over historical facts for there is selection and interpretation in presenting facts including thoughts and events behind a phenomenon. Shah gave a call to rewrite history from "Indian point of view", and asked, "Who is stopping us from amending history?" meaning history books. He put the responsibility on historians and people to preserve and rewrite the nation's history.

The intention of the Government of Tamil Nadu is to start Indian history by tracing the prosperous trade culture the Tamils had with other countries. Keeladi excavations have proved the existence of a rich riverside civilization on the banks of the River Vaigai and that Tamils were literates far back in the 6th century BC.

Rewriting history has two major dimensions. One is based on new documentary and archaeological findings supplementing and/or correcting earlier knowledge. The other is bringing to light facts missed, omitted, suppressed or misinterpreted for various reasons so as to provide a balanced coverage without bias, which is the biggest enemy of true history. On 16 September, Tamil Nadu celebrated centenary for introduction of communal representation in public service, which came into force after the dyarchic government in Madras Presidency adopted a resolution and passed an order determining the turns of the recognised communities in a unit of 12 appointments. This raised the curiosity of the government to go deeper into history and politics.

Stalin spoke of collecting pre-independence documents pertaining to Tamil Nadu. In fact, using these documents, there are many research thesis, published and unpublished, prepared for research degrees in Madras and other universities in India and abroad. But, not all of them have found entry into history books.

Rewriting history is not changing history. History cannot be changed, but historical writings can be. Rewriting under discussion in India is to correct errors and distortions in available texts and add new discoveries. This exercise is long overdue in our country.

Several instances of re-writing history guided and directed by politics have taken place with reference to World Wars mostly to justify a nation's decisions and actions. Japanese war crimes, bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Croatian, and Serbian war crimes, Turkey and the Armenian genocide are

some major historical events that have been rewritten. South Korea, Japan, China, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are some of the countries that have substantially changed contents of history books and have documented historical events.

Historical revisionism is a wider exercise which extends to bringing to light new evidence and new interpretations to help resurrect memories of important players and significant incidents that form part of true history. It leads to changes in historical writings, revival of memories, and more comprehensive understanding of the past, with new facts and interpretations. This is happening again and again all over the world as part of history. It is common within the Marxist Movement.

Revision is said to be an essential part of life-giving exercise for history. There cannot be any ultimate or eternal "truth" about past events and their meaning which cannot be challenged or changed with fresh revelations. Revisionism is what makes history lively, and meaningful and trustworthy. People's problems and expectations, needs, interests, motivations, and points of view do not remain constant. Every regime has its own relations with the past and the necessity to read and grasp the past for evolving, correcting, and framing its perspective. People have a right to look upon and reinterpret history, an academic task that can be undertaken only by scholars.

Historical revisionism is normally done by revisiting the sources of a historical record of a period with a different perspective or data that could alter how we perceive it. This way of revisiting history has had both positive and negative aspects.

Today, our object should be to collect relevant and complete facts to rectify omissions, imbalance, disproportionate coverage, and to present them without fear or favour. Indian history that is familiar to us has many gaps and omissions to be filled. Several areas and people are not even mentioned. Knowledge about social, economic and cultural life when the East India Company was extending its hold is scanty and scattered. Information on building of cities and ports or on engineering knowledge and skills, state of science and technology, and development of arts and architecture will go a long way in building national unity and integration. History of freedom movement must be enlarged to cover contributions of various schools of thought and forgotten personalities, whose sacrifices were immense.

In 2017, a committee of scholars was appointed by the Prime Minister to study ancient Hindu scripts to establish that these are facts and not myth. An open enquiry without predetermined conclusions can enlighten our understanding of the scripts.

A significant characteristic of historical studies which we cannot afford to ignore is that past history and present politics are inseparable. This may make the task of revising historical writings difficult and the ultimate product of the endeavour controversial. Is it possible to leave the task entirely to independent scholars working with no political interference? Academic institutions and scholars are also politicised to such an extent that once the concept of revision is accepted politically, it is likely to become a routine affair with every change in government.

We are already witnessing this in the form of renaming places and programmes, recasting institutions with notional changes and in its extreme form overthrowing everything coming from political opponents. Still, we cannot be pessimistic at the start itself. —INFA
(The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

contributed anything. In fact some of the smaller parties may face extinction.

Yours etc...
Philip Marwein,
Senior Journalist.
Via email

Vaccine racism uncalled for

Editor,
A new travel advisory by the UK that says that people from India and a few other countries will be considered "unvaccinated" even after two doses of AstraZeneca's Covishield. This has sparked off a controversy over freedom of international travel during the Covid-19 pandemic. Asking fully vaccinated Indians to quarantine is very offensive to them. Given that Covishield was originally developed in the UK and the Serum Institute, Pune has supplied it to that country too, this suggests racism.

India has not yet been included in the 'green' list - countries whose vaccines are recognized by the UK. As per the new directive, passengers not vaccinated

as per the rules in the UK, Europe, or the US will have to self-quarantine for 10 days and pay for two Covid tests. It is ironic that these rules exclude a few countries where the AstraZeneca vaccine is used.

Covishield is widely used in India. What is the logic of its non-recognition by the UK when the UK government is using the same drug under a different name? The new advisory is a cause for concern for India as it will hinder the travel plans of a large number of people. Notwithstanding the fact that a dozen European nations have approved India-made Covishield, the UK government is unwilling to recognize it.

It should be recalled that in July there was a controversy over Covishield's recognition by the European Union as well. All these illustrate the West's unfair treatment of vaccines used elsewhere. The governments of such countries must understand that only recognised vaccines are used by countries. People from other countries who are properly vaccinated must not be treated in an unfair way and they must not be

discriminated against.
Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

Traffic arrangement at Fire Brigade

Editor,
With the phenomenal growth of traffic, the Fire Brigade point has become a busy traffic junction. To manage the burgeoning traffic the Traffic Police has been experimenting with different arrangements. It has included sporadic 'no right turn' signs, from Nongrim Hills to Laitumkhrah, 'no right turn' to the Marbaniang Petrol Pump and 'No right turn' towards Nongthymmai as you exit Motinagar. As of date the first two of the above mentioned 'No right turns' have been discontinued while the one for Motinagar to Nongthymmai remains. As a result, anyone wanting to go towards Nongthymmai has to take a turnabout from Fire Brigade, which by itself is not a problem. But the problem is that the road

towards the Fire Brigade is normally choc-a-bloc with traffic while the road to Nongthymmai could be free of traffic. However, due to the current rules of 'no right turn,' people are forced to add to the traffic jam of vehicles proceeding towards Dhankheti and Laitumkhrah which takes up to 15 minutes to negotiate the Fire Brigade round, a distance of a hundred meters, in order to turn back and proceed towards Nongthymmai. The fact that the 'no right turn' rule has been discontinued in the other roads that merge into Fire Brigade and has been made applicable to only one locality is baffling to say the least and the rule has actually added to the overall traffic congestion in the Fire Brigade roundabout. The STP is requested to have a relook at this rule and rationalize the traffic arrangement.

Yours etc.,
Sanjeeb Kakoty
Shillong 14

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"The virtues of science are skepticism and independence of thought."

— Walter Gilbert

The Shillong Times

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Government versus interest groups

NEXT to free and fair elections, one the most important defining characteristics of democracy is the rule of law. While the citizens of a democracy choose their leaders and representatives through elections, the rule of law defines the relationship between representatives and citizens in between elections. A Government that is elected to govern must uphold the rule of law at all times. Irrespective of how high an office a person holds or how influential or powerful a person or group is, the same law applies to all. It is when those elected to govern allow the rule of law to erode because of their own acts of omission and commission that chaos ensues. In the Cheristerfield Thangkiew alleged "encounter killing" it would appear that the rule of law was not implicitly followed. Granted that Thangkiew might have been the master strategist behind the IED blasts at different locations but the manner in which he was eliminated raises serious questions as to why one arm of the law failed to observe the constitutional moralities that are prescribed for all other citizens. This single act of subversion of the rule of law has emboldened interest groups of all kinds to taunt the government and make demands that are yet again constitutionally untenable – the suspension of two IPS officers whose role in the entire August 13 episode is still shrouded in mystery. As citizens we are yet to be informed who actually pulled the trigger on Thangkiew and why only these two officers have been targeted.

The Cherister killing inflamed passions which a few disparate elements have successfully converted into political capital. Now while the Government has set up a judicial inquiry into the incident and asked interested persons to depose before it, none of the leaders of these interest groups have done so. However, they are constantly raising the banner of protest to force the government to subvert its constitutional obligations.

Considering that the Constitution is what guides governments and citizens alike on their code of conduct it would imply that every citizen be informed about its basic tenets. Constitutional literacy is what is missing in this country. Of those that know to read and write, very few have actually read the Constitution to understand what civil behaviour is about. While Article 19(1)(b) grants citizens the right to assemble peaceably, Article 19(2) imposes reasonable restrictions on the right to assemble peaceably and without arms and to freedom of speech and expression as none of these rights are absolute in nature. Essentially these restrictions are imposed in the interests of public order, decency and morality. The rule of law is sacrosanct.

Dear Bangladeshi elites,

As I sit here in Shillong, reports from cousins in Mymensingh have brought me back to the perennial question: "Why do you hate us so?" What did we ever do to you? What do my distant relatives in Dhaka do to offend you so much, that you must seek their extinction as a people? Is there some problem with the way they wash your floors, guard your buildings, serve you drinks at your clubs?

My father was born in Mymensingh, and my view has not changed since he first told me about the way you massacred my people in 1963, 1964, and 1965. Of course, you were Pakistanis then. We were then what we are now: Garos.

Mymensingh it seems that you hate us because we, as a people, as a culture, are a standing rebuke to your cowardice, your venality, and your inexplicable, irrational hatred of women. We are your shame!

After the educated, cultured, pious Mir Jafar sold himself to the British, who was it who fought back against the colonialists? Not the Bengalis. For decades after the Cornwallis settlement, we raided the plains, invariably in retaliation for some zamindar trying to take what was not his, or some sahuksar trying to cheat us.

My ancestors dragged the British into a gruelling jungle war against their will. They called the result a victory. We kept our freedom here in the hills. It was put on a legal footing with Regulation X. Under the kampani raj. The year was 1822.

And if you knew your own history, you would know that that regulation was the basis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts protections seventy-eight years later. The basis for the Peace Accord in 1997. Which you haven't implemented because obviously you hate the Jumas too. And what were your ancestors doing after the Cornwallis settlement, after 1793? Falling over themselves to kiss British feet, trading in their Mughal sanads for British titles, to ensure their unearned income, and to be left in peace to rack-rented their peasants to death, and rape their women.

The Garos were among the first to fight them. Always the first to fight and the last to benefit. That stings, doesn't it? We, along with the Khasis, the Mundas, the Mal Paharias, the Santals, the Chakmas. We all fought the British decades before you found the nerve in 1857. It stings so much your stinking left-wing intelligentsia had to invent the preposterous fairy tale of "proto-nationalism"; we were too backward apparently. We could not fight

A Question for Bengali elites in Bangladesh

By Gidita Rema

politically, because we lacked the tutelage of some suitably qualified intellectual and appropriately Bengali vanguard.

We needed to be taught. Liberated from our backwardness and false consciousness, which were obviously one and the same. But to paraphrase Lefebvre, the Garos fought for their own reasons, and they were more than sufficient.

And what of the Qader Bahini? So few, so very few of you know about the Qader Bahini. Our standing rebuke to you. My father fought in the Qader Bahini. His enemy was the military regime that took power after they gunned down the Father of your Nation. And who were his fellow freedom fighters?

Not the Bengalis. They were covering in their apartments, relieved to find that all, indeed, would be forgiven. If they just kissed the right feet. Here comes the new boss, same as the old boss. "Ji sir, ji sir." Obviously it was the Garos who fought. The first to fight.

The veterans of Sector 11, who moved to the Hills over the border to contest the dreadful verdict of 1975. The first to fight, the last to share in the fruits of what you still insist on calling "Liberation".

Who was liberated? And from what? Some of those freedom fighters, the only ones to go to war over the outrage of 1975, are alive and here still. I think they are the smart ones, from what I hear about what is going on in Sherpur, and Baksiganj, and Moulvi bazaar. They stayed when others went back, because they were the ones who understood that they would receive no thanks for their patriotism, for their quest to avenge Bangabandhu, and to punish his murderers. They were the ones who most clearly understood how much you hate us. You in fact, hate us more than you hate your own women, which is saying something.

I remain convinced that this is a major reason that we have to disappear. Because when we are gone, your uppity middle-class feminists can be safely dismissed as acolytes of a foreign religion, brainwashed by neo-colonialism. It is hard to appeal to "Bangladeshi values" or "local culture" when right in the heart of it is our beautiful system of village endogamy, safeguarded by our lineage system; the ma'chong: Ritchil, Rema, Mankhin, Mrong, Mree, Nokrek.

I think you know some of the names. For your reference, they typically appear in your newspapers under headlines like "X gang raped

in Mohammadpur" or "murder remains unsolved X years after...."

Our system isn't perfect. No system is. But the fact remains, if Bangladesh became 100% Garo tomorrow, your dreadful 50% reported Intimate Partner Violence rate would be cut in half. At least. It would be hailed as a miracle, worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize. Here in Meghalaya, the rate is 35%. But we do have rather a lot of you here, and the statistics aren't disaggregated.

I note with some amusement that IFAD is trumpeting "dual titles" as a way of promoting women's land rights in Bangladesh. The decades-long Cadastral Survey of Bengal saw dual titles in Garo communities; this took place in Mymensingh around 1918, four years before the British themselves afforded their own women equal rights to property. But of course, those are the documents that don't exist, right? *wink wink* Because, you know, the Forest Department.

Which brings me to the reason I have been brought back to this question of why you hate us so.

I was wondering why you Bengalis, in solidarity with your fellow Muslims, have done so little about the camps in Xinjiang. Then I found out you're rounding up my people into camps of your own.

You are pleased to call them gucca gram, but they look like camps to me. Being built right now, in Sherpur, in Halaughat, and in Jamalpur, funded by the World Bank, neo-colonialism being perfectly acceptable insofar as it matches your own ends.

These camps are so very strange to us, with our a'king territories, where Garos can roam as they will through their own forests. Their forests, not the Government's. We never made the distinction, you see, between land and forest. Through contesting British military power, we saw that this was respected in 1822 and in 1869, and your ridiculous Forest Acts were never implemented here.

As I understand it, you people still think the distinction between land and forest is "vital to conservation". Good grief, but why? Why do you think this nonsense? Ah wait, of course, because the British told you so: "Ji sir, ji sir."

You may be interested to know that there is not even a proximate translation of the phrase "ji sir, ji sir" in Abeng, the dialect of Garo I speak, nor indeed any dialect of Garo of which I am aware. And here in the Hills,

the President of the World Bank defers to the humblest par excellence, Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya has been an inspiration for millions. You see, whereas you are painfully dependent on it for your camps.

I believe the World Bank project is called SUFAL? A cursory search on the internet gives the acronym: Sustainable Forests and Livelihoods. I applaud the fan service to Orwell.

What a strange place is Bangladesh, where the pious huzur and left-wing liberal are united, both in applauding the death of American neo-colonialism in Afghanistan, and staying silent about camps in Xinjiang, and camps in Sherpur.

I am pleased to have been born in Ampati, and to live in Shillong. I am glad my father never went back to the village of his birth. I am glad he had that level of understanding of how much you hate us. It allows me a certain level of detachment you see, and I am morbidly curious.

The languages of the Bodo group have been heard in speech and song east of Jamuna since before the birth of the Prophet. So when we, the last of its speakers, have finally been civilised out of existence, it will be a historical moment of enormous significance. Few of you will mark this change; people in your elite circles who simultaneously pay obsequious deference to your own vaunted language movement with little if any grasp of literary Bengali.

But the passing of our own mother tongue, and the other strange, backward languages spoken by indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, will be a significant moment for you. You haven't realised it, because you are so short sighted. But it really will be. Because it will require you to find someone else to hate. Like I say, I'm morbidly curious. Who's next on the list? And who will you blame for deforestation, while you're at it? Because lord knows the true culprits must be protected.

On the upside, the "equal rights for women = neo-colonial imposition" thesis won't have to contend with our matrilineal residence practices as a fly in the ointment. Maybe after all is said and done it really is all about being left in peace to rape your peasants. You can call that "Liberation" if you want. There is not even a proximate translation for it in Abeng.

(The author is a Garo woman living in Shillong. Gidita Rema is a pseudonym, paying homage to a Garo woman activist from Madhupur who was assassinated in 2001. At the time of writing, the case remains unsolved)

Antyodaya – Uplifting of the weakest person

By Deeya Rathore

A philosopher, statesman, intellectual and organiser par excellence, Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya has been an inspiration for millions. Antyodaya, the lasting legacy of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya is the philosophy of Integral Humanism, which means "uplifting up to the last person" or "the rise of the last person". It is the means to rid the nation of extreme poverty and to ensure a minimum standard of living of all individuals. September 25 every year is now celebrated as Antyodaya Diwas to mark the Birth Anniversary of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. He propounded the philosophy that in human being, the individual and society are not competing identities, but indeed the human being himself is the society and the progress of one is the progress of all. This he called "Ekam Manavtavad" or "Integral Humanism".

Antyodaya is the basic principle of the political and economic philosophy of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. Not forgetting about nature, fulfillment of necessities of human life including health care for individual, educating individual, work for all and capital formation were some of the morals defined under the concept of Integral Humanism by Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. He always believed that the goal of an individual is not merely to conserve culture, but to give it momentum for its revitalization as a dynamic and capable entity. His ideology propounded that there is a need to develop community leaders who in return can address development issues at the community level.

The philosophy of Antyodaya, aims at the progress and happiness of "Man", the "Integral Man". This means ensuring that the last person in the ladder or the chain gets the benefit of growth and development. He believed that the economic schemes and progress can be measured by the person situated at the lowest level and not at the highest level of society and one who has risen above the economic ladder. Unless the weakest of humans progresses, the society cannot progress!

Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, was one of the founding leaders of Bharatiya Jana Sangh and has been a source of ideological guidance for the Bharatiya Janata Party since its inception. In recent years since 2014, "Antodaya" has been one of the guiding principles of the BJP Government at the Centre and the States. Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has said that guided by the ideals and philosophy of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, we are continuously striving to improve the quality of life of the downtrodden. Be it toilets, electricity, bank accounts, gas, education or health care, we have focused on providing basic amenities to the poor, disadvantaged and underprivileged sections of society.

Mission Antyodaya is a convergence and accountability framework aiming to bring optimum use and management of resources allocated by various Ministries and Departments of the Government of India under various programmes. It is envisaged as a State-level initiative with Gram Panchayats as focal point of convergence efforts. The BJP led NDA Government has launched a series of social welfare programmes and schemes in Upadhyaya's name. In India, deprived and poor households require targeted interventions under Government's various schemes and programmes in areas such as health, nutrition and livelihood. Mission Antyodaya seeks to converge government interventions with our governing units at the grassroots level by pooling resources, both human and financial to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Self Help Groups are enablers to this approach based on convergence, partnership, accountability and measurable outcomes to ensure

that resources are effectively managed in providing sustainable livelihood for every deprived household.

On September 25, 2014, Pandit Deendayal's first birth anniversary under the present Government at the Centre, it launched the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana (DAY), integrating the National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) and National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) for alleviating poverty in urban and rural areas by enhancing livelihood opportunities through skill development and enhancing the sustainable livelihood opportunities. On the same day, the Rural Development Ministry announced the Deendayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU- GK Y) Antyodaya Diwas, to diversify the incomes of rural poor families and to cater to the career aspirations of rural youth. The guiding principle behind DAY-NRLM Mission is that the poor have a strong desire to come out of poverty, and they possess the innate capabilities for it. Ownership and key role of the poor and their institutions in all stages of planning, implementation and monitoring are values on which the Mission is based. The Mission aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms of the poor, enabling them to increase household incomes through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial resources on a sustainable basis, through building strong grassroots institutions for the poor through accountability, convergence and partnership. This scheme also aims at providing shelters equipped with essential services to the urban homeless and addresses the livelihood concerns of marginalised sections like urban street vendors by facilitating access to them of institutional credit, suitable spaces, skills for accessing market opportunities and social security.

India has a unique position in the world. It's troubles as well as it's opportunities cannot be compared to any other nation's challenges or progress and may not be properly addressed by blindly following models of other countries. That India's solutions have to come from within was clearly understood by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya. Time has proven that India's solution comes from within and India's society progresses with the progress of each of its components and to which progress everyone must contribute. As remarked by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, if each person marches one step forward, the nation would march 130 crore steps forward.

From taking education to the streets, to utilising innovations for better agricultural output; providing livelihoods to aalof tribes; to reviving the long lost traditional arts of India; from striving to provide medical conveniences to the underserved; to transforming the villages into sustainable green village there is no end to the stories of such heroic efforts. Many of these stories have not been heard though their impact has been immense. These Antyodaya workers are not working for popularity or recognition, as their basic aim is to contribute to society and upliftment of their brethren.

According to Deen Dayal Upadhyaya India should be able to develop an indigenous development model that has human beings as its core focus. Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya stressed, "Man the highest creation of God is losing his own identity. We must re-establish him in his rightful position, bring him the realisation of his greatness, reawaken his abilities and encourage him to attain the divine heights of his latest personalities. This is possible only through a decentralised economy."

Ekam Manavtavad necessitates the upliftment of the weakest, the last person in the society - "Antyodaya" - for the upliftment of the nation.

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya Congress at the crossroads

Editor,

The on-going drama in the Congress party in Meghalaya is a source of great amusement for the public. First the Party High Command unilaterally nominated its favourite Vincent Pala as the PCC President much against the express wishes of former CM Mukul Sangma. It is the worst kept secret that Pala and Mukul have personal issues between themselves. Pala, it seems, had a clue that Mukul had recommended his trusted colleague Charles Pynngrope's name for the big post. If that had happened, Mukul would have had his way with nomination of candidates for the next election. That would have ensured Mukul retains his hold over the party MLAs and ensured his return to power. The move was scuttled by Pala through his close connections with the Gandhi family.

It is apparent that Pala wants to relocate in the State as the CM. For, in Delhi Congress has the dimmest hope of returning to power in the foreseeable future. With no hope in Delhi, he has to make a move for paving his way. What better than becoming the party president and taking control of selecting those who are close to him. No surprise that he picked former Home Minister RG Lyngdoh and ex-MLA PN Syiem who had resigned from the party hurling allegations against Mukul when he was in power. The induction of two of Mukul's harshest critics into the party alarmed him.

First, he lost out on having his own nominee as party president and then Pala's shrewd machinations for consolidating his own position must have pushed Mukul hard. Small wonder then, that the former Chief Minister was exploring his own political options. As always, BJP lost no time in sending feelers to Mukul for taking over the saffron party reins. The former CM

is careful enough not to take the BJP bait knowing as he does the hills tribes' discomfort with BJP's strident Hindutva agenda. Indeed, it would be a big surprise if Mukul embraces BJP after he has been canvassing quite effectively against his primary political adversary the National People's Party (NPP)'s proximity with the saffron party. And didn't it pay off at the last GHADC election? Although Congress bagged the largest number of seats it is Conrad Sangma with his money power and current position of authority who managed to retain power with a slender majority. Therefore, Mukul had to try something different, including wooing TMC. But how that would have played out in Garo Hills is difficult to predict, even though it is known that the plains belt voters would have gone all out with the TMC.

In the light of these developments, Mukul can't be blamed, especially since it is claimed he never consulted by the Congress

High Command before sending Pala as their nominee. This practice of nomination is totally undemocratic. Why couldn't AICC hold a poll is not difficult to comprehend. Rahul-Priyanka who are calling the shots these days betray their lack of political astuteness. They are not even the shadow of their predecessors in office from the family. Nehru, Indira and Rajiv were several notches above the Gandhi siblings in all aspects. The handling of Punjab and Rajasthan's internal bickering are cases in point. Therefore, bereft of power and powerful leadership the Congress does not inspire confidence. The decline of the grand old Party is writ large. It however remains to be seen which way the Meghalaya Congress turns before the next election. Will Pala and Mukul be able to rise above personal agenda? That's a million-dollar question.

Yours etc.,
Pynshngain Jyrva,
Via email

Good governance need of the hour

Editor,

Whilst browsing through the news reports in your esteemed daily recently, I couldn't help but notice that our government's performance is always in the news but for the wrong reasons. Be it the power scam in the Saubhaagya scheme fiasco or the smart meter scandal, there is nothing to cheer about. Ours is a small state with a lot of potential left to be unleashed, provided the reins of power were to be in the right hands but it seems like our representatives are too busy playing musical chairs for that is what politicians do best - fool the electorate. However, we as citizens must also take the blame for electing them to power.

Now some may say that I'm being too cynical about the governance in the state but if one looks beyond our borders, we can see so much

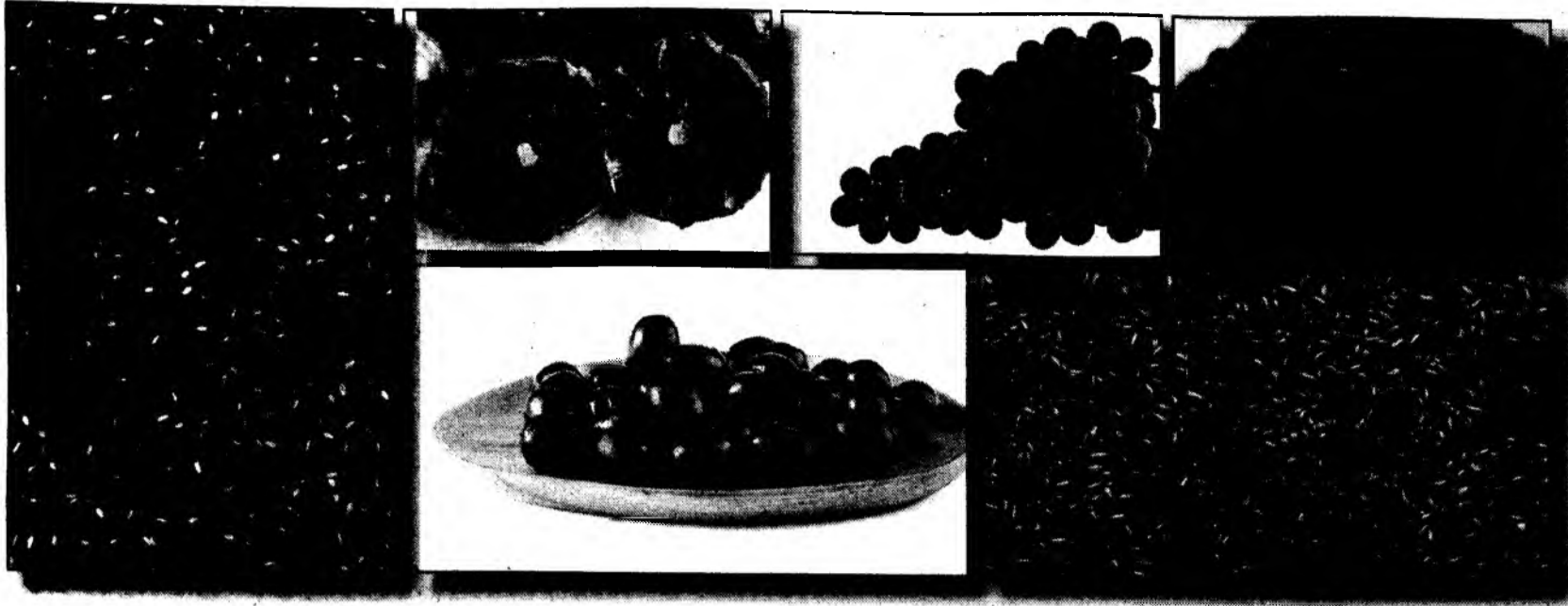
development whereas we seem to be stuck in a time warp. We can no longer blame the Covid virus for the situation we're in. Our domestic violence crime rate is one of the highest in the North East which should be a warning sign that something is amiss in spite of us being a matrilineal society. Our State Women's Commission is still without a Chairperson since last year.

All these situations and the current restiveness of civil society because of the killing of the former HNLCL leader have only added to the feeling of an uneasy calm which could boil over to the smouldering cauldron and spark unrest once again. It is therefore time for those in governance to buck up and get down to business in the literal sense of the word.

Yours etc.,
Angela Lyngdoh,
Shillong-14

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The New Super Food



When you think of the colours on your plate, do you ever think of black? Well, its time you do! As they are the new power food. We all know greens, yellows and reds are loaded with nutrients — so are the lesser spoken about black ones too!

What are black foods? Foods with the pigments called anthocyanins are known as black foods.

Anthocyanins are found in black, blue and purple coloured foods and have hidden nutrients and benefits galore. These pigments have rich anti-oxidant properties which promote health and have the potential to reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease and stroke. They play a huge role in immunity.

They are fun, healthy, offbeat and make for a nice visual treat too.

Abhilasha V, HOD and Chief Clinical Nutritionist — Cloudnine group of hospitals, Bengaluru, few interesting ones and their benefits:

BLACK RICE

Cultivated in South East Asian belt, this rice has a nutty flavour and can be used in many recipes. In China this was known as the Forbidden rice in ancient times as it was reserved for only royalty. Now, some parts of north East India grow black rice too. They are loaded with lutein and zeaxanthin and promote good eye health. They have cancer fighting properties due to their high anti-oxidant and fiber content. They can be used in puddings, stir fries, risotto, porridge, noodles, bread and even makes a great idea for a good kheer!

BLACK DAL

A closer to home surprise! Indians have used black dal since ages. They are used as

gravies and in mixed dal preparations. They are rich in fibre, iron, folate and protein and can be quite delicious too.

BLACK OLIVES

With the western influence on our eating habits, it has brought along a long list of good foods. Olives are one of them and they are versatile in their flavour. They can be added to salads, pastas, stir fries and some pickles and drinks too. Olives contain monounsaturated fats, Vitamin E, Polyphenols and oleocanthal — which is a strong anti-inflammatory and pain-killer compound found in olives. This little power-packed food can protect your arteries from clogging, maintain eye health, prevent DNA damage, promote good skin health and also hair health.

BLACK SESAME SEEDS

Commonly known as Til, they come with a huge bunch of benefits, loaded with fibre, protein, magnesium, potassium, iron, calcium, zinc, copper, selenium and Vitamin E. It also contains sesamin, which helps reduce inflammation and plays a vital role in joint pain. Yes! All of that in a daily allowance of 1-2 teaspoons can do wonders for your health. They can be used in salads as garnish, in laddoos, in breads, smoothies, soups, hummus, dips and even tahini. They can be consumed soaked, sprouted, baked or roasted too.

BLACK GRAPES

Known for their sweet taste and popular flavour, black grapes are a favourite for many. This seasonal fruit has a host of benefits to give us. Black grapes contain Lutein, Zeaxanthin which prevents retinal damage and macular degeneration. Resveratrol in grapes are known to have anti-cancer prop-

erties and have a huge protective effect on cardiac health by lowering LDL levels too. Proanthocyanidins present in this fruit has great benefits for skin health too. Use these grapes in salads, smoothies, jams, and even good old curd rice!

BLACK GARLIC

Yes you heard that right. Well these aren't naturally found, but develop this colour due to a process that turns them black and used widely in Asian cuisine. It is regular white garlic that has been fermented or aged. It possesses a caramelized, savoury richness that adds flavour to stir fries, meat bakes, rice and noodles preparations and soups too. These have properties that prevent cell damage and hence protect us from cancers. Black garlic contains more anti-oxidants [almost 2X] than its white counterpart. So why wait — add them in small doses into your meals and let your health thrive.

*** ADVANTAGES:** As mentioned above they come with a host of benefits such as anti-cancer, anti-ageing, good for eye, heart, skin and hair health too.

*** DISADVANTAGES:** Nothing in particular. There are no real toxicities associated with these foods that are reported and are considered generally safe, but always do remember, too much of anything is not the rule in nutrition.

*** POINTS TO REMEMBER:** Always ensure you have a balanced diet that contains all food groups, myriad colours, nutrients and varieties — choose in moderation and build them into your daily meal plan with the help of a nutritionist. (IANSlife)

Yoga & Breathing Rules

Without a doubt, the wedding is one of the most important days of a person's life. To ensure everything is memorable, comes with its own set of pressures and anxiety. This can take a toll on your mind and body, leaving you stressed. A great way to combat wedding anxiety is with yoga.

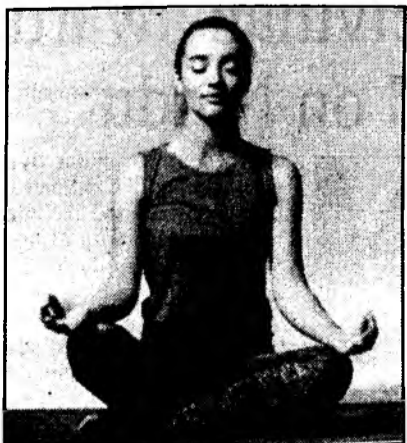
Yoga also calms the mind and can contribute to deeper regulated sleep which is crucial for wellness. We all are aware how good sleep can help heal and maintain a healthy body. With so much to tend to at a wedding, sound sleep helps you stay fresh the whole day.

Kaavita Das, Founder and Yoga Expert at The Pink Lotus Academia shares yoga poses to help unwind and find your peace:

SUKHASANA

Sukhasana refers to a cross-legged, seated position, and one of the most basic poses used in yoga practice and meditation. It is also a calming pose and it is one commonly used for meditation and practicing breathing exercises.

Sit on your padding in a comfortable, cross-legged position.



Slide the shoulder blades down your back so your shoulders move away from your ears. The crown of your head should rise towards the ceiling.

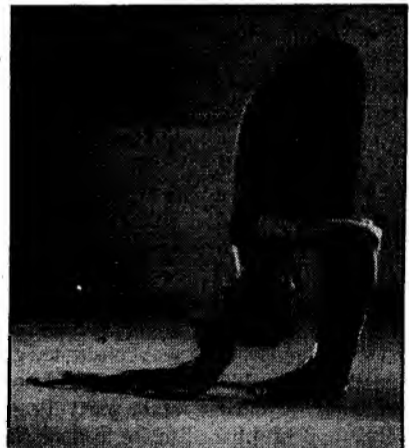
Your hands can rest in your lap or on the tops of your thighs.

On your inhalations, feel your spine grow long. On your exhalations, root down through your seat.

UTTANASANA

Standing Forward Bend stretches and lengthens the hamstrings and calves. It is regarded as a relaxing and stress-relieving pose. Traditionally, it is said to help relieve insomnia.

From Raised Hands Pose, sweep your arms down on either side of your body to come into a forward fold from your hips.



Bring your fingertips in line with the toes. Press your palms flat to the mat if you can.

You can use blocks under your hands here if they don't reach the floor.

Bend the knees a little bit so that they are not locked.

Bring your weight a little bit forward into the balls of your feet so that your hips stay over your ankles. Let your head hang.

Inhale and place your hands onto your hips, press your tailbone down and contract your abdominal muscles as you rise up slowly.

BHUJANGASANA

Cobra Pose increases the mobility of the spine, strengthens spinal support muscles, and can help relieve back pain. It opens the chest and the front of the body.

Place your palms flat on the

ground directly under your shoulders. Bend your elbows straight



back and hug them into your sides.

Pause for a moment looking straight down at your mat with your neck in a neutral position.

Inhale and lift your chest off the floor. Roll your shoulders back and keep your low ribs on the floor. Make sure your elbows continue hugging your sides.

Keep your neck neutral. Your gaze should stay on the floor.

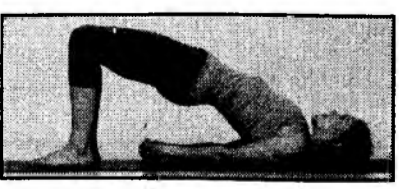
SETU BANDHASANA

As you perform Setu Bandhasana, also known as Bridge Pose, you will become more alert in both body and mind. This rejuvenating backbend will open your chest up and keep your spine flexible.

Lie on the floor, bend your knees and set your feet on the floor, heels as close to the sitting bones as possible.

Exhale and, pressing your inner feet and arms actively into the floor, lift the buttocks off the floor.

Keep your thighs and inner feet parallel. Clasp the hands below your pelvis and extend through the arms to help you stay on the



tops of your shoulders.

Lift your chin slightly away from the sternum and, firming the shoulder blades against your back, press the top of the sternum toward the chin.

Firm the outer arms, broaden

the shoulder blades, and try to lift the space between them at the base of the neck up into the torso.

Stay in the pose anywhere from 30 seconds to 1 minute. Release with an exhalation, rolling the spine slowly down onto the floor.

SHAVASANA

Corpse pose is essential to practice at the end of every yoga practice. This posture rejuvenates the body, mind and spirit while reducing stress and tension.

Spread the legs one to two feet apart, the toes are turned outwards, the heels facing each other, a comfortable distance apart.

Bring the arms a little away from the body, palms turned upward.



Relax the neck and allow it to turn to the side if it is more comfortable.

Close the eyes and focus the attention on the body, breathing normally.

Begin focusing each body part and relaxing it, then moving on. Keep the mind focused on relaxation, the breath should be normal. Relax the whole body.

Breathing properly, contributes to the stress response which worsens with anxiety. Do not take breathing for granted, take out the time in the beginning and the end of any yoga session or just once in a day breathe deeply for at least 2-3 minutes and you can see the difference without moving a muscle.

The short time effects of yoga can be felt though breathing techniques by learning to deeply breathe you not only allow your muscles to relax but you also feel equipped with other relaxation techniques like meditation. (IANSlife)

Literature & More...

Netflix acquires rights to Roald Dahl's books

Streaming giant Netflix has got the golden ticket as it has acquired the rights to the books of the iconic writer of children's fiction, Roald Dahl.

The deal means the streaming giant will own creations like 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' and 'The BFG', reports bbc.com.

Netflix will control what happens to them in publishing as well as TV and film - and receive the royalties.

It will also create numerous spin-off games, stage shows and other live experiences.

The takeover means The Roald Dahl Story Company, which is run by the late author's grandson Luke Kelly and was previously owned by the family and other employees, will now become a division of Netflix.

In a joint statement, Kelly and Netflix boss Ted Sarandos said they were "joining forces to bring some of the world's most loved stories to current and future fans in creative new ways".

The move builds on a deal between the streaming giant and the estate in 2018, allowing it to make animated series based on his books.

Under that agreement, Oscar winner Taika Waititi is currently working on a series based on the world of 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory', while Sony and Working Title are making an adaptation of 'Matilda The Musical'.

Nineteen TV shows, films, stage shows and live experiences are already in the works.

"These projects opened our eyes to a much more ambitious venture - the creation of a unique universe across animated and live action films and TV, publishing, games, immersive experiences, live theatre, consumer products and more," Kelly and Sarandos said.

Netflix made the announcement by revealing its name on a golden ticket hidden inside a Willy Wonka chocolate bar wrapper.

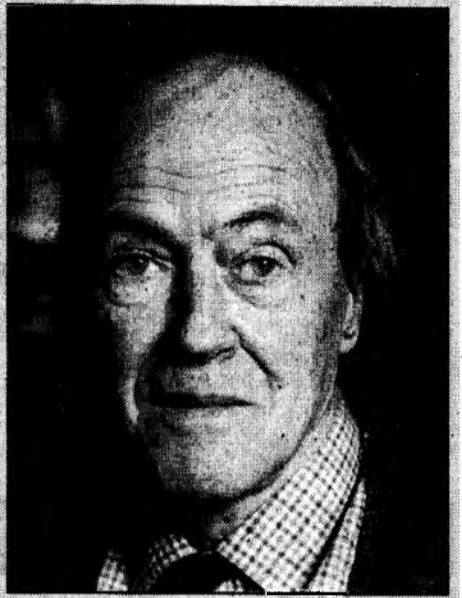
The back of the ticket had the words "There is no knowing what we shall see" - a line from 'James and the Giant Peach'.

"As we bring these timeless tales to more audiences in new formats, we're committed to maintaining their unique spirit and their universal themes of surprise and kindness, while also sprinkling some fresh magic into the mix," Kelly and Sarandos added.

Dahl throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s became known for best-selling children's books - many of which were later turned into films.

He died at the age of 74 in 1990, and has sold 300 million books around the world, printed in 65 languages.

The Dahl catalogue also includes the likes of 'Fantastic Mr Fox', 'James and the Giant Peach', 'The Witches and The Twits'. (IANS)



Indian cricketing history after Independence

As the Indian cricket team prepares for a transition to a new head coach and a change of guard in the shortest format, its story is, in so many ways, the story of the nation itself. It is also a game that has inspired some of the most insightful writing across all genres. 'Indian Innings' (Westland) collects some of the finest samples of this writing, thoughtfully curated by Ayaz Memon, one of India's foremost sports journalists.

It's all done in stages.

In his own magisterial introduction, Memon traces the development of the sport in a newly independent country up to the 1970s, a decade of inflection points that dramatically altered Indian cricket. From K.N. Prabhu to P.N. Sundaresan and Dicky Rutnagar to Ramachandra Guha and Suresh Menon - those years of famous victories and of the Spin Quartet come alive.

The Prudential Cup victory, the legends that were Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev, the Tied Test of 1986, the influence of television - voices as diverse as Raj Singh Dungarpur, Shashi Tharoor, Anil Dharker and Rajdeep Sardesai - capture the historic 1980s.

The post-1990s years have seen a profusion of cricketing riches for India. The Tendulkar Era, the epic Eden Gardens win in 2001, the 2007 T20 World Cup win, the emergence of the IPL, the 2011 World Cup win, the Dhoni captaincy era, the victory in Australia in 2021 and much more all feature in the essays of some of India's finest sports writers, like Rohit Brijnath, Sambit Bal and Sharda Ugra.

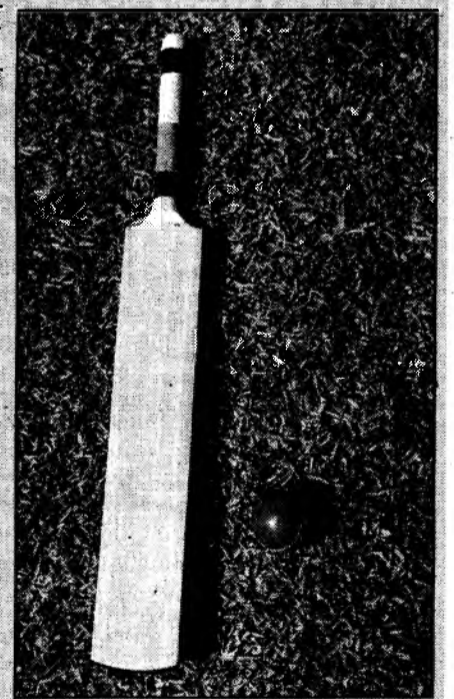
Equally, the book wrestles with the game's difficult history. The 'Summer of 42' (the score at which India capitulated at Lords in 1974), the match-fixing issue, the Greg Chappell saga, the Lalit Modi affair and more are addressed in pieces by Bishan Singh Bedi, Aniruddha Bahal, Pradeep Magazine, Sriram Veera, among others.

To round off these fine offerings is Clayton Murzello's carefully prepared 'Milestones' section — a superb snapshot view of the last 75 years.

As complete a picture of post-independence cricketing history as one could hope for, this riveting volume promises hours of reading pleasure for every cricket fan.

Ayaz Memon is an Indian journalist, columnist and author who writes on sports, politics, and social issues. A lawyer by qualification, he chose journalism over law, starting his career with Sportsweek and went on to edit newspapers like Mid-Day, Bombay Times and DNA apart from being Editor of Sportsweek and Sports Editor of The Times of India and The Independent at various stages of his 42-year-long career.

Memon has authored the "Wills Book of Excellence: One-Day Cricket" and "Thunder Down Under", and co-authored "India 50 — The Making of a Nation" released on the 50th anniversary of Indian Independence. He has also been a commentator for sports channels and an analyst on various issues for news channels. (IANS)



Tell-tale Signs of Autumn



The tell-tale signs that autumn is here are clear to us; the days are getting shorter and the temperature is decreasing. We take this as a sign to pull out our winter woollies and think about turning on the radiators. But how do insects know that winter is coming? And what do they do to prepare?

Folklore has suggested over the years that insects and other invertebrates can predict the weather and that, for example, we could start to see bigger spider webs if the weather is going to get colder. The evidence for those bigger webs ahead of bad weather is weak. But there certainly are changes in insect behaviour we can see at this time of year, and it shows they are predicting changes they need to make as the weather changes.

Insects are extremely sensitive to changes in the environment and change in light is the main cue that insects use to signal the change in seasons. Insects, like humans, detect light with their eyes. But unlike humans insects have more than two eyes. In addition to the two big compound eyes that they have on the front of their heads most insects also have three smaller eyes on the top of their heads called ocelli. Light information is passed from their eyes to the brain and interpreted by an internal clock to detect the changing seasons, which may also be important in humans and other primates.

Responding to the changing seasons is really important for insects as they are cold blooded and can't regulate their own body temperature. But insects have

different ways of coping with the oncoming cold weather. Some, like the painted lady butterfly, leave the UK in autumn heading to north Africa where they breed. Others produce their own "anti-freeze" proteins that allow them to cope with winter temperatures. However, the majority of insects undergo a slowing down process called diapause, where they essentially sleep for the winter. At this time of year these insects are looking for a sheltered place to spend the winter - and this is why we see more spiders in our houses at this time of year. You may also notice groups of insects, like ladybirds, huddled on windowsills and under rocks. These insects will stay protected over the winter and reawaken in spring.

Because of migration, diapause and the natural death of some

insects at the end of the summer, you may generally feel there are fewer insects around than just a few weeks ago. But there are some new ones emerging that we didn't see earlier in the summer. In the south you might spot the beautiful ivy bee which is only active when the ivy is in blossom.

Autumn also brings the mass emergence of crane flies, which, although they look a bit like mosquitoes, are actually harmless.

You also might notice more wasps visiting flowers to drink the sugary nectar - at this time of year they become very hungry for sugar. Wasps don't really care where they get their sugar fix from and are just as likely to try and steal our sugary drinks as we are enjoying the last of the summer in our gardens or enjoying a walk. Their craving for sugar is actually really beneficial as their visits flower-to-flower, trying to satisfy their insatiable craving, lead them to pollinate flowers just like bees.

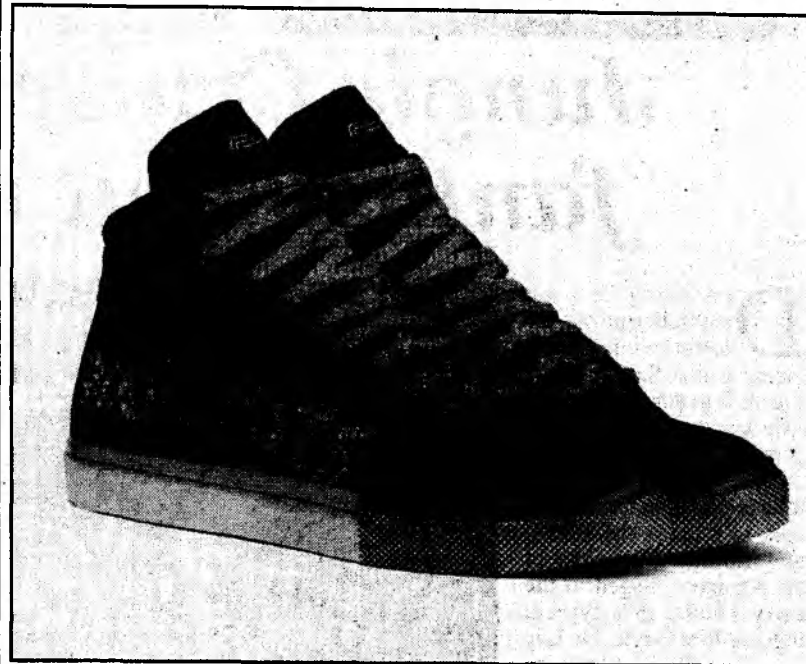
For me the most striking sign of autumn is the appearance of a lot of very large bumblebees out visiting the last flowers of the season.

These large bees are next year's queens. After being born late in the summer season they mate and stock up on energy before finding a place to hibernate for the winter. When we see them again it'll be an indicator that spring is on its way when the queens emerge from their sleep and make new nests.

This response to changing seasons and the fact that insects have been shown to change their behaviours, like mating, in response to impending rain leads to the assumption that insects are weather forecasters, predicting that rain is coming.

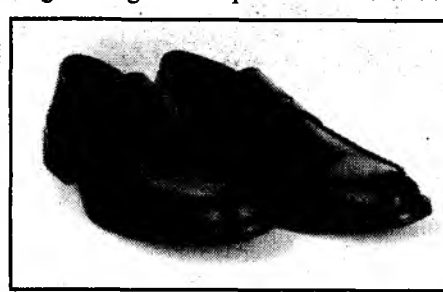
However, it is more likely that they are just responding to the changes in weather, like people taking an umbrella with them when the skies are grey. But there is a lot of variation in how insects do respond to the weather and I, for one, will be sticking to the Met Office for my weather forecasts. *(The Conversation)*

Going Vegan



By N. Lothungbeni Humtsoe

PETA India — whose motto reads, in part, that "animals are not ours to wear" — opposes speciesism, a human-supremacist worldview. Thanks to video documentation found on PETA India's YouTube page a Delhi-based brand was moved enough to go Vegan, and will be among the retailers that use the "PETA-Approved Vegan" logo to help consumers choose vegan products and accessories.



Other Indian companies, designers, and brands using the logo include House of Anita Dongre, Welspun India, Purvi Doshi, Paperdom, and PAIO.

Empyrean Luxury known for its Italian aesthetic as well as the quality footwear celebrates its transition from using leather to vegan by broadcasting the hashtag #WeLoveAnimals on its website and offering a 10 per cent discount to consumers who use the purchase code "GOVEGAN".

"By embracing vegan fashion, Empyrean Luxury pledges to stand as a socially responsible brand and never promote any kind of cruelty to animals in any manner," says Saksham

Chaudhary, owner of Empyrean Luxury. "Our sought-after vegan shoes will help consumers give cruelty to cows the boot!"

"The brand knows that cows and buffaloes are living, thinking, feeling beings, not footwear," says PETA India Chief Corporate Liaison Pooja Gupta. "PETA India thanks to this conscientious company for kicking leather to the curb and proving there's nothing more luxurious than compassion."

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPT 26, 2021

Sun trine Rahu on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results. It will open the doors of profits for you. Your business will prosper and flourish and will give you good returns. You will also receive a salary hike. You could also get promoted in your job. Your government related work will get done. Students will get results according to their expectations. Your relationship with your bosses will become cordial and they will support you a lot. You will also meet old friends. Those who are single will plan to get married. Love birds will have a wonderful time and get support of their families. Your business activities will see an upward trend. You will get interested in Yoga, meditation and prayers. You will also bring about a change in your daily routine and habits.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

The whole week will be filled with full of happiness for you. These days are totally in your favor. You will have financial gains. Your work will also get appreciated and you will work with lot of dedication. You will also find peace in your personal life. You will also have time for pleasure and entertainment with your loved ones. The time will be good from all angles. You will have happiness all around. Your communication skills will be second to none. You will be successful in establishing a dialogue by your gift of conversation. Students will do well in exams. You will also discharge your new additional responsibility. Days of tension and worries are over. Your health is going to be perfect and your elders will bless you. Business related trips will keep you busy.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Time is fully favorable. Whatever work that you want to do, will be done now. It is time to realize your dreams. Those looking for job for a long time will get success. For those who have an interest in politics and media, the time is right to establish your influence and impression. You will be able to prove your worth before everyone. You will also be able to make people see your point of view. You will also get name and fame due to your noble deeds. You will help people a lot and will harbor generous feelings towards poor and weak people. You will show them the right path. Travelling will be comfortable. You will get some good news from somewhere. A misunderstanding between husband and wife will get removed. You will also utilize your time well. You will remain busy in religious activities.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Take special care of your needs. Do not interfere in other's affairs, otherwise you might have to pay some special price. You will play an important role in your organization and get promoted too. You will have some problems with relatives. It is a time of self analysis and introspection. You will excel in your business. You will have gains. You will also win a debate. You will be successful in whatever you do. The later part of the week will be prestige enhancing days. You will get the due for your work. A charming person will come in your life all of a sudden filling it with colours. You will share your feelings with him/her and understand each other better. Students will focus on their studies. Examinations will give their best. You will gain expertise in your field. You will get the blessings of elders.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You will through yourself into work and will not rest till you get the desired results. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will also make best use of money. And will buy valuable items. The time will be extremely good and happy. You will also get success in some interview or competitive exams. Your right advice will change the life of a person. You will get appreciated for your work. You will also get rid of diseases. You will be knowledge enhancing days. A long standing worry will come to an end. Family happiness will increase. Your influence and impression at the work place will remain. You will also meet lot of new people. You will take advice of experts in legal property matters. You will remain busy in social activities. The luck is favoring you. Your efforts will be appreciated.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You will shine in your work. You will impress people with your attitude. Your behavior will be very good. Some new work will be completed at this time. You will also adorn new clothes. And buy jewellery for wife or sister. You will also spend some quality time with your family. You might take leave and go to some nearby place for a holiday. You will try your best to achieve your objectives. There will be happiness in family life. You will also give salary to your staff. Someone will talk behind your back but will be disappointed. You will meditate in some matter and will also get success in it. But you will get happiness by meeting an old friend. You will establish cordial relations with neighbors. Mutual understanding between husband and wife will be good.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The time is favorable. You will get promoted in your job. You will also have financial gains. You will get support of your bosses. You will feel a change in your relative's behavior and get good news from their side. You need not be worried about the health of your elders. The situation at work will be under your control. You will also be stable in your job. You

will be busy but will be happy that your desired work is completed. In the field of politics/media you will establish contact with new people. The time is good from all perspective. You will be successful in whatever you do. Your contacts will prove to be beneficial. Your boss will be in your favor. You will be asked to depart from the line of working and this will work in your favor.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

You will remain very busy. You will have new responsibilities to complete in your job in a specified time frame. Even your bosses will put pressure on you and expect a lot from you. Students will study quiet concentratedly to get good results. You will face wrath of a family member. However, all misunderstandings and disputes will be soon removed. You may receive some exhilarating news about your friend or relative. You will also take some solid decisions in business which might give you good gain later on. Your love life is going to be amazing. And your relationship with your spouse will be better. Money inflow will remain uninterrupted during this phase. You need to drive your vehicle carefully. You could get deceived by your trusted man.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You may come across many good professional opportunities. May recover your money that was held for long. You will enhance your income. You call fall in a trap so take adequate care. Your close ones will keep giving support. Some untoward incident may happen to your friend or relative. A government related matter will get resolved. You will get the blessings of your senior family members to have your morale boosted. Your investments will give you good returns. Property disputes will also be resolved by some senior family member's intervention. Your health will remain perfect. Lovebirds will have an amazing time. You will get an unexpected success in your professional deals. Long held back money will also be recovered.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

You will get lot of opportunities for professional growth. Even your boss and seniors will be happy with you. You may get a new contract. Your family dispute with your brothers relating to property will get resolved. Business gains will make you cheerful. Health of spouse will improve. You may bring a massive change in your organization and staff. You will share amazing bonding with your mate. But some secret of yours will come out in the open. It will cause trouble to you. You must exercise restraint and patience during this phase. You will get a stable career as your terms with your boss and seniors will improve. You will make plans to go abroad for research and higher studies. You will also be reading spiritual and religious books. Students will be willing to learn new techniques.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will be full of self confidence. And will take some strong decisions in your business which shall cast a powerful impact upon your rivals. Your profits will increase. And you will use your talent and abilities to your best advantage. Your hopes and expectations would be met. You will impress your boss with your attitude and outlook. You will also have financial gains. You will come closer to your partner and all misunderstanding of the past will get removed. You will recover money that was given to someone. You will have much mental peace. Your long standing worries will come to an end. You will take some vital decisions which may prove to be fruitful for your family later on. But you will not like anyone poking your private life. You will meet an influential person. And will plan to introduce a novelty in your work.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

It is going to be a progressive week for you. You will make plenty of money. The problems that you were having with your health will come to an end. Matters related to courts will be settled with ease. You will overcome hurdles and defeat your opponents. Your business will be on the rise. You will bring in changes in your lifestyle. You will recover money given to someone. Students will get busy in their studies and get lot of success. Check your documents carefully. You will get lot of success in love and romantic matters. You can get married too. Don't compare yourself with others. It will hurt your interests. There will be an increase in your earnings and sources of income.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

The start of the week will be stupendous. You will get money, fame and will be bestowed with wonderful health. You will share amazing bonding with your mate. Your bosses will be happy with your performance. You will achieve the heights of success. You will also spend the time happily in the company of your family. You will be guest somewhere and derive pleasure. You will focus on your studies and career. This is the right time to get the results of your hard work. Your fame will spread in all directions. Marriage talks may be finalized. Brother and sister will assist and cooperate each other. Some close relative may deceive you. You will win a big order.

Career in Tourism for Inclusive Growth

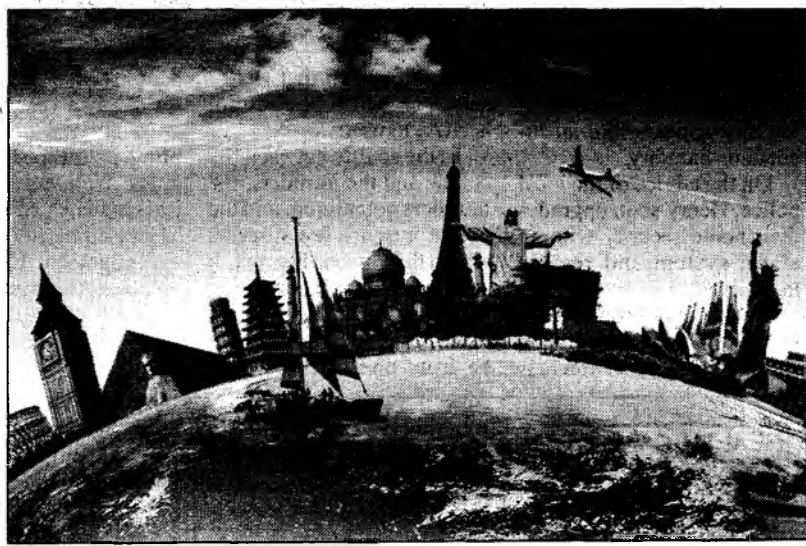
By Ranjan K Baruah

Though the recent pandemic has brought challenges to the tourism industry but it can again build back better after pandemic as there would be more domestic tourist than foreign tourist in our region. We are aware that tourism is one of the world's most important economic sectors. It employs one in every ten people on Earth and provides livelihoods to hundreds of millions more. For some countries, it can represent over 20 percent of their GDP. It allows people to experience some of the world's cultural and natural riches and brings people closer to each other, highlighting our common humanity.

It is an essential pillar of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the commitment to our Sustainable Development Goals, especially goals 8, 12, and 14. It serves as a first entry point to the world of work, especially for women, youth, migrant workers, and rural populations in developing and least developed countries (LDCs).

It creates jobs, promotes local culture and products, works in the sustainable use and management of the environment, like marine resources, and improves measures to make tourism an inclusive experience for all. 27th September is observed as World Tourism Day around the world.

Looking at the demand and necessities one may choose to build their career related to tourism. The jobs related to tourism varies which includes government jobs like Tourist Information Officer and other designation, managing tour agencies or tour operators, tourist guide or even managing home stays and all. The courses related to tourism include graduation level courses apart from post graduation courses and other special training programs like certificate courses or diploma programmes. Many leading institutes provide courses related to



travel and tourism management. One of the leading institutes in the country is Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management which has campuses in different parts of the country. IITM is an institute based in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, India, with campuses in Bhubaneswar, Noida, Nellore, and Goa, offering training, education and research in sustainable management of tourism, travel and other allied sectors.

Tourism is one of the best sectors where young people from Northeastern region may get self employment apart from working for others. One must have effective communication skills and other people skills to be successful in this field. Knowing different language is always advantage for a person who wants to do business or activities related to tourism. Knowing foreign language will enhance possibilities of getting better placement or getting more tourists as clients.

The best part is that one does not need much investment to be successful in tour guiding and managing tourists. Positive attitude and other skills is must to be successful in this field. Different government also support financial assistance to promising entrepreneurs or others who have ideas

or working experiences related to the field. A career in the field of travel and tourism is always rewarding.

UPDATES

■ The Schaeffler India Social Innovator Fellowship Program is a scheme of Schaeffler India to make out and reward individuals who are developing unique solutions that have the possible to positively impact society at extent. Aspirants in between 18 years to 30 years may apply on or before 15th October.

■ HDFC Bank announced Covid Crisis Support Scholarship for students who have been impacted by COVID 19. The scholarship is part of Parivartan, HDFC Bank's umbrella for its social responsibility and the scholarship programme is meant for school students as well as those pursuing UG, PG and diploma courses. Under this scholarship scheme, students will be provided with a one-time financial assistance ranging from Rs 15,000 to Rs 75,000. Aspirants may apply before 31st October.

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at bkranjana@gmail.com or, 8473943734 for any further query)

"Nothing is impossible, the word itself says, 'I'm possible!'"

-Audrey Hepburn

The Shillong Times

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Another Bharat Bandh

INDIA is set for a Bharat Bandh on Monday. The bandh called by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha is backed at the political level by the Opposition parties and participated also by the unions in the banking and several other sectors as an expression of solidarity. Public life would be disturbed. The bandh spans all government and private entities across the board and seeks closure of not just shops, offices, transport and industries but educational institutions too. It marks the day that completes a year of introduction of the three farm sector reforms and also the completion of 10 months of farmers' protests that were mostly confined to Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, and which the Modi government watched with no noticeable disquiet.

Farmers have been getting a raw deal for decades and most of them are caught in debt traps also because of seasonal crop failures for which there has been no massive or meaningful insurance scheme as yet. The farm reform laws, the government side has argued, is a panacea for all the ills plaguing the agriculture sector that contributes 20 percent of the GDP – the highest among all sectors. Yet, the debt burden of farmers, who form about half of the Indian population, keeps increasing. Banking unions say the plight of farmers is worsening; and that the average outstanding loan per agricultural household has increased to Rs 74,121 in 2018 from Rs 47,000 in 2013, a proof of farm sector distress.

The Covid pandemic season was a parched phase for the Opposition parties, mainly the Communists, to march people to the streets and engage in agitations. The Congress, on its own, often exercises restraint. Yet, with the relaxations being effected in relation to pandemic curbs, more such activism can be expected in the coming months. Curiously, bandhs and nationwide labour strikes are called by leftists close to the weekends, as is the case now too, so that the employees across the board could, as a bonus, "enjoy" an additional day of holiday alongside the week-end rest. Point to note is, are these protests serving any purpose. If they do, well and good. Else, one can only curse the fate of India. In the present context, neither the bank employees nor students should have been a party to an agitation linked to the farm sector. Bank employees are a well-fed lot; they are fancying more strikes at the drop of a hat. Students have already suffered hugely in the Covid season. Irresponsible styles of protests do not help the nation.

Meghalaya Congress at the crossroads

By H H Mohrmen

It looks like the Grand Old Party is not only going on a downhill slide in the entire nation but it is meeting the same fate in the State too. It is rather unfortunate that the Party is having the same experience even in Meghalaya where it still has a strong foothold. After the Punjab imbroglio where the Chief Minister was unceremoniously removed, a similar incident is happening here where the Leader of the Opposition in the House was ignored when the new President of the State Pradesh Congress was appointed. And that was where and how the story began.

No inner-party Democracy in the Congress

The incident in Meghalaya has only brought to light the fact that the Congress in the current dispensation is not interested in inner-party democracy. Obviously neither the party cadres nor the party's MLA in the state were involved in the process of electing the new President of the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC). The same situation prevails even with the central leadership of the party too. In spite of the fact that some party leaders and die-hard party workers had sent a letter to the acting president of the party requesting her to reorganise the party, the leadership turned its deaf ears to the plea. Notwithstanding the fact that the reluctant Prince has resigned from the post of the President after the party's humiliating defeat in the last general election, no election was conducted to elect a new president for the party. Sonia Gandhi is compelled to hold the post as the acting president of the party since then and sadly, the Congress has not even tried to elect or reelect Rahul as the President of the party.

Appointment of V H Pala as PCC president

In Meghalaya too V H Pala the party's MP to the Shillong parliamentary constituency all of a sudden landed in Shillong with an appointment to the post of President MPCC. Obviously even Dr Mukul Sangma was not aware of the developments as he was clearly taken by surprise by the High Command's action. If the Leader of Opposition in the House who is also the former Chief Minister of the state was not taken into confidence in taking such a big decision then what does this tell the people about the decision making in the Congress High Command?

There is also a question about Vincent Pala's performance as the MP of the Shillong parliamentary constituency. Are people happy with his performance? Or

how much has he really contributed to the development of the constituency or the state since he was elected as the MP? Did he do anything except distributing MP local area development scheme to the lucky few?

Pala's Chief Ministerial ambition

It is also obvious that Pala has long since nurtured the dream of being the chief minister of the state and this is seen from his excitement of taking on the mantle of Congress President in the state. He was seen busy welcoming old members of the Congress to the party-fold and there is nothing wrong in that. In fact, it was expected of him to strengthen the party, but the question is whether he stands on a strong footing. Isn't it a

scenario for lower, middle and higher education in the state? How does he propose to improve healthcare in the state particularly in the rural areas of Meghalaya? What are his plans to address the unemployment issue in the state? How does he propose to ensure urban and rural development in the state? Does he have a plan for the farmers and agriculture development in the villages? These are few important questions that one would like to hear from Pala if he is to get the support of the public.

Pala's leadership style

Pala wanted to project himself as an astute politician but will he be able to shed 'the just another businessman' tag that is being associated with him? People, par-

a person who occupies the high office of the President of the state party unit to be diplomatic and restrain from making public especially internal matters of the party. Pala should instead make sure that the matter remains within the four walls of the party rather than divulging it to the press, but the cat is out of the bag now and the Party's High Command will have to deal with it.

The other important question that one would ask is whether Pala has the experience to take the party to new heights. How long has he been involved in state politics? It is a known fact that Pala is new to state politics and the other hindrance that he had is that he is still a new face for people in the Garo hills region.

Dr Mukul Sangma's move

On the other hand Dr Mukul Sangma showed maturity in the way he was dealing with the situation. This was evident from his interacting with the media on his return from Kolkata. He was diplomatic in his approach and his statements. He was careful with what he said and did not let people know what his future plans are. Like any mature politician Mukul Sangma made no comments on his relationship with Vincent Pala as he refused to let the media drag him to the issue. He remained tight-lipped on all questions which are related to the internal party politics and he made it clear that he does not want to make public the party's internal bickerings. One thing that came out prominently in his interview with the press that he was expecting that the party leadership in Delhi would take immediate action to resolve the issue.

While opening the doors ajar for the party's High Command to engage with him for course correction (to use his own words), he at the same time is open to other possibilities if the course correction does not work out as he expected. A smart politician that he is, Dr Mukul Sangma is keeping his cards close to his chest by keeping all options open and like they say the ball is now in the Congress High Command's court.

Congress future without Mukul

Congress in Meghalaya will become like the Khasi Jaintia based regional party with no presence in Garo hills without Mukul Sangma. As of now in the Garo hills, Congress is Mukul and Mukul is Congress. And the future of the state without Dr Sangma in the Congress party is going to be advantage NPP even before the 2023 elections are announced.

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case of Pala being over ambitious hence welcoming new members instead of trying to put his house in order first? Or was it purposely done to send a clear message to Mukul Sangma that Pala is in charge now and he is a much better leader so even erstwhile members are queuing to rejoin the Party again?

The pertinent question is whether Pala has what it takes to be the Chief Minister of the State? He has no grassroots experience as he admittedly made it public that he was catapulted to the position he held today just few years back with the support of his mentor then, Mr DD Lapang. He just happened to be at right place at the right time. The public are yet to know of Pala's vision for the state and how he intends to improve the education

particularly those in Jaintia hills have all along seen him as a businessman with interest in politics. He is a businessman first then a politician, so is he not just another case of a businessman in the garb of a politician? Is he any different from the businessmen politicians on the other side of the political spectrum that are doing brisk business while the sun shines?

During the few days that he was in the limelight, Pala has demonstrated that he is still immature in his approach. His statement to the press on being asked about Dr Sangma and his colleagues deliberate absence from the Party's two important meetings was rather uncalled for. In the process he has unnecessarily brought to the public domain the strained relationship the two have. One would expect

Wanted policy-makers not contractors

Editor,

Political parties are gradually gearing up for the 2023 polls and gathering their flock from their respective areas of influence. The Congress is one party that appears to be giving serious attention to the matter of rejuvenating itself. But it is also caught in an internal crisis. Whether this crisis will die down or escalate as we come closer to the Assembly polls when the clamour for party tickets gathers steam, it is difficult to predict. It is sad that governance has presently gone down the drain. No longer do we see statesmen, intellectuals and policy makers in the 60-members Assembly. In the past few years, the Assembly has become a hub of businessmen and contractors, which is why we continue to suffer from policy paralysis in all sectors and levels. If the Congress has to come up with new leaders it cannot afford to bring in wheelers and dealers to sit in the State Assembly as this will lead

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

to more chaos and failed governance. We need people with intellect and vision to lead the state.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin
Wankhar
Via email

Covid vaccine for children

Editor,
The schools that had remained closed due to the Covid pandemic for the last 18 months reopened in many states and the other states have decided to reopen the schools without much delay. However, the safety of school children in the time of the pandemic is a cause for concern. One of the reasons for parents' worry about their children's safety is that they have not yet been vaccinated.

It is a fact that children below the age of 18 have not been vaccinated so far. As Pfizer conducted trials in a small number of children (6-11 years), its efficacy cannot be proved. Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are being used for children in the US

The political economy of Meghalaya tourism

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

September 27 is celebrated globally as 'World Tourism Day'. The theme this year is 'tourism for inclusive growth'. Inclusivity means the capacity of tourism to provide a livelihood to the stakeholders. It also means the capacity to pull prospective stakeholders into tourism. Inclusiveness depends on how tourism is streamlined. The factor which impacts upon streamlining is 'political economy'. It is the study of business and its development in relation to regulations. It analyses the ways in which governments allocate scarce resources in society through regulations. The flow is pretty straightforward i.e. regulation leads to a dynamic business environment. However, the scope of political economy also includes 'government thinking'. In tourism, the political economy provides a framework for the growth of services such as food and beverages, accommodation, transportation, recreation, entertainment, etc. That being said, the goal of a political economy is the achievement of sustainable development. But this concept has not caught up in Meghalaya. This deficit can be attributed to tourism being largely observed only from the prism of business.

The political economy of Meghalaya tourism is a narration in disappointment, both in terms of regulation and government thinking. Let us put things into perspective. Tourism has reached many parts of the state and is a source of livelihoods for many. Community-based tourism is popular. Money returns apart, it has helped in shaping the confidence of many stakeholders. This can be seen in destinations like Mawlynnong, Shnongpdeng, Nongriat, etc. But is this enough? Many assessments (government included) tell us that the potential is much more. What is needed is a structure and streamlining of tourism. This way, many more attractions can be included in the tourism map in a meaningful manner with a focus on services and their quality.

Meghalaya has a tourism policy and a tourism property scheme (for home stays). However, this is not the solution either. These are mere guidelines in the organization of tourism. If we observe the attractions analytically we will find that the political economy is missing. Forget about regulation of tourism services, even a clear vision and mission is not there. There is no tourism brand. As a result, marketing suffers. Kerala is 'God's own country'. What is Meghalaya? We cannot go on using generic terms like 'natural beauty and pleasant weather'. It is time to build a brand logo with a tagline that fits the destination. A student competition can be organized for this. They have brilliant ideas.

Many stakeholders point to the growth of tourism in Meghalaya. They say it has happened without regulations. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the domestic and international arrivals were around 12 lakh and 25 thousand per annum respectively. It is these numbers that have created a negative perception towards regulation. There is a fear that regulation will spoil the tourism bandwagon. Accepted, there is growth without regulation. But we need to take a step back and analyze the nature of growth. Is it sustainable? What happens when we start facing stiff competition from other destinations? In Mawlynnong, waste management is an issue. Do we ever wonder how the waste is disposed of? At Shnongpdeng, sewage management is an issue. River Umngot is at the receiving end.

At many attractions, service quality of the tourism enterprises is an issue. Sometimes the drive for money has got the better of etiquette and hospitality. So, how do we reverse the trend? For this, regulation and government thinking has to be proactive. That is the only way out.

But, being proactive does not equate to talking about 'high-end tourism'. This is the most ironic thing today. There are no regulations and checks at all on the current stock of tourism services; yet, we are trying to jump directly to the other end of tourism services (high-end tourism). This is not how an economic sector works. Things cannot be achieved by saying; they are better achieved by putting up well thought out processes in place.

In a discussion, Ian A. Lyngdoh (General Secretary, Meghalaya Tourism Development Forum) raised the issue of 'morality' in relation to high-end tourism. He has a very valid point. After all, tourism in Meghalaya (and the world over) is driven by micro and small enterprises. These enterprises engage a lot of semi-skilled workforce. Unskilled people are also involved. This is the uniqueness of tourism. Although it is a specialized activity, the employment can be highly casual. This has both good and bad points. The good point is the chance for livelihood for the grassroots; the bad point is the dilution in service quality. This is where regulation can play a transformative role. It can make the tourism experience better for the tourist. In return, it can give better livelihoods to the stakeholders. Regulation can keep a tab on carrying capacity of an attraction along with ways and means for capacity building of the workforce. This will add value to the destination.

From this point, Meghalaya can gradually migrate towards high-end tourism a few years down the line. This is where the political economy of tourism has to focus. The quality of a destination is determined by the forces of tourism demand and tourism supply. In Meghalaya, we have been focusing too much on the demand aspect (the tourist numbers). It is time to focus on the real deal which is the supply aspect (service quality of tourism).

The achievement of the above requires a focus on regulation and government thinking. The grassroots stakeholders must not be scared of regulations. This is because the purpose is not to cast people away from tourism. On the contrary, it is about streamlining of the sector together with a focus on capacity building. Regulation would also help in record-keeping of the tourism enterprises. This will help in situations such as Covid-19 with regards to planning a relief/stimulus package. The government will have a base for decision-making. In relation to this, there is a Meghalaya Registration of Tourist Trade Bill, 2019. It is a start and a good initiative. However, it has not moved since the year 2019. It is time to reactivate the process. Although the time period for public suggestions on the Bill are over, nonetheless many tourism thinkers have pointed to the scope of the Bill. It only includes registration of hotels, travel agents and guides. But there are many other tourist trades such as small accommodations, tour operators, transport, food and beverages, souvenir shops, way side amenities, etc., which should be considered. Only then can we do justice to the exercise.

In the end, government thinking must take an interest in contemporary issues. Let us take Kongthong village as an example. There is talk to officially call it a 'whistling' village. Alan West Kharkongor (President, Meghalaya Rural Tourism Forum) says that it is not right; rather, it should be called a song/singing village. Well, who will address this confusion? It is the political economy of government thinking that must step in and do the needful!

(Email: benjamin21-in@yahoo.co.in; the writer teaches at NEHU)

Letters to the Editor

The cry for safe drinking water

Editor,
It is indeed encouraging to note the seriousness with which the Centre is viewing the shortage of drinking water in Meghalaya, especially the water shortage for Shillong City. How I wish that our own elected representatives, especially those charged with delivering civic amenities to a suffering citizenry showed the same concern. If news reports are to be believed (ST 26th Sept 2021) the Jal Shakti Union Minister of state, Shri Prahlad Singh Patel has taken serious note of the scarcity of water in Shillong. He has further stated that the State need only submit a DPR (Detailed Project Report) to the Ministry for the Centre to make available funds on a 90:10 ratio basis for implementing new water supply projects. High time for the Govt and its PHE department to wake up from their deep slumber and take serious note of such offers.

The point to note is we have been hearing about the augmentation of the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme for the last 30 years but till today the scheme apparently needs to be rescued from the technocratic Red Tape that it has got mired into. Meanwhile Shillong city is expanding; its population has increased tenfold, yet the Govt and its PHE department seem totally oblivious to the ever increasing demand for safe drinking water from these extended areas of Shillong. Instead we note with growing alarm the Govt outsourcing its responsibility to private water carriers to fulfil the civic needs of its citizens. It's a crying shame! Private drilling for commercial purposes is on the rise. Our underground aquifers and community-based water sources are being exploited for commercial purposes and the authorities concerned seem least bothered while on the other hand harassed citizens spend not less 1/3 of their incomes to purchase drinking water. Seriously, does the Minister PHE know or care as to what is going on?

Of all the localities in Shillong, Mawlai with its vast and growing population is the one that has been most neglected as far as water supply and piped water connections is concerned. Mawlai is no longer on the outskirts of the city. It is a growing urban centre by itself yet most of its residents still depend on drawing their water needs from public taps or from private water suppliers. A study has identified the upper reaches of the Umiam River as the most viable source for supplying Mawlai and its adjacent areas with the much-needed piped drinking water. I believe a DPR and a feasibility report on the same also exists but somehow the relevant file has got itself buried in some 'Babu's' desk. In view of the promise of the Jal Shakti Minister this is the most appropriate time to revive the file; brush off the dust it has collected and voice the people's demand for the immediate implementation of a viable drinking water project for the population of Mawlai. Hope the Government listens.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

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

"The function of the artist in a disturbed society is to give awareness of the universe, to ask the right questions, and to elevate the mind."

— Marina Abramovic

The Shillong Times

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Assam gripped by schizophrenia

THE events unfolding in Assam in the past few months ever since Himanta Biswas Sarma took over as Chief Minister are ominous to say the least. Extra-judicial killings have spiraled and all on the plea that those killed were drug peddlers or criminals that allegedly tried to escape from prison. The latest round of eviction drive in Darrang district have led to the most inhuman killings that occurred on Thursday. Police blame a Muslim organisation for fanning the communal flames while police allege that the those settled on illegally occupied spaces had attacked them. What's bizarre is that a man armed only with a bamboo was shot at and killed by police. The man who was killed apparently tried chasing away the policemen who had come to evict the illegal settlers. This man then ran into another group of armed policemen who shot him at two places, killing him instantly. But what followed the killing is shocking. An official photographer hired by the district administration of Darrang to capture the eviction drive seemed to have acquired the face of an avenger. He stomped on the dead man's body and even dealt him a few blows until he was arrested by the police. The video capturing this gruesome incident has since gone viral. It's also intuitive that the photographer Bijoy Shankar Baniya carried an outdated press card issued by some news agency from Kolkata.

Was it a coincidence that the police team was led by Sushanta Biswa Sarma the SP of the district and also the younger brother of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma? And yet all this seems to have the sanction of the larger 'Assamese' community. Discussions on social media clearly demonstrate the deep schism in Assam's society today. A large section of the intellectual class endorses the Government's move and argue that the reason why the BJP was voted to power is because it promised to deal with illegal migrants with a strong hand. The Assamese have long held the belief that illegal settlers in Assam have been occupying their land for the past several decades without any checks from the elected, who have conveniently turned these "Bangladeshis" into their vote banks. This gentry alludes to the past Congress-led governments which they said just sat back and did nothing about the unabated illegal migration from across the porous border.

It's not a simple matter to evict settlers who possess documents and to accuse them of having procured those wrongfully. Assam is a victim of history and of contested boundaries and nationalities. What's needed is a humanitarian approach to the citizenship issue.

Launched by the Chief Minister in May 2019 at Byrwa village (Ri Bhoi district), the Aroma Mission is steadily progressing. Though relatively less conspicuous and somewhat thinly funded, the Mission, with a budget outlay of Rs.18 crore and a coverage target of 1000 hectares, is firmly on track.

It all started with the insight that the Government needed to do something about the cultivable wastelands across the State. As per the Government of India's (2014-15) wasteland atlas, the cultivable wasteland of Meghalaya is 3.9 lakh hectares, i.e., 17.38% of the total geographical area. Since the medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) are short-duration crops and some can grow even in low-fertility soils, the Aroma Mission was conceptualized to pursue the twin objectives of (1) utilizing the cultivable wastelands and (2) widening the livelihood choices of our farmers through high-value MAPs.

With its varying altitudes and diverse agroclimatic conditions, Meghalaya is conducive to the growth of several medicinal plants. The Meghalaya Medicinal Plants Board estimates that about 834 plant species of Meghalaya are medicinal - of which eight plants are endemic only to Meghalaya and another seventeen are threatened species (in danger of extinction). Moreover, unlike most cereal crops marketed as raw produce, the MAPs would need to be distilled for essential oils before marketing. Adding value through distillation will benefit the farmers because of better price realization while encouraging entrepreneurs to emerge. Therefore, the rationale for a focussed Aroma Mission to step into the commercial cultivation of the MAPs was strong enough.

There were a few issues, however. The implementation of the Mission was relatively going to be more complicated than the others because it was not just about growing commercial quantities of MAPs; it was also about adding value through the distillation process. That meant imparting new skills to the farmers and entrepreneurs in quick time. Therefore, much preparation was needed before the actual commencement of the cultivation of the MAPs. Technical support from an established research institution was also required because it was entirely a new turf for our farmers and the officials. The range of the MAPs being so extensive, it was also necessary to pick the ones that suited our agro-climatic conditions best. The Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP), Lucknow, a Government of India organization under the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), was identified as our techni-

cal partner to handhold us necessary consultancy agreements were signed.

The Institute of Natural Resources, Meghalaya (INRM) under the MBDA was the identified institution to implement the Meghalaya Aroma Mission. Partnership with CIMAP had been very productive because we need-



ed to know which plants to grow, their agronomy, how to source high-yielding varieties, build capacities of farmers, and establish market networks. The CIMAP went so far as to customize the distillation units to suit Meghalaya's small-sized farms. Four stainless steel distillation units were fabricated, and the CIMAP specially designed an unloading system based on the cantilever principle exclusively for our State. These distillation units are now functional in eight

in 180 hectares, organized 47 awareness camps and 26 training programmes across the State. One thousand five hundred farmers are now drawn into the Mission. At the end of the first year's operation, six tonnes of essential oil were distilled out and marketed at an average price of Rs. 1000/- per litre.

concentrated in the West & Southwest Khasi Hills districts. The Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills farmers are also doing well.

Another exciting aspect about the MAPs is their ability to do phytoremediation (improving the soil quality by planting certain types of crops). Thus, MAPs can reclaim soils that are degraded due to mining operations. The INRM did action research to ascertain if any aromatic grasses would have the potential to remediate some of these mine-affected soils, and the results are promising. For the sake of brevity, I will only mention three significant findings of the research: (1) There was a slight improvement in the nutrient content (N, P, K, Organic Carbon) and pH of the soil after the introduction of Aromatic grasses. (2) There was a 2% reduction in Iron, Copper, and Zinc concentrations in the soil after nine months, and (3) Citronella could withstand acidic and metal stress conditions of the degraded lands.

"The implementation of the Mission was relatively going to be more complicated than the others because it was not just about growing commercial quantities of MAPs; it was also about adding value through the distillation process."

locations, and six more Field Distillation Units (FDUs) are now being established in the State. The CIMAP also supported us in reaching out to the farmers by establishing a Technology Window at Langkyrding, Shillong.

Citronella, Lemongrass, Geranium, Pyrethrum, Patchouli, Pepper Mint, Palmarosa, and Vetiver are currently out prioritized crops considering their suitability to the State's agro-climatic conditions and the readily available market. The INRM established five Central Nurseries in each of the agro-climatic zones of the State so that appropriate MAPs could be cultivated. The INRM has, over the last two years, facilitated plantations

will cover another 242 hectares. An interesting spinoff is that some enterprising farmers have turned themselves into suppliers of saplings to new entrants. As I write this article, fifty-five farmers in the State have begun selling the planting materials to the new entrants at moderate prices. That is a new vertical for us. That day is not too far when our farmers will emerge as the suppliers of planting materials to the other northeastern states.

A redeeming feature of the area coverage is that the West Khasi Hills district, generally considered remote, stood second, after the Ri Bhoi district, with 22.75 hectares. That is gratifying because wastelands are

Aroma mission

Wafting across the State, but quietly!

By K N Kumar

Renewing teaching approach in education system

By Aiborlang Nongsiej

Albert Thyrmiang's article 'My Categories of Teachers' (ST Sep 8, 2021), is relevant to the present educational system. Teachers are the second parents to the children. But it is unfortunate that the state government pays no attention to their demands and wellbeing. In fact, during the recent autumn session of the State Legislative Assembly, the Education Minister was not present in the house during the question hour. Hence if the education department fails in its duty of providing quality education in the state one day Shillong will lose its title as 'educational hub of Northeast India'.

Education is a powerful means of bringing up the society in various fields. The standard of life of any society depends very much on education. However, with the passage of time education has become monotonous and boring. It is high time for the teachers and the Education Department to develop and train teachers with new techniques and skills in order to provide a fruitful and joyful learning for the students. As an educator, the writer had seen in several places where classrooms are no longer joyful learning spaces. Instead they have become monotonous and boring for the students. Students are forced to sit inside the classroom without learning anything. Perhaps, this is what makes students take extra tuition classes, for they understand nothing inside the classroom. Older generations hardly went for tuition. Why is tuition so common to the new generation? Is it because the teachers are interested in tuition rather than in the classroom? Or is it that the classroom has become boring and monotonous?

Personally, I don't know why private tuition has become so common today. Perhaps students need a more personal learning space which tuitions provide. It is high time to develop new teaching techniques in order to create joyful and active learning in the classroom. The traditional method of teaching in which the teacher is at the center of the classroom, lecturing away for a whole 45 minutes with no space for interaction is boring and monotonous for the new generation. There must be space to draw out the student's pre-knowledge on the lesson. When the teacher is at the center of the classroom the students are only to listen. Hence the cognitive domain is not fully activated since they don't use all their thinking faculties as there is no active participation in the classroom. Hence if students talk, sleep or are distracted during the class the teacher must introspect as to why students do so. It is not just for the teachers to scold or punish the students without introspecting on their teaching method. Perhaps, there is something wrong in our teaching approach that makes the students distracted or sleep away during the classes. It is the teachers' duty to manage the classroom creatively in order for students to have joyful and better learning. The following are some of the probable methods that can help teachers and students to achieve joyful and fruitful classroom teaching-learning:

a. Using Constructivist Method: This is one of the best methods in approaching students in the classroom. It is a student-centered classroom rather than teacher-centered. In other words, the students are at the center of the classroom and not the teacher. The method consists of five steps known as five 'Es', Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate and Evaluate. In this method the teacher acts as the facilitator and students participate actively with their pre-knowledge experience of the lesson. Each person is born with certain intelligences and skills and each student will already have something in

mind. It is the duty of the teacher to bring out those pre-learned ideas from students. The term 'education' itself comes from the Latin word 'Educare' meaning 'to bring out'. Hence teachers must put priority on the students' pre-knowledge and help them to understand the lesson connected to their pre-knowledge experience. The method helps students take active part during the class while the teacher is only a guide.

b. Bringing creativity to the classroom. Teachers should prepare the class well. It is unfortunate to see many teachers still unprepared before entering the classroom. The traditional way of entering the classroom with just a book in hand is a killjoy for students. Every lesson provides interesting and joyful learning, if the teachers are smart and creative. Making students involved in the lesson with their pre-knowledge experience by dramatizing the lesson is part of creative teaching. Using available learning aids connected to the lesson and helping students to understand the lesson through those materials is a good teaching method. The classroom is boring and monotonous because of the lack of creativity in classroom management by teachers concerned. Creativity in teaching is imperative to create interest in the subject and improve retention.

c. Develop the skills of teaching with love: Teaching is an art and a gift to certain individuals. However, if the individual loves his/her profession they can progress and excel in their teaching career. It is often painful to see an individual teaching for decades but never developing the skills for teaching. There are cases where majority of the students fail in a particular subject but the teacher concerned never introspects on his/her own teaching methods but blames the students instead. Loving the profession and continuing to excel with new methods and skills in teaching is a must for an effective teaching career. Every teacher must develop new teaching techniques that can generate interest in students.

d. Avoid sitting while teaching: This writer has seen teachers who sit and teach. In such a situation the teachers are not really connected to students while teaching. Interaction and close contact with students are integral for classroom teaching-learning. There are several schools where chairs are not provided for the teacher in order to have effective and close contact learning with the students. To sit and teach is not a good teaching method. It is advisable that teachers walk around and stand while teaching in the classroom so that they command attention.

e. Understand the uniqueness of each student: Every person is unique and born with different intelligences and capacities. Teachers must understand this uniqueness. There are slow learners, average and fast learners and teachers should keep in mind each category of students while teaching. There have been several cases where poor learners are victims of the classroom learning process. Therefore, understanding the uniqueness of each student in the classroom is important.

f. Making use of training: Albert Thyrmiang had pointed out that many trained teachers are not making use of the teaching methods learnt during their B.Ed training. How many teachers prepare their daily lesson plans? For many individuals the methods of teaching ends with the completion of the B.Ed training. It is unfortunate if such situations continue to exist in our educational system. Thus, teachers must use their training to prove teaching-learning outcomes.

Letters to the Editor

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

Editor,

It is commendable that Women's College celebrated the social contributions of Vidyasagar Ishwar Chandra, the renowned educationist and reformer (Shillong Times, Sep 26, 2021). Ishwar grew up in extreme poverty, studying late into the night under a street lamp. He became a Sanskrit teacher. Recognising his scholarship, his teachers bestowed on him the title of 'Vidyasagar', meaning 'ocean of knowledge'.

He promised his poor mother that he would buy her a gold ornament from his earnings as a teacher. When he went back to the village to fulfill his promise, she told him to use the money to start a school for girls. Eventually he opened 30 girls' schools in Bengal, going door to

door, urging parents to send their daughters to school.

He was distressed by the treatment and exploitation of widows in the name of religion. These widows had been married in childhood to older men, and when the husbands died, lived with stigma and poverty. Thousands turned to prostitution in the towns and cities. Vidyasagar drafted and campaigned for the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856. He realised that unless girls and women were educated, it would not be possible to liberate them from the burden of inequality and injustice. It is said that half his salary and the royalties from his books was donated to his social work.

Apart from my admiration for his noble work, there is a personal note. He lived in a remote rural area in the last two decades of his life and started the first school for Santali tribal girls in a small village called Karmatar. A hundred years later my parents moved to

this little village of a few hundred people, working in a church mission station with a school and dispensary. I spent my teenage years in this hamlet of spotlessly clean mud huts.

The village suffered during the famine of 1966-1967 in which several thousand died from starvation in UP and Bihar. Successive years of drought had caused a marked drop in grain production. Relief efforts by the government and voluntary organizations limited the impact, but we saw several dead bodies on the roadside and many were treated at our dispensary.

Shillong is privileged to have a multi-ethnic heritage. The Bengali community in particular has contributed to culture and education in a substantial way. The celebration of heroes such as Ishwar Chandra brings our community together.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor,
Via email

Clash within Meghalaya Congress

Editor,

The clash between the top leaders within the Congress in Meghalaya is out in the open for everyone to see. This does not augur too well for the grand old party which hopes to bounce back to the saddle of power in 2023. The elevation of Vincent H Pala to the post of President of MPCC by the Congress High Command and the return of the former congress heavy weights into the Congress fold under the influence of Pamlam was a threat to Dr Mukul's leadership of the party. Hence Dr. Mukul and his bandwagon developed cold feet by not attending the induction of some prominent persons into the Party and installation of Pala as New Chief of MPCC. One can also clearly read from the events that Dr Mukul cannot see eye to eye with Pala in

party matters and there are deep rooted differences between him and Pala. Above all the tussle for top honours in the state for becoming Leader of Congress Legislature Party has become clear. This rivalry is uppermost.

However, it will not be easy for the Congress party to succeed in 2023 as it has to overcome many obstacles. First its leaders have to unite, Pala and his cohorts have to be united with Dr Mukul and his team. In the Congress of Garo Hills, Mukul is the undisputed leader much like what it was during (L) Purno Sangma's time. But in Khasi and Jaintia Hills Pala is not the undisputed leader of the Congress party. He is yet to become one. Moreover, here the Congress is yet to emerge as the single largest party with a clear-cut undisputed leader. Pala is not experienced in state politics. He may be self-confident in steering the Congress because in three consecutive terms he

had won as an MP and must have doled out MP schemes to many lucky ones. Pala has enough money to throw around to realise his political ambitions which will be converted simultaneously into business ambitions. If Congress remains a divided house here in Meghalaya it will miss the chance to regain power in Meghalaya and it will take a long time to resurrect. It will on the other hand be a golden opportunity for the NPP to strengthen and consolidate its fledgling position. Again, it will pave the way for unwanted victory of some mushroom parties which will again throw up a hung Assembly in 2023.

Yours etc.
Philip Marwein,
Sr. Journalist,
Via email

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"Rank does not confer privilege or give power. It imposes responsibility."

-- Peter Drucker

The Shillong Times

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Germany after Merkel

STABILITY and growth are a heady mix. This was precisely what Chancellor Angela Merkel provided to Germany in her 16 years at the helm. She's exiting soon with her head held high, but the election to find a replacement for her has not decisively favoured her conservative Christian Democratic Union. A slight shift in favour of center-left Social Democrats was evident in the counting and its nominee Olaf Scholz seemed to be taking the upper hand over CDU's Armin Laschet. Germany is used to having coalition governments and having even a grand coalition of principal rivals joining hands under Merkel. This had meant a set-back to the Social Democrats under the huge Merkel aura. Yet, Germans now seemingly want to give a chance for the centre-left to form the next government.

Angela Merkel's popularity remains undiminished – a rare credit to someone who led a democracy for quite a long tenure and this is reflected in the fact that 'change' was not the 'mantra' for the contending sides in the present poll campaign; rather, continuity is the Merkel way was the promise from the Social Democrats too. Reunited Germany began regaining its powerful presence after 1990 – with the weak East Germany joining hands with West Germany and the Wall that separated them having unceremoniously been pulled down. The age of ideology gave way to an era of pragmatism; and these three decades were years of progress for Germany. Under Merkel, it emerged as the strongest nation in Europe, edging past the UK and France when unemployment was at its lowest under her tenure. The additional bonus she provided was political stability, granting the nation a single-minded attention to economic growth. Merkel displayed the good side of democracy and she, by nature, was a unifying figure all along. This meant the scope for confrontation was less. By sharing power with Social Democrats, she made sure there was little scope for dissent. This unity too worked wonders for the nation.

Democracy's problem is, it's not always that the right kind of leader comes to the helm. Many turn out to be weak-kneed. Autocrats, rather, have the cutting edge. China and Russia are going strong by virtue of the strong party apparatus in the case of the first and the powerful persona of President Putin in the second. India, rather, is into an era of slow growth, the stress here being more on freebies and compromises to win votes. Growth suffers. For sure, Angela Merkel steered Germany on the path of democracy coupled with progress and stability.

Poor PGI, SDGs ratings, what next?

By Albert Thyrniang

Recently, in Guwahati, a concerned citizen drew the attention of this writer to the recent report of NITI Aayog and Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (M/DoNER) on North Eastern Region (NER) District Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Index and Dashboard for 2021-22. The agitated person narrated upsetting private comments of a NITI Aayog official regarding Meghalaya and other states. The remarks will be revealed below so that the introduction to this topic is not disrupted.

The Index report was released on August 26 this year. As reported this first of its kind exercise in the country measures the performance of the districts of the eight states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura on the SDGs and ranks them based on NITI Aayog's official tools for monitoring progress on the SDGs at the national and State/Union Territory levels and provide the benchmarks for districts to achieve.

Altogether 103 districts were ranked under four categories, namely, 1. Achiever (100 points); 2. Front-Runner (65-99 points); 3. Performer (50-64 points) and 4. Aspirant (0-49 points). 64 districts were placed in the Front Runner category while 39 districts were in the Performer category. No district was placed under the Achiever and the Aspirant categories. In other words 64 districts scored between 65-99 points and 39 of them could master only between 50-64 scores. There is no 'Achiever district' which scored the perfect 100, neither is there a district that performed so badly so as to score less than 49. Perhaps, it is quite a surprise that all the districts in Sikkim and Tripura fall in the Front Runner category, or the second best group. More unexpected is that East Sikkim district with the score of 75.87 (out of 100) is ranked first in the region followed by Gomati and North Tripura (both Tripura) which amassed 75.73 points. West Tripura, Serchhip (Mizoram), South Sikkim, Unakoti (Tripura), Lunglei (Mizoram), Dhalai and Sepahijala (Tripura, ranked 8th), South Tripura and Kolashib (Mizoram) complete the top 10 performing districts. As we can see in the top 10, the list is dominated by Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim.

Now, among the 10 bottom districts, six are from Nagaland, four are from Arunachal Pradesh and one is from Meghalaya. Nagaland has the dubious record of having two districts at rock bottom.

I feel tempted to divulge the comments of the NITI Aayog official right here, but suspense is a thrill. We continue with the analysis. We limit ourselves only to Meghalaya, with some references to Nagaland, for lack of space and especially because this article appears in a Meghalaya Daily.

Among the 11 districts in Meghalaya, not a single one is placed in the Front Runner, that is, the second best category. All fall under performer category, the third best cluster. The best Meghalaya district is East Khasi Hills which is placed at 57th with 66.27 points. North Garo Hills is the lowest district standing at 98th with the composite score of 56.87. The other districts (from the worst) stand as follows: South Garo Hills - 92nd (59.20 points); South West Khasi Hills - 87th (61.93 points); Ri Bhoi - 83rd (62.80 points); East Garo Hills - 82nd (63 points); East Jaintia Hills - 81st (63.33 points); South West Garo Hills stood 79th (63.40 points); West Khasi Hills was placed 77th (63.60 points); West Garo Hills was at 74th (63.80 points) and West Jaintia Hills at 69th (64.27 points). None in Meghalaya are in the top 50 districts. Just to put things in perspective Karbi Anglong at 73rd (63.87) has performed much better than all the districts in Meghalaya except East Khasi Hills (57th) and West Jaintia Hills (69th). Karbi Anglong is ranked one place higher than West Garo Hills. If you think the ranking is not realistic come and see Diphu, the capital of Karbi Anglong. Certainly it is much more developed than Tura, Jowai and Nongstoin.

One more useful figure before we come to the point. Overall, Sikkim with scores between 71.87 and 75.87 stands right at the top. Second is Tripura with its score ranging between 71.93 and 75.73. Mizoram with the scores between 63.40 and 74.87 occupies the third spot. Manipur is next with scores between 64.93 and 72.13. Assam which scored between 62.67

and 71.73 is at mid-table. The third worst state is Arunachal Pradesh with scores between 55.60 and 68.87. Meghalaya is second from the bottom scoring between 56.87 and 66.27 better only to Nagaland which sits right at the last place scoring only between 53.00 and 64.07.

Now the much awaited NITI Aayog official's stinking criticism! The reproduction below may not be verbatim but the message is true to its original. Nagaland and Meghalaya are two 'Christian' states. But they have performed the least. 'Nagaland for Christ' is a popular slogan in the state. Nagaland has almost 100% Christian population among the tribal groups, on whom political power rests. Meghalaya is not far behind with almost 75 % Christian population. Why are the above two states performing below the rest? The official continues: In Assam and other states there is stealing but in Nagaland and Meghalaya massive looting is going on.

Reference was then made to the letter by Nagaland Governor, R.N. Ravi scathing remarks on Chief Minister Neiphu Rio in 2020 for the grim law and order situation but also for the 'siphoning off a large chunk of government funds meant for development' resulting in down-sliding of the state in various parameters such as road connectivity, health and education infrastructures. About Meghalaya the official said, "You're a state of scams and corruption. Look at MeECL which has been in the news for several irregularities. Your state development is held to ransom by pressure groups," referring, particularly to the stalled Byrnihat railway and the Nongstoin-Ranikor two-lane high way road projects.

The below par performers in the Sustainable Development Goals rating are districts in Garo Hills. "Why?" asked the gentleman. "In Meghalaya's 50 years of history for about 33 years the state was under Chief Ministers from Garo Hills. Captain Williamson Sangma, the longest serving CM was from South Garo Hills. SC Marak hails from North Garo Hills, the least performing district. PA Sangma and Mukul Sangma were also Chief Ministers. Now Conrad Sangma is at

the helm of affairs but where is the development."

Since this writer once resided in North Garo Hills an observation about the 2012 established district is made. The lowest spot is probably accurate. One of the worst roads one has ridden on is from Bajengdoba/Mendal to Ashotchonggre. The wooden bridges have all broken down beyond recognition. The Rongrang area too wears a look of underdevelopment with bad roads, the most visible of all. Till 2015 the road from Resubelpara to Williamnagar was almost not motorable.

The next three lowest placed districts, namely South Garo Hills, South West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi, and, in fact, the rest of the ranking is as per expectations. If one visits the Bagmara-the-Ranikor-Langrin and the Ri Bhoi areas, one will agree with NITI Aayog 100 per cent. It is a shame that the state, whose capital was one of the seats of the united Assam state, and the hub of education, is now far behind Sikkim and Tripura, considered unheralded by all. The NITI Aayog employee was amazed that the study did not figure in the recently concluded Autumn Assembly session. The M/DoNER's assessment should have been discussed at length so that the government can use the tool as a criteria for the state's policy and ensure necessary interventions on a priority basis. This shows the casual attitude of the state government. One good thing is that no one has rejected the rating unlike the recent Performance Grading Index (PGI) rating on school with some individuals seeing a conspiracy behind it.

The poor M/DoNER's evaluation has come after the shocked PGI ranking by the Union Education Ministry condemning Meghalaya as one of the worst performers in school education. It is a second slap on the face of the state within a short span of time. In school education too the attitude of the government is lackadaisical. The desire to improve the crucial sector is not visible. Recently the Education Minister, Lakmen Rymbui was not even present in the House to answer questions on Education during the question hour. Be sure, in whatever rating that comes next we are sure to rank last or one of the last.

albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com

Governance, leadership & political parties

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

Doordarshan Kendra Meghalaya has always made good attempts in educating people of the state on the importance of quality leadership in governance. Recently a live telecast of a panel discussion on the topic 'Important qualities of leaders in the 21st century' was being telecast by the same channel. This is a noble and commendable effort. Panellists of the opening episode vehemently broke their silence on the nature and types of leaders that are being elected and projected throughout these past few years which has really damaged the image and quality of governance in the state as a whole. If this trend continues, I am afraid that democracy too will be in great danger and capitalism will replace the system of governance in the state.

The greatness of Indian democracy can only remain vibrant and grow stronger if all the citizens of the country realize the meaning and purpose of a good governance system and to be able to differentiate the interrelationship of these three aspects i.e. governance, leadership and politics. Let us forget, that the goal of governance is to keep the people informed and aware of all that is happening in the country and the universe so that no one should be left alone in the journey of development and this is what DDK Meghalaya is doing as one of the organs of the Central Government.

It is high time that the general public have clarity on the concept of governance including the application and implications therein. Governance should be people-centric rather than leader or party-centric. The classic example of leader and party-centric governance is the Communist Party of China. But the sad thing is that there are political parties in India that try to replicate the system through political manipulation taking advantage of people's ignorance. In the Indian democratic system we cannot separate the interrelationship between governance and political parties. The fact is that most of the Heads of State in the Country are produced by Political Parties. But people should be able to draw the boundary when it comes to the governing process for the entire state or country.

Coming to the concept of leadership, people should also understand who a leader is and what type of leaders the state or country needs. Here again I can say that good governance or people-centric government educates the public from time to time about the true nature of leadership; it also promotes and prepares youngsters for the future as well. It is very sad to see that in our state most of the leaders that people have elected to the State Legislature or those self-styled leaders did not emerge from any school of thought or from an appropriate nurturing environment of experiences. They are made leaders or public representatives simply because they have the capacity to buy voters. And others call themselves leaders simply by arousing the emotions of the uninformed mob on a particular issue.

A leader in fact is a person who can make things happen; he/she must have a vision or be able to see beyond and what lies ahead. Leadership is always associated with development therefore leaders must be able to bring development in the lives of citizens and the surrounding environment they are living in. Only then will the goal enshrined in the Constitution of India be realized. It is the duty of the Government to make these things happen. To get the type of government we need it's the people who will decide what type of representatives we should elect. As a common citizen, I will always look to a person who wants to be a leader from this perspective besides measur-

ing his/her capacity from the three aspects of valuable importance. First, I will look to a leader from the technical aspect or that capacity and capability of a person to deal with and handle issues successfully and to resolve crisis. This also implies that a person should be loaded with knowledge and skills or be a knowledgeable person acquired through education, experiences, etc. Secondly, I will gauge a leader from the social aspect or the relationship that a person has with the society or community. A person may be highly qualified and educated but if that person is at odds with the society and people around or in isolation from the common public, it is meaningless to project such people. Thirdly, leaders may possess both these qualities but unless they have good ethical and moral reputation, they will hijack the trust of the public just for their personal benefits. The moral aspect of a leader is very important because it proves that the leader is a trustworthy person free from any immoral and corrupt practices and habits. Thus, a quality and righteous leader is one who satisfies these three aspects. The people should measure the quality of their leaders from time to time. This will make our democracy more vibrant and the governance system more people-centric.

There is no doubt that political parties are vital in the political system of the country because they provide leaders to the legislature and government and they derive that mandate from the people. But as time passes by, most political parties have become party-centric or founder-centric. On the contrary, we the people in Meghalaya have never understood the importance of party politics and party ideology. People have voted during every general election for individuals, irrespective of his/her party alliance. This on the other hand has greatly affected the nature of governance because the government formed is a fractured one and ultimately the general public will suffer. As often said that people in our state vote for a person and not party, and the danger is that these elected representatives becomes lone rangers who will never care for the welfare of the entire state except his/her own constituency and that section of the electorate who have voted for him/her. They are not under the control of any party and its difficult to tame or discipline them against any misbehaviour or misconduct whether in the House or outside it.

It is high time that party politics should be encouraged and built up and at the same time to make the public aware about such a system and its importance in the governance of the state. Political parties too should prove that they are professional political institutions and not only a club of aspiring candidates. They should have a stance with sound principles and meaningful ideology and most importantly the vision, mission and strategy on how to develop the state and its people.

Unfortunately here in Meghalaya things are just the opposite. The situation is so glaring that the intention of all the political parties is just to win a sizable number of seats by nominating candidates whose criteria is 'winnability-monetary'. There is no effort from the party leadership to go to the grass roots and build the support base by educating the people on the policies and programmes that the party intends to adopt if voted to power. This is politics in Meghalaya and I conclude by appealing to the people to stand together and decide what type of future we want for our children and our state. It's up to the people to make the right decision.

Letters to the Editor

Mechanized agriculture & equitable inheritance

Editor,

I fully agree with the views of Mr. K.N. Kumar in his article "Meghalaya's farm mechanization" (ST September 14, 2021) that agriculture in Meghalaya needs mechanization if "it does not want to disrupt its food security" and also to make it a viable occupation. The condition of the farmers today in our state can best be understood by asking the students, "Who wants to become a farmer when you grow up?" The answer will tell the story.

Meghalaya with its small population makes the availability of agricultural workers very acute and according to "the 2011 census report the percentage of agricultural labourers in Meghalaya is a very low 16.7% (as against the national availability of 41.49%)" and because of this labour shortage the daily cost of labour is very high adding to the overall cost of production which even the minimum support price will not yield any profit margin to the farmers. (inputs from Mr. Kumar's article)

The introduction of large scale mechanized farming

will go a long way in cutting the cost of production besides encouraging the formation of cooperative societies among small land-holdings. Kumar had also suggested increasing the number of Government Custom Hiring Centres for marginalized farmers and a ten-fold increase in the annual government investment in this scheme.

But this shortage of agricultural workers in our state is further compounded by our system of inheritance where property including land is not inherited by the sons of the family but by the youngest daughter. So while he might till the family land when he is still single and living with the family, he will have to work on someone else's (wife's) land when he's married. Not having any ownership over land makes many Khasi men look for alternative means of employment if available and this further adds to the shortage of manpower in agriculture. When there is no bond with the land, the enthusiasm to develop and improve it is not there and that's the reason why many agricultural lands are left fallow or sold off for non-farm activities.

The Maitshaphrang's campaign for a law on 'Equitable Distribution of Ancestral and Self Acquired Property' will help in reduc-

ing this manpower shortage; take the cooperative movement and mechanization of agriculture forward, because as owners of the land, faced with dwindling employment opportunities elsewhere, a man will go the extra mile to make farming a profitable occupation. With the government setting up more cold storage facilities and providing assistance in marketing the agricultural products, farming will then be a thriving economic activity. With this in place, if we are also to learn from Israel how they've successfully turned their 65% desert country into a major exporter of agricultural and horticultural products, we will surely turn our fertile lands into an envy of every state in India.

Yours etc.,
Michael. N Syiem,
Via email

Good governance a casualty

Editor,
Apropos the recent letter of Angela Lyngdoh commenting on the poor governance prevailing in our state, everyone will agree that good governance demands that we have good governors which, sadly, is missing in our state of Me-

ghalaya. When the majority of our so-called governors are more interested in enriching themselves and their kith and kin and not involved in effective governance for the benefit of the people of the state, there is only one direction in which the state can head towards and that is downwards. The hot topic nowadays in most conversations is how corruption has been institutionalised - a friend of mine had jokingly suggested that the name of Meghalaya should be changed to Marolaya!! Our forefathers must be turning over in their graves at the present state of affairs where 'kamai ia ka hok' has been replaced by 'troh kat ba ioh'. Our only hope is in our up and coming youth else Meghalaya is, to put it succinctly, doomed.

Yours etc.,
DM Pariat,
Aberystwyth, Wales

Congress must remain united

Editor,
The internal squabbles of the Congress are like a bad taste in the mouth. If the intention of the Party is to serve the people of the state and provide the much-needed good governance then the senior leaders should rise above personal

differences and think instead of what will be the outcome should the same set of MLAs return to power in 2023. It is bad enough that even as Meghalaya heads towards its 50th year the state does not even have a railroad that could help many with wholesale food grains and other businesses requiring big consignments to come to Meghalaya without requiring road transportation and negotiating with the cabal in Assam.

Meghalaya requires rapid development to make up for all the wasted years when precious time was wasted dealing with communal politics triggered by insecure politicians wanting to get into the Meghalaya Assembly. Much was expected from the NPP Government led by a well-spoken, suave Chief Minister graduating from two foreign institutions. But perhaps those institutions didn't teach ethics and governance which to the present set of MLAs appears to be an oxymoron. The medical colleges have not yet been started. The new Assembly building is yet to be completed after twenty years. It's doubtful if the building will be completed by next year. Even potable water supply to urban Shillong remains in the realm of the impossible. In the 21st century we the residents of this city are having to drink turbid water. Or

is the Government expecting us to drink bottled water?

We seem doomed to suffer because of the leadership vacuum. The Congress Party with people like RG Lyngdoh rejoining it will be a big boost. Lyngdoh was responsible for taking on the HNLG and eroding its cadre strength. We can never forget that era in the history of our state. I am not sure how VH Pala the new Meghalaya Congress President will be as the Chief Minister of the State because that is his ambition I believe. Dr Mukul Sangma ruled the state for nearly seven years. Perhaps it's time for the Congress to have a new Legislature Party leader. The Congress can defeat the Opposition NPP only if it remains united. That's the litmus test. We are unsure now if the TMC will also be the new entrant to Meghalaya. If that happens many disgruntled Congressmen and some from the NPP might join Mamata's Party. At least there will be some options for the people. Hopefully the TMC will encourage new faces to join it.

Yours etc.,
Bristar Lyngdoh Nongbri,
Via email

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"Retiring is just practicing up to be dead. That doesn't take any practice."

— Will Harvey

The Shillong Times

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Dynasty versus Democracy

ELECTION to the three constituencies – Mawryngkneng, Mawphlang and Rajabala have been announced and the search for candidates by political parties begins. Political parties have one month between announcing their candidates and campaigning for them. So far only one candidate – Pyniaid Sing Syiem of the NPP has emerged as the sure-shot contestant from Mawryngkneng. It remains to be seen whether the coalition partners in the MDA – namely the UDP, HSPDP and PDF will put up candidates in Mawryngkneng which was until February 2021 represented by Congress MLA David Nongrum. Rajabala too was represented by (L) Dr Azad Zaman of the Congress. Chances are that the NPP might set up a candidate from there. So will the Congress and the fight will be between these two national parties. The regional parties though are not expected to have any supporters in what is essentially a plains belt of Garo Hills.

In Mawphlang there are talks that the son of (L) SK Sunn – Eugeneson Lyngdoh a football player of repute would contest and keep the family legacy intact. In fact, an MLA has even appealed that no party should set any candidate from Mawphlang to make way for a member of SK Sunn's family to inherit his seat. In Meghalaya this unseemly culture of promoting dynasties and family legacies which are the anti-thesis to democracy seem to have taken roots. Already the Assembly is represented by several members of one family. Such is the interest to promote hierarchies and dynasties in Meghalaya. It is sad but true that the party under which India earned its Independence – the Indian National Congress started by AO Hume – an Englishman with a heart for India was also the Party that promulgated the Emergency. This was the first major sacrifice extracted at the altar of dynasty worship by Congressmen and women. The servility of Congress party followers at the time allowed the Emergency to happen. It was a heavy price paid by the country when all institutions of Democracy including the Judiciary were compromised. Such was the blow dealt to these democratic Institutions that they could never fully recover.

With the second generation of Nehru-Gandhis in power and the third as a virtual regent, the Congress has been reduced to a dynasty which also spawned a dangerous coterie of vested interests. Congress members in every state have mimicked the Congress leadership and promoted their own family members as candidates. The NCP led by Sharad Pawar is following in the Congresses' footsteps. The NPP too is a family-led Party. Now even regional parties might follow suit. Democracy cannot thrive in this eco-system. Dynasty has to end.

Getting people to retire is not easy

By Rajdeep Sardesai

"Retire when people ask why and not when they ask why not." That memorable quote is attributed to cricketer great Vijay Merchant who called it a day after scoring a masterful century against an English side in 1951. Timing your retirement right is never easy but at least in cricket there is a selection committee which can nudge you to call it quits. In corporate set-ups, there are boardrooms that can take the decision out of your hands. In the bureaucracy, there is an officially prescribed retirement age. In politics, on the other hand, there is neither a retirement age nor an institutionalized mechanism to facilitate a smooth transition to a new order. As a result, ensuring a generational change remains one of the biggest challenges and bottlenecks in contemporary Indian politics.

Take the recent political upheaval in Punjab. A 79 year old chief minister who was born in the year of the Quit India movement is virtually forced out of office in far from ideal circumstances. Captain Amarinder Singh has been chief minister of Punjab for over nine years spread across two terms. In 2016, just ahead of the last Punjab elections, he had gone on record to say that it would be his last election. Then, earlier this year, he suddenly changed his mind, insisting that he would continue to 'serve the people'. A man of refined tastes – a military historian, a chef, a sportsman, a raconteur – the increasingly inaccessible Captain was slowly losing his connect with his MLAs and the people and yet didn't want to leave the political battlefield, pushing the Congress into a difficult situation where the party dithered for months before finally giving him a pink slip.

Singh of course is not alone in the Congress in wanting to cling onto power even after a long innings. In Rajasthan, Ashok Gehlot has turned 70, is a three time chief minister but won't cede an inch of space to his much younger rival in Sachin Pilot. In Uttarakhand, a 73 year old Harish Rawat is still hoping

to be the party's face in next year's election. In Haryana, the 74 year old two time chief minister, Bhupinder Singh Hooda is still dreaming of a hat-trick. In Madhya Pradesh, the Kamal Nath-Dig Vijaya Singh duo, both in their mid 70s, squeezed out the youthful Jyotiraditya Scindia from the power equations. The Congress working committee has several septuagenarians and even the odd octogenarian in the ranks.

The BJP age composition wasn't too different to the Congress until prime minister Narendra Modi dramatically

arrived on the scene seven years ago. One of the new prime minister's first acts was to create a 'Margdarshak Mandal', a body of 'eminent leaders' to guide the party leadership. It meant essentially ensuring that the previous Vajpayee-Advani generation of leaders within the BJP were kept out of all the core decision-making bodies and given an exalted but undefined role that suggested retirement from active politics. At the time, a 'retirement home' was seen as a shabby, disrespectful way of treating those who had devoted their entire lives to the party, including Mr Modi's mentor in LK Advani.

Seven years on, the 'marg-darshak' mandal concept is slowly beginning to make sense. By effectively putting a 75 years cut off date for 'senior' leaders, the BJP has been able to effect a generational change within the party hierarchy without too much resistance. Every BJP chief minister across states is now under 70, many in

Supreme Leader within the BJP, a lofty status that allows him unbridled power to do as he pleases, as witnessed in the surgical strike on the entire Gujarat cabinet last week. A less domineering leader would have struggled with the pulls and pressures of party factionalism as a weakened Congress leadership has realized in recent times. Only an imperious 'high command' where the lines between decisiveness and dictatorial behavior are blurred has the capacity to ease out the old guard without demur.

Interestingly, the regional parties that increasingly resemble tightly controlled family run businesses are even more prone to being run by leaders who simply will not 'retire' or give way easily to even their own children. The indefatigable Sharad Pawar at 80 remains the Nationalist Congress Party's tallest leader. For almost half a century, M Karunanidhi was the DMK's mascot. It is only illness that

has almost forced Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prasad to relinquish power to the next generation of Yadav leaders. While in Odisha, the 75 year old visibly tiring Naveen Patnaik remains the Biju Janata Dal's solitary figure with no clarity yet on who will succeed him.

In the absence of inner party democracy, arriving at a fine balance between a younger citizen demographic and an ageing political leadership seems difficult. In politics, the premium placed on 'experience' and 'stature' makes it even more problematic to bring about any dramatic instant change. Here are a few practical suggestions offered to break the geriatric deadlock.

* A legislative amendment by which there are term limits – say a maximum of four to five terms for any MLA or MP, not age but term based.

* Rotation policy for leadership positions in any party organization. No individual for example can be party president for more than two terms up to a maximum of four years each.

One person one post principle at all levels, including party committees. At least half the tickets distributed during an election must be mandatorily given to individuals below the age of 50.

Create a formal system of political mentorship that promotes a healthy, less fractious relationship between generations.

The question now is, which party leadership will show the gumption to bite the bullet before it's too late? Or does eternal power remain the ultimate elixir of life? Post-script: Since the 'marg-darshakmandal' concept is seen as one possible way in which to usher in a generational shift, here is a key question: will Mr Modi who turns 75 in 2025 apply the same 'retirement' rule to himself? Or will he, like Captain Amarinder Singh and many others, insist that they wish to continue to 'serve the people' in perpetuity?

(The writer is senior journalist and author)

Rahul infuses new blood in Congress

By Sushil Kutty

Former Jawaharlal University Students Union president Kanhaiya Kumar would henceforth be Congress neta not CPI 'comrade'. Ditto Jignesh Mevani, 'independent' MLA from Vadnagar, Gujarat. The two will grace Congress ranks. Rahul Gandhi himself was at the forefront to welcome the two into the grand old party. People consider them both "catch" of the day, month and year. The Congress couldn't be more pleased.

How CPI leaders are taking this shift in allegiance is anybody's guess. D. Raja, CPI General Secretary, was nowhere lacking or lagging when the "merciless state" was gunning for Kanhaiya Kumar during the 'tukde-

tukde' days, when he was hauled to jail by the Modi Government for being "anti-national". D. Raja and the CPI stood by him and in 2019 the CPI gave him a party ticket to contest the 2019 general elections.

Kanhaiya Kumar fought from Begusarai, his home district in Bihar, pitted against Union Minister Giriraj Singh. It was a tough nail-biting contest and, say CPI supporters, if it wasn't because of elements of the RJD, who betrayed their own party's decision, Kanhaiya Kumar would have won hands down. He lost but he won the hearts of the young. He had the full backing of the national CPI leadership. He was made a member of the national executive committee at a young age. The CPI nursed high expectations from him in respect of galvanizing the young as also the party organization in Bihar.

That way, Kanhaiya Kumar's leaving the CPI and joining the Congress is certainly a big loss to the CPI, but CPI is an ideologically driven organization and it can absorb the exit, however

influential the person might be. But taking into account the dwindling nature of CPI influence among the youth, the CPI leadership should have made all efforts to sort out his grievances, if any. However, the party sources say that KK never mentioned any intention of leaving the Party and joining the Congress.

Jignesh Mevani also has a winning way to him, both in winning elections, and in winning friends. The Congress, of course, was giving top billing to Kanhaiya Kumar. At least the Congress headquarters, 24 Akbar Road, was festooned

with hoardings welcoming Kanhaiya Kumar on board, not one but a bunch of them standing side by side.

Jignesh Mevani also found mention, but the picture closer to Rahul Gandhi on the hoardings was that of the former JNSU President, not of Jignesh Mevani. Maybe because JNU is in the same city Delhi and Vadnagar, Mevani's constituency, in faraway Gujarat. In fact, CPI leaders got news of Kanhaiya Kumar jumping ship from Jignesh Mevani.

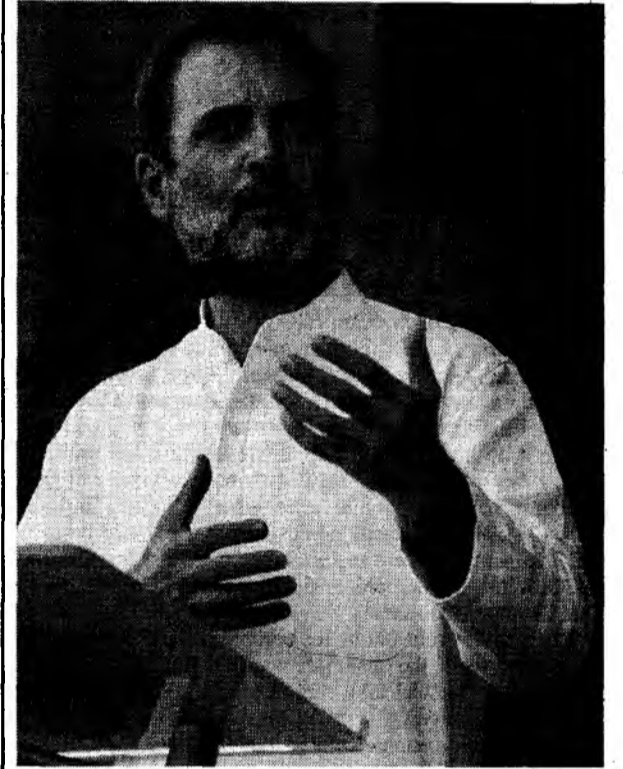
Mevani addressed a presser and revealed that he and Kanhaiya Kumar would join the Congress on September 28. Informed of this, D Raja replied, "Let us see." They say Kanhaiya Kumar

was "unhappy" because he wasn't given a bigger role in the CPI. Some even say that Kanhaiya Kumar wanted to be "state party chief" but those are the matters decided by party leadership, not by the claimant.

Rahul Gandhi is in the process of building a "young leadership" that will stand behind him through thick and thin. Kanhaiya Kumar shot to limelight in 2016 when he was arrested and charged with sedition. At that time, Rahul Gandhi had visited JNU to sit in solidarity with the students. And Kanhaiya Kumar might have drawn Rahul's attention since then

For the Congress, Kanhaiya Kumar is a "revolutionary youth leader" who will strengthen the Congress at a time when the Congress party has been falling behind other political parties in terms of electoral victories. Kanhaiya Kumar is a charismatic young leader and is extremely popular among the youth. He's also a fiery orator.

The induction of Kanhaiya Kumar and Jignesh Mevani is a sign of Rahul



Former Jawaharlal University Students Union president Kanhaiya Kumar would henceforth be Congress neta not CPI 'comrade'. Ditto Jignesh Mevani, 'independent' MLA from Vadnagar, Gujarat. The two will grace Congress ranks.

Both KK and Jignesh Mevani are great fighters and they are against the BJP-RSS combination. If both of them give some additional ammo to the Congress and opposition's fight against the BJP, that will be a big contribution to the opposition including the CPI."

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

Letters to the Editor

Mockery of education

Editor, Since the onset of Covid-19 in March last year, educational institutions in the State have adopted online classes especially for the higher classes. However, one school which has completely turned a blind eye to online classes is Pine Mount School in Shillong. There was no effort by the Principal and the teachers of the school to start the classes and the students were left at their own mercy to educate themselves. Very rarely and randomly few teachers, based on God knows what instinct, suddenly send messages on Whatsapp to students to do some work on their own and then they disappear for a few weeks. Education for them is only sending some instructions on Whatsapp. Other schools have exploited Apps like Google meet for online classes. The teachers were and are still least bothered about their responsibility as educators and are happy to draw salaries without teaching.

The school Principal is also least bothered to instruct teachers to take online classes as they get regular salaries and nobody dares to ask them. They should leave their jobs if it is painful for them to perform their duties. The district school inspector or any authority is also shy of taking any action and are just happy doing their desk jobs. Moreover, the

parents are also scared that any complaint against the school might lead to punishment of their wards. I ask the Education Minister to please immediately enquire about the pathetic role of the Principal and teachers in the school and set up a Committee to find out the current state of education in Pine Mount School.

Yours etc., Donald Swer Shillong - 22

Urgent need for stable, effective governance

Editor, Before I start I want to clarify that I am a simple citizen with no preference or leanings towards any political party, dispensation or ideology. I harbour no political ambitions and my only desire is for effective governance where citizens like me can feel safe, secure and at ease with the performance of the Government we have elected for ourselves. I hate to say it but the truth has to be said and the truth is that under this MDA Govt there is no longer any semblance of governance in the state! No one seems to know what is going on and worse no one seems to care either. We are all in the dark as to the direction the state is headed for but from media reports it seems that we are permanently on a back-slide

in almost every aspect of human development. Law and order is on the verge of collapse and at one point of time a part of our capital, Shillong, was held hostage by a hysterical mob who blatantly extolled, eulogised and elevated a former terrorist, mass murderer and extortionist as a martyr and hero of the Khasis. Have we all gone mad? The silence on the incident, especially from the Chief Minister and his Home Minister was shocking. Where are the leaders to lead the people and the state?

The message the people of Meghalaya are getting from this MDA Govt are most distressing. The immediate impression collected from the deeds and actions of the two NPP brothers in the Government is that Meghalaya and its resources are being systematically exploited to fund the national ambition of the party. Another senior Cabinet Minister is there simply to augment the prospects of his own family business by grabbing all Government contracts. Looting the state for personal gains seems to be the vogue. Its team B partner, the UDP fares no better. In fact the UDP is proving day by day to be totally unfit to call itself the champion of the hill people. It was quick to demand the recall of the Home portfolio from James Sangma, but has chosen to remain blind and silent to the scams of the Social Welfare Dept and the non-performance of the Education and Home Dept, both of which are incidentally

manned by UDP members. The party has managed to add hypocrisy to the list of evils usually associated with unprincipled politics. One would also like to solve the mystery as to why the Speaker of the House, supposedly a neutral entity, has to follow wherever the Chief Minister goes like Mary's little lamb? The less said the better about the other MDA partners the BJP, HSPDP and the PDF. It's obvious they are simply hanging on to the Government as mere decorative pieces. Their contribution to the overall governance and welfare of the state till date is a big Zero. It would therefore not be unrealistic to describe the MDA as a big colony of leeches.

So what hope do the people of the state have for 2023? The need of the hour is for a majority ruled, stable, no-nonsense leadership to take over the reins of Government. A Government that has the ability to deliver. The Congress is no assembly of angels and saints but at this moment, for better or for worse, it seems to be the only hope for Meghalaya, but unfortunately it too is a house divided within itself. To come to power it has to do an immediate introspection and reconsolidate itself. Personal interests and ambitions should be discarded in the interests of the state and its people. Vincent Pala is a go-getter with the agreeable demeanour to patch up differences among disgruntled members. But by no stretch of the imagination can he be described as Chief Minister

material. He should be satisfied to continue serving the state as its representative in the Lok Sabha. Mukul Sangma has had his innings as CM but many are not happy with his style of leadership. Many see him as good MP material. Why not him as the 2024 MP Party candidate from Garo Hills as he would be sure to unseat the voiceless Agatha?

For the Congress to come back with a thumping majority in 2023 there is a need for the party to declare beforehand its CM candidate. For this there is none better than RG Lyngdoh. Declare RG as the CM for 2023 and bag the majority of the 36 seats from Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Let Dr. Mukul canvass for the party from Garo Hills as he is sure to make possible the return of quite a number Congress seats. A win-win situation for the Congress and why not? This is bound to get the Congress a comfortable Majority in the House and give Meghalaya, after its bitter tryst with incompetence, taste once again the fruits of governance and development all framed within the Rule of Law.

Yours etc., Shaikupar Lyngdoh, Shillong-8

The political circus begins

Editor, The upcoming bye-election in 3 constituencies would be an interesting game to watch how the regional

parties that are allies of the NPP will pit one against the other while Congress and BJP would be pitting against all and one another in a different game. So, all the rhetoric that is spewed on the media or on public platforms would be just an eyewash. The UDP has gone on an overdrive telling people that it is not Team B but Team A in the State. Well then my question is - what has the Party done in respect to its coalition ties with NPP if it's really a team leader? A team leader should basically lead from the front and excel in quality leadership but from what is evident it doesn't demonstrate those qualities. The BJP too which follows its 'Masters Voice' against corruption has in fact compromised on its principles so we need not say much. The NCP has even gone to the extent of asking parties not to put up a candidate against a family member of a deceased candidate. The question is - have we sold our democratic rights to family dynastic politics? The election drama as predicted would be full of surprises, thrilling and akin to betting on a "Teer" counter. The party that hits the bull's eye will call the shots for the 2023 state assembly elections.

Yours etc... Dominic Stadlin Wankhar Shillong