

"A man only learns in two ways, one by reading, and the other by association with smarter people." —Will Rogers

The Shillong Times

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Promise of growth

IN the run-up to the Union Budget, it was time for stock-taking on the national economy based on multiple parameters including the performances by various sectors. The Economic Survey 2023 prepared by chief economic adviser Anantha Nageswaran and presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on Tuesday forecast India's growth for the next fiscal to be 6.5 per cent — a slight fall from the seven per cent this fiscal. Compared to a global average of 3 per cent, this pace of growth in the post-Covid-19 phase is perhaps a reassurance that the national economy is performing well.

On the positive side, the number of SMEs coming up with IPOs almost doubled while the total funds raised by them were three times the receipts of the previous fiscal. The post-Covid economic recovery is "complete" and non-banking and corporate sectors have healthy balance sheets. India is the largest recipient of remittances in the world, it receiving \$100 billion in 2022, a "major source of external financing after service export." The automobile sector is now a key driver of economic growth, the nation being the third largest automobile market, surpassing Japan and Germany in terms of sales. This is reflective of the purchasing power of the middle and higher income groups. Annual FDI equity inflows in the manufacturing sector have doubled over a year to \$21 billion. The budgeted expenditure on the health sector reached 2.1 per cent of the GDP against 1.6 per cent the previous fiscal. The Centre's capital expenditure for roads and highways at more than Rs1.49 lakh crore meant a rise of 102 per cent year-on-year. The capital expenditure for Defence services this fiscal was more than Rs1.52 lakh crore — a marginal rise of 0.88 per cent year-on-year. On the Welfare front, the Centre has spent Rs3.5 lakh crore on the free food programme as part of its poverty alleviation programmes. In the health care sector too, there was a substantial jump in governmental spending.

On the negative side, industrial output faced constraints this fiscal because of "high rainfall" affecting output in sectors like real estate and construction. Manufacturing output was hit by "inventory build-up and uneven growth." Automobile and electronics sectors did well while sectors like textiles did not due to "poor global demand." Export growth, hit this fiscal year, may slow further and "remain weak in view of the global recession." To sum up, India rated as the world's fifth largest economy, registers the "fastest growth" among major economies. The document also stresses that the fiscal parameters would continue to improve even as the advanced economies faced recessionary trends.

New Year resolutions Prime Minister Modi is unlikely to make or keep

By Derek O'Brien

Own up to the demoralisation disaster. Ensure zero deaths from manual scavenging. Do you think Prime Minister Narendra Modi makes New Year resolutions? I have no idea. Maybe he does, maybe he doesn't. Either way, here is a list of New Year resolutions which he will not make (or keep) in 2023.

First New Year resolution: Hold a press conference. When was the last time PM Modi formally addressed the media? The master of the monologue deserves an entry in the 2023 edition of The Guinness Book of World Records. He hasn't held a press conference since assuming

the Prime Minister in June 2015, the initial deadline of 2020 has been pushed back to June 2023. Work orders have been issued for 7,738 projects out of which only about two-thirds have been completed. 63 per cent of the amount allocated by the Union government has been utilised till now. How will the remaining 36 per cent of the projects be completed in the next few months? Little wonder, the PM, his ministers, bureaucrats and government-friendly media platforms rarely mention the term Smart City.

by the 15th Finance Commission is 41 per cent. However, in 2022-23, the states' share in central taxes is estimated to be just 30 per cent. The revenue collected from GST as a percentage of GDP continues to be lower than revenue collected through taxes submitted in GST. Revenue collected from GST was 5.88 per cent of GDP in 2021-22, while the revenues from taxes submitted under GST was 6.68 per cent of GDP in 2016-17. States have suffered as the revenue growth rate of many of them, including Bengal, was higher in the

demoralisation disaster. Demoralisation was announced in November 2016 with the aim of curbing black money and eliminating terror financing. "Give me 50 days," Modi dramatically said, "and punish me if the problem persists." It's been a while. Over 99.3 per cent of the notes that were invalidated were returned to the banks. The value of fake currency notes seized in 2017 was 76.5 per cent higher than 2016. More than half of the total value of the seized fake currency was in new Rs 2,000 notes. So, after all, let's hope that in 2023 he will at least acknowledge that demoralisation was a failed stunt.



office in 2014. The practice of holding structured press conferences in the conference hall of Vigyan Bhawan (later held in the New Media Centre, Delhi) dates back to Jawaharlal Nehru in the mid 1950s. Subsequently, this established mode of communication was adopted by many prime ministers. Our current PM prefers one-way communication like his radio address, puffly tweets and, of course, playing teleprompter tag. For the record, Modi was a part of a press conference held at the BJP headquarters in Delhi in 2019. It is another matter that all the questions at that presser were answered by Amit Shah. (The method of using a teleprompter has been quickly adopted by a follow-up presser from Gujarat, who recently created a flutter by even using the T device while being interviewed by a television channel.)

Second New Year resolution: Mention the term Smart City. Smart City is a good brand name. But beyond that? Launched by

Third New Year resolution: Improve his abysmal record in Parliament. The archival links on the Prime Minister of India's website provide records for the "PM in Parliament" for former Prime Ministers: For Manmohan Singh, the page shows 71 speeches made in Parliament while the number is six for Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Shockingly, the records for "PM in Parliament" are missing altogether on the much flashier looking website dedicated to the current PM. What could be the reason for this? During the general elections in 2022, PM Modi addressed 31 public rallies and three roadshows, but participated in zero discussions on Bills, and answered zero questions in Parliament for the whole of 2022.

Seventh New Year resolution: Ensure zero deaths from manual scavenging. In an answer given in the Rajya Sabha, the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment said in August 2022 that there have been no deaths in India due to manual scavenging. However, it was stated on the same day that 352 persons have died due to accidents while undertaking hazardous work of sewers and septic tanks during the last five years. Will the PM tell us when this number will become zero?

This column was written in mid-January 2023. In December 2023, I would request the publication to post this piece again. Another year. Another set of broken New Year resolutions. (The writer is Member of Parliament and Leader All India Triamool Congress Parliamentary Party, Rajya Sabha. Article published by arrangement with The Indian Express.)

Letters to the Editor

Failure of PHED to implement JJM Scheme Editor, In March last year, the Government of India sanctioned a water supply scheme for our village near Sohlong under Jal Jeevan Mission. We were all ecstatic that drinking water facilities would finally be available within our households. Months have passed and it is almost a year now, implementation of the scheme has not started for reasons known only to the PHED Department. Last November, I went to the office of the SDO, PHE, Sohlong to enquire about the delay in the scheme implementation. I was told by the staff that the SDO is not available on that day. They asked me to come the next day. The next day the same thing happened and the following week too. I later came to know that the SDO of PHE Sohlong comes to office only twice a week. Then I got my answer! It was obvious why there was a delay. The worry is that our village is not the only one; there are many villages nearby that suffer the same ordeal. It is time for the PHED Department functions then. I don't know how the State bagged an award in JPM implementation last year.

Through your esteemed magazine, I humbly request the Government and concerned authorities to look into this matter and resolve it soon for the well-being of the people in rural areas. Yours etc., Manshohor Kynah, Sohlong Constituency

Transactional versus transformational leadership Editor, Over the years we have seen Meghalaya's state politics and its reformations. One such transformation is the rise of "transactional" leaders. These leaders turn the entire state into a machine for their own benefit. Since the State will be going to the polls on February 27, to elect representatives to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly for a five-year term, I see clear "transactional" leaders, not "transformational" leaders. The biggest mistake that we as an electorate make when we elect a representative is to choose the person who lacks the basic understanding of democracy and skills needed to be a politician. Our foremost duty in this state assembly election is to lift the state from poverty through honest and effective

governance. Let us remember that elections serve two main functions in representative democracies: they allow voters to select the politicians that best represent their preferences and to punish incumbents that misbehave and are corrupt. Because corruption is the abuse of office for illicit ends. James Freeman Clarke said, "A politician thinks of the next election. A statesman, of the next generation." We need to vote for statesmen. Yours etc., Dr. Omairin Kynah, Via email

Congress call for alliance a wise move Editor, The behaviour of the UDP and HSPBP the latter deceiving the legacy of the firebrand leader, Hopingstone Lyngdoh, who never lost election till his last breath and the former a leader like BH Lyngdoh a shrewd politician who would not help his own son to get a job in his government; also his shrewdness in denying the agreed term of 2.5 years to the would be successor to the CM's post, all prove that both will club with Central Sangma's JPM after the results. It will be back to

the 2018-2023 model! BJP though true side-lined from 2018, divorced the MDA a little too late is sure to regain NPP especially with Prime Minister, Modi carefully adjusting between Sanbor Shalla BJP and Central Sangma. During Modi's visit to Shillong he seemed to endorse everything that the MDA government had done. The majority of voters in Jaintia Hills bombarded with freebies for the last one year had forgotten the FCI rice episode and the death of the Lulka due to excessive loss that ministers have for cement plants. The lawmusing with mounds of garbage is also forgotten. The poor tractors transporting coal for high level owners are themselves starving. The Mukroh tragedy is also already forgotten. After freebies were given to three churches as shown on social media. Unless an alliance of the three like-minded parties is made in Jania we would repeat the 2019 Lok Sabha election results in which 69% lost to 31% and we call it the world's largest party.

The Khasi Hills too require alliances. One example: Laitumkhrah has three strong candidates. The VPP and Congress should have an understanding or how to play in this election. The Poll alliance is a must. Meghalaya has one electoral disease in which the constituency of one person in Jaintia Hills does not feel the pain for poor implementation of the SSA scheme and Adhoc and contractual teachers. The rest of Jaintia Hills does not feel for the Lamsahang and Brishmyim people about to shift to safer environmental ground and nor do they feel for Suanga and its polluting illegal plants run by benami owners from Rajasthan. Voters don't remember the Marion stench or the leathery mindset of MUDA. SBHlongies don't feel for the people living in borders from Wakhait to Borhait who have now lost their paddy fields and orchards by unlawful international border fencing right across. Of course, in December 2022, one candidate of the TMC has run in the Home Secretary, Meghalaya to intervene. There is no sign of any action on this front till date. SBHlongies don't feel for people of Rhoi who now fear that casinos will come up in their areas as soon as poll results are declared.

The church leaders' forum would not get any respect from either the Chief Minister or the Deputy. Just wait and watch. The casino

promises huge profits unlike the little influence of a few lakhs rupees. Casinos will rake in crores of rupees by attracting millionaires from across the globe. Unless the electorate knows the facts that old campaigners should united with their boss, the NPP chief. The dome collapse; the MoU on Phlangkara and Maikhuli, CAA, the push for HIndi, not questioning the 20 crore wastes on the ISBI roof and a walls that leaked; the red buses of only 9 years old junked to the lowest bidder. There is as yet no sign of the medical college, health card, Anamnic, Megha Meme, Tekel Upharsin, which means, "Thou an weighed, numbered and found wanting."

Yours etc., Nongkrem

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Is the movie Pathaan a Game-Changer?

By H. Srikanth

That I am a movie buff is a fact. I enjoy watching and talking about movies. I like Shah Rukh Khan as an actor. But that is no reason I go gaga about his comeback movie, Pathaan, now running in packed houses and breaking all box-office records. Pathaan is no path-breaking movie; it is a mass appeal action spy thriller with riveting songs, dance, fights, and a dose of patriotism. There is nothing more to say about the content of the movie. Still, I feel the need to talk about the movie as it is a game-changer that could reverse the politics of hate that the regime has been perpetuating in the country in the name of religion.

Hollywood is the biggest entertainment industry in the country, providing livelihood to thousands of artists, technicians, and professionals. Every year, artists from different parts of the country flock to Hollywood to try their luck in the film industry. Bollywood produced several maverick blockbusters and also several experimental movies that touched the hearts of millions of spectators in the country and abroad. For a long time, it remained an inspiration to regional film industries. Many movies from Bollywood were remade in different regional industries.

Known for its plurality, Bollywood, like Indian cricket, remained secular in large measure. Although there are some big players, it is not monopolized by any one community, religion, or region. The people work in the industry without bothering about the religious identities of the actors and other artists. Many leading actors, directors, singers, music directors, lyricists and writers belonging to the Muslim community have made their mark in Bollywood. The Indian audience loved them as much as they did with Rajesh Khanna, Hema Malini, Ramesh Sippy and Kishor Kumar. The moviegoers are crazy about their favorite actors. They want to see their movies but also show an interest in private lives of the lead actors and their love stories, heart-breaks, marriages, divorce, rivalry and friendship. To the audience at large, the actors' religion, region and caste hardly matter.

Bollywood, which had a glorious past, has not been doing well in the last few decades. It has seen little creativity and innovations in recent decades, been slow selling, or in using technology. Unlike the actors and artists of the earlier times who were products of progressive organizations and movements, the new breed of Bollywood filmmakers has no organic association with the people and the society. The stories they were ever repetitive and divorced from social reality. Although it is often exaggerated, still there is some truth in the allegations of nepotism and the mafia influence in the industry. The movie industry in the south has been doing well on all fronts compared to Bollywood. There is indeed a need for Bollywood to reflect and innovate. Positive criticism of Bollywood was indeed needed. But that did not happen, instead, Bollywood has become a target of attack by rightwing ideologues in the country for other reasons.

Anti-Bollywood trend is to be seen in the context of political changes taking place in the country. In the last three decades, efforts are on to attack the secular fabric of the nation and convert India into a Hindu nation. Apart from controlling politics and the economy, the regime has been attempting to control and direct people's religious beliefs and culture to attain their political goals. It is here that they find Bollywood a stumbling block. Pre-eminence status of the Khans and the commanding hold of the left liberals in Bollywood became an eyecore to the saffron brigade, which cannot think beyond Hindu-Muslim divide. The communal or sectarian bias of Modi and his team has everything and everyone in Bollywood who did not share the vision of Hindutva. Hence, they have been painting Bollywood as anti-Hindu and anti-national. Instead of viewing artists as artists, they

identified actors and film artists based on religion and political ideology. Naturally, they opposed not only the paritization of Pakistani artists but also Indian Muslim actors and artists working in Bollywood. The Khans are seen not as actors, but as individuals belonging to an enemy religion. Because the Khans are Muslims, the saffron brigade concludes, the said actors cannot but be pro-Pakistan, pro-Mafia and, hence, anti-national. It is therefore necessary that their films, irrespective of the content, must be banned. Apart from the movies of the Khans, even the movies of liberal and left oriented Hindus should also be boycotted, as they are also 'anti-Hindu' and 'anti-national'.

Boycott gangs allege that all Bollywood movies glorify the Mughal 'invaders', and hurt the sentiments by insulting Hindu history, culture, and traditions. The Censor Board's certification is not enough to release the movies that touch the hearts of millions of spectators in the country and abroad. For a long time, it remained an inspiration to regional film industries. Many movies from Bollywood were remade in different regional industries, barring the movies of those 'national' actors and directors, who were under political regime. The boycott trend, which started with the movie 'Padmaava', picked up momentum in the name of a secular environment, some decent movies like Lal Singh Chaddha that portrayed the growing religious intolerance, marriage, divorce, rivalry and friendship. To the audience at large, the actors' religion, region and caste hardly matter. Bollywood, which had a glorious past, has not been doing well in the last few decades. It has seen little creativity and innovations in recent decades, been slow selling, or in using technology. Unlike the actors and artists of the earlier times who were products of progressive organizations and movements, the new breed of Bollywood filmmakers has no organic association with the people and the society. The stories they were ever repetitive and divorced from social reality. Although it is often exaggerated, still there is some truth in the allegations of nepotism and the mafia influence in the industry. The movie industry in the south has been doing well on all fronts compared to Bollywood. There is indeed a need for Bollywood to reflect and innovate. Positive criticism of Bollywood was indeed needed. But that did not happen, instead, Bollywood has become a target of attack by rightwing ideologues in the country for other reasons.

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"Transparency increases credibility and accountability."  
— Park Won-soon

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2023

CONGRESS revival imminent

THE Congress Party at the national level has gained much traction from the Bharat Jodo Yatra. The 4000 km long journey undertaken by Rahul Gandhi in 146 days has raised hopes among those that cherish an India where the soul breathes free and the state has not turned into a big brother constantly keeping a watch on what documentaries people choose to view, which movies are to be banned which ones to be watched. Since 2014 there has been an air of despondency for those who believe in the diversity and happy co-existence among people of all faiths. Religion never became a political prop. Today for the BJP, the main draw for the 2024 parliamentary elections would be the completion of the Ram temple as if, on that structure, hinges the future and progress of this nation. A temple is meaningless if people don't have adequate healthcare. Today the out of pocket expenses on healthcare is at an all-time high because the state has not made healthcare accessible to rural habitats.

Since the pandemic unemployment has risen manifold and a good number of factory workers have not found new jobs. There is heartburn among the youth on the bleak employment scenario especially for the less skilled among them. The education system is broken as it produces too many people with degrees but without adequate reasoning power and therefore the inability to innovate. Creativity is stifled by regimentation. India needs an ecosystem where ideas are respected, incubated and nurtured. India's economic model has produced a few billionaires who enjoy state patronage and whose incomes derive from the rest of the population. They run business empires which rely on state institutions that could collapse if the business venture fails. The Congress Party must engage itself with how to fix this broken system. It cannot continue to critique the Modi government at the Centre without coming up with alternatives such as building a robust economic model; an education system that empowers ideas to take wings and a health system that all can access. The Congress must introspect on what actually brought it down other than the runaway corruption by a few in government, business and politics. Unless there is a serious soul-searching, people will soon forget the Bharat Jodo Yatra which will be subsumed by the noise of right wing extremism.

India needs to grow in an atmosphere where public goods are accessible not by virtue of their political leanings but because the Constitution guarantees them those. In Meghalaya, the Congress is perhaps the only Party that has set up quite a few women candidates. Other parties, particularly the regional parties, remain gender blind and only pay lip service to women's empowerment. It is not easy to decimate a Party that has a history of leading the freedom struggle. However, the Congress needs to learn important lessons from its period in exile.

Letters to the Editor

Save the broken education system!

Editor,  
It seems my mind is wired up with flasks, beakers and test tubes. I have very strong opinions and thoughts on these two areas, but that's too exhaustive for this column. Remember politicians and bureaucrats: YOU ARE WHAT YOU ARE TODAY BECAUSE OF YOUR TEACHERS! So, with your hands on your hearts, I implore the new ruling government to be excited and enthusiastic in lifting the quality and standard of education at the school level.

Yours etc.,  
Kevin Phillips  
Shillong - 19

and B Ed colleges indeed have to be overhauled. However, I will say that they must be relevant and not outdated! I have very strong opinions and thoughts on these two areas, but that's too exhaustive for this column. Remember politicians and bureaucrats: YOU ARE WHAT YOU ARE TODAY BECAUSE OF YOUR TEACHERS! So, with your hands on your hearts, I implore the new ruling government to be excited and enthusiastic in lifting the quality and standard of education at the school level.

Sad demise of the Lukha

Editor,  
I read with great pain and dismay the article 'The Lukha River is Dead: An Obituary by W. Pasah (ST Jan 31, 2023) and wonder why this issue is not even mentioned by any politician past and present. Not a single politician is ready to lift a finger to save the dead Lukha river and other rivers in different parts of the State of Meghalaya. The Union Minister in Smit issued to wash vehicles right in the middle.

Introspection into Meghalaya's economy on its 50th year

By RV Warji

Meghalaya at Fifty 1972-2022, is condensed into a 141 page kind of coffee table book published by the Department of Education, Government of Meghalaya. It's a good record about Meghalaya's Freedom Fighters, Traditional institutions of Meghalaya and Traditional games of Meghalaya. The same cannot be said for the very sketchy chapter called 'An Overview of the Economy of Meghalaya'. It should have been 'On the Economic Progress of Meghalaya'. Why? Because fundamentally, culture, belief and practices, traditions, society and life in general, can sustain only on the basis of economic progress. Fall of empires, nations and societies took place essentially because of economic upheavals. Instead, the chapter contains a surfeit of piecemeals which are easily available on Google and other tourist literature. There is nothing reflective or introspective of the past fifty years. As such Meghalaya at Fifty turns out to be okay, only as a feel good book. Here is my critique.

Given that the elections to the state legislature is due, the book could have provided some opportunity for aspiring law makers or legislators to envision a Meghalaya for the next 50 years. A glimpse not only of the past but also a spark to the future: systemic and institutional changes and change of mindset that should have taken place but were not able to. How long can Meghalaya carry on as a special category state? What happens if there is no more Sixth Schedule and removal of the several reservations, protection and exemptions from paying income tax etc. does happen?

Then there is a need to look beyond one's interstate and international borders and boundaries in this transnational digital age. Also the significance of trade, commerce and exports. The book mentions nothing about investment. There's no mention of the economic policy, strategy or medium term plan for Meghalaya: in short some road map for the future generation. That after fifty years when Meghalaya celebrates its centenary, the people of Meghalaya would feel in par with the rest of the states in India and the world itself and devoid of any psyche of inferiority. A reality check to show that Meghalaya has graduated from a politically mobilized society to a society that is economically mobilized. The above is an imperative particularly because of the preponderance of a plethora of pressure groups which have become

like a parallel government. Meghalaya. Government portal has been adopting the data format as per Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 17 goals under it. The same format could have been followed for the last fifty years. It would enable, for instance, to compare the poverty levels with the growth in state domestic product or per capita income. The graph on State Domestic Product gives the figure of Rs 2,89,284 lakh in 1980-81 increases to Rs 28,34,392 lakhs in 2018-19. The other on Per Capita Income says

"Most states in India have come out with a policy to promote investments. They mention among other things the kinds of incentives with regard to land availability, supply of power, tax holiday etc. Meghalaya needs to do the same in a manner which fits into the ecosystem of Meghalaya."

Rs 21,921 in 1980-81 and Rs 79,573 in 2018-19. There should also have been some cognition on policies and qualitative factors like human resource, technology etc. which led to the increase in State Domestic Product. Coloured graphs on Sectoral Distribution of State Income placed the primary sector (Agriculture, fishing and logging, industry, mining and quarrying) at 37% in 1980-81 and decreases to 23% in 2018-19. Tertiary sector (Industry & Construction) at 19% in 1980-81 decreases to 17% in 2018-19 and the tertiary sector of services, trade, repair, services, hotels and restaurants, transport, storage, communication & services related to broadcasting, financial services, public administration and other services) at 44% in 1980-81 increases to 66% in 2018-19. Distribution of workers in 2017-18 stood at primary sector 57%, secondary sector 13% and tertiary sector 30%. In Agriculture so much has been touted about going organic? The growth of the service sector is universal. At the same time IT and ITES (IT enabled services) are not even mentioned. Some data on women's role in economic development is commendable. What about the role of single mothers which is widely prevalent. Key areas on the State's achievements included road

connectivity and air connectivity have been written about but there's nothing about quality of roads and the market for air connectivity to sustain. There's nothing on rural connectivity, let alone digital connectivity which is paramount in the inevitably growing knowledge based economy.

Natural resources: The primary source of all economic activities is the availability of land. Farmers need land to cultivate and produce food. Land is required for livestock. Forests grow on land. There cannot be housing without land. Factories have to be built on land. Roads, markets, sports etc. need land. Even technology parks need land. Optimization on the use of land, access a major determinant of economic prosperity. An urgent reform on land beginning with cadastral survey for proper land records is called for. One reads that 76% of the population in Meghalaya is landless. There's a need for necessary legislation even if means a Land Ceiling Act. There's a need to look at the effectiveness of the Land Transfer Act.

Human resources: Meghalaya at Fifty contains some data on the progress in education and health which are the primary prerequisites for any economic progress. Dang Xiaoping, the architect of the economic reforms in China, chose to be the party top functionary on education and health that made China what it is today. It may be recalled that in the 1980s India and China were more or less at the same level regarding levels of poverty, literacy, per capita income, infant mortality rate etc. Today the economy of China is more than five times that of India. Western investment into China poured in, in a big way because of availability of skilled labour that correlated with education. There is however no data on the proper utilization of the human resources. No data on

skilled labour or personnel. Technology: The ubiquitous mobile phone is now in everybody's hands and pockets irrespective of profession, income level, gender or age. There should have been data on the density of mobile phones and access to the internet. The availability and efficiency of networking and laying down of fibre optics. Publicity on the launching of 5G is welcome but at least there should have been data on the efficacy of the 4G and to what extent there is a ready infrastructure for 5G. I'd like to see a big talk about technology will come a cropper without a dependable and reliable supply of power.

Capital Formation: There is a line in Meghalaya at Fifty which says "With the right kind of investment in infrastructure and a system of incentives, it can be a hub for the high value service sector. This is imperative in the face of growing unemployment among the educated youth." The question remains what are the skills and levels of knowledge of the so called educated youth? Most states in India have come out with a policy to promote investments. They mention among other things the kinds of incentives with regard to land availability, supply of power, tax holiday etc. Meghalaya needs to do the same in a manner which fits into the ecosystem of Meghalaya. It is well recognized that whereas it is the capitalist western system or the communist but market driven economy of China or the increasingly expanding private sector economy of India, it is capital formation or investments which have revolutionized the economic and technological landscape. Without capital there cannot be any economic activity, be it micro, medium or big.

At the same time lies the danger of the state allying with capital that can lead to a few thousand families controlling the resources of the State. It is crucial to realize that the economy of Meghalaya cannot remain stagnant or dependent from the central government for the next 50 years. Hopefully, notwithstanding the degree of seriousness of the manifesto of political parties in Meghalaya, will for the record, go beyond the competitive populism and welfareism and instead lay down some realistic and reformist vision and strategy for the next fifty years. Some kaleidoscope for the youth to visualize their future is the need of the hour.

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Dark clouds as we head into Budget 2024

By Jagdish Rattanani

The fourth and the last full-fledged Union Budget of the Narendra Modi government's second term, scheduled to be presented to Parliament on Wednesday, comes amid some dark clouds or the global scene. Globally, growth is down, inflation is up, geo-political tensions are on the rise, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is unending and the outlook is not exactly sunny. Luc Frieden, President of Euro-chamber ("the eyes, ears and voice of the business community at EU level") was quoted by Reuters as saying last week: "In the short term, we are in a difficult economic situation." And according to the IMF, more than a third of the global economy has contracted in 2022 and is expected to further do so in 2023. This indicates the problems of all levels that will exact a toll on India.

But India itself is at a difficult time. We are headed into a round of general elections that will bring new pressures to make promises and sanction expenditures to secure

the vote perils of a so-called election-year budget. Many analysts say this is a temptation that the government should and will resist. It has a vote-on-account to give goodies next year, closer to the 2024 elections. A Haasberg survey of economists showed that a majority expect the budget to steer clear of populist measures and focus on strengthening manufacturing and creating jobs. The fiscal is under pressure and has not recovered fully from the impact of Covid-19. As we know, the fiscal deficit ballooned to 9.2% of GDP in 2020-21, twice that than seen in 2019-20, and was pegged at 6.4% in 2022-23 (Budget Estimates), a decent pull back from the abyss, but the government's last year of keeping a 5% deficit below 4.5% by 2025-26 may not be easy to reach given the conditions. Today, private investment's picking up, inflation (particularly the core inflation which excludes volatile food and fuel prices) is persistent, excise and customs receipts are projected to be down, and disinvestment will be a challenging as ever. If not more so. The government has therefore limited fiscal space for bold action.

One of the big challenges of the government is creating employment opportunities for the youth, with ugly unemployment numbers coming out as a consistent feature of the economy and raising fears of a demographic disaster. Expert some push in this direction, the move to build Chinese-style mega plants, as appears to be the plan given the recent agreements between Foxconn and Vedanta (tells us that India will bring jobs via large factories where the only skill is India's labourer's sweat and price. It is not in dispute that the Chinese factories are built on exploitative models so had that workers there have committed suicide and the factories had to put up nets to stop others from jumping to their death.

Can this be the answer to India's jobs crisis? The counterargument that this is only the beginning of a semiconductor push in India is fair but misses the point that the dynamics of low-end assembly are very different from an economy known for design, manufacture and solutions up the value chain. Moreover, this is a centralized way of growing jobs in concentrated packs rather than a thriving decentralized economy where MSMEs in lakhs and large-scale business in their thousands are firing away on multiple fronts to create an energy that drives sustainable growth and brings a widespread jobs market for all kinds of skills and specialties. There is new attention needed on agriculture which has supported growth and employs a vast majority of Indians. After the farm laws failed, there has to be a new push for development, productivity, marketing, and the creation of new linkages between agriculture and industry. How can the government offer new solutions to excite farmers without bringing back anxieties that it created with the farm laws? This is one big question that the Union Budget 2024 must answer.



can't the Meghalaya High Court save us from this onslaught of cement companies which also depend largely on the coal legibility mind to fire up their factories in cement production. All the illegalities are connected. Who will save us from callous companies and greedy politicians?

Yours etc.,  
LN Rymbai,  
Via email

Back to Mandal politics

Editor,  
Whatever is happening in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh clearly indicates that the country is again reverting to Mandal politics which needs to be curbed at the earliest as the country is already facing many problems. In such a scenario both sides will be responsible for forming communal tensions and such types of elements should not be encouraged as it will harm the social fabric of the country. A group supporting Maurya, called the Akhil Bharatiya OBC Mahasabha, on Sunday in Vrindavan burned photocopies of the pages allegedly carrying "objectionable comments on

women and Dalits" in Ramcharitmanas. Days before these incidents, the Ayodhya court had slammed Bihar Minister Chandra Shekhar for the latter's comment that the epic is 'divisive and spreads hatred in society. This is a tried and tested trick every political party deploys: it allows one of its leaders to say things which may not be generally defensible, and then it distances itself from his or her remarks, calling them the 'personal views' of the person concerned. And there are no consequences for the leader for having made objectionable remarks.

There is an idiom for such behaviour: Running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. Therefore, it is quite evident that the SP and the RJD (whose member Chandra Shekhar is) are trying to play the blame game. The Mandal Commission Report, whose implementation triggered the rise of OBC politics, also included several recommendations which were not very charitable to Brahmins. Both SP and RJD - and even the RJD's ally in Bihar, JDU - are the beneficiaries

of Mandal. The spectacular rise of the BJP in the last decade was the result of the Modi-Amit Shah duo eclipsed caste-oriented OBC politics, but only the most toxic of Hindu zealots would say that caste has ceased to be a reality in India. In fact, even the BJP acknowledges this fact, this is the reason that many of the elevations made by the saffron party in the last few decades have been influenced by the social engineering dogma. Mandal parties seem to be going back to basics - or, to be precise, the basic: caste. Hence the persistent demand for caste census. They know that caste is an emotive issue, and it is easier to convince people by making emotional appeals than by making reasonable arguments. The BJP has been doing the same thing, though it relies on different kinds of emotions. We must get ready for more sentimentalism in politics.

Yours etc.,  
Yash Pal Rattanani,  
Via email

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"Find a peace inside where there's joy, and the joy will burn out the pain."  
— Joseph Campbell

The Shillong Times

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Growth as priority

A peace-all budget is the antithesis of a progressive budget, while a growth-oriented budget cares for the interests of the nation. When the nation grows, individuals benefit by way of a trickle-down effect. The growth of the nation and the individuals are, therefore, supplementary and complementary to each other. The Narendra Modi government had, through its past nine years, sought to balance between the interests of the nation and the aspirations of the people. Hence, when the world is caught in a fresh bout of recessionary trends, India keeps its head up. The national economy is registering an impressive 6 per cent growth and the deficit is progressively brought down. While the base for Modern India was laid by successive governments since the 1990s, the Modi government carried this push forward. It, however, so happened that the rich have become richer and the poor benefited only marginally. The problem is also the population budge, at nearly 1.4 billion. The Union Budget for 2023-24 must be seen against this backdrop.

The budget introduced in Parliament on Wednesday by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has its major emphasis on infrastructure development, which would uplift the nation and indirectly reach its benefits in both immediate and long-term to the people. The priorities under the Saptarishi vision to turn India into the level of an advanced nation by year 2047 — the hundredth year of Independence — has its focus on infra development, health care, education and women empowerment with major emphasis also on the farm sector growth. The budget also lays stress on skill development, encouragement to agriculture start-ups including rural start-ups, widening the reach of SG, tribal empowerment, major allocations for fisheries sector etc.

A 30 per cent hike has been effected in the allocations for infra development, which would also mean a big push to the MSME sector that has the potential to create jobs on a massive scale. Some 50 new airports have been planned against the present 137. The railway sector got Rs 2.40 lakh crore, the highest-ever allocation. A 15,000 crore rupees allocation for tribal development is targeted also at the upcoming elections in the North-East just as a Rs 5,300 crore offer made to poll-bound Karnataka for irrigation purposes. The allocations for MGNREGA job guarantee scheme for rural areas have been cut by one-fifth, which is being highlighted by the opposition as a major "flaw" in the budget proposals. Such cuts have helped in earmarking funds for infra development and ensuring a 13 per cent hike in defence allocations. The income tax structure has been simplified and the resultant burden on a major segment of the population reduced. On the whole this seems like a good budget.

Letters to the Editor

NPP: An ensemble of entertainers we don't need at all

Editor,  
As election day draws near more and more fun is being added by the politicians against our desire. Topping the entertainers is the National People's Party. It has some of the most unfavorable characters and more and more are being added as the D-day approaches. It has among its candidates someone who believes in openly fooling the public by offering money and offering cosmetics to make people in different constituencies look attractive in exchange for votes. It also has a candidate who has already declared that he and his family members are guaranteed first row seats in Heaven. I don't understand what else he wants to achieve by being in politics except to plunder the adorable State of ours and reduce it to abject poverty and lawlessness before occupying their high seat in Heaven.

Then there is the candidate who has been charged by CBI in the education scam and is trying to avoid conviction by associating with anyone in power in the State. Now

she is invoking the judicial system to bail her out of that mess. Recently, another candidate joined the troupe and ignorantly compared the election of MLA to the election of Pastor or Rangbhalang Tymben Hasan, ignorantly. First thing first, Pastors are not elected, they have to qualify and undergo a rigorous course, pass it and then be ordained as a Pastor — a long process. Secondly, I wish the election of MP/MLA/MDC are done like the election of Rangbhalang Tymben Hasan. In that election, the total bonafide members (Ricwickhot) have to be at least 50% present and voting and one must secure 2/3rd votes to be elected as Rangbhalang Tymben Hasan. My humble appeal to all voters in different constituencies is please reject these sanguinary people. We don't need people who are only catering to their constituencies, families and their businesses and are least bothered about the overall development of the entire State of Meghalaya. How many of them have ever opened their mouths in Assembly in the last 5 years? The answer is big fat zero.

Let's get rid of NPP otherwise Meghalaya is guaranteed to be the next Bihar of 15-20 years ago where the politicians have sucked every flesh out of the State and left it with only the skeleton during Lulu Prasad

Meghalaya elections 2023: Why do we want change?

By Patricia Mukhim

As elections approach, it is normal for sitting MLAs and beneficiaries of largesse from the present government to desire its continuance. The former don't want to give up their perks; the latter don't want to lose business opportunities and have to contend with a new government and a new set of ministers. Some individuals and groups have had more than their share of contract work. The wealth ranking of hangers on has risen substantially in the last five years and they want that to continue. These groups have a vested interest in wanting the NPP-UIJP-BJP-PDP combine to return. For now these three parties particularly the UIJP are trying to throw mud in our eyes by attacking their senior partner in the MDA Government, the NPP. The UIJP has not spoken a word against the BJP, knowing fully well that 2024 will see the return of Modi and the BJP and the continued subservience of Meghalaya to whoever rules Delhi. So for now the UIJP sees the BJP as a potential partner and will not mind sharing power with the NPP yet again should that Party get over 15 seats.

Political parties therefore are shrewd manipulators. All the pious mumbo-jumbo about serving the people is so much trash! All they want is power. Power to continue their wealth creation projects; power to build bigger mansions; power to send their kids to the US/UK and all the best destinations to study. Without power all those aspirations might turn to futile wishes except for some in the NPP who have really been on a property buying spree in Shillong city and can well capitalize on those properties. If this same group returns we can imagine just how much lower Meghalaya will sink. At present 32.7% of our people live below the poverty line. When Meghalaya was born we were better off. There were not so many landless, poverty-stricken folk. It has taken 50 years of self-serving politics to bring us where we are today.

**Manifesto: Why the delay?**  
A political party is expected to have some cherished principles and some goalposts for the voters. What are the goalposts for the UIJP? The NPP? We know the intentions of the TMC from its 64 page manifesto. The TMC has promised fresher but has not indicated where the resources to meet the expenditures will come

from. Of course women need social and economic safety nets but they are willing to work for it so let the TMC not turn our people into beggars looking for a free ride. It's not a good idea at all! On the contrary the TMC should get an economist with no strings attached to study the economy of Meghalaya and propose some concrete solutions. No political party can do patchwork. Things have to be very clear. We need to know where the problem lies and find the means and the methods to address those pain points. Questions such as (1) Why is Meghalaya resource rich but money poor, need straight answers. (2) How has Meghalaya used its land, forest, mineral, water and agricultural resources? (3) Who benefited from all these resources? (4) Who owns the bulk of the land in Meghalaya today? Do we have transparent records? If someone has bought property at the speed of sound don't we have the right to know how that person came into so much money? What business is the person doing? What are the person's known sources of income? A

Why don't these groups speak up at the stark inequalities in this same society.

Do these groups believe that we can't see through their shenanigans? Are they not as avaricious as politicians? Aren't their ambitions also about amassing power and influence?

society that keeps the above information a closely guarded secret is actually nurturing the proverbial "filen" for why should only a few become rich at the cost of the many?

A tribal society is not supposed to nurture such disparate inequalities as we see today. Yet any government we elect is unwilling to do a caste/survey even today. I am waiting to see which political party will be bold enough to commit to a cadastral survey. I know the BJP, UIJP, NPP, Congress will not for obvious reasons. Too many of their leaders own too much property. The TMC does not have cadastral survey in its agenda. The other day I heard the VPP President speaking and he mentioned cadastral survey or something of that effect.

Come elections and the pressure grows soon to go underground. After the elec-

tions we will again hear them asserting that they are the custodians of tribal rights. Why don't these groups speak up at the stark inequalities in this same society? Do these groups believe that we can't see through their shenanigans? Are they not as avaricious as politicians? Aren't their ambitions also about amassing power and influence? Otherwise by now these groups should have organized public meetings where sitting MLAs would be held accountable and the new ones being asked what they will do differently.

Also why the delay in circulating the manifestos? Are political parties going to pick issues from the grand and then craft out a manifesto that reflects people's aspirations?

**Does money win elections?**  
Let's not overrate and discount the role played by the big moneybags in elections. These moneybags study the electoral prospects of each candidate and bet on the most probable winning horse. Its usually one who has been in power; one they have done deals with; one whose moods

and responses they can predict and whose weaknesses they have a handle on. Every such "winnable" candidate has some businessman working behind the scenes to ensure he/she gets elected. Moneybags will not bet on a new face that desires to change the system because business people don't want a system change. They love predictability and they prefer to do business with those that are not capricious. Believe me, in Meghalaya business has always dictated who wins and who loses.

**Fragnated voters:**  
Meghalaya society is not homogeneous by any yardstick. There is the affluent class that breathes a different air and we can see this from the opulent destination weddings that are aired on social media. Even Hollywood weddings are not as ostentatious. In fact, in

whenever he believes in the Span of God is saved irrespective of whether the person is rich or poor, literate or illiterate, master or slave, healthy or sickly. Amen.

Yours etc.,  
Toris Mark,  
Via email

**Real change is just a distant dream**

Editor,  
Elections are just round the corner and the whole state is in election mood but the million-dollar question is whether real change is round the corner?

In the last election, expectations were in the air since the electorate felt that things were going to change for the better but sadly in the last five years, the high hope and expectations have vanished into thin air. In the last decade or so, our state has been in a downward spiral marked by soaring youth unemployment and a stagnant economy. The education system has now become redundant in agriculture is still the main sector of our economy. There's no sign of our economy transitioning from a rural based agrarian economy into a modern economy.

In other states of the country especially the southern states, manufacturing

the west guest list includes just a couple hundred. Here we have thousands of guests. Somewhere beyond the hills where the weddings are held are little hamlets where people are still unsure of two square meals. But what we don't see doesn't hurt us. So people think it's better to remain distant and unconcerned about the poverty that is slowly eroding over 50% of our people and for which no one is taking responsibility. Especially not the political parties.

We don't vote as a society. We vote to suit our personal agenda. We also don't vote for political parties; we vote for the individual we believe is best to feel our pain (this in case of the poor, neglected voters whose voices are stifled). The affluent will vote for the person who they believe will continue to feed from their hand and what they can capitalize from.

Incidentally, even government employees (and there are quite a few) who have benefited from the benevolence of this government by way of giving them a free run of the land and not subjecting them to strict accountability. They include in the main the H&S Development Officers (HDOs) whose wealth ranking has risen up in the last five years. And because tribal officers don't compulsorily have to submit the list of their assets, properties on joining office and how much they and their spouses own today, Meghalaya has become the uneven playing field of the opportunists. To be a journalist is suffer from information overload about which one can do so little. Alas! All we can do is write and hope that one day justice prevails.

The Meghalaya High Court has pointed out so blatantly how government officials have been complicit in the illegal mining and transportation of coal and in facilitating the setting up of coke factories. Yet no one can take action against these government employees who have amassed wealth beyond their known sources of income. We the next government have the muscle and the will to deal with such rapacious types? Let's see who forms the Government on March 3. Will money be the Waterloo of Meghalaya yet again? Time will tell whether the poverty stricken will vote for change. If they vote back a government that deprives them of their rights, then they will have to themselves to blame.

Yours etc.,  
Gary Marhabang,  
Via email

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

Poor allocation to health in the budget to have serious implications  
No effort by Modi gov't to implement universal healthcare scheme

By Dr Arun Mitra

Much was expected from the budget presented by the Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2023. As this was the last budget of the present government before the upcoming elections to the parliament next year, people had high hopes of relief in various sectors including health. Thumping the chest by the BJP members and its allies in NDA apart the allocation to health in the budget completely belied people's aspirations. This is apparently because health and education are not taken as assets by the governments in power in our country.

It is in this context that there is a decrease in allocation to health sector in the budget presented by the FM. In the budget presented last year out of 39.45 lakh crores rupees of total budget the health was allocated Rs. 66600 crores that is 2.19% of the budget. But this year health has been allocated Rs. 8956 crores out of the total budget of 45 lakh crores rupees. This is affecting nutrition of the marginalized sections. The allocation to Poshan Abhiyan was reduced last year out of Rs. 3700 crore to Rs. 2700 crore. This is affecting nutrition of the marginalized sections. The allocation for MGNREGA is cut from Rs. 89,400 crore to Rs. 60,000 crores. Further, rural development allocation has been reduced from Rs. 2,43,317 crore in the revised estimate to Rs. 2,38,204 crore of the total budget expenditure, it is getting 5% and that shows the low priority of the gov-



ernment for the rural sector. Poor allocation to the rural sector and MGNREGA will reduce the purchasing capacity of the people thus affecting their nutrition. With under nutrition it would be naive to expect better health indicators among the people.

There is talk of increasing nursing colleges. But unless this is accompanied with job employment for them they will be left to work in the private sector at very low wages or migrate to other countries for better opportunities.

The Community Health Centres (CHCs) such as the first referral centres and are supposed to have a surgeon, an obstetrician-gynaecologist, a paediatrician, a physician and an anaesthetist. But there is over 80% shortfall in surgeons and paediatricians, and an over 70% shortfall in physicians and obstetrician-gynaecologists. There is no plan or intention to fill these vacancies despite the fact that the number of doctors coming out every year has increased but because of lack of infrastructural facilities in the rural areas most of them opt for the private sector or migrate to other countries.

There is emphasis on Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode in the health sector through which money will be shelled to the private players.

The whole exercise of budgetary allocation is not going to improve health services in the country and show no sign of universal health care. There is a need to increase the budgetary allocation to 10% of the revenue budget if the health services have to be made inclusive for all sections of the society (IPA Service)

"If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading."

The Shillong Times

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Cancer still the killer disease

IT is unfortunate that the country is so dependent on revenue from the tobacco industry that cigarettes and bidi cannot be banned. Smoking is linked to many types of cancer, including cancer of the lung, mouth, throat, voice box, pancreas, bladder, cervix and kidney. Even passive smoking which children and other smokers are subjected to when one member of the family smokes inside the house around other family members, especially children. This increases the risk of lung cancer. But it's not only smoking that's harmful. Chewing tobacco has been linked to cancer of the mouth, throat and pancreas. But in Meghalaya tobacco is still a hot selling product. Perhaps the campaign against tobacco has not gained the momentum it deserves. But there are enough studies to prove that staying away from tobacco or deciding to stop using it is an important way to help prevent cancer.

In Meghalaya the use of betel nut is also linked to stomach and oesophageal cancers but the State finds itself in a bind and cannot prohibit the chewing of betel but because this happens to be a source of livelihood for so many growers in Meghalaya. It's a catch 22 situation. It also true that a healthy lifestyle which comes with weight control, regular exercise and above all eating a healthy diet. Women are susceptible to cervical cancer, breast cancer and uterine cancer. Doctors always advise that women get regular check up in these vulnerable locations but as generally happens women always put off going for check-ups until it's too late. Perhaps the awareness campaign for women to get themselves examined regularly to avoid preventable diseases like cancer needs to gain momentum.

The Harvard Health Publishing lays down a few ground rules to prevent cancer. They include avoiding exposure to industrial and environmental toxins such as asbestos, fibres, benzene, aromatic amines, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). There are infections that contribute to cancer such as hepatitis viruses, HIV and the and the human papillomavirus. Many are transmitted sexually or through contaminated needles. That is why there are free needle exchange programmes for drug addicts in most states barring Meghalaya. Doctors also suggest that quality sleep is a priority even if the evidence linking poor sleep to cancer is not strong. But they say poor and insufficient sleep is associated with weight gain which is a cancer risk factor. There are also suggestions from experts that getting enough Vitamin D which is near impossible to attain without a supplement, can keep cancers of the colon and prostate at bay. These are suggestions but doctors rue the fact that while cancer is preventable not enough is being done on the preventive aspects even as families spend considerable sums of money on the curative aspect, very often outside the state. People should know that NEIGRIHMS has some of the best treatment facilities for cancer patients today

Letters to the Editor

Why pavements now?

Editor, While it is nice to see that pavements along the Laitumkhrab main road are being given a facelift, it is very irksome to see that none of these pavements in the city have wheelchair accessibility. Even though most of our schools, colleges and offices have made provisions, something as simple as a footpath is not accessible to the differently-abled. We still see people on wheelchairs having to ply on the road, constantly having to dodge speeding vehicles. Even the visually-impaired struggle to walk along these footpaths and walkways in our city. It is truly a sad sight. Maybe this is what happens when people who don't have the slightest civic sense nor any dignified civic qualifications

get voted to power? Elections are round the corner, let us make the right choice. Yours etc., Corinne War Shillong - 3

Why this penchant to cut down trees?

Editor, I would like to draw your kind attention to the ongoing mass felling of trees and construction work happening at Umroi Road, Umiam, all of it within 1.5 km distance from the dam for setting up of a gas boiling unit. This unit is coming up right opposite the residential college of Post Graduate Studies in Agricultural College. A hotting plant opposite to a residential educational institution should have raised

World Cancer Day, February 4, 2022 Fifty years of statehood: Why does Meghalaya top the list?

By Dr Caleb Harris

As Meghalaya celebrates fifty years of statehood, we have been treated to several articles extolling the achievements of the state in the past five decades. Looking back into our past is necessary to ensure that we do not repeat our mistakes and also encourage us to build up on our successes. While a lot has been written about achievements in education, law and order, connectivity, being a doctor, I pondered over the state of healthcare in Meghalaya. As a surgical

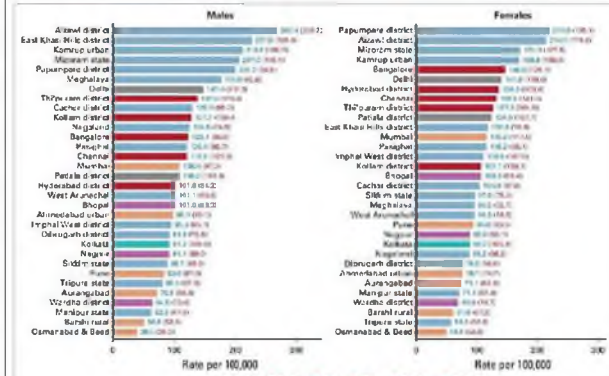
specialist, one in NEIGRIHMS and the other in Civil Hospital, Shillong, both being technologically advanced machines. We also have the necessary technical expertise to operate these machines. Once the 252-bed Regional Cancer Center at NEIGRIHMS is functional, we would have a comprehensive cancer treatment facility and would be amongst the cancer care being provided.

man with people, they often quip that probably there is some genetic problem in Northeast India, due to which people get more cancer than the rest of India. While that needs more research (which is being carried out), one cannot ignore the fact that we know the reason for high cancer rates in Northeast India. This report also gives data pertaining to cancers which are known to be caused by tobacco-Meghalaya tops

Survey (GYTS 2019). This is another form of a bomb which these youngsters are handling, and if we do not intervene now, there would be long term ramifications, not only on the health of the individuals, but also on other aspects of the society.

While India has excellent laws to curb the use of tobacco, unfortunately, the implementation is rather poor. The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade

The National Cancer Registry Program Report released in 2020



oncologist (cancer surgeon), I would confine to my area of expertise, cancer care. When a society invests in good roads, the results may be visible immediately, but investments in health and education would show major returns only after several years. So our current state is the result of efforts put in several years earlier. World Cancer Day, observed on February 4th annually, is an initiative of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC). The theme for this year is 'Closing the gap in cancer care'. The UICC says that, 'Half the world's population lacks access to the full range of essential health services. When it comes to cancer, many are denied basic care, despite the fact that we live in a time of awe-inspiring advances in cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment. People who seek cancer care hit barriers at every turn. Income, education, geographical location and discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and lifestyle are just a few of the factors that can negatively affect care.'

Several patients rue the fact that the cancer care facilities in Meghalaya are inadequate. We have only one radiotherapy machine and many patients end up traveling outside the state. But we would soon see two more machines being in-

But is increasing cancer treatment facilities the only answer to cancer? For long we have focused a lot on treating the 'tree' without adequate focus on treating the 'cause'. The National Health Policy has seen a shift in focus towards health promotion, which is the need of the hour.

The National Cancer Registry Program Report released in 2020 is an important document which enables us to understand the burden of cancer in India. The data pertaining to all patients diagnosed with cancer in India are recorded into 'Cancer Registries' and this is analysed at regular intervals to provide us with valuable information which helps shape health policy. One of the important information provided in this report is the number of persons afflicted by cancer in each district/state. East Khasi Hills is second on this list with 228 males per one lakh population being affected with cancer. It is sad to note that only the states from Northeast India have crossed the 200 mark in this list, with the other states in the country well below the 150 mark. All these are Age Adjusted Rates (AAR), meaning that the differences in demographics are accounted for. To give another perspective, one in four men below the age of 74 in East Khasi Hills is likely to develop cancer.

When I stare this infographic (cancer surgeon), I would confine to my area of expertise, cancer care. When a society invests in good roads, the results may be visible immediately, but investments in health and education would show major returns only after several years. So our current state is the result of efforts put in several years earlier. World Cancer Day, observed on February 4th annually, is an initiative of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC). The theme for this year is 'Closing the gap in cancer care'. The UICC says that, 'Half the world's population lacks access to the full range of essential health services. When it comes to cancer, many are denied basic care, despite the fact that we live in a time of awe-inspiring advances in cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment. People who seek cancer care hit barriers at every turn. Income, education, geographical location and discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and lifestyle are just a few of the factors that can negatively affect care.'

the list! It is sad to note that 70.4% of cancers in men and 46.5% of cancers in women of East Khasi Hills District are recorded in this list, with all tobacco-related cancers and by shunning tobacco, we would be left with fewer cancers to treat. As per the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS 2016-17), 47% of people in Meghalaya use tobacco, as compared to the national average of 28.4%.

Tobacco, in any form, is the most important cause of cancer. The use of kawai (betel nut) can also independently (without the use of tobacco) cause cancers. Meghalaya has among the highest rates of esophageal (food pipe) cancer in the world. Tobacco, heated nut and alcohol are group 1 carcinogens, yet are abused by a majority of the population, including women.

The UICC adds, 'The most disadvantaged groups are also more likely to have increased exposures to a host of other risk factors, like tobacco, unhealthy diet or environmental hazards'. We were all shocked to hear that 17 year olds in the prime accused in the recent bombing to disturb the peace of Shillong and it is good that the society is awakened by such signs of depravity. I wish the same society wakes up to the fact that 34% of our youngsters (13-15 year old) consume tobacco according to the Global Youth Tobacco

and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 or COTPA, 2003 provides the legal basis for curbing the use of tobacco. As per this Act, there should not be any smoking activity or sale of tobacco within 100 yards of all educational institutions. The Health and Education Ministers of Meghalaya have implemented the 'Tobacco Free Educational Institution' (TofEI) program to curb use of Tobacco by school students. But this needs the cooperation from the parents and other members of the society. The civil society and religious organisations can also independently curb tobacco, as this would transform the state over the next decade. The society should share the burden of changing this deplorable distinction of Meghalaya topping the list for tobacco-related cancers in India.

Meghalaya has come up with a State Health Policy, which aspires to improve the life expectancy in the state from the current 62.3 years (national average 68.8) to 70 years by the year 2025. This will never be possible by improving healthcare facilities in the state, but can only be done by curbing tobacco, which is a much cheaper intervention.

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India's G20 Presidency Uniquely Indian perspective

By Dr. D.K. Giri

The G20 year under India's leadership has begun. People from across various sectors - government and non-governmental, business, and social - are pooling to make the year memorable and worthwhile. The events leading up to the Summit are being planned. These have also a few ideas that could shape policies across the country. India as the President of G20 could introduce them in various events around the Summit.

First and foremost, there should be prudent and pragmatic energy policies across the world. At present, there is universal fight for fossil fuels with horrible consequences. The Ukraine war, although not caused by an energy conflict, is being influenced by energy concerns. There is a need for immediate shift to renewable energies as against the big lobbies operating in favour of gigantic oil companies. The poor and developing countries should have equal and affordable access to energy resources. The rich and powerful countries should not continue to impose their models of growth based on heavy technologies ruthlessly exploiting the nature.

India has a strong tradition of living in harmony with nature and many Indian beliefs and practices emphasise the importance of preserving the natural environment. India could give a push for renewable energy cutting out rhetoric, promote sustainability and environmental security and encourage other countries to do the same. India should have no control or try to conquer it. That leads to the second idea of how a human-centric and nature-friendly approach to economic planning and political management could be fostered.

Third, paying attention to the social development based on family systems, social harmony, cultural accommodation, and regional cohesiveness. It is popularly held that a country is a family of families. That logic can be extended beyond the countries too.

This is in keeping with the slogan, which is deeply meaningful and emotional, enunciated by India for the 2023 Summit of G20 which is 'one earth, one family, one future'. Despite massive developments in economy, technology and indeed other sectors, societies are torn apart by jealousy, hatred, and violence. This is a paradoxical paradigm - the development and decay embedded in our current governance models. This also reflects the profound remark made by Maxim Gorky, "man has learned to fly like a bird in the air and swim like a fish in water but fails to learn to live peacefully with his neighbour".

Such familial culture is unique to India. The structure of Indian families is such that they manifest a loving hierarchical authority vested in the head of a family who is usually the father or in his absence the first-born. At the same time, there is a process of consultation with each of the family members as a decision is taken; the family is imbued with a spirit of mutual sacrifice, best exemplified in the 'apple story' circulating in the development sector.

The story goes, an apple was found by the father of a poor family, who did not eat it as he thought that his wife was preparing food for everybody in the family, and she should have it. The wife thought that it is her son who is growing without sufficient food, so she should have it in full instead of cutting it into

pieces. The son thought that his mother is always kind to him and often prefers him to the daughter. This is both a Freudian affinity between opposite sexes as well as a so-called preference for the male child. So, he gave the apple to the daughter, who in her mind thought that it is the father who is toiling and toiling for everyone in the family. So, for his energy, the father should have it. This family feeling has more than one manifestation. One, it is sacrificed, second, it validates the proverbial wisdom, love begets love.

In addition, the importance of family is reflected in the respect for elderly. In India, the elderly are often respected and honoured. There is a universal fight for fossil fuels with horrible consequences. The Ukraine war, although not caused by an energy conflict, is being influenced by energy concerns. There is a need for immediate shift to renewable energies as against the big lobbies operating in favour of gigantic oil companies. The poor and developing countries should have equal and affordable access to energy resources. The rich and powerful countries should not continue to impose their models of growth based on heavy technologies ruthlessly exploiting the nature.

All in all, Indian spirituality is deep which advocates tolerance, accommodation, and synthesis of competing ideas. The last cultural principle is unique to India. Once Netaji Subhash Bose prophesied that "British rule has given to the world Parliament, Russia - the October Revolution, France - liberty, equality with nature and many Indian beliefs and practices emphasise the importance of preserving the natural environment. India could give a push for renewable energy cutting out rhetoric, promote sustainability and environmental security and encourage other countries to do the same. India should have no control or try to conquer it. That leads to the second idea of how a human-centric and nature-friendly approach to economic planning and political management could be fostered."

This is what would be championed by India around G20 in terms of laying out the nature, live with it and no control or try to conquer it. That leads to the second idea of how a human-centric and nature-friendly approach to economic planning and political management could be fostered.

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President to the rescue of poor prisoners

Editor, President Murmu had expressed concerns over poor prisoners who are languishing in the jails due to non deposit of fine imposed by the courts. Financial support will be given to poor persons languishing in jails who are unable to afford the penalty and bail amount. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said President Droupadi Murmu had in November last year suggested decongesting jails by helping the poor languishing there for years for petty crime.

"It is said that jails are getting overcrowded and there is a need to set up more jails. What is the need for more jails? We need to reduce their number," the

President had said on Constitution Day, Murmu had said there was a need to do something for poor people languishing in jail. "You need to do something for these people. Who are these people in jails? They do not know their fundamental rights, the Preamble or fundamental duties," Murmu had said. "If people landing up in prison for petty crime are a burden on the government, I leave this wish to the concerned judges and the Law Minister," the President had said, stressing, "Our job is to think about the poor undertrials languishing in jails."

This example shows how a president of country is to you refer to judges and the concerns for the poorest of poor to poor person. Keeping in view the sensitive attitude of the President of country I being a disability activist had sent the representation on behalf

of all disabled who had been denied their legitimate right of full pension as well full family pension. As per media reports the husband of president was in Bank of India so after taking the charge I had sent two reminders but got no response. So through this letter I request her to take into consideration the representation sent by her husband. The disparity exists since the last 26 years and no one takes interest in the problems of the disabled as the number of such persons are very a few and can be counted on the fingertips. I expect that the President of country will take note of the sufferings of the disabled.

Yash Pal Rallian, Via email Articles and Letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

# Justin Bieber sells his back catalogue

## An expert explains why artists give up rights to their music

Justin Bieber is the latest artist in a growing list of musicians who have sold the rights to their music.

This move is typically made by more seasoned artists such as Bruce Springsteen, who reportedly received US\$500m (£406m) for the sale of his life's work in 2021, or Stevie Nicks who sold a share of her publishing for US\$100m in 2020.

Bieber, at the age of 28, has sold his rights to all the music he released before 2023 for a reported US\$200m. Merck Mercuriadis, founder and chief executive officer of Hipgnosis Song Management, who bought the rights, said: "This acquisition ranks among the biggest deals ever made for an artist under the age of 30."

**What does it mean when an artist sells rights to their songs?**

Songs are protected by something called copyright. This is a legal right that the creators can sell or licence in order to make money from their music.

Artists with deals sign over some, or most, of these rights to publishers and record labels. In fact, songs have more than one right attached to them.

There is a right for the composition which can be owned by a publisher, one for the recording which can be owned by the record label and there are also rights in the performance of a song. All this means is that when a song is bought, or performed (e.g. played on the radio, in a film or on TV) the money is divided between all those that have a stake in the music rights.

Justin Bieber has a record deal with Universal Music Group and a publishing deal with Universal Music Publishing Group. So, he owned a percentage of his rights. He shares these rights with his publisher, which owns a percentage of his composition copyright and his record label, which owns a share of his rights attached to the recording of the songs, sometimes referred to as the master recordings.

Bieber sold 100% of his share of his publishing copyright and performance rights, master recordings and neighbouring rights (the performance within the recording) for his entire back catalogue - which includes over 200 tracks - to investment company Hipgnosis Songs Capital. Hipgnosis buys catalogues of music and then manages the rights to make an income from the royalty payments.

This means that when his songs are bought or performed, the share of the income that would have previously been a royalty payment to Bieber, now goes to Hipgnosis. The company is hoping that over time these royalties will exceed the upfront payment it made to Bieber and so it will profit from this investment.

Copyright in the musical composition lasts for 70 years after the death of the creator, so the owner of the copyright can keep receiving royalties for a long time. However, the songs need to be used in order to make an income, so it is a risk.

When artists tour, they can make money from ticket and merchandise sales, but they also receive a



royalty when their music is performed. This sounds great, but the cost of touring is huge and continues to increase, so it doesn't always turn a profit.

Bieber doesn't own his back catalogue anymore, so he won't receive that royalty when he performs those songs. This is unlikely to affect his motivations to tour because it forms a smaller part of the income.

**Why artists are selling their music rights?**

So why would Bieber and other artists want to sell their rights, when they could keep this income for themselves?

For artists who are thinking about retirement, it's a way to enjoy the fruits of their labour and create a pension for themselves. It could be that, because of the pandemic, artists have sold their catalogue

to compensate for loss of revenue while venues and other income streams were lost.

Copyright is an asset that can be left in a will, so for the 70 years that copyright survives the creator, their royalties can go to their heirs. However, copyright must be managed and so it may be more attractive for some to cash-out and leave the administration to the purchaser.

Bieber can still make royalty income on music that he creates from January 2022 onwards, so perhaps he has plans to release new music and in the meantime wanted to increase his current income. The singer had to take time off and postpone tour dates because of difficulties with Ramsay Hunt syndrome, a rare virus that in his case caused facial paralysis, which may have contributed to his decision.

**Is there a risk?**

The risk for Bieber is that, in the long term, he could have made more money from keeping his rights and receiving royalty payments than from the lump-sum payment. To make any more money from music, Bieber will now need to release new songs.

In general, it is essential for artists to retain their rights so that they can continue to benefit from their music over time.

There has been push back from the music industry on similar deals where catalogues are being collated by investment businesses buying out creator copyright.

While it can seem very attractive to receive up-front cash, playing the long game can often be more beneficial for artists. *(The Conversation)*

# What your Zodiac says about your relationship goals

The beginning of the year is a time for optimism, new beginnings, and "positive vibes." Anyone trying to improve their dating profiles and make significant connections will find this formula to be a good one.

Astro Expert Anisha Arora's cosmic energies assist you in determining how your dating life will be in 2023. Add your Relationship Goal to your profile to locate a match who has the same vibe as you, whether you are new pals or still figuring it out.

**ARIES (March 21 - April 19):** As an Aries woman, you bring a lot of excitement to your relationships because of your exuberance and energy. There's no holding back for you when you are in love or looking for a partner; instead, you tend to wear your heart on your sleeve. You love attention (hate having your texts ignored), and are waiting for a match to win you over with some luxurious indulgences! 2023 will be your year.

**Ideal Date:** A long drive  
**Ideal colour:** Red  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Monday  
**Most likely to match with:** Leo, Libra, Sagittarius

**TAURUS (April 20 - May 20):** A Venusian Goddess of Love, you are all about luxury and sensuality. You spend your time daydreaming of the ideal "happily ever after" with your chosen S.O. (significant other). With so much love to give, this year, you will be patient while taking it forward and put your date/match's needs before your own.

**Ideal Date:** Impress your Taurian by taking her to that neighborhood coffee shop and chat about your philosophy.

**Ideal colour:** Pink  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Wednesday  
**Most likely to match with:** Scorpio, Virgo, Pisces

**GEMINI (May 21 - June 20):** A Gemini woman is a free spirit. You are beaming with freshness, creativity and ideas. You have the ability to think quickly on your feet, especially if something

(rather someone) has grabbed your interest. This year, you need to take charge of your love life! The year 2023 calls for letting go of seeking any kind of validation that's stopping you from taking the next step.

**Ideal Date:** Go for a Stand-Up show  
**Ideal colour:** Yellow  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Wednesday

**Ideal Day for a Date:** Monday  
**Most likely to match with:** Pisces, Virgo, Scorpio

**LEO (July 23 - August 22):** A true Lioness, as a Leo woman, you are extremely warm and high-spirited when it comes to expressing your feelings. You will fight tirelessly for the people you love and care for. At the same time, you love to be admired and

from emotional drama and wild obsession. You can see through one quickly, recognise their weaknesses and soft spots, and know how to tread cautiously. It's not easy to impress you but once someone does, you offer them the world. For the Virgo woman, stars in 2023 advise you to go slow.

**Ideal Date:** Spa Sesh  
**Ideal colour:** Keep cool with

relationship you want (need!). Remember to put greater importance on harmony and peace as you try to balance love and life.

**Ideal Date:** A fun shopping spree  
**Ideal Colour:** A shade of lilac  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Friday  
**Most likely to match with:** Aquarius, Gemini, Aries

**SCORPIO (October 23 - November 21):** As a Scorpio woman is known to be bold, sensual and strong headed. In the world of online dating, everyone will find themselves checking you out (at least once). You are intelligent, passionate, loyal, brave, and highly intuitive and are looking for a mind that can match this energy and vibe. As someone who seeks a lavishly bold lifestyle, you will find yourself carefully assessing every (romantic) situation before jumping in this year. Possessiveness is in the blood, soul, and heart of everything you do and will seek a partner who will be generous in giving their attention to you.

**Ideal Date:** A romantic dinner date!  
**Ideal Colour:** Red  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Tuesday  
**Most likely to match with:** Taurus, Leo, Capricorn

**SAGITTARIUS (November 22 - December 21):** As a Sagittarius, you are an independent thinker, risk-taker, and pretty woke when it comes to emotional intelligence, helping you form instant connections. Known to imbibe a 'main character' energy, you need a mental and physical counterpart; someone who can illustrate the mystery of life and love. As someone a bit wary of intimacy, you can find your love naturally blooming from a friendship this year.

**Ideal Date:** An outdoorsy date  
**Ideal colour:** Blue  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Weekend  
**Most likely to match with:** Gemini, Libra, Aries

**CAPRICORN (December**

**22 - January 19):** As a Capricorn woman, you are generally the leader in a group. You are best-known for your persistence and a "never give up" attitude. You excel at flattery and are also known to be your partner's biggest cheerleader. This year, the planets are in your favor! If you are open to it, you will find a match who is willing to work with you and appreciate your best efforts.

**Ideal Date:** Indoor board games  
**Ideal Colour:** Black  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Saturday  
**Most likely to match with:** Taurus, Pisces, Capricorn

**PISCES (February 19 - March 20):** Mystery, sensuality, romance and spirituality define a Piscesian woman. While dating, you are empathetic towards your partner's needs and are always ready to comfort them. Regardless of how well you seem to have it together, you will have moments of doubts. Don't ignore the signs that don't align with your energy.

**Ideal Date:** Buy 2 tickets for that next Sip and Paint class near you  
**Ideal Colour:** Golden Yellow  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Thursday and Friday  
**Most likely to match with:** Cancer, Virgo, Taurus

**AQUARIUS (January 20 - February 18):** Self-reliant and independent, as an Aquarian woman, you are calm and sensitive and absolutely clear about what you want. You never try to fit in and when you do, you'll find your best-bud. Despite your reputation for being a boss woman, you will be happiest when you also have a balanced work-life life.

**Ideal Date:** To share the universal love of food, visit that bakery that has been on your list!  
**Ideal Colour:** Turquoise  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Saturday  
**Most likely to match with:** Gemini, Scorpio, Sagittarius. *(IANS)*



**Most likely to match with:** Aquarius, Gemini, Sagittarius

**CANCER (June 21 - July 22):** Ruled by the moon, you are known to be deeply connected and guided by your emotions. When it comes to matters of the heart you are extremely selfless, devoted and nurturing, yet a strict disciplinarian. Imbibing the mystery and fluidity of water, as a Cancerian female, you have an incredible artistic quality, which manifests itself in your love life.

**Ideal Date:** A walk in the park  
**Ideal colour:** Silver and white

praised for your uniqueness. This year, you must embrace your dating life with romance, passion and fearlessness and let the stars guide you to find your ideal match. But choose someone who will match your energies with an extra dose of kindness and empathy.

**Ideal Date:** Stargazing  
**Ideal colour:** Gold & Shimmer  
**Ideal Day for a Date:** Sunday  
**Most likely to match with:** Virgo, Sagittarius, Aquarius

**VIRGO (August 23 - September 22):** The Perfectionist! Diva. As a Virgo woman, you refrain

from emotional drama and wild obsession. You can see through one quickly, recognise their weaknesses and soft spots, and know how to tread cautiously.

**Ideal Day for a Date:** Wednesday  
**Most likely to match with:** Capricorn, Cancer, Taurus

**LIBRA (September 23 - October 22):** The Libra woman is known for being graceful and glamorous. Even in moments of clumsiness and disorganisation, you know how to carry yourself with a sense of grace. Libras aren't "crazy in love" per se, but you are all about that relationship life, and meaningful ones at that. The year 2023 will bring for you multiple opportunities to put yourself out there and seek the

# Sou Songs: The dazzling diversity of national anthems

By Vikas Datta

Part from the flag, national anthems are the cherished symbols of nationhood. However, as these musical compositions, celebrating the particular country/nation's history and traditions are espoused, destiny, only the cultural epitome of patriotic sentiment?

Examples from around the world show anthems are not only valuable representations of history, politics, and popular sentiments - but also a prime form of literary expression, for they are, essentially poems, whether they praise the nation's history or topography, invoke deities for protection, or call their compatriots to action.

British journalist and anthem expert Alex Marshall divide anthems into four types. And his focus is mainly the music, the lyrics also are key.

The first are the hymn sorts - in both music and lyrics, which Marshall attributes to the prevailing influence of UK's *God Save the King* and colonialism, for cropping up across Africa (say, Kenya's *Ee Mungu Nguvu Yetu* or *Oh God of Our Creation*), Asia, the Caribbean (*Louisa, Land Be*), India, incidentally written by a clergyman), and various Pacific island nations (take *Tuvalu mo i Atua* (*Tuvalu for the Almighty*)).

However, like songs are also found in countries like Hungary's *Himnusz* and Iceland's *Lofsungur* - both meaning hymn.

India's *Jana Gana Mana* is also an example - in its invocation.

Second, there are the ones that sound like military marches.

The "State Anthem of the Soviet Union" and "State Anthem of the Russian Federation" are the best examples, and those of many post-Soviet states are of similar type too. France's *La Marseillaise* is another prime example, with its stirring martial refrain *Aux armes, citoyens/ Form your battalions/ March, march, march.../ To arms, citizens/ Form your battalions/ March, march...*

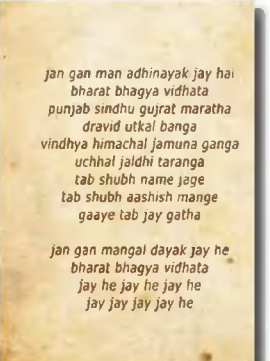
The third are the fanfare an-



**United States**  
The melody of "The Star-Spangled Banner" is based on "To Anacron in Heaven," a British song that celebrates drinking and sex.

**Italy**  
The Italian national anthem has been official since... 2017. Although the song was written in 1847 and became de facto anthem after World War II, the government never put this in writing until November.

**Russia**  
Vladimir Putin established a new Russian national anthem in 2000 that wasn't really so new. It was just an update of the Soviet-era anthem that Stalin approved in 1944.



**India**  
jan gan man adhinayak jai hai bharat bhagya vidhata punjab sindhua gujrat maratha dravid utkal banga vindhya himachal jamuna ganga uchhal jaldhi taranga tab shubh name jage tab shubh aashish mange gaaye tab jai gatha

**Nepal**  
jan gan mangal dayak jai he bharat bhagya vidhata jai he jai he jai he jai he jai he jai he

thems, particularly of the Middle East, which are mostly a few trumpet flourishes, some even lasting even less than a minute.

But, Marshall terms the fourth ones - the epic anthems of South America - the best, despite their tunes ignoring all conventions of anthems, while also being far from short, or easy to sing, being "set out like mini operas, with rollicking openings in which every part of the orchestra seems to outplay the others; melodramatic middle sections... and huge over-the-top finishes, with multiple false endings".

They, he says, feel like songs written for the stage, and it is not surprising that opera composers were behind most of them.

Also in the same mould is Georgia's *Tavisupleba* (*Freedom*), brought in 2004, along with a new flag and symbol, after the 2003 revolution.

Not only is its music taken from the two popular Georgian operas, but the Caucasian nation's public broadcaster often airs a music video version, featuring a

notable opera singer.

However, if we take anthems from all around the world, save for four or five odd, they are all written by eminent poets or litterateurs.

Polyamah Rabindranath Tagore, who bears the unique distinction of having his works figuring as the anthems of two separate countries - and Bangladesh - is the best example.

He is followed by modern Greece's national poet, Dionysios Solomos, whose *cis in Eleutheria* (*Hymn to Liberty*) is the national anthem of his country as well as Cyprus. At 58 stanzas, it is also the longest in the world - however, on most official occasions - only the first two stanzas are used.

Then, Soviet/Russian author Sergey Vladimirovich Mikhailkov, known for children's poetry and satirical fables, was tasked by Stalin himself to write the lyrics to the first Soviet anthem in 1942, and then wrote a revised version adopted in 1977. He was subsequently urged by President

Vladimir Putin to write the new Russian anthem in 2000 at the age of 86. All used the same tune, but Mikhailkov proved his expertise with the lyrics.

While the first Stalin-era version had the refrain as *Be glorified, our free Fatherland/Reliable stronghold of the people's friendship/Banner of the Soviets, the banner of the people/May it lead from victory to victory!*, the 1977 version changed the last two lines to *The Party of Lenin - the strength of the people/Leads us to the triumph of Communism!*. The new Russian anthem goes: *Be glorified, our free Fatherland/ The age-old union of fraternal peoples/Ancestor-given wisdom of the people/Be glorified, country! We are proud of you!*

In the first version, the second stanza was *Through storms, the sign of freedom shone on us/ And Great Lenin Illuminated our path/ Stalin taught us to be faithful to the people/To labor and achievements, we were inspired!*, but the new version removed the reference to Stalin to make the

final two lines: *To a righteous cause, he (Lenin) raised the people/To labor and achievements, we were inspired!*

Top Angolan author Manuel Rui Alves Monteiro wrote his country's *Angola Avante* (*Onward Angola*), which closer to home, Nepal's *Sayann Thunga Phulka* was composed by Pradeep Kumar Rai, alias Byakul Malla, to replace the royalist anthem, and there are many other examples.

Even when political leaders are involved in creating an anthem, it turns out that they are poets too, or otherwise culturally gifted - be in Argentina's *Himno Nacional Argentino*, written by poet and lawmaker Vicente Lopez y Planes, who briefly became President over a decade later, and Burkina Faso's *Le Dyanne* (or *Une Seule Nuit*), written by then revolution-ary President Thomas Sankara, who was also an accomplished jazz pianist.

And then, anthems can be quite jingoistic - while France's *La Marseillaise*, after asking citizens to mobilise, calls for *Qu'on sang*

*impur/Abreuve nos sillons! (Let impure blood/Water our furrows)*. More bloodthirsty is Algeria's *Kassaman* (*The Pledge*), which tells us *When we spoke, nobody listened to us/ So we have taken the noise of gunpowder as our rhythm/And the sound of machine guns as our melody...*

On the other hand, there was the erstwhile GDR's (East Germany) *Auferstanden aus Ruinen* (*Risen from Ruins*), written by its Culture Minister - and poet - Johannes Becher, which stressed that *Let the light of peace shine, so that a mother never again/ Mourns her son...*

There are myriad other aspects, and some can be found in Marshall's *Republic as Death-Travelers in Search of National Anthems* (2015), about his multi-continental odyssey to bring out the nature and history of the songs, which despite being fundamental to "national consciousness", have had the stories of their creation, adoption, and the usually unlucky or forgotten creator rarely, if ever, told. (IANS)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambal

Sunday, FEBRUARY 5, 2023

**'Birth Day Forecast'**  
Venus square Mars on your solar return chart. It will give you mixed results. The number of your enemies increase. But you can learn challenges posed by them with bit of confidence. As a result, due to your good nature and kindness your opponent will become your friends. Money and wealth will keep coming. Your income will also increase. You will take any risk responsibly because the socially friendly. Your businesses will also grow by leaps and bounds. You will have profits. You will remain active in your social life. New job may arise offers will come to you. You could be promoted/elected in your job. All your professional work will be finalized easily and smoothly. There will be an increase in your work potential and output levels. Those who are single will get marriage offers. Astrological functions will bring good.

**'This week for you'**  
**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)** You will have a wonderful time. You will be kept busy in your work. You will complete your task using your initiative. You will focus your energies getting unfinished projects completed. You will give your friends financial assistance. You will be making lot of new people and will be able to complete your task. You will also come in contact with some important person and busy in day in your work. You will sign a lot from home. You will also extend a helping hand to your relatives. You will share wonderful bonding with your relatives/friends. You will also be happy to meet an old friend of yours. You will also receive some pleasant news. The obstacles that you were having in your work will come to an end.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)** Your enemies will not be able to obstruct you. You will face things with a bit of confidence. You will complete your tasks with lot of patience and discretion. You will also take firm decisions regarding your business and work. Your financial condition will also be getting better. You will fulfil obligations of your family. You will take care of the smallest requirement of your family. A sudden accident will confront you in your work. You will have equal understanding with your colleagues. Your work will get done on time. You will also get a pleasant news from somewhere. If any of your hard work you will be able to achieve everything. Your dominions in work related matters will continue.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)** If it going to be a wonderful week. You will participate in a function. You will be happy in the company of your relatives/friends. You will have improvement in your health. You will connect your new and dear ones. You will move towards accomplishing your goals in your work. You will do your work with bit of concentration. Your objectives will be achieved. There will be an increase of happiness in married life. Some new thoughts will come in your mind. You will like to improve a few things in your life. You will have monetary gains. Students will get success in examinations. The teachers that you have thought of will get completed. You will take an important decision in business matters with your wisdom.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)** There will be an increase in your domestic environment. You will feel more energetic and powerful. The matters of people to people contact. You will also do each work with full honesty, hard work and lot of responsibility. Your results will come on expedient basis. You will focus your attention on future goals. There are possibilities of a change of job/business. You will welcome guests at your home. There will be profits in your business and your self confidence will get boosted. There are strong chances of gains in business/profession. You will have money in your hand. You will not be able to drop a single bit of cash. Your enemies and rivals will get defeated.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)** Solving some problems you will have a favorable week. You will enjoy yourself and will also work with lot of dedication. Your job will be stable. New contacts will give you wonderful results. You will make good progress in your business. Some auspicious function will be celebrated in your family. You will buy new items for your house. You will have good social/professional contacts which will make you feel proud. You will develop better skills to influence people. You will enjoy warm relationship with your partner. Your spouse will work with you and you will understand well. Your marital tension will get over. You will get credit for your achievements. Students will perform well.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)** Your financial position will get consolidated. You will get more assurance. You will get promotion in your job as well. Your business will run smoothly. Student will do well in exams/interviews. You will plan for white wash and exterior decoration of your house. You will enjoy your knowledge

You will try to learn something new and implement the same in your work. The tide will be favorable for you. You will get full cooperation from your close ones. You will also get a new vehicle. Your husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. Those in media, politics and sports will do well. Your life will be full of joy and happiness. You will enjoy your daily routine organized.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)** You will have a lot of material pleasures that you can afford easily. You will have money on your hands. You will spend liberally to buy clothes, electronic items, jewelry and household goods. You will also do well in your job. After getting your target you will work very methodically to achieve it. You will also bring about a change in your way of thinking and doing things. You will work very peacefully. Your creative talent would be on the peak. You will achieve it and will remain popular. You will let your work with great enthusiasm and you will let your work enjoy its benefits. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your life partner.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23)** You will have great professional job. Keep a control over your speech. You will have monetary gains. It is time for entertainment and luxury. Taking with your family members will give you lot of satisfaction. You will be full of energy. You will do your job efficiently. You will be once again be full of confidence and courage and hope will flow. You will have wonderful bonding with your life partner. Love matters will have a wonderful time. You will also extend some party/function to your friends. You will also give money to your family and friends. You will also take a little break from work and plan to travel abroad in your life vacations.

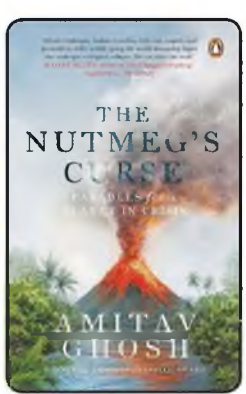
**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)** It is going to be a wonderful time. You will be full of energy. You will have great progress in your job. You will have gains in business. You will also receive love from family members. You will get new business orders that will be profitable. A change of plan according to time will be good. You will get full of appreciation from others for work done by you. Seeing your work being praised by others your workers will be happy and you will get promoted. You need to keep your important documents ready in case of urgent need. People will be attracted to you because of your strong personality. You will get full support from the officials.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)** You will make a budget of your domestic expenses. You will also keep your plans with a lot of quality time with your family and will have wonderful time. You will get full of contribution. You will organize your house and office in a proper manner and your desire to help people will be very strong. You will be capable of finishing your job alone. You will get the blessings of elders. You will get happiness in marital relations. You will understand the feelings and aspirations of your partner well.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)** You will discharge your responsibilities very well. You will also enjoy your work. You will spend quality time with your family and will have wonderful time. You will establish a balance between your work and activities to perfection. You will be fully sympathetic to your children's aspirations and also try to fulfil them. You will have monetary gains. You will also be the recipient of a large sum of money. You will possibly name future state/union. You will receive costly gifts. You might get invited to party or function. You will stick to your work and your personal agenda. You need to be well prepared for any situation. You will be able to meet all your desires in life.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)** These are good days. You will do your daily chores peacefully and successfully. You will have no professional funds. Your marital life will be blessed. Newlywed couples will understand the feeling of each other well. Your travels will be successful. Your works that you had planned will get completed. You will be alone doubt and not lack of determination. You will not be worried of responsibilities. You will have great understanding with your life partner. You will be able to establish a proper balance between your work and family. There are strong chances of improvement in your financial position. You will also plan to start a new business.

# Colonial sentiments rule in Indian mines: Amitav Ghosh



An exploitative economy in all its ruthless facets was the hallmark of colonialism across the globe in the earlier centuries, and the same economics continues to rule in the mineral-rich mines of Jharkhand and Odisha, said renowned writer and Jnanpith Award winner Amitav Ghosh. He said this while speaking at the Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters (MIHL) that has opened here.

Ghosh, who for a brief period, was a faculty at the prestigious Centre for Development Studies here said resources have become the bane of people as their native land comes into the crosshair of exploitative economy.

"The uranium mines of Jharkhand are now being exploited by mining companies at the cost of all the local people whose lives are essentially doomed because of the resources they once had. Another good example is Niyamgiri in Odisha. It is sacred mountains for the Adivasis of the region, but they have been thrown off their land and their land has been seized by mining companies," said Ghosh.

Presenting the background of his book, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, to explain his concern, he said the 1,621 massacre of the native people in the Banda Islands was carried out to control the trade of nutmeg, which was a priced item and grew only in that region due to soil fertility caused by volcanic activity. This later on also led to slavery of people and many were taken from south India to work in nutmeg plantations in Banda.

History is replete with such instances where people and nature became expendable before commercial interests. Iraq and Libya were more modern recent examples of such "extractivist economies", he said.

"Fortunately for a few years in India, we were able to hold extractivism at bay, but now this extractivism is absolutely rampant. It has become the dominant model in the Indian economy," Ghosh said.

This is an exploitative thinking that is rooted in the 17th century European outlook that earth is a dead, clockwork machinery that can be manipulated in any way. The opposition against this was strong even in Europe as people who regarded land as sacred fought this. Women were in the forefront of this fight and the witch-hunt against them is rooted in this confrontation, he explained.

Historians rely on documents and narrations but elements of nature like a tree, mountain or volcano rarely are actors in these documentaries. But the role they played in the history of humankind is decisive, he pointed out. The global elite, who shape the world, consider non-human entities as inert forms.

This is an approach in which a coloniser uses human and non-human beings as resources to be used as slaves and commodities. "This entire continuum was also believed to be subject to the national laws that condemn certain species to extinction and extermination," he added. (IANS)

“Reach for it. Push yourself as far as you can.” — Christa McAuliffe

The Shillong Times

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Saving the girl child

CHILD marriage, admittedly, is among the worst curses on children of both the sexes and more starkly on the lives of girls. India, overall, has nearly 2.5 crore child brides — mostly teenagers — these forming one-third of the 'world total' as per UN estimates. While the problem is not restricted to one state, Assam reportedly has the worst case-scenario. The state has the highest maternal mortality rate and the third highest infant mortality rate, both believed linked to child/teenage marriages. Given the present context, it was logical for the government to act and put things in order. However, rather than going about in a systematic manner and starting with a sufficiently long term of awareness campaign, chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma chose to take the bull by its horns in a ham-handed manner. The arrests and filing of FIRs on thousands of men — fathers of the girls and husbands — in recent days have caused agony and put fear in the minds of such families. Such a style of governance does not augur well for the democratic system. A law that was virtually left in cold storage despite periodic amendments was naturally taken for granted by the people, the poor, the less-informed tribals and illiterate Muslims.

It is well-appreciated that one has to start the process of setting a wrong right at some point of time. Such a strong governmental response was long overdue but successive national and state governments slept over the matter. Even today, other states are reticent about wielding the stick against those promoting this highly condemnable system. The Assam government deserves praise for its action even though the abrupt manner it chose to go 'hammer and tongs' at the law-violators vis-a-vis child marriages is both objectionable and disturbing to the civilized mind. At the same time, since the BJP is ruling Assam, the politics involved in the present offensive is not lost sight of. Poor Muslims, as also tribal communities, showed a tendency to marry off their girls in their childhood or in adolescence both as part of their customs and to escape from the responsibility of safe upkeep of their girls at home for longer periods. Among tribal communities especially, with less security at home, the idea was also to avoid teenage pregnancy of unmarried girls. Muslims are allegedly procreating with "the more the merrier" attitude out of a religious frenzy to increase their population and emerge as the single largest faith in India. If so, the resultant explosion in the nation's population and its ill effects in the long term can be imagined only with a shudder.

Letters to the Editor

Not NPP alone please

Editor, Apropos of the letter "NPP: An ensemble of contentions were not done at all" by Prof Lalbon Kina, (SF Feb 3, 2023), it would be more appropriate if the entire MDA comprising the UDP and the HSPDP are clubbed alongside. The BJP was lucky not to swim with NPP since day one. The only matter of concern is that while they knew that Conrad Sangma only needed them to get the attention of Prime Minister Modi, they still played along. The NPP was trying to get the national party tag despite having only one NPP MP in the 340 strong house. The BJP-NPP divorce came too late. Even with the fearful writing on the wall when the Assembly dome collapsed in absence of any seismic disturbance, the BJP still teamed with NPP, despite getting in return no respect or gratitude at all from CM Conrad Sangma in the last 5 years.

We who were there in front of the State Central library on that evening day and who escorted Mr HS Shylla home to bring the 3 flags had witnessed all events, INC was invincible then but only the 3 flags still alive, indulged in uniting before election to splitting after the swearing in. In 2018 it advantaged the NPP

versus Congress though the latter had a larger mandate. Had they clubbed with the Congress, Meghalaya won't be as it is today with the state hanging by a thread. The behaviour of these regional parties had compelled the Congress government at the centre to pass the Anti Defection Law but with disingenuous clients inside, there was a time when even an Independent MLA had become Chief Minister of the state! Henceforth Independent MLAs became very costly in the horse trading markets week before swearing in and lucrative portfolios like Power and PWD would go to them.

From 2018 to 2023, the UDP & HSPDP both lovers of the JaiJaiwheer (the indigenous people) did not stand up against CAA. They were least interested about lending support to CM Conrad Sangma when he and a few Assam NPP leaders flew to Delhi to protest against it. And quite amusingly they did not know that Agatha Sangma in the winter session of 2019 had voted for the CAA. Whereas university students in Delhi fought heart and soul and had to face teargas in the fight against CAA, in Meghalaya we did not bother until it reached a dead end.

The border areas of Mairakhol and Phlengkai were surrendered to Assam despite them being very much part of Meghalaya. The Shillong Times of 2019 April 11 says, "It may be seen how the

Conrad Sangma's green Chief Minister image battered

By H H Mohrmen

When Conrad K Sangma assumed office five years ago, he was very concerned with conserving the environment. He did show his concern about 'green' issues and also launched projects and programs which aimed at the protection of the environment. In fact in the five years that he has been the Chief Minister of the state, he has announced an attractive environment programs with catchy names, which unfortunately are good on paper only. Many of these programs launched by the government end up as mere rhetoric by the Chief Minister.

Not walking the talk In June 2018 Chief Minister Conrad Sangma launched a fancy program that was part of the Fit India movement. After attending the Fit India Movement at Yojana Bhawan as a mark of starting the movement in the state, the CM walked from his official residence at Polo to his office in the State Secretariat. The CM said that he would undertake "a 2w" (walk to work) every Wednesday. Intending to achieve a 'fit Meghalaya' the CM even appealed to the people of the state to take the 'healthy step' and make it a habit to walk to work every Wednesday. Besides, Sangma also added that due to the growing concern about global warming, people could cut down on toxic carbon dioxide emissions by walking to work and also save money by cutting down on fuel expenditure besides reducing congestion on Shillong roads. He even suggested that people can take shortcuts to their offices or schools and made a clarion call to the people to take up the challenge of walking instead of driving to work. Sangma also said that many of the youths were physically active but the problem lay in people's daily lives where they forget about staying healthy. That is the program was destined to fail was obvious from the fact that while the CM was walking to the Secretariat from his official residence, none of his Cabinet Ministers was around to accompany him. Not surprisingly the walk to the office became a one-day affair and the CM too conveniently forgot his promise the very next week as he drove to the Secretariat.

The Failed Million Trees Campaign Another of the government's programs on the environment was the million trees campaign which was also part of this government's environment day celebration. In June 2019, the MDA government launched a 1.5 million trees campaign in the entire state. During the World Environment Day celebration, the government claimed that it had planted 1,000 saplings in 460 villages across the 46 Community & Rural Development blocks. The government through this program called the 'one citizen one tree' campaign also claimed that a million saplings were planted in 306 spring sheds and catchment areas across the state. It was also claimed that this is a record of sorts concerning that such a mass campaign has never been attempted in the past. The goal was to

also part of this government's environment day celebration. In June 2019, the MDA government launched a 1.5 million trees campaign in the entire state. During the World Environment Day celebration, the government claimed that it had planted 1,000 saplings in 460 villages across the 46 Community & Rural Development blocks. The government through this program called the 'one citizen one tree' campaign also claimed that a million saplings were planted in 306 spring sheds and catchment areas across the state. It was also claimed that this is a record of sorts concerning that such a mass campaign has never been attempted in the past. The goal was to



plant one million saplings in commemoration of World Environment Day that year.

It was reported by the press that the tree plantation was under the supervision of the state's Soil & Water Conservation Department and was organized in collaboration with the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development's (NABARD) regional office in Shillong. It was also reported that this was part of the project on spring-shed development, funded under the National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCF). The project was part of the initiative to protect vulnerable springs and rejuvenate their catchments or recharge areas, which cost the exchequer Rs 4.11 crore. The project was an afforestation measure which was in sync with the

the environment and reduce the impact of fossil fuels in global warming and climate change.

The question we need to ask today is whether the CM has lived up to his promise. Unfortunately, all of Conrad Sangma's promises are empty rhetoric as he has not followed them up with action. He is rarely seen riding in his electric car.

Illegal mining of coal continues, as I wrote in this column. It casts a dark shadow on the CM's 'Green image' proclamation. Despite the court's intervention, illegal mining and transportation of coal continues unabated. If one visits the coal mining areas, one would see fresh coal collected at different locations, which only testifies to the fact that the MDA Government under Conrad Sangma is not serious in stopping illegal mining and transportation of coal from the state.

The other question that people raise is, how can the CM talk about reducing carbon emissions when he is still driving a large car, alcade of cars? And why buy an electric vehicle that's lying idle? But even if he uses the EV, how can the CM reduce carbon emissions when he is still using a convoy of cars to follow him?

Hence the carefully cultivated 'green image' proposed by some consultants perhaps has burst like a bubble. That green image came crashing like an avalanche when in the few months before the elections the CM was seen using a chopper to fly across the state to inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of different projects. One wonders how much carbon footprint the CM has let off into the atmosphere, apart from the dust that still coats trees and other objects. Is the Department of Environment and Forests measuring the carbon footprints of the CM in the last few months that he was busy inaugurating and launching projects?

Conrad Sangma is also the star campaigner for his party hence the carbon footprints would also increase by leaps and bounds because he also has to use the chopper to campaign for his party. In the last five years, the CM had made many promises to protect the environment and help in trying to central climate change, but it is for the wise people of the State to say if their Chief Minister has lived up to his promises.

Bollywood dances during Chhath puja

Editor, Apropos of the eye-opening letter by Usha Kakoti, "Stop noise, drinks and vulgar during puja" (ST January 30, 2023), I also wish to share my views on how some of our youths straggled to stop Bollywood dances in certain Chhath Puja venues in the town in 2022. This practice has been going on for some years. I think the Puja organizers do not know what is devotion to God and what is enjoyment. It is indeed a matter of shame that the way we are mixed up.

Chhath festival is dedicated to the worship of the Sun God and his wife Usha (dawn). This festival is observed to express gratitude for supporting various natural phenomena and objects like rivers, oceans, hills, and mountains on this earth. We seek the blessings of the Sun God for harmony in the universe. To express devotion to the Sun God, it is recommended to observe complete fasting. Many fast for four days with two days without

the deadline. This is in sharp contrast to the practice in Meghalaya. And the NPP wants to have a second tenure! Yours etc, J C Wahlang Via email

Deceptions in plenty in the union budget 2023-24 Allocations are disturbingly against equity

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

The Union Budget 2023-24 is deceptive. The very presumptions of revenue and growth are overestimated, promises made are too high to be realized, allocations made are inequitable for different sectors as well as social groups, and the higher allocations are being energetically overplayed.

If the Indian economy is set to have a low growth rate in 2023-24 as per all the national and international authoritative estimates, all the big talks about budget provisions are only efforts to deceive the people in the backdrop of the alarming ground realities and inefficiency and insularity of the last full budget of the Modi government before General Election 2024. Vulnerable sections of the society would find themselves even more vulnerable with less allocations in real terms adjusted with high prices and inflation.

The deception begins with a presumption of the Nominal GDP for HE 2023-2024 that has been projected at Rs 3,01,75,065 crore assuming 10.5% growth over the estimated Nominal GDP of Rs 2,73,07,751 crore as per the First Advance Estimates of FY 2023-23.

The presumption of growth rate of 10.5 per cent of the GDP for 2023-24 on which all the revenues and expenditure would rest is quite misleading. OECD has projected the growth rate to decline to 5.7 per cent in 2023, and all other international agencies have cut their earlier growth estimates and put it in the range of 6.5-7 per cent.

Even the Economic Survey 2022-23 has projected a headline GDP growth of 6.5 per cent for 2023-24 in real terms, which it claimed broadly comparable to the estimates provided by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the ADB, and by RBI. The actual outcome for real GDP growth, it says, will probably lie in the range of 6 to 6.8 per cent, depending on the trajectory of economic and political developments globally.

It clearly indicates that India's growth rate for the year 2022-23 has been overestimated to bring bigger figures only to impress the people of India, and to show that the government has been made to swell by including several other things among which is the money given to support oil companies under "capital expenditure" to fund the green transition."

Government says that it would boost growth and employment, but it does not explain how the lives and livelihoods of the people would be secured without complete social security coverage at a time when even this so-called 'big boom' would not be able to stop the decline in GDP growth.

There have been massive cuts in allocation for MGNREGS, labour welfare schemes, food subsidy, and several health schemes including PM Swasthya Suraksha Yojna. Allocation for rural sanitation is not enough to recover even the learning loss that our students suffered during the pandemic.

The market intervention scheme supposed to provide price support to farmers may shock all that has fallen from Rs 1,500 crore to 100 crore of the GDP, as against the budget presumption of 11.1 per cent of growth. It shows the deception of giving big picture and realising much less. Pleading deep into the data is even more puzzling. The first advanced estimate for the year 2022-23

shows the estimated GDP at Rs 2,73,07,751 crore, as against the budget estimate of Rs 25800600 crore. It shows an increase of GDP at 15.4 per cent. How it came that the Economic Survey 2022-23 put the GDP growth rate for the current fiscal at only 7 per cent? There are obviously much more concealed in the deceptive and unexplained data. Even the 7 per cent GDP growth for the current fiscal is highly doubtful when it is sliding quarter by quarter. This makes not only the GDP data dubious but also unachievably high assumption of growth posh. The revenue projection unrealistically high on the basis of which higher allocations are shown.

Reduction in social security allocation in real terms adjusted to the price rise and inflation especially in health, education, and employment shows the general intention of the government to reduce the burden of the common people has been just ignored.

Budget 2023-24 focused providing big money to a select few through privatisation, investment, disinvestment, financial incentives, and even through capital market investment in infrastructure. It would be clear if one compares social sector allocations and provisions with other sectors that create big profit for the government, the big corporates, and officials, either legal or illegal in the form of cut and commissions. Inequitable allocation of funds in infrastructure, and we already know how inequality has been rising sharply under the policies adopted by Modi government since 2014.

The total expenditure in HE 2023-24 is estimated at Rs 45,03,097 crore of which total capital expenditure is Rs 16,10,000 crore. The Economic Survey 2023-24 has claimed that it reflects continuing strong commitment of the Union Government to boost economic growth by investing in infrastructure development leading to an increase in capital expenditure by 37.4 per cent over HE 2022-23. Effective Capital Expenditure, at Rs 13,70,949 crore in HE 2023-24, shows an increase of 30.1 per cent over HE 2022-23.

Even this big capex conceal several other things, and has been made to swell by including several other things among which is the money given to support oil companies under "capital expenditure" to fund the green transition."

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"Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction." — John F. Kennedy

The Shillong Times

Shillong, Wednesday, February 8, 2023

Nation and pension

A government that does not care for national interests, first and foremost, is not worth its salt. A government that caves in to pressure and acts against national interests or one that acts in self-interest to win votes and power is a curse on both the nation and its people.

Notably, OPS was abolished by the AB Vajpayee-led NDA government while the states that went to return to the old scheme — Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand — are ruled by non-BJP governments. The Congress had even given a pre-electoral promise in states like Himachal that it would bring back OPS.

Financial experts and RBI itself had gone on record to stress that OPS was a major drain on national resources, which could otherwise be used for promoting national growth and strengthening the Defence sector with more fund allocations. India spends just one-fifth of what China spends on defence as this country, caught in a splurge, does not have the resources to spend more.

To those on whom we have erred to trust

On Feb 6, 2023 the people of Shillong woke up to the rude reality of everyday politics. Politicians wishing to enroll their nominations for the forthcoming 2023 Assembly sailed forth to the DC's office to do so.

And if this crime is caused either by lack of space, lack of imagination, the inability to foresee by the concerned authorities supplemented by the selfish indifference of hopeful PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVES, then the only solution to prevent it happening in the future is to change the venue where such public nuisance is committed.

The hope of this letter is that the authorities concerned and the politicians who will eventually form the next Government realize the disgust, revulsion and loathing the hapless public view such thoughtless antics, especially by those who earnestly seek the public's votes.

One of the most talked about points from the 2023-24 Budget is the announcement by the Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman that the threshold for being eligible for paying income tax has been raised from 5 lakh to 7 lakh.

A look at data provided by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows that India's trade balance during November 2022 had a deficit of around 11.11 billion dollars, i.e., imports were more than exports.

However, the 'State of Inequality in India Report' released on Feb 6, 2023 by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) revealed that based on the extrapolation of the income data from the PLPS (Periodic Labour Force Survey) 2019-2020 those earning a monthly salary of Rs. 25,000 are already amongst the top 10% earners in the country.

By Bhogtaram Mawroh

policy, i.e., putting money in this case through tax relief in the hands of the common people is important for driving growth in the economy.

Recently the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) released their manifesto for the upcoming Assembly elections in Meghalaya. What has been most talked about from their document is the tax transfer schemes which they have promised to implement if voted to power.

"A look at data provided by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows that India's trade balance during November 2022 had a deficit of around 11.11 billion dollars. i.e., imports were more than exports. This means that it is not external but internal demand which has been the main factor driving growth in the country."

all school going children in Government run schools to cover the cost of books and allied material. Under the Meghalaya Youth Empowerment (MYE) scheme every unemployed youth between the ages of 21-40 will get a monthly allowance of Rs. 1000 per month (Rs. 12,000 annually).

According to the NPP (National People's Party) the schemes would cost around Rs. 2000 crore to the Government which will put a strain on the State's exchequer. However, this is just one part of the solution. This demand-side intervention needs to be supplemented by supply-side interventions as well.

One of the most important sources of revenue for the Government is taxes, direct and indirect. While direct tax is paid by those whose incomes exceed a certain limit, in this case above 7 lakh, indirect taxes are paid by

State, to ensure that more resources are available to improve the living standards of the population. Also if the supply side is ignored, the just income transfer will definitely lead to the State falling into indolence.

TMC has promised to bring a 100% double digit growth in the next five years to double the size of the state's GDP. With the State's CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) being less than 2%, this will be a very difficult task. Also, the question is how will that be achieved? The Manifesto gives the impression that TMC intends to achieve these goals by adding more MSMEs (Micro Small and Medium Enterprises) and resuming coal mining.

While we welcome the government's efforts to improve the living standards of the population, it is not enough to just increase the total value in the economy, i.e., increase the GDP of the

Pisacrazy over democracy: Challenge of 2023 election

By Michael Makri

"Kishh ih baroh" they are all the same, a (best) mixer who wins

As an external observer and a voter, what is important post 2023 election is how to uplift our people who are living in villages few kilometers from the city. The big majority live in hunger, are deprived of roads, communication and safe drinking water and yet unknowingly are burdened with the government's debt to pay back loans from various funding agencies as found by many RTI activists and published by media both traditional and social.

Latest research tells us that Sri Lanka is in a deep financial crisis; Pakistan is in turmoil; there are predictions of more developing countries facing similar instability in the near future due to loans taken from various national and international funding agencies such as the World Bank, ADB etc. How will the present government or the next one fulfil the promises in the election manifesto in a state hardly coping with providing even basic necessities to its citizens and having to repay the loan for non-existent projects? Remember a month back or so, there were so many 'Maw Nongrim' (foundation stones) being laid to the point that no stones were left. True, most of the stones have also crossed borders either to Jharghul or other neighbouring states.

We need to be united, but with sincere efforts to restore the credibility of those contesting the elections and their ungodly tactics that churned super-fast results compounded by massive vote buying. Is democracy still a reality or has it been made obsolete by pisacrazy? Whatever we have to move on and our faith has to face the challenges. So, some February 27, 2023 and then what follows. Ngi dawa ka kahok (we demand for our rights) again and continue with those who are dancing like David in front of the Ark during these days of election campaign.

I recently wanted to conclude a family that lost a mother; after a brief prayer we were offered tea and a gentleman gave his opening remark about "principled collaboration" in areas that benefit the people if so and so party wins the election. Next to my seat was an elderly woman who listened carefully and gave her concluding remark: 'ki juh ih baroh' (all political parties are the same, no matter who wins - change and development seems a distant reality). Will the new administration - bolster its credibility - fulfil their manifestos to prevent ordinary voters like me from believing in the power of pisacrazy (money power to win elections, not service). Or will it be the same for eternity?

Listening to so many speeches of politicians in mushrooming YouTube (Channels) in the state, 'Pisacrazia' not 'democracy' is what we have in our state and in our country as a whole. What our country as a whole is a confession by the Deputy Chief Minister that "it piduh ki shah pyibij njan ka san snem" (the people are fooled every five years by politicians). He is justifying that fooling the voters with money is part of our culture. I strongly disagree with this rationalization of the minister. I still believe that there are honest citizens who are people-oriented and development-oriented. I still find such values embedded in the lives of our ethnic; population; and have been reinforced by our forefathers but sadly, none with the current batch of leaders. Yes, deep inside, there are many who can distinguish who is right and wrong. Unfortunately, we may have been misled and mesmerized by money. I just wish this ends and it ends with this 2023 election.

While accessing our

WhatsApp Channel 'Don Hosco Media Network' approving comments before they are live, on February 4, 2023 I approved a story of one resident of Lumdingriji who went to the houses of political candidates to return their pressure cooker and bowl in exchange for her vote. True, how can a vote be so cheap as a bowl or a pressure cooker. While I can't comment on the lady's motive for her act, I can only appeal to every citizen to do likewise, demand for your vote to justify the various organizations wear headgears, carry flags, shout slogans and give realises to the police and para-military forces that patrol the roads and offices now? I am not calling for agitation or cooing war. I just want to justify the power of pisacrazia over democracy.

Of the many WhatsApp Groups I am associated with as a member, one political WhatsApp group posted a video clip of a certain MDC from West Khasi Hills who vehemently criticized the chief minister who went for election campaign to Tripura and sang 'Summer a month back to vote for his political party. In between of the one minute long video is a picture of a man with white hair, wearing a white shirt and a white tie, holding a white flag in his hand. Then the video continues with the same MDC praising the CM and the political party.

We need to be united, but with sincere efforts to restore the credibility of those contesting the elections and their ungodly tactics that churned super-fast results compounded by massive vote buying. Is democracy still a reality or has it been made obsolete by pisacrazy? Whatever we have to move on and our faith has to face the challenges. So, some February 27, 2023 and then what follows. Ngi dawa ka kahok (we demand for our rights) again and continue with those who are dancing like David in front of the Ark during these days of election campaign.

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Too much election news stinks!

Editor, Every single news item in the front page of your newspaper on Tuesday, Feb 7, 2023, relates to the assembly elections, especially in Shillong. Come on, your readers (most I would presume) are fed up with these once-in-a-3-year quacks.

Harrowing Monday

Editor, We are living in a modern society with citizens, especially the self-proclaimed leaders are expected to respect the rule of law and the internet has driven us into the cavean period but when politicians decide to engage in a show of strength life goes haywire. I along with many ordinary mortals witnessed a traffic jam not caused by the early start of educational institutions but

Traffic snarls should be resolved immediately

Editor, Apropos of the letter by Raghav Bajaj 'Harrowing Monday' in the city' (ST Feb 7, 2023), I too wish to express my sense of great desperation at what has happened on Monday 6, 2023. All roads from Laitkor and from 7th mile Upper Shillong saw a

sea of stranded vehicles for nearly 4 hours. Every day the routine bottlenecks at Sawlad and Bailey bridge at Unshupri with 7 km long traffic seems to have become an incurable illness. Luckily schools are closed otherwise what a turmoil there would have been among children.

Let us admit that as of now the traffic jam is not curable and to accept that the Shillong of yore is no longer able to allow rallies or processions if we are to lead a civil life.

With roads from all corners of the state pounding heavily into and away from Shillong especially patients in a critical state, passengers trying to catch trains and flights and people having interviews or examination or having any appointments, not to forget the daily bread earners are exasperated by the ominous traffic jam. Let there are honest citizens who are people-oriented and development-oriented. I still find such values embedded in the lives of our ethnic; population; and have been reinforced by our forefathers but sadly, none with the current batch of leaders. Yes, deep inside, there are many who can distinguish who is right and wrong. Unfortunately, we may have been misled and mesmerized by money. I just wish this ends and it ends with this 2023 election.

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Yours etc., Christopher Gagnon, Shillong-10

Yours etc., Shillong-10

Yours etc., Shillong-10

Yours etc., Shillong-10

Yours etc., Shillong-10

Yours etc., Shillong-10

Yours etc., Shillong-10

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Yours etc., Shillong-10

Yours etc., Shillong-10

"The top of one mountain is always the bottom of another."

— Marianne Williamson

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 178 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2023

Double-faced Covid expenditure

THE claim by the former Director Health Services (DHS) who is now a candidate of the United Democratic Party (UDP) from North Shillong that the actual expenses on Covid which he described as having 'come as a hurricane and leaving like a calm breeze' also left the state poorer by Rs 816 crores. The DHS claims the amount actually expended was Rs 248 crores. The Health Minister on the floor of the House said the Covid expenditure was a whopping Rs 816 crores. The question now is where has the amount of Rs 568 crore disappeared? That this matter was tabled in the Assembly and there was no uproar reveals the stark reality that the MLAs who are supposed to hold the government to account don't really do their homework. It was incumbent that the MLAs in the Opposition, which is mainly the TMC should have raised hell on this huge expenditure and asked for a detailed discussion on the matter. The MDA Government had earlier claimed that it had spent a considerable sum on infrastructure like the Covid Step-down facility at the New Shillong Township and a similar infra near the Ganesh Das hospital.

An inspection of this site found that it was an unused facility. But the size of the infrastructure did not warrant such a huge expenditure. Rs 248 crore in itself would have covered a lot of ground and paid for the anti-Covid injections and the medical expenditure of Covid patients that could not pay for their treatment. The number of people who received the first dose stood at 13,17,407 (34%), the lowest in the country; the second dose 9,72,056 (25%) and the Precaution dose was lowest at 44,815 (1.17%). What this informs is that more than half the population of Meghalaya was unvaccinated even with the first dose and about 75% did not get their second dose. The less we speak about the precautionary dose the better. So, there is a shroud of secrecy surrounding the Covid expenditure. Unless some RTI activist tries to dig at the truth of the matter this too will disappear from the radar of public attention.

The issue is about public accountability which is sorely lacking in Meghalaya. Will the sitting MLAs explain why they did not raise this matter in the Assembly? After all, an excess expenditure of over Rs 500 crore means a huge amount of public money that is unaccounted for. Will this issue come up for discussion during the campaign period? Knowing Meghalaya, this issue will be lost in the cacophony of noises and finger pointing that is characteristic of campaigns here that skin over critical issues. Perhaps only candidates from KAM and VPP actually have the capacity to go deep into the matter and dig up the truth about the Covid expenses. An RTI on this is in order!

Letters to the Editor

Do we have a choice?

Editor,  
Recently I came across a video in which an African spoke about the political situation in his home country. Here is what he said, "What is the difference between an ordinary thief and a political thief? The ordinary thief steals our money, our bag, our jewellery, our watch, etc., but a political thief steals our future, our careers, our education, our health, our business, our roads and other infrastructure. The hilarious part is that the ordinary thief decides whom to rob but we are the ones who choose the political thief who robs us because we vote for him in every election. We blindly say we are not blind, who is deceiving whom? The ridiculous part of the whole issue is that we fight to protect our belongings from the ordinary thief but we fight each other to defend and protect the political thief. Is that not what we do? We fight for the thugs who steal our future, our careers, our education, our health, our roads, our livelihoods. What a shame! What a travesty! It calls for us to think and think deeply."  
I think the above speech also perfectly describes our

own predicament here in Meghalaya. Do we really have a choice? I don't see that we have any. We really have to choose the best from amongst evil men perhaps because generally only the worst of humanity are attracted to join politics.

Yours etc.,  
Samuel Swetti,  
Shillong-2

Encourage those who work for the environment

Editor,  
Whom do you blame if a child is not properly washed and is scurvy? Certainly, the parents. So, who should you blame if the rivers and lakes are polluted and dumped with mountains of garbage? Please, keep guessing. Well, the news story - "Rivers orplanned. Is OCU pursuing a futile agenda?" (ST Jan 23, 2023) rightly blames the "natural resources" in the state are in a sorry state of affairs. Why and who are answerable? Frankly speaking, the heaps of clothes, broken furniture, tin, plastic filled with whatnot... will be left uncleaned until they are washed away one day

# Decoding the Union Budget for North-East

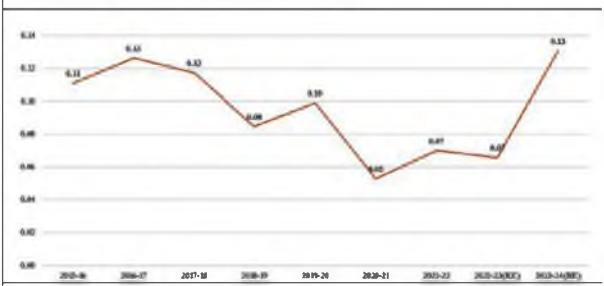
By Srihar Kundu

The budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Development of North-East Region (MDONER) in the union budget of the Government of India has not crossed over 1 percent. In 2015-16, the total allocation was Rs. 1986 crores, which was about 0.11 percent of the total union budget. In 2016-17, this share went up to 0.13 percent. Since 2016-17, there is a progressive reduction of budget allocation for MDONER, and it came down to Rs. 1853 crores i.e., about 0.05 percent in 2020-21. During the post-Covid-19 period, the budget allocation for the ministry went up by small margins. However, a major correction happened in the union budget for 2023-24.

Total budget allocation under the MDONER has increased above 200 percent of the expenditure is broadly divided into two heads, Revenue Expenditure (Revex) and Capital Expenditure (Capex). Spending under the head of maintenance of existing establishments is known as Revenue Expenditure. For example, salary, subsidy, interest payment, etc. Spending under the head of creation of new establishments is known as Capital Expenditure. For example, creating new schools and hospitals, setting up manufacturing units, etc. Capital spending as a result helps in total output and in creating new employment opportunities. Public spending on capital formation helps as a push factor for economic growth and it is needed during an

inception of the scheme in 2018. In 2018-19, the total budgetary allocation under NESIDS was only Rs. 180 crores. In the current year i.e., 2022-23(HE), the total allocation is Rs.1273 crores. The important aspect of the budgetary allocation under NESIDS is its composition. A larger share of total spending under the scheme is provided under the capital head. Total Capex is fixed at Rs.2446 crores which is about 98 percent of the total allocation proposed under the scheme in 2023-24(BE). Briefly, NESIDS is a development scheme under which financial assistance is provided for projects of physical infrastructure such as road connectivity, supply

Share of Budgetary Allocation under MDONER in Union Budget



Source: Union Budget Documents for 2021-22 and its previous years

economic slowdown. As far as the budget allocation under MDONER is concerned, among these two major heads of expenditure, the Capex share in total expenditure in 2023-24(FY) stands at 70 percent. However, in 2022-23(HE), this share was just 27 percent and in 2021-22, the share was even less i.e., 25 percent. There is a massive increment in the Capex in 2023-24(FY). In 2023-23(HE), the total Capex was Rs. 659 crores and it increased to Rs. 4094 crores in 2023-24(BE). The growth in Capex for the northeast is above 500 percent in 2023-24(FY). Second, a major share of the rise in budgetary allocation under MDONER went towards the North-East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) in 2023-24 (BE). The total budgetary allocation under the scheme is Rs. 2491, the largest allocation since the

of power, and drinking water. The scheme also emphasizes on developing social sector infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, etc. A big push for Capex under this scheme aims at accelerating the pace of progress of the projects sanctioned across all eight states in the region. The third, important allocation is made under the head of the Prime Minister Development Initiative for the North-East Region (PM-DevINE). This scheme was introduced in 2022-23 and the total budgetary allocation under the scheme was Rs. 400 crores out of which the Revex was Rs. 50 crores and the rest Rs. 350 crores allocated under Capex. In 2023-24(BE), total allocation under PM-DevINE increased to Rs. 2200 crores with a rise above 500 percent. A major share of total expenditure is allocated under the head of Capex i.e., above 70 percent.

total budgetary provision for these two PSUs stands at Rs. 9.7 crore which is the same as in 2022-23(HE). However, in 2021-22, the budgetary allocation was a little higher at Rs. 15 crores. The union budget 2023-24(FY) is undoubtedly a budget aims at capital formation. Total Capex in the budget for the country went up by 37 percent from its previous year i.e., 2022-23(HE). The broader objective of the government is to lay out a plan for medium and long-term growth which would take the country forward towards sustainable development. The budgetary provision under MDONER and its composition is certainly a reflection of the overall macroeconomic objective of the government.

(Dr Srihar Kundu is the author of *India's Growth: A New Paradigm of Public Policy*, Indian School of Business, Mohali)

Who scores more marks in Parliament?

Editor,  
When AB Vajpayee whose government lasted only thirteen days delivered a memorable speech in Lok Sabha and explained in detail why he and his cabinet were resigning it was the view of Vajpayee that the public should know about the functioning of the government. On February 7, it was the turn of Rahul Gandhi where he levelled various allegations against the present government. On February 8, the Modi government replied to the allegations levelled against it. And just as Vajpayee had said that the public should know about the functioning of the government, the same is now applicable to Modi. In his speech Modi remained silent on the issues raised by Rahul Gandhi whereas in a nature democratic country answers to various questions are expected. In the USA there is open discussion every issue and candidates have to first clear the doubts of their own party members and later respond to allega-

tions from the Opposition. Listening to such discussions makes Americans proud of their democracy. Here, it was obligatory on the part of Modi to at least give some sort of assurance that matters raised would be looked into seriously and if there are irregularities those would be addressed. Modi should have touched on the issue of Agaveer and should have given assurance to the people of this country in this regard. Modi is confident because he believes the common man has confidence in him but he forgets that the same common man had defeated the party recently in Himachal Pradesh assembly elections and corporation elections in Delhi. Modi speaking in Parliament is no different from Modi giving an election speech. Finally, if one is to decide on the marks to be given to Rahul Gandhi and Modi on their speeches in Parliament then Modi would have scored 59 marks and Rahul Gandhi 51.

Yash Pal Rathan  
Via email  
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# Surge in Capital Expenditure and Neglect of the Poor

By T.M. Thomas Isaac

We may soon see the third largest economy in the world but budgets like the one for 2023-24, presented last week in Parliament, will ensure that the quality-of-life ranking of the average citizen in the third largest economy is at the bottom quarter of the global list. Rapid growth with fair distribution should be the objective of any budget. And every budget should be assessed by the dictum of Mahatma Gandhi: "Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if this step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him". What is the condition of the ordinary Indian citizen today? The bottom 50% own less than 4% of the national wealth and less than 15% of the national income. The World Inequality Report 2022 which highlighted the situation placed India among the most unequal countries with rising poverty and an "affluent elite". The growth in the national income had been decelerating during the NDA period from over 8% to 3.1% in the quarter on the eve of Covid. If we take the average of the four years from 2019-20 to 2022-23, the growth rate would come to 2.7%. The per capita income in 2021-22 is lower than the per capita income before Covid. But the basic assumption of the Budget is that of "a full recovery in FY22 ahead of many nations and (is) positioned to assist the pre-pandemic growth path in FY23".

Having declared a state of full recovery by 2022-23, there is little wonder why the budget has turned away from the poor and ordinary citizens. The government claims a reduction in urban unemployment (it is silent on rural employment) and inflation but both are still on the high side. It remains a fact that the available official data also points to an increase in the people under the official poverty line, for the first time since poverty began to decline during the 1980s. In the past four years, the per capita real GDP has declined and continued to decelerate under NDA to around 21%. Under Covid it fell sharply and has yet to fully recover. An experienced Finance Minister was heard demanding answers from industry at a summit in Delhi last September "Since 2019... I have been hearing industry leaders think (the environment) is conducive. Alright, the tax rate was brought down. The (GDP) growth (projection) linked incentives. We have given PLI. I want to hear from India Inc.; what's stopping you?"

The answer to that puzzle is not simple. Their expectations of consumption demand are an important factor. Besides excessive optimism and lack of fairness and transparency would be another deterrent. A public policy that is geared to the creation of a few champion investors leads the minimum government to be a maximum government when it comes to certain favoured corporates. Such a situation does not entice the "animal spirits" of the investors who may be subdued. The budget celebrations were rudely disrupted, not by protesting people but by the investors who hid down the share prices of Adani companies. Whatever the reason, the subdued investment growth the level of technology was highly subdued. We have already referred to economic deceleration under NDA. Though even the economic growth has very carefully avoided it from the list of shocks that adversely affected the Indian economy, it was the deceleration that triggered the downward slip.

(Dr. T.M. Thomas Isaac is the former Finance Minister of Assam. He is the author of *The Billion People* (email: editor@thebillionspress)

"Without a sense of urgency, desire loses its value." — Jim Rohn

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2023

Cow caught in a row

UNFORTUNATELY, the present unsavoury row over cows might leave a bitter taste in many mouths. It all started with a call from the Animal Welfare Board to celebrate February 14 next, as Cow Hug Day. The day is marked and celebrated worldwide as Valentine's Day, or the day of the Feast of Saint Valentine as per Christian beliefs. In fact, such celebrations now cut across religious persuasions. This is a part of the folklore and, year after year, the day is made a big event by young men and women. For, its sentiments are predominantly identified with love and romance. The animal welfare board is well within its jurisdiction to decide on any day to express the nation's affection and high regard for the cow, but the twist the Board sought to effect in the tale by giving it an obvious link to Valentine Day's theme was perhaps uncalled for.

Cow is holy for Hindus and sentiments therein are very strong across most states. The BJP's politics is veered round Hindu sentiments. This has only raised the esteem large section of the populace here have for this animal. The mother motif vis-a-vis the cow is for real from the fact that the cow's milk is widely used for human sustenance. Cows are revered in the western culture as well. The Netherlands is famous for its koe knuffelen ("hugging the cow") practice, which the Dutch believe helps in healing one's ailment. Well-bred cows are a sight to behold, irrespective of their religious aura and affection towards them across continents.

All said, the Animal Welfare Board's strange mix could have been left at that and no ulterior motives needed to be read into it. But, when Union Minister for animal husbandry, Parshottam Rupala, stepped forward to put his weight behind the decision, many eyebrows were naturally raised. The spirit of Valentine's Day is far removed from the love and affection one has for cows or other animals or even to one's own family members. When a strange mix is presented it creates both shock and revulsion. Be that as it may, it would be highly appreciated if the ministers running the nation steer themselves clear of petty controversies. They have a wider canvas to think about and act. Unfortunately, a feeling gains ground that several of the ministers in the Modi dispensation are not able to rise up to people's expectations and they are so faceless. The high esteem for the present government is principally reserved for the Prime Minister and some veterans in his ministry. The others rarely speak, and when they speak they show a tendency to go overboard.

Letters to the Editor

Open letter to DC East Khasi Hills

Editor, I am using this space of your esteemed daily to draw the attention of the District Administration to certain concerns as earlier attempts at doing so have failed. As usual, on February 4, 2023 there was a big bang of Rock Music concert at Mawlai Nongpang where heavy metal groups enthralled the audience of the locality until the night flipped in the next day of the calendar. People, especially youths from all walks of life thronged into the venue to watch the entertainment live. The sorry state of affairs from the inept district administration was that people danced and screamed to the tune and tenor of music euphonia with full decibel that can be heard from long distances.

To prolong the event till the late hours past midnight? As far as our knowledge goes the District Administration usually grants No Objection Certificates to such organizers with the condition that they should conclude their event before 10:00 PM only. The liberty of holding such events till midnight with full musical and DJ blasts has become a nightmare to neighbouring localities. Now with the ongoing elections to the state Assembly, we could even hear the loud speakers at the dead of night. Will the District Administration wake up from its slumber and contain the noise pollutants? Yours etc., HT Wells Shillong-2

Amnesia of the voter in Meghalaya

Editor, Elections are an essential component of democracies as they allow citizens to express their thoughts and have

Whither Khasi spiritual values? Society disparate and broken

By Patricia Mukhim

At any social gathering, know very gleefully talk about their glorious past such as, "Ka Tip Brierw Tip Bler" (To know fellow humans in order to know God) and Kamun in la Hlak which could have been applied reduced to "kamun huk" (earn righteousness or earn by righteous means) and "Kamaisid ka nampyep" (earn by the sweat of your brow). These aphorisms were of great value in a distant past but as we became civilised, these values were jettisoned in favour of a crass culture and mindless pursuit of wealth by depriving others of their just share. This is what our political system has bred. The stark poverty that only the obscurantist worldliness even in Shillong city tells us that we are not getting better as a society. Unfortunately, we have begun to take for granted the poverty we see around us. It does not move us any longer because we dash across in vehicles and hardly have time to walk and feel the pain of many around us who are victims of a predatory system.

It was Confucius who said, "To be wealthy and honored in an unjust society is a disgrace." In present day Khasi society, we have turned this into an accepted norm. The well-heeled occupy places of pride at any function. They are respected not because of what they do and how they live their lives but because of how much they are able to donate to the organisation that invites them as the chief guest. That is why people love to invite politicians to their functions. This is true even of religious organisations. Look at the churches today. Have they spoken up and exhorted their followers on what to look for in a candidate before voting for him/her? Or have the respective administrations gone into a huddle to elect one of their own? The whispering campaign has already been run in right earnest especially by the churches that are preparing to have their synods or processions just before the elections if only to get better roads and other material advantages. And this dispirit all the candidates who tender to the wishes of churches and other religious institutions for one sole purpose - that of winning votes.

Sometimes one wonders if the learn of the churches (pastors, priests, and other heavyweights of the Niam Khasi Niam Tre and the affluent laiy) still beats for the poor and destitute. Looking at the lifestyles of those who call themselves church leaders, one doubts their commitment to serving the poor. Religion has become a cosy little club of PLUs (people like us), American writer, David Brooks states that in

a democratic, non-theocratic society with a decentralized eco-system of academics, clergy members, teachers, journalists, there can be disagreements about a lot of things but they all agree on a shared system of rules for weighing evidence and knowledge. This eco-system operates as a funnel allowing a wide volume of ideas to get filtered but only a narrow group of ideas survive collective scrutiny. I have seen in Meghalaya over had a joint conclavé where the above can sit together and discuss critical issues that need to be

"At the moment in Meghalaya we have some activists that have decided to throw their hats into the electoral ring. There are those who say that all that activists do is to cast stones and that they will not get too far. Casting stones is easy they say. The reason why politicians are still popular is because they seek to unify people around a set of beliefs while the activist seeks to raise a wrong that has been held up by those sets of beliefs."

addressed or presented to the government for its intervention? No, we have never had such brainstorm sessions because perhaps there is an inherent distrust among us. Brooks further states that every society should have an epidemic regime, a marketplace of ideas where people collectively hammer out what's real. In Meghalaya we are too daunted to offend those in power because we don't know when we might need them for personal favours.

At the moment in Meghalaya we have some activists that have decided to throw their hats into the electoral ring. There are those who say that all that activists do is to cast stones and that they will not get too far. Casting stones is easy they say. The reason why politicians are still popular is because they seek to unify people around a set of beliefs while the activist seeks to raise a wrong that has been held up by those sets of beliefs. In brief, the politician navigates the system while the activist delves it. The politicians will justify corruption like the person involved in the white ink scam. Recently the NPP stoutly defended her because issues her winnability despite the scam. In any case corruption has been normalised in Meghalaya. In fact the public seem to easily forgive the corrupt. At this rate Meghalaya's future is

dark as dark can be.

The politician builds a coalition by using muddling philosophy and policies that appeal to the most and offend the fewest. The activist is driven more by purpose, morality and righteousness. There's perhaps the reason why activists across the world never become politicians. They would have had to compromise too much of themselves and their causes. But when the system demands connection, it would be wrong on our part to pass judgment and say that activists should remain activists.

At least they are giving some politicians a run for their money. One of the worst disasters to have happened to Meghalaya in 50 years is the breaking down of the education system. It is often said that humans are rational beings. But psychologists find that claim rather shallow. We humans are creatures of passion and more often than not are laced by that same passion to commit crimes that we later regret of. One of the great projects of schooling therefore is to educate the passions and help the young learn the proper kind of respect (what about abuse) at injustice, the proper kind of reverence before sacrifice, the right kind of civic pride and responsibility and affection for fellow humans. This sort of knowledge is conveyed not through facts but through emotional experiences in the form of stories.

Our education system has tried to simplify too many of the complex problems of life so much so we tend to look for simplistic solutions to the most convoluted challenges facing us today. That is because education has focussed too much on reasoning and thinking skills - which are important in their own ways but what about emotions that we are told must be kept bottled up? It is precisely because we have bottled up our emotions or failed to channel

centres, events and many more. Yes, as drivers we are charged with the responsibility to drive and down the streets of Police Bazar which is located just opposite the old assembly building. Yet we don't feel embarrassed since the Constitution of India enshrines the dignity of labour which is enshrined in Chapter IV which states, "The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing - (a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood." The Constitution also guarantees equal opportunities but as drivers we are being treated as second class citizens especially by the Sadar Traffic Police who do not allow us to pass passengers in places which are rightfully ours. They threaten us, clamp our vehicles and even hit our cars like they own them. This is our state. Let us consider an important duty we perform which is to transport the commoned officials for the 2023 elections. These officials will operate in differ-

- 1. Road tax
2. Passenger tax
3. Permit
4. Insurance
5. Toll gate fare
6. POL tax

These are just some of the major contributions we have made towards the development of the State. We don't want the present Government to recognise us but we just want them to allocate a plot of land which is rightfully ours that has been bartered over the years. Covid lockdown in 2019. If the incumbent government along with the existing Transport Minister cannot resolve this small and minor issue, it will end up costing these things. Ignorance, Irresponsibility and incompetence. Yours etc., Willberstar Diongoh, Via email

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PM Modi's refusal to probe fraud in Adani group smacks of an unholy alliance

Revelations from Hindenburg research call for high level inquiry

By Krishna Jha

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has blocked the demand raised by the Opposition in the Parliament for an enquiry to be monitored by the Supreme Court or to set up Joint Parliamentary Committee to investigate the Adani group's manipulations of the stock market and fraud and into the allegations levelled against the industrialist Gautam Adani himself and his company by Hindenburg Research. The step reconfirms the Centre's patronage for the Adani group. Adani's own response to Hindenburg's allegations which runs in 413 pages is a blatant attempt to deflect the serious charges of fraud against the group. The company called the allegations "calculated attack on India, its independence, integrity, and quality of Indian institutions, and also the growth story and ambition of India."

Gautam Adani, founder and chairman of Adani group, has acquired a net

worth of roughly 120 billion dollars, adding over hundred billion over the past three years largely through stock price appreciation in the group's seven key listed companies which have posted an average of 819 percent in that period.

A section of the securities of the group that Credit Suisse had assigned a lending value of 75 percent, are now rated zero. The conglomerate finds it impossible to raise money. The American investment bank Citigroup has refused to give loans to the group against securities. The share sale also has been facing the brunt, causing heightened scrutiny. According to reports, at least two more companies said to be from the Adani group have been likely bought in the share sale. Hindenburg Research says they have been helping the Adani Group engage in corporate malfeasance. The conglomerate denied this.

The Adani share sale was oversubscribed by rich Indian individuals at the last minute, after retail investors or non professional investors stayed away. It is common knowl-



edge that Adani and Modi both hail from the western state of Gujarat. As Modi climbed through the political ranks, he also openly displayed a close friendship with Gautam Adani's private jets during his election campaign, and again when he travelled from Gujarat to New Delhi to take office as Prime Minister. In those days, Adani became richer by nearly 230 percent. Much of it has been credited to the Indian government's mass privatization drive and business-friendly policies, which saw Adani winning several government tenders and infrastructure projects in ports, airports, roads, rail, fossil fuels, and green energy across the country. It was a process of building a nation, as Modi called it.

This 'nation building' hands-on approach in Modi got too, offering mega profits to the rich while taking away the means of livelihoods from the common masses. The protests have been raised demanding job-inclusive investments as well as hikes in social security spending.

There is a visible fall in the allocations in real terms for MNREGA, social security, pensions, child nutrition programmes, and maternity benefits. The budget fails to take notice of how people are left starving as they have almost nothing to purchase even food. In the budget there should have been provisions for funds to increase people's purchasing power with job generation and boosting the growth of domestic demand. This budget fails to meet this situation. Fiscal federalism has been aggressively attacked as funds transfer to states have been restrained.

With the raising of curtain from almost the greatest con of the decade, it is the finance capital that aggressively attacks the one that rules over the phase, matured and irresistible, serving the few at the cost of the rest, vast and starving. (PB Service)



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"Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." — Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya's abysmal database

DATA is useful information that is collected to support organizational decision-making and strategy. Within government systems, data is critical for effective intervention. Data equals Knowledge. Good data provides indisputable evidence, while anecdotal evidence, assumptions, or abstract observation might lead to wasted resources due to action being based on incorrect conclusions. Governments more than any other institutions require good data to measure human development on various parameters. Only accurate data will enable governments to take strategic action that can bring out measurable outcomes. It also helps in course correction. Data allows the government to monitor the function of important departments particularly health and education. By utilizing data for quality monitoring, departments can respond to challenges before they turn to full-blown crises. Also, effective quality monitoring will enable the departments to proactively make timely intervention, instead of reacting to situations based on data provided by national agencies from time to time.

Data is a key component for all advocates of social change. Utilizing data also helps present a strong argument for systems change as well. Very often government departments implement schemes conceived in Delhi but which do not necessarily work in hill states. If such schemes are not measured for their efficacy, government will continue investing money without any visible results. Whether the state government is advocating for increased funding from public or private sources, or making the case for changes in regulation, the funding agency judge a presentation that relies on strong, authentic data before accepting any changes are needed. Data will help explain to stakeholders why decisions have been taken. It may happen that some strategies and decisions do not yield the desired outcomes but finally an action taken based on solid data and not on guesses is still better than action taken on guesswork. Good data allows organizations to establish baselines, benchmarks, and performance goals to keep moving forward. A baseline is what a certain area looks like before a particular solution is implemented.

Funding today is outcome and data-driven. The central government is increasingly moving from funding based on services provided to funding based on outcomes achieved. This makes it increasingly important for states to implement evidence-based practice and develop systems to collect and analyze data. A survey on the ground will reveal that in the rural areas of Meghalaya the drop-out rate of school students from the primary, upper primary and high school level has gone up substantially post Covid. But to get a handle on this, some quick survey backed by case studies to find out the extent of the problem is urgently required so that remedial measures can be taken. Even with the persistent problem of women's anaemia in the child bearing years and other important human development indices, Meghalaya fares very poorly. This has to change. The Department of Economics and Statistics needs a complete overhaul. Data is critical to development interventions.

For the past few months, we have seen endless rallies, public meetings sometimes causing public inconvenience. Door to door campaigns by candidates sometimes even disrupt family time. Party workers are spending sleepless nights to capture the last seat. Some candidates even go around with gifts of cash and kind to lure voters. These 'some' are the ones we know. Who knows what might be going on unannounced? Have we questioned ourselves as to what to expect after this? One candidate pointed out, "receive the money because it is yours, but vote for the right candidate." But if you feel obligated because of the money you received then it is better to follow in the footsteps of one of the voters who returned the gift received even if they were Christmas gifts. So you are free to vote for change.

It is often said that people's memories are short-lived. History has been proven right particularly in Meghalaya. For over 50 years the same lists of promises have been uttered (we hope they are not photocopied), promises such as better roads, health care, electricity, water supply, education, farmers' welfare, policies, employment, etc., but every time at least it is packaged in a new form, delivered in a new logic with unparalleled vigour. All these are ideal development projects but what happens? Why is it that in 50 long years we have not been able to solve these problems? While the world is speeding ahead and Meghalaya seems to move at snail's pace, if not remaining stagnant. People started loving faith in democracy, governments, politicians, development and particularly in elections. We hope that this time most of the electorate won't select only Mr. NOTA or make a mockery of the whole edious, costly process of election. But the time might come soon if it continues this way. For some

Vote for Change

By Gervastus Nongkseh

With the filing of nominations done the election temperature is rising. The culmination of the campaign is drawing near as February 27 is approaching expeditiously. While candidates try to pitch in their last effort, the commoners are delighted beneficiaries and wish that these days could last forever. But all good things come to an end. The verdict for the hard-fought battle will be pronounced on the second of March. This time 379 candidates including 59 sitting MLAs and 37 women are in the fray in this megalopolis.

It is fascinating to listen to every candidate as they come out after filing their nomination. While some candidates stick to the common phenomena of mid-throwing and promises galore others enumerate the needs and challenges of the constituencies and chalk out their way forward. About and beyond all, everyone seems to be 200% confident of winning. That we all know that only 60 candidates can be victorious. All the others will have to bite the hard chip dust.

For Shillongites the past week was a nightmare. Everything came to a standstill. For a city that experiences daily traffic jams, the show of strength by candidates and their supporters was horrendous. It is unwarranted. Citizens have come up with novel suggestions for bringing nominations should be done online henceforth or followers should be limited. Some candidates brought with them thousands of vehicles and supporters. Hopefully, they are not the same supporters of other candidates as well.

For the past few months, we have seen endless rallies, public meetings sometimes causing public inconvenience. Door to door campaigns by candidates sometimes even disrupt family time. Party workers are spending sleepless nights to capture the last seat. Some candidates even go around with gifts of cash and kind to lure voters. These 'some' are the ones we know. Who knows what might be going on unannounced? Have we questioned ourselves as to what to expect after this? One candidate pointed out, "receive the money because it is yours, but vote for the right candidate." But if you feel obligated because of the money you received then it is better to follow in the footsteps of one of the voters who returned the gift received even if they were Christmas gifts. So you are free to vote for change.

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development from the state is going to crumble down in every sector. Every election comes with so many twists and turns, deflections and digressions, trials by hope and beyond and above money. Change requires an intelligent voter. It is with fear that another five years might just be wasted away in ineffective sameness; we fear that Meghalaya will be governed by elected leaders with self-interest. We fear that people with no vision or low vision sit in command; we fear that this beautiful hill state would be dragged to an abyss. We fear that people who had educated youth become anti-social elements; we fear

the mishandling of farmers agitation. Even the Land Acquisition Bill had to be taken back when the ruling party could not satisfy the Opposition parties of the various objections raised by them.

BJP has to be more responsible

The present ruckus that is going on in both Houses of Parliament is primarily due to the ruling party not giving straight answers to the questions raised by members of the Opposition. Such behaviour is not expected in a mature democratic country for democracy demands consultation on every important issue among the political parties. From the point of view of the Opposition parties, their voice is being suppressed and some parts of their speeches are being deleted from the proceedings of Parliament. It is expected from the BJP that an assurance be given to the Opposition parties that the Adm. matter would be scrutinised. Previously too the BJP had adopted an adamant attitude and the country lost a lot which is evident from

that farmers, residents at borders, women and children would be abandoned; we fear that illegal practices, corruptions, scandals, blackmailing, abuse, crimes and the like would be the new normal. Vote for change can put all these to rest.

It is with regret that I mention that five years ago the same author had called upon the people of the state to open their eyes and vote responsibly but it all fell on deaf ears. Let's hope the voters have experienced the reality this time and vote responsibly. Not that the present government and our representatives have done nothing. They have done their best. Perhaps it could have been better if we as voters know the candidates and choose those that are selfless, dedicated, unbiased, capable, accountable, visionary, honest and ready to listen.

The report card of these five years is in our hands. Hope you know how to vote for change. And vote without fear we should not.

This election 2023 brings about new waves, new parties, new candidates and new voters. Some groups have even taken the task of bringing awareness among the voters. It is going to be a new experience for many. It is hoped 50 years have taught many lessons, people have become more politically literate and above all have learnt from the mistakes and tears shed over the years. This is a wake-up call for us that if we don't want to shed tears this time, a lot will depend on us. Enough is enough. We should not be blinded by the same trivial and futile drama. The appeal to all voters is to use their power judiciously to this time lest they will have to shed crocodile tears for many years to come. Reason and not emotions should be the yardstick. Small petty issues and promises should not detain us. We have the power to write a new chapter and a new history.

When we observe the characteristics of voters, it is seen that most of us are excited and wake up only during elections. After this, we don't care. Have we followed up with our leaders and reminded them of their duties? That is our responsibility as well. This time with all the hype of campaigning the voters should not lose sight of bigger issues, such as, dilapidated roads, health care, infrastructures, sustainable energy, policies, education, water supply, border issues, clean environment, security, peace and harmony, women and children law and order, crimes, drug menace and of course the list is endless. Let's vote for change, let's vote for development and progress.

Yours etc., Yash Pal Raihan, Via email

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

All indications suggest a hung assembly in Tripura with TM playing a key role

Amit Shah keen on BJP retaining Tripura even with support of Tripura Motha

By Tirhankar Mitra

Even after Pradyot Kishor Manikya Debbarma, chief of the most powerful party of the tribals in Tripura (TPM) Motha (TM) sought to carve out a separate state from Tripura, none of the leaders of the major political parties contesting the state Assembly elections have dared to label him a separatist. For the man's bhargava (king) to whose rallies the tribals flock to by the thousands. He is the only leader in Tripura who is challenging Home Minister Amit Shah in terms of attendance in poll rallies before the elections in the state on February 16.

As the border state goes to test the people's will next Thursday, Debbarma may emerge as the kingmaker in a closely fought electoral battle. Stated to have personal relations with Union Home Minister Amit Shah to former Congress

tribe seats. How come such a potential maceholder is without an electoral ally is the question which puzzles political commentators at first. The alliance talks with BJP, CPI(M) and Congress hit a wall after an agreement in writing an Greater Tripaland was sought by Debbarma.

Some of these political outfits are refusing to sign on the dotted lines stating their assent on an issue which can backfire on them. After all, the political compulsions of these parties in the other non-tribal part of the state turned out to be a stunning blow in having the Motha as a poll partner.

Moreover, Debbarma's political rivals point out that an alliance with Motha in the state Assembly election may not be such a good idea. Unlike the other tribal Areas Autonomous District Council elections, tribal areas in Assembly constituencies are spread across the state and scattered over the constituencies.

Given the memories of violent clashes, the non-tribals are not keen on the idea of Greater Tripaland. It is most likely that Motha will not have many takers in the non-tribal areas. If this school of thought is anything to go by, then the Motha will not be scripting the same tale of success as it did in the TEADDC elections. The rationale of not allying with it is thus justified by the principal political outfits.

But another picture emerges as one reads between the lines. Sounds placating to the Motha has been emanating from the Congress, CPI(M) and Trinamool Congress. The BJP is also aware of the importance of tribal votes in the Tripura assembly elections. Party chief JP Nadda has recled out promises to woo the community.

Though Union Home Minister, Amit Shah has accused Motha of having struck a deal with CPI(M) and Congress, some Tripura voters feel Shah and Nadda are playing out a balancing act in the event they have to work out a post-poll formula of sharing the government. BJP leadership has kept its communications open with Pradyot. So the position with the rival Left-Congress alliance and Trinamool Congress. Meanwhile, Debbarma continues to count his ebullience; it remains to be seen whether they will be hatched.

For BJP, the stake in Tripura poll is the biggest among the three North Eastern states going to the polls in the first phase this month. BJP cannot afford to lose Tripura since this is the only state out of three where it is ruling as the main party. In Meghalaya and Nagaland, BJP is a junior partner of the NDA. In Meghalaya, the alliance has broken and BJP is fighting alone. So, the Union Home Minister is again visiting Tripura on February 12 and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 13. Both of them are expected to sense the mood of the people. Motha swept the tribal council polls in 2021 riding the Greater Tripaland demand. It is now contesting in 42 seats. This includes 22 constituencies outside a 20 Scheduled (IPH Service)



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Letters to the Editor

REW: Issues of election 2023

TER supply (REW). For the last fifty years all the governments have failed to provide these three basic amenities to the people. Think of the many rural villages which are not yet connected by motorable roads. For example, many villages in the Khatra-shrong area, are still isolated. In many remote villages of our state, even the existing motorable roads are in such miserable conditions that they are a more suitable for travelling. In rainy seasons they become deep pools of water. Why speak of rural villages? Even in Shillong city itself we know how traffic congestion remains an everlasting crisis. While Govshahi is witnessing the misbehaviour of flyovers to ease the traffic, Shillong can only dream of such development. So on roads, all governments have failed.

When it comes to electricity supply, we have not reached that level of 24x7 power supply. In spite of being an electricity generating state, the benefits are not seen at all. Even in the city areas, we are plagued with frequent scheduled and unscheduled

power cuts. Think of the many rural villages where power supply is either missing or not regular at all. In remote villages when power fails due to some disruptions, it remains so for weeks without immediate repairs. In this matter once again all governments have failed. When it comes to water supply, it is pathetic to think that our citizens do not yet have running water at home. The multiplicity of water tankers in Shillong and even in rural areas, is a clear proof that the governments for the last five decades have not been able to provide sufficient water supply to the public. Poor families have to shell out a good amount of their income buying water every day. Unfortunately, in this area too, all governments have failed miserably.

In conclusion I would say, let us not bother about other election promises (building this and that etc), but what we expect most of all from any government that will come to power is to provide us with the above-mentioned basic amenities. Long live our beloved state Meghalaya.

Yours etc., Barnes Mavrie adib, Via email

# Struck by Cupid's arrow — exciting or excruciating?

As Valentine's Day, that Hallmark holiday of greeting cards and chocolates, its bloody origins almost entirely forgotten over the last 2,000 years!

What began as a Christian feast day honoring two or three early Christian martyrs — the original "Valentines" — is now associated with flocks of winged cherubim, Cupids, whose innocuous-looking bows and arrows symbolize romantic death-dealing was here, the phrase "struck by Cupid's arrow" is exciting rather than excruciating.

The original Cupid was the son of Venus, Roman goddess of love and beauty. He himself was a Roman deity associated with lust and love, based on the Greek Eros. In Greece and Rome, both figures were depicted as handsome young men, but as winged infants.

But ancient poets and artists also imagined a troop of "Erotes" or "Cupidines" as attendants of these gods. The Romans portrayed them as winged infants, or "putti," as they became known in Italian Renaissance art. These, in turn, became the chubby choruses of today's valentines.

Despite envisioning the god with a troop of adorable attendants, even the Romans understood that Cupid had a darker, more dangerous side — one whose power you wouldn't want to dismist.

## SMALL BUT MIGHTY

The archer god Apollo found this out the hard way, as the poet Ovid told in his epic of A.D. 8, "Metamorphoses." Having just slain the dragon of Delphi with 1,000 arrows, Apollo provoked the fierce fury of Venus' son by mocking Cupid's seemingly toylike weapons.

Cupid swiftly took his revenge. He pierced Apollo's heart with a golden arrow, causing him to fall passionately in love with the nymph Daphne. But Daphne was a sworn virgin, and Cupid shot her with a lead arrow, intensifying her loathing for all things amorous.

She fled from Apollo's advances. The desperate deity pursued her relentlessly, until Daphne's father turned her into a laurel tree to save her. Cupid's arrows, however diminutive, were more powerful than Apollo's.

## THE UNSEEN SPOUSE

But the most famous characterization of Cupid in Latin literature appears in the work of

Apuleius, who lived during the second century in what is now Algeria. He wrote a story about Psyche, a princess so exceedingly beautiful that mortals worshipped her as if she were the goddess of love herself.

Enraged by jealousy, Venus commanded her son to make Psyche fall in love with the ugliest man possible. But a witch's oracle told the royal family that their daughter was destined to marry a "winged, untailed creature" that flew about tormenting everyone with fire — and they abandoned her on a cliff.

Psyche found herself borne by a gentle breeze to an elaborate palace inhabited by an "unknown" husband. He arrived and made Psyche his wife, departing before sunrise.

Her unseen spouse continued to visit nightly, and Psyche was soon overjoyed to find herself pregnant. But she also became increasingly lonely. Her mysterious husband agreed that her sisters could visit — as long as she did not try to "investigate his appearance." She happily agreed, telling him, "Whoever you are, I love you deeply. Not even Cupid could compare to you."

But when Psyche's two older sisters visited, they became envious of her luxurious life. "She must be married to a god!" they intreated — unlike Psyche, who remained inexplicably clueless. Hoping to break up the marriage, they offered a false explanation for her husband's secrecy: He must be a monstrous serpent intent on devouring her and her unborn child.

A horrified Psyche believed them, despite her intimate physical knowledge of her spouse — his "perfumed locks, tender cheeks, and warm chest." Armed with a dagger, she prepared to kill her husband as he slept. But first, ignoring his repeated warnings, she gazed at him by the light of an oil lamp.

Here, halfway through the story, the audience finally finds out his identity: none other than Cupid himself!

A statue of a naked woman looking down at a sleeping man on display in a park in autumn.

Psyche finally gets a good look at her husband.

At the sight, Psyche "fell in love with Love."

But a drop of scalding oil awakened Cupid. Utterly dismayed at his wife's betrayal, he flew away — but first explained: "I have disobeyed my mother's orders to fill you with passion for some vile wretch. I flew to you as your lover instead."

## LOVE LOST — AND FOUND

The rest of the narrative involves Psyche's long, arduous quest to win Cupid back. Though despairing and exhausted, Psyche willingly submitted herself to a series of brutal tasks imposed by Venus, only to fall into a deathlike slumber just before completing them.

And here is Cupid during all this: If he is characterized as a powerful, dangerous force in the first half of the story, the second half depicts him as a helpless mama's boy.

He flew back to Venus' palace, where his mother scolded him rigorously, scamed that he had embarrassed her, and locked him

in his room. Finally, recalling his love for Psyche, Cupid escaped out the window and saved her from eternal slumber.

Then he made a savvy deal with Jupiter, king of the gods: Psyche could be made immortal, clearing the way for her to "officially" marry Cupid in an arrangement that even satisfied Venus.

## COMPLEX VISION OF LOVE

Apuleius' story is rare in focusing on a female character and how love and desire affect her. The audience follows Psyche through several rites of passage. Initially, as an unmarried girl, she has not fulfilled her expected role of wife and mother.

As a frightened bride, she has no say in whom she marries — an experience common for young wives in ancient Roman society. Love does not enter the picture.

But Apuleius' portrayal of Psyche's situation suggests a lesson Roman writers of the day warned readers to believe: that young married women eventually come to desire and love

their husbands. Although that process can be long and difficult, wives and husbands both adjust to their roles over time.

The birth of Psyche's child, "Pleasure," at the end of the story results in harmony all around, an idealized image of marriage.

Ovid and Apuleius remind us that the original Cupid is not the benign little bearer of valentines but an elemental force of human nature — a "savage, untamed creature" that lights the fires of passion in unpredictable ways. Whereas Apuleius' lust for Daphne's visible beauty remained unsated, Psyche eventually enjoyed sex with her unseen husband. Apollo learned that longing isn't always mutual, while Psyche realized that love and trust must be earned.

Apuleius's story suggests that Cupid and all the intense emotions he represents, once tempered, can provide the basis for a loving, long-lasting relationship.

In short, both stories contain valuable lessons about the nature of romance. (The Conversation)

## Women dominance not representation

Wall Street Journal, Economist and Financial Times all now have female editors

Female editors have taken centre stage in three of the most prominent organisations on financial commentary — the *Economist*, *Financial Times* (FT) and the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ).

Heather McGaugher, Provost & Vice Principal, Heriot-Watt University Dubai, gives her gripping narrative on these women tussling their crucial roles and what it means for business.

After Emma Tucker starting work as editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, I thought for the first time ever, women are in charge of what I believe to be the three most influential organs of financial commentary.

When I commented on this on Twitter, it was the first time that one of my posts has gone viral. People pointed out many more women in positions of editorial command — Alessandra Galloni is editor in chief of *Reuters*, Sally Beebe is executive editor of the *Washington Post*, Deborah Turness is CEO of *BBC News* and *Current Affairs*, Julia Pace is executive editor of *Associated Press*.

I could carry on — Victoria Newton edits the *Sun*, Alison Phillips edits the *Daily Mirror*, and indeed to Adetunji edits *The Conversation* UK. Tucker herself arrives at the WSJ after being in charge of the UK's *Sunday Times*. Perhaps we should speak about female dominance rather than representation.

## THE EFFECT ON BUSINESS

All of that is fantastic progress, and more likely to inspire other female journalists to want to be editors — after all, it's hard to be what you can't see. The *Economist*/FT/WSJ trio, though, is the most critical for women in business. Full disclosure: I wrote a weekly column for the FT for 17 years under (three) male editors, before giving up when I became a full-time academic. My final editor, Lionel Barber, was fully supportive of women's careers — he did, after all, help to appoint Raula Khalaf as editor in January 2020 when he left.

Khalaf spoke in an interview in 2021 about taking the paper in a more female-friendly direction, striving towards a 50-50 male-female management split, as well as increasing the proportion of female columnists and subscribers. I took a look at the prestigious Lunch with the FT profile that appears each weekend, for instance, which featured 101 men to 56 women in the three years before Khalaf took over, while the divide has been 93:64 in the three years since.

Meanwhile at the *Economist*, where Zanny Minton Beddoes took over in 2015, the keywords "women in leadership" yielded 30 articles in the eight years before her appointment. In the eight years since, there have been 53.



More women at the top increases the likelihood of women rising through the ranks. Are these appointments more important in this respect than the increased number of women on boards? I think so. I was one of the small group of women who, in 2010, under the leadership of the financier Baroness Helena Morrissey, founded the 30% Club, which successfully campaigned to raise the proportion of women on boards.

The proportion of women on FTSE 100 company boards sank in 2010 was 12%, having been flat for over a decade. These days it's over 40%. But that's only 100 companies out of 2,000 listed on the London Stock Exchange, and doesn't include private businesses. There are over 5 million businesses in the UK, with 45,000 employing more than 50 people, and no reliable data available on their gender progress.

Even if we had that data, that's just businesses in the UK — these three publications cover the world. The *FT*, *WSJ* and *Economist* are so much more influential than the women that lead the UK's businesses.

The work of the 30% Club — which has gone from focusing on board-level appointments to challenging the makeup of the executive committee, and the pipeline behind it — has shown me that the thing that matters most is trying to change any inequality in giving it the oxygen of publicity. Women

leading the most respected financial commentary in the world can't fail to help other women in this regard.

Women in business are more likely to be known by women in the media, something that academics call "homophily" (the tendency for people who are similar to seek out each other's company). Success breeds success, so being appointed to these jobs means that the women taking them are more likely to meet other successful women, a concept known as "preferential attachment".

The high-profile nature of these appointments will also have drawn the attention of others to the merits of a woman editor. Arguably the biggest change that the appointment of Minton Beddoes made was that Khalaf and now Tucker were able to follow. Surprisingly, round about now seems a popular time for female leaders of major financial and business media organisations to start work. Minton Beddoes started in her current role on February 2 2015. Khalaf on January 20 2020.

Returning to Severn Trent, Helen Miles does not join until April 1, so that is when the company's all-female top team will get going. I am sure that they will be pleased that their progress, and the value that they will hopefully deliver to all their stakeholders, will be closely observed by women. (The Conversation)

## A whole new level of mixed media art

Artists never really leave anything alone. If you give them a tool it's going to get used. The prophetic words of art connoisseur Bill Goldston resounded as one witnessed the digital artworks of three brilliant artists at the ongoing India Art Fair here.

Taking mixed media art to a whole new level, Varun Desai, Mira Felicia Malhotra and Gaurav Ogale used the Apple iPad Pro to do things at the sort of speed at which the artist can imagine, well almost!

"Apple has been providing me with the best technology for this whole thing... An artwork like mine has a whole bunch of layers, so I am able to create about 150 layers in a really huge size. You can see that I am actually drawing on a small iPad, but it can be blown up to a bigger size," Mumbai based visual artist and illustrator Malhotra told IANS.

Malhotra, known for her bold, multicoloured, illustrated portraits of Indian women, feels that her iPad Pro and Apple Pencil help her bring her ideas out into the world quicker than ever.

Aligning with the theme for this year's showcase, "Finding the Extraordinary in the Ordinary", was multidisciplinary artist Desai's work titled, "Dimorphism" — a digital installation of code-generated video art, 3D LiDAR scanning, hand-drawn animation, and sound synthesis.

"This was created using code. Being a computer engineer, I learnt coding in a very sterile way that was not catered towards creating a visual art. So once this software called processing came along, I was able to channel all this technical knowledge I had to visualise these ideas," Desai said.

"The next process came from a very powerful aspect of the device which is called LiDAR Scanner, which allows you to scan architectural objects in the real world," Desai told IANS.

Apple CEO Tim Cook or Friday tweeted that at the first India Art Fair. "Digital Artists in Residence programme shows how technology can unlock creativity." "Great to see how iPad Pro is helping artists Mira, Varun, and Gaurav to tap into such incredible creative expression," Cook said.



Artists at work during the ongoing India Art Fair. (IANS)

A friendly interactive session at the event showed the attendees how to use the iPad Pro along with the Procreate graphic editor app to create basic artworks and unlock new styles and techniques. "Digital art is the future. I think one needs to be a pro at both — digital as well as traditional art. Using digital tech like iPads etc will only help us understand art better," Anisha Gaig, a student of Delhi College of Art who attended the digital art exhibit, said. (IANS)



# How disaster diplomacy united warring nations

The death toll of the massive earthquakes that have rocked the Turkey-Syria border region has now exceeded 5,000 people and the World Health Organization has suggested it could rise as high as 20,000. The catastrophe has led to an international outpouring of support. Numerous international rescue, medical, and other teams are arriving and on their way.

As ever, local emergency services were first on the front line to pull survivors from the collapsed buildings. We know from researching previous earthquake responses that most survivors are pulled out of the rubble by local residents and workers in the immediate aftermath.

But rescue attempts are ongoing and reports are continuing to emerge of people being found alive under the rubble, despite freezing temperatures at night and poor weather in many earthquake-affected areas.

Having researched disasters in conflict zones for more than 20 years, I'm acutely aware of how difficult the task will be in Turkey and Syria. This border region is riven with conflict which not only impedes the response to the disaster, but also often prevents or inhibits work to reduce the risk of earthquake impacts.

Yet effective diplomacy and a willingness for countries to work together despite their tensions can make a huge difference.

The area over which shocks continue to be felt has suffered long-term violent conflict. Kurds in the region have been fighting for a homeland for years in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Syria has been shattered by civil war since 2011, so the area around Turkey's border with Syria is packed with refugees from the fighting and is a crossing point for terrorists.

Reports are emerging that Damascus is demanding control of aid crossing into Syria and is allowing relief supplies to enter the region through only one border crossing. There have been calls for more crossing points to be opened to allow aid to get to disaster-affected people in Turkish areas affected by the quakes but so far there is no confirmation that Syria will allow this.

However, past experience tells us that if countries who are seemingly at loggerheads can pull together after a

disaster such as this, it can sometimes yield dividends.

Turkey itself provides an instructive example. For several decades, Turkey has had a fraught relationship with its neighbour Greece, including over Cyprus since Turkish forces invaded the north in 1974 in response to a coup supported by the Greek military government of the time.

And yet two earthquakes in 1999 challenged this picture of mutual enmity and distrust.

On August 17, more than 17,000 people died in an earthquake in north-west Turkey.

Greece offered extensive assistance and Turkey accepted.

Then on September 7, Turkey's main search-and-rescue team phoned the Greek ambassador to Turkey to explain that they had heard that Athens had been rocked by a tremor and to offer assistance. The quake killed over 140 people. A Turkish team pulled at least one trapped person from the rubble.

Since then, collaboration between Greece and Turkey on preventing disasters—involving wildfires, earthquakes and other hazards—has endured despite the shifting status of their diplomatic relationship.

Now, less than two months after threats of war over disputed territory in the Aegean Sea, Greece is once again offering disaster aid to help Turkey in the wake of the latest earthquakes.

### Stopping earthquake disasters

However, measures to help prevent disasters are always more useful than international post-disaster aid, which is notoriously inefficient. It usually takes at least 24 hours for an international search-and-rescue team to be on site and active.

It's expensive, too. As part of our research, we calculated that the approximate cost per post-earthquake life saved by international search-and-rescue teams is US\$1 million (£830,000).

Research has shown that "informal disaster diplomacy" aimed at preventing or mitigating disaster impacts, such as those seen in these earthquakes, tends to be more successful than cooperation after the event.

Long-term pre-earthquake actions



are certainly far more effective for saving lives and helping people than waiting until the ground has shaken and infrastructure has collapsed.

From the US to Japan, many lives have been saved by building codes and

planning regulations—not to mention a population that knows what to do before and during an earthquake. It's eminently possible these days to build structures that can withstand seismic shaking.

Because of our ability to mitigate the effects of hazards such as earthquakes, researchers avoid the phrase "natural disaster".

Earthquakes will always happen as the earth's tectonic plates clash and do

shift. But it doesn't follow that this must always mean a disaster. And we can make ourselves less vulnerable to tremors by working together—even with our political enemies. (The Conversation)

## 'Star - Gazing'

Sunday, FEBRUARY 12, 2023

**By Pt. Ajal Bhambi**

**'Birthday Forecast'**  
Moon square Mercury on your solar return chart and gives excellent results. Opportunities for some good news in work-related will come to you. You will grow in your career/business. Your family life will remain peaceful. You will also learn something new. Bring something new into your job, career and business and you will be involved in your work. You will have financial gain. You will also see some problems of other people. There will be an increase in your popularity and self respect. You will remain in the spotlight. You will also strengthen your potential and capabilities to other people. You will share wonderful bonding with your life partner. Your contact in business will expand. You may adventure you could gain from these contacts will be known with the passage of time.

**This week for you?**  
**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)** You will begin your week with a bang. You will get promoted in your job. Best wishes will pour in from every nook and corner. Your government related work will get completed. You will focus on your business/work. You will bring changes in your office. You will get the benefit of the change later on. This will also change in your manner of working. You will have new plans made with regard to the future. You will also establish a harmonious relationship with friends and bring each work a logical conclusion. You will get a promotion in your job, email, or internet etc. You will have no financial aspects. Lovebirds will have a great time. You will fulfil your responsibilities with maturity and confidence.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)** There will be the pressure of work. You will cope up with it well. You will get lot of money for your efforts. You will get help from your colleagues/subordinates. You will fill up work on planning for some future project. You will have a good hold for some time together. You will get lot of financial problems and difficulties. But will come out of it. You will not take any risk in your business. You will be well prepared. You will bring about a change in your speech and behavior. The worries that were there with regards to your children will come to an end. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time. Students will do well in examinations. You also need to keep your anger under control.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)** You will have harmony in your family. Loved ones will give lot of respect to each other. People will be in awe of you. You will have money on your hands to spend. You might buy something new for the house. You will take a real decision regarding your business. You will make some important plans regarding your work/relations. Students will make good progress in their careers. You will remain popular among people. You will get your work done with your guests, friends and mutual etc. The purchase of a sudden gains from strangers. Marriage gets successful. You may get a loan. Matters pertaining to property will be resolved. Money that was given on loan will come back to you from somewhere.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)** Your health related problems will get solved. You will also fulfil resolutions made by you. You will make you a lot happy. You will get favourable results in financial field. Money that was given to some person will come back to you all of a sudden. You will be an advantage person in your business. You will also be a complete your work. You will have wonderful relations with your partner/spouse. There are chances of money/love. Your efforts will be full of confidence. Your financial position will be stable. A family get together might take place. You will be happy a lot.

**Leo: (July 23 - Aug 23)** Some job related matters might be solved. Your own people will give you a helping hand. You will perform an outstanding task which will bring lot of name and fame to you. You will get favourable results in government services. You will also take the heights of success. You will have the likes for leaders etc. Your obstacles in government work will get removed. You need to focus on your goals. Do not let your ego come between your career and personal life. Always do not be a rival your job with anyone. Your achievements in the financial field will be great. You will plan to go with your family. And will have lot of fun.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)** The growth of your fame and prestige will rise up more. You will be full of self esteem. You will also get a lot of the respect in your work. You will be able to do what you desire. It is a great time for those who plan to give some assistance. You will take the advice of some superior or get in connection with some important subject. Your work will get completed with ease. Hence you will get mental peace. You will be busy at home and with family. The contact is your business and employment matters will come to an end. You might visit an elderly person or your house for drink. You will also spend in welfare work and social donations.

**Libra: (September 24 - October 23)** You will have the pressure of work, but you will not be under any tension. You will be able to finish your work. You will also get the money needed. You tasks will not remain unfinished. There are chances of some new work plan. You will get better opportunities in your career and job. You will be getting support of your boss. Your health will remain perfect. You will not get any sort of virus. There will be no differences between husband and wife. Your opportunities and ideas will get fulfilled. There will be excess travelling. You could also be about a change in your speech and behavior. Students will perform well. You will enhance your capabilities and will get better results. Expansion plans in business will flourish and you will get opportunities to progress in your job.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23)** Your life is like an open book which everyone can read. You will be once again on track. You will do well in your job/business. There is a right in education, marriage and other areas. Your marriage can be gratified. Expansion plans in business will flourish. You will get a promotion in your job that you always wanted. You will give leaders respect in questions thrown at you. Husband and wife will sit an wonderful bonding. There can be a positive change in your life with the aid and advice of a family member. There are strong chances of monetary gains. No one will be able to stand up to you in legal matters. You will win court battles.

**Sagittarius: (November 24 - December 23)** There will be good harmony between husband and wife. You will start by yourself and new for the house. You will also make important plans regarding your career and business. Your job prospects will also increase. You may find the right job that you have been searching for a long time now. Visitors will drop in your home. You will have lot of fun and joy with family members. You will get your work done with your good communication skills. You will also plan to go on a pilgrimage with your family. You will take interest in your busy schedule. Despite being busy, you will come in contact with rich people. You will be monetary and mentally satisfied.

**Capricorn: (December 24 - January 23)** Your time will be well spent. You will do your job perfectly. You will do all time doing unproductive work. You will meet some persons who will help you a lot. Guests will come in and you will be busy in welcoming them. Many persons will acknowledge your capability. You should also do the work with sincerity and honesty. You will pay attention to your family. You have the quality of humility and will get emotional support from friends. Resolve your misunderstandings with your partner/spouse. You will also plan to visit you relative's place. Your financial position will be great. You will be full of positivity. Your relations with high rank officials will be good.

**Aquarius: (January 24 - February 18)** Your name and fame will spread far and wide. You will be full of enthusiasm. You will gather all the resources in studies. You will also feel some changes in your life. In your quest to do something, you will make new contacts. You will have gains in your business. Your attention will be focused on your targets. You will move towards projects. You will like getting help from your life partner and family members. Students will do well. It is a great time for those who are studying. You will find a special opportunity that you are looking. You will have loving relations with your spouse/partner. You also need to control your anger and emotion.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)** You will get lot of mental peace. Love affairs will be successful. You will enjoy good bonding with your partner. There will be obstacles in business and employment matters that will not bother you. You will receive them one by one in business you will sign a big contract or deal. The outpouring of names will be good. You might give some name/labels to you or other and remember. You will also change your name/labels with that. You will receive pleasant news. Always at improving your career will prove to be successful. Some suspicious works will get done at your hands. You will be happy at the purchase of some new items for the house.

# Homestays – the next big thing in Indian hospitality

The hotel industry in India is getting ready for significant changes to meet the evolving and dynamic needs of the modern Indian tourist. The travel industry in India is expected to develop at a rate of 11 to 11.5 percent, reaching a staggering \$48 billion in 2020.

In order to meet the enormous demand for homestays among foreign and domestic travellers, India needs to add 2.5 million rooms to the homestay market. Travel firms are searching for hassle-free, relaxing vacations that include comfort and convenience. People like vacation spots that are both affordable and close to their homes.

The ultimate pleasure of a vacation is the opportunity to relax and revitalise in a place that makes you feel at home. Unquestionably, one way to see the expanding travel industry in India is through home stays.

As a result of the significant demand in the Indian industry, homestays are offering expanding business opportunities. Both vacationers and homeowners can consider them as a suitable choice.

Homestay is a private residence that has been transformed by the host into lodging. It includes a variety of extras, such as meals, a personal butler, local transportation, and pickups. It's a terrific way to get involved in local affairs and experience a sense of "home away from home." Homestays give visitors a special experience and pay tribute to Indian hospitality.

Unlike home stays, which offer the opportunity to accommodate large groups and families, formal hotels have restrictions on the number of visitors they may hold. It provides a level of luxury and individuality that even the most famous hotels are unable to match.



Peaceful locations that are away from the hustle of the city

The calm settings are a big factor in why homestays are becoming more and more popular. Homestays are the ideal getaway for travellers because they are situated in charming districts away from the busy city centre and tourist noise. While sipping coffee and taking in the sunrise between the hills, tourists may avoid tourist traps, tours, frauds, and other problems.

Personalized service

The beauty and spirit of homestays is that they provide visitors the chance to experience the cosiness of a one-on-one connection. You can get a lot of one-on-one attention because it is administered by homeowners who also serve as hosts and only cater to one family at a time. The owners of the homes can serve as your tour guides and show you around, arrange transportation for day trips nearby, and prepare meals according to your preferences. This individualised care and bonding is a fantastic method to create relationships that last.

Distinctive accommodations

The idea of staying in impersonal accommodations has grown old with travellers. Homestays provide an unparalleled chance to explore India's breathtaking beauty and diversity. There are several

possibilities for homestays, such as tree huts, stone homes, farm houses, plantation bungalows, old havelis (mansions), and rural cottages. There are other options, including residing with a tribal family or a royal family.

Unique activities

Depending on the location of the homestay, proprietors invest a lot of effort into planning activities for the hosts. Some of the alternatives include touring a coffee plantation in Coorg or attending a polo match in Rajasthan.

Affordable alternative

Homestays provide an authentic local experience. Homestays enable tourists to get out of their comfort zones and interact with the local culture. A homestay offers tourists a genuine and unadulterated experience that includes getting to know local people, eating food that is grown nearby, and taking in the wonders of other cultures.

Instead of paying extravagantly only on a room at a standard hotel, tourists may afford that extra excursion or a pampering session at an Ayurvedic resort. (HANSI)

*"Time stays long enough for anyone who will use it."*  
—Leonardo da Vinci

The Shillong Times  
Vol No. LXV No. 102 SHILLONG, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2023

**Railways first, roads next**

FOR the common man, India's economic growth is reflected principally in the unveiling of world-class highways and expressways being set in place by the successive governments since the AB Vajpayee term. This is not to ignore the other pointers like the railways where, however, progress of a minor scale is being witnessed; or in the case of new ports under the Sagor Maik project that are aimed at improving the networks for the logistics sector. Scores of new airports are coming up too. The inauguration of the first section of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway -- the Delhi-Dausa-Lalsot segment -- by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Rajasthan on Sunday is a praiseworthy push for national growth. Once completed, this would substantially reduce the road travel/land movement time between the national capital and the nation's principal commercial city. This would provide "a major boost" to the region's economic development -- encompassing mainly Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Appreciably, several world-class expressway projects are currently being implemented across the country to boost connectivity and act as an engine of growth and development. The forward momentum to the nation's growth is "experienced" by people across regions. However, what must not go unnoticed is the continuing plight of the railways sector. The overall growth of this vital sector during the two Modi terms is less than impressive; so was the case during the two UPA terms. At that time, Manmohan Bhanjee stonewalled attempts at raising passenger fares, which resulted in a serious handicap to the railways in raising resources for modernization. There existed no such constraint for the Modi government in making a harder push for railway sector growth and modernization -- meaning changing the old tracks system and introducing trains that could travel at high speed. But, in the past nine years, even the much-trumpeted Bullet Train project promising a speed of 300 kmph failed to materialize. The locally produced Vande Bharat trains with a promised speed of 160 kmph are only an improvement over the antiquated systems that the railways have maintained for many years. This, overall, is small comfort.

A fact that should be borne in mind is that the railways offer the most cost-effective mode of transport both for passengers and freight. India spends through its nose for oil imports. The government is doing a disservice to the nation by zealously promoting the roads sector at the cost of the railways. True, road projects create jobs for large numbers of people and reach a substantial part of the money thus spent into the hands of the poor. So would railway track development too. It's time to concentrate more on the Railways.

Letters to the Editor

**Why create ethnic-political divide?**

Editor,  
From the day, the election dates were announced by ECI your esteemed paper had been periodically reporting about who should become Chief Minister after the State Assembly elections. Even in the edition of February 12, 2023 you published this report in the front page and propagated ethnic friction among the two indigenous tribes in Meghalaya. Apparently the paper is trying to create toxic ideas that may lead to disturbance of peace and bonhomie existing among the indigenous tribes. The question as to who should become Chief Minister of Meghalaya, whether a Khasi or a Jaintia or a Garo or from other tribes recognised in the State is a question best left to political parties. They are competent enough to arrive at such consensus amongst themselves. If the Shillong Times is regularly poking the political parties with that same toxic question, I doubt its apolitical nature. Or is it aspiring to become a political mouthpiece of some political parties?

Also, the political slugging and associated drama occupies the centre stage in your paper these days. Allegations and counter allegations have become monotonous features. I believe there are more pressing concerns in the State, the country and the globe that you can enrich your readers with rather than petty issues. For instance, a few days ago the news item about students

getting sick due to pollution in Bymnat deserves much applause and would have been much better if it was the main headline to draw the attention of readers.

Yours etc.,  
Lamington R Sangma,  
Ex-Manager, United Bank of India,  
Shillong

**Editor replies:** This paper has always been apolitical and will remain so. When leaders of political parties make public claims about who they prefer as the Chief Minister after the results are announced on March 2, it is our duty to voice their views. During elections the public get to know the political parties and their objectives better when they read the newspapers and can make informed opinions about who to vote for. Not all are as well-informed about issues as some are.

**Wrong name of factory**

Editor,  
We would like to draw your kind attention to the report published in your esteemed daily on Feb 11, 2023, regarding students of Don Bosco Higher Secondary School, Bymnat falling ill from fugitive pollutants of a steel plant. The report goes as with a detailed location of the steel plant at Haribogang, Bymnat where a team of officials from KJ - BHO district administration and Environmental Engineers of Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board visited the plant on Friday for investigation.

Here, we would like to clarify that the name of the plant has been wrongfully

**To hug or not to hug a Cow is the Question**

By H H Mohrmen

The notice issued by the Animal Welfare Board of India, which is an agency of the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying of the government of India declaring February 14 as Cow Hug Day has not only sparked a debate but cartoonists and meme makers also had a field day because of the order. The notice compelled me to revisit an article I wrote a decade ago and realized how relevant it is to the current situation. It was a real story that happened to me a decade ago and I rewrite it again because the situation in the country requires that we question, introspect and ask ourselves the question whether we really want to hug a cow on Valentine's Day (February 14) or not.

I always envy people who live in villages; to me, their lives seem simple, easy, and at peace with everything around them. It looks like it is not difficult and complex as life in the towns and the cities is. It was out of this love for country life that I decided as a young boy on the profession that I spent a good part of my life in.

I love the green hills and enjoy the pleasant breeze in the open fields. I also love to watch the clear pristine waters that flow from the rivers to the roaring river down below. For me, the life down the calm, narrow, and scenic traffic road in the countryside is a spiritual exercise in itself. It is an opportunity to enjoy nature in all its grandeur, a hassle-free drive where I can park anywhere I like and be overwhelmed by the splendor of the green nature around.

Of all my visits to many villages in these beautiful Khasi Jaintia hills of Meghalaya, this one visit was the most memorable. Kschryngchang is a beautiful village on the important road which connects Jowai in Meghalaya with Khamti and Hlanon in the state of Assam. I used to shuttle to and from Jowai to Khamti in Kschryngchang to perform my pastoral duties. On one particular visit to the village, I had to stay overnight to complete my pastoral duties the next

day. I arrived in the evening just before it got dark. It was indeed a magnificent moonless and cloudless night. I spent some time out of doors in the cold dry night sitting on a bamboo stool to enjoy the darkness which was illuminated by the dim light from the stars in the sky. The soft light from the starry sky dimly lit the nature around me. Even though it was mid-December, the needle leaves on the pine trees still looked fresh and green, and the pristine waters of the Myntang sparkled while it flowed down the course to join the river Myntang. When I looked around, the open fields surrounded by hills looked so beautiful; everything was black and white. I took beautiful black-and-white snapshots of the wonderful night with my mind's eye.

I thought village life was simple and I knew almost everything I needed to know about living in the countryside. The cow croaked three times and I was woken up by the mooing of a mother cow calling its calf which had loitered nearby. It was the beginning of the post-harvest season in the area and by tradition after harvest farmers are allowed to let their animals loose without the owner having to take care of the animals. The tradition is called "Dat-ran" in the Jaintia hills and "pyatlat" in the Khasi hills. During this time of the year, animals are allowed to roam freely without anyone tending to them. It is the only time of the year when the cow herders and goat herders are given a holiday. The animals (cattle in particular) were left uncared for during the dry months and will be shepherded back in spring before the sowing season.

The next morning was cold, dry, and ensy. I hesitatingly unzipped my sleeping bag and got out of bed and walked to the porch of the house overlooking the hills. I raised my hands and stretched them high to greet the rising sun. While standing on the porch of

the house, I looked for a place nearby with patches of wood in it. To my right, I saw a small hill nearby with plenty of standing pine trees and walked towards the hill to answer nature's call. On reaching the hill I noticed a herd of cows grazing on a frosty morning. I walked on the clear path and a young bull threatened me by lowering its head as if to hit me. I shouted at the bull, which from the way it was blowing air from its nose, seemed to be in a rage. I shouted at it again and it somewhat avoided confronting each other. I continued to walk and not to finish my chore. I walked the same path again to return to the house where I again noticed a cow that seemed to be avoiding confronting each other. I continued to walk and not to finish my chore. I walked the same path again to return to the house where I again noticed a cow that seemed to be avoiding confronting each other. I continued to walk and not to finish my chore.

The second attack hit me on my right face near my right eye; the attack was so powerful that with a big thud, I saw stars and lost consciousness. Even after I fell to the ground, the furious bull did not leave me; it kept on hitting me and made me conscious again. While hitting me, it also made an angry call, which was answered by the mother cow nearby. The cow too joined forces with the bull to mercilessly attack me and fix me on the pine tree nearby. It was sheer luck that Khamtiwoot Lamare and Hsiting Langsumang who accompanied me on the trip were close by. They, being villagers, understood the unusual call of the cows, and went to see what happened. When they saw me being hit mercilessly time and again by the bull and the cow, Khamti tried to shoot the cow away; but the cow

paid no heed. He then took a long stick and started hitting the attacking cow to save me from the animals. Finally, the bull and cow left me alone but not unscathed. I was left with bruises and pain all over my body. Khamti and Beitlang helped me get back on my feet and walked me down to the house.

On reaching our host's home I was told that I was lucky that it was the young bull that attacked me because its horns are still too small to do any serious damage to my body. When I reached the house and innocently told them that I always assumed that cows are harmless animals, I asked them why the animals attacked me. They said it was because I went too close to the mother cow which still milks a baby calf. They advised me not to walk near the mother cow anymore. Thank goodness, my ribs are intact and I only had bruises on my face, but it would have been a different story if it had been an adult bull with full-grown horns that attacked me.

Of course, I had learnt another lesson, but I learned the lesson the hard way. I call the incident a crash course on cow's behaviour not because it is quick but because it came crashing on me all of a sudden. I learnt that generally animals have the instinct to feel the pangs of hunger to procure, and to protect themselves and their offspring. The incident has also taught me another lesson - to never assume that village life is simple. It is very complex and includes among other things, the wisdom to know and predict the behavior of animals, the cycle of the seasons, and the vagaries of plants' lives.

I hope this piece will make our friends who plan to hug (or even go near) a cow, gives makes teaches them to think ahead and that the unfortunate incident that occurred to me will make them revisit their enthusiasm to make people hug a cow. Thankfully the Animal Welfare Board comes to have been sung by the jokes and memes and has cancelled the "Hug a Cow" circus.

absent on what is most probably the most important platform of deliberation where almost all those contesting the elections took time out of their tight schedules to attend it, unsurmountable. The question is why couldn't the make some time for her own constituents?

The Sena Samita Laitumkhrah is deserving of immense praise and acclamations for taking the initiative to host a public debate the first in the entire history of the constituency, where the candidates from different parties could come together and share their vision for the 16-East Shillong constituency in this upcoming general election to the Legislative Assembly.

**Shorting being made scapegoat for Adani group's malpractices Practice of short sale performs vital role as a corrective force**

By K Raveendran

In a desperate bid to defend Adani, an orchestrated attempt is being made to present shorting as something undesirable and even abominable. Adani himself has tried to pretend that the action by US investment firm Hindenburg in exposing the irregularities in his group's accounting practices as an attack against India and the Modi government is putting all its might behind the tycoon, obviously because it is the most favoured corporate house in the country. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court, which is hearing pleas seeking investigations into Hindenburg's expose, is also giving the impression that shorting is the villain.

Shorting is an accepted trading practice and it serves as a great corrective against corporate impunity, forcing companies to be on their guard. The threat of

The court, however, noted that the Hindenburg report, which was beyond its territorial jurisdiction and that there are regulations which deal with the practice. The court also opined that it was for the government to take a call on whether some modification is required for the regulatory framework. The court also indicated that beyond a certain stage it won't enter into the policy domain. It is obvious that there will be a lot of arguments in favour of disallowing shorting as it has been found to hurt investors of the Adani group companies. That it would be a good day if the government falls for the argument and comes forward to ban the practice, which is accepted as normal and salutary in all mature markets. In fact, intolerance towards shorting has been mostly an Asian phenomenon as emerging



shorting keeps companies to be beware of questionable practices as when it is detected it can damage a company's prospects in the market for ever.

It is true that the since the Hindenburg report was published, shares of Adani group companies have crashed, with the group forced to ditch its FPO issue, citing morality. It has indeed hurt millions of investors. But that is no reason to justify fraud, as

market governments often show weariness towards practices that work against their companies even when they are in their practices. It has been pointed out time and again that without this corrective, it is easier for bubbles to form, and then burst. Shorting, however, can also mean that investors have to pay higher prices for stocks. According to a report released by MSC1, short-selling is a key "ingredient in

**Adani himself has tried to pretend that the action by US investment firm Hindenburg in exposing the irregularities in his group's accounting practices as an attack against India and the Modi government is putting all its might behind the tycoon, obviously because it is the most favoured corporate house in the country.**

pointed out by Hindenburg in its reply to the alleged rebuttal by the Adani group. In fact, the investment firm has further exposed the rebuttal, citing the fact that Adani's '313 page' response only included about 30 pages focused on issues related to its report and that the rest comprised high-level financials, general information, and details on irrelevant corporate initiatives, such as how it encourages female entrepreneurship and the production of safe vegetables.

What's expressing concern about protecting Indian investors, the Supreme Court has sought the views of the Centre and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on suggestions to improve the regulatory mechanism and proposed the constitution of an expert committee to give suggestions on strengthening the regulatory framework.

Another benefit of short-selling is that it can enable investment strategies that align with environmental, social and governance principles and support a more sustainable economy. According to a report by Alternative Investment Management Association released in July, short-selling can help create "an economic impact by influencing the nature of capital flows through 'active' investing."

Governments have been advised to recognize that regulated and transparent short-selling supports efficient markets, makes them more attractive to global investors, and enhances their ability to support local economies. (IPA Service)

published as M's Commercial Iron & Steel Co. Pvt. Ltd. Bymnat as our factory is not located at Haribogang, near Don Bosco Higher Secondary School, Bymnat nor has any official as mentioned in the news item visited our factory to investigate the matter. Our factory is located at EPIP Complex, Rajabagan Bymnat at a distance of 15 KM from Haribogang and the name of our factory has been unnecessarily dragged into the matter.

**Incumbent MLA absent from public debate**

Editor,  
After our visit to congratulate the Sena Samita Laitumkhrah for taking the initiative to host a public debate where candidates from different parties could come and share their vision for the 16-East Shillong constituency in this upcoming general election to the Legislative Assembly.

The debate was civil, productive, highly stimulating and an eye-opener for the constituents. Unfortunately it was disappointing to note the absence of the incumbent MLA Dr Ampreen Lyngdoh. It saddens me that she couldn't be there to defend her work as a three-term representative, but perhaps there's not much to defend since she's done nothing concrete at all, hence her absence is not surprising.

Although her absence was blamed on her busy schedule as informed by her minion (the incumbent MD). What we all know is that she is busy campaigning for her sister in Nongthymma. The question is why couldn't she make some time for her own constituents? We all know that a political de sate is healthy for democracy, and since this being the first political debate between the first political debate based in 16 East Shillong, as a three-term candidate her presence would've given her rivals an opportunity to question her. Is the Sena Samita's invitation not worthy of her time? Whatever her excuses may be, her absence is nothing short of an insult to the Sena Samita, to her fellow constituents who also made time out of their busy schedules to participate in the debate and the constituents in general.

We expect better from our MLA. We also expect other constituencies to be inspired and emulate the example set by the Sena Samita Laitumkhrah to hold political debates during this election so that the public get a chance to elect the most eligible candidate to represent us in the Legislative Assembly.

Yours etc.,  
Rikkita Sawian  
Via email

**Hats off Sena Samita Laitumkhrah!**

Editor,  
The Sena Samita Laitumkhrah in partnership with the Shillong Maf organised an interesting and enlightening debate. A unique feature is that it included almost all

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

"Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit."

— Jawaharlal Nehru

The Shillong Times

Corruption an in-issue in Meghalaya

MANIFESTOS are coming out thick and fast from political parties contesting the 2023 elections. Most manifestos are generic in nature and give a broad brush of governance issues. Political parties that are yet to be tried and tested have publicly stated that they will ensure corruption-free governance and look into corruption cases by the previous government if voted to power. The problem is that apart from the urban voters who feel that corruption is a debilitating factor and the reason why Meghalaya is economically weaker, the bulk of the voters in rural Meghalaya don't really understand why corruption is the bane of governance and deprives them of their right to a range of resources. Corruption is a form of tyranny as it deprives those with the greatest need for state services on account of their poverty. Corruption is the reason why over 32% of Meghalaya's population has slipped below the poverty line.

In the rural areas the public distribution system is often subverted. Money is being made on transportation of food grains. Money is being made from road construction projects. In fact, money is being made from every conceivable project from every department. Right now the much-touted claim that the Jal Jeevan Mission has reached every village and household is a hollow claim. But the problem is that people in villages don't know of this scheme. They still spend hours at water points waiting to fill water in a queue. This does not bother the officials of the PHED or the minister in charge of the Department. People are so used to not being serviced by government schemes that they are grateful for small improvements in their lives.

The Power Department has existed before statehood but there are still many villages that do not yet have electricity. Ground reports have found smart meters being fixed in homes that do not yet have electricity. There cannot be more gross corruption than this! Yet people wallowing in poverty and ignorance don't know that they are being short-changed. Even during the campaign period, people don't raise questions over these burning issues. Candidates come, give long speeches and leave no space for people to raise questions. This monologic election campaign has to give way to something better. Corruption is the biggest enemy that must be fought head on. In Meghalaya there are too few people in the urban centres that are aware about the Right to Information (RTI) as a tool to bring the corrupt to book. The RTI movement has not really reached the rural areas of Meghalaya but why would the government care when it is better served if people continue to remain ignorant of their rights.

Letters to the Editor

Visionary leaders need of the hour in Meghalaya

Editor, I just saw a video of the BJP candidate from Masaynam saying that he joined the BJP because he wants to bring the milk and the honey from Delhi. Leaving aside political affiliations and politics, I think Meghalaya and other Northeastern states need politicians who will find out ways and means to enable us to stand on our own feet rather than politicians with such mentality. It's a shame too that he doesn't know the basic tenets of Centre-State financial relations considering the fact that he was a former Meghalaya Civil Service Officer. For his information, there is a constitutional body called the Finance Commission and its main function is to distribute the net proceeds of taxes between Centre and States according to their respective contributions to the taxes and its second main function is to determine factors governing Grants-in-Aid to the States and the magnitude of the same. In 2022-23, there are 14 states including 7 Northeastern states that received the Past Devolution Review Deficit grant. Meghalaya is also one of them. The revenue grant is based on the gap between revenue and expenditure of

each state post tax devolution. It basically means that the National People's Party that they earned hence the need for the revenue deficit grant.

Looking at the bright side, the fiscal health of the National People's Party of smaller states like Nagaland and Mizoram. Cutting across party lines, our state needs visionary leaders who will help improve the fiscal health of the state and also generate employment for the thousands of unemployed youths and hopefully if we produce such leaders, our state will become a revenue surplus state in the future.

Yours etc., Gary Marhanjang, Via email

NPP still going strong!

Editor, The front page news "NPP mocks Congress '5-star dream' for state" (ST February 12, 2023) made an interesting reading. The NPP spokesperson Biju Pynorpe rightly mocked the 5-star dream of the Congress party which is struggling to revive in order to survive. He has also rightly questioned that is Congress is aiming to achieve this, why does nobody across the country believe their own words? Even an average person with an iota of political basic sense knows that this will never happen. More likely than not, the coming elections will produce another hung Assembly with the NPP again emerging as the single largest party with 20 to 22 seats more or less. The UDP

"History never repeats itself, but it does often rhyme"

— Mark Twain

This quote often attributed to Mark Twain, is a good tool to make sense of our current times. Recently various members of the ruling dispensation in India have stirred up the controversy regarding the appointment of judges. The Supreme Court was criticised for striking down the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) brought by the Modi government in 2016 and the judgement in Kesavananda Bharati Case (1973) which laid down the doctrine of Basic Structure of the Constitution was called a bad precedent. Supreme Court was also berated for the creation of collegium system and it was advocated that "search committee" or "evaluation committee" comprising of representatives of the executive and judiciary should be formed to short list candidates for appointment. Such repeated attacks create the false narrative that judiciary is a group of individuals with a conspiracy against the elected government of the people. It is as if a cabal hides its secrets from the public. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Historical Background There has always been a tussle between the judiciary and the executive be it on appointments or on matters pertaining to rights and policy. The areas of contention lies in the constitution. Articles 124 and 217 grant power to the President of India to appoint judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts respectively after "consultation" with the Chief Justice of India (CJI). However, Article 74 states that President shall carry out all executive functions on the "aid and advice" of the "Council of Ministers". This leads to a natural conflict between the two branches of the State as there is a disagreement as to whose advice shall bear more weightage. Although there was no such problem during the tenure of first two Prime Ministers, who were accepting the CJI having the final say, things went downhill when Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister. Many of her policies were struck down by the judiciary. During her second term the idea of "committed judiciary" took centre stage. This implied that judges whose ideologies were in alignment with that of the government were to

be promoted and appointed. Many judges were promoted out of turn superseding their seniors. This carried on until 1993 in the case of Supreme Court Advocates-On-Record Association (SCARA) vs Union of India, commonly called the Second Judges Case, where it was held that judicial view will hold primacy. A new institution called the Collegium was created which consisted of the CJI along with two senior most judges. This was later increased to five in 1998.

Collegium system was brought to preserve the idea of independence of judiciary which is the part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution. The independence of judiciary is possible when the judges are independent, and they are independent when they are not committed to the Executive but to the Constitution.

Insidious Criticism It is claimed that collegium is aligned to the Executive. It is also said that Government has no say in the appointment of judges and it is only the judges who appoint the judges. This shows a defective understanding of the functioning of four institutions and Constitution. The doctrine of Basic Structure which is also not explicitly part of our Constitution and yet integral part, is rooted in jurisprudence and history. It has saved India from the whims and fancies of the Executive. Since independence, the idea of collegium is a refined mechanism to appoint judges thereby balancing the views of the judiciary and executive. If we go deeper into the workings of the Collegium and understand how it plays out in the real world, then we will not only appreciate the collegium mechanism but also appreciate the wisdom of the Executive. The views of the latter are taken. If there is an objection by the Executive the said names are sent back for reconsideration. Many a times the judiciary considers the objection and the collegium is withdrawn. In case, after the objection is considered and judiciary reiterates the same names then the appointment must happen. This is the only instance where the judges have the last word. If for some reason the President (or Executive/Government)

ment) does not give his assent, then appointment does not go through. Therefore the final stamp of approval lies with the Government and not the judiciary.

By Manraj Singh

Collegium, Conflict and Resolution

UK follows the policy of open competition of the candidates. They are interviewed by a Judicial Commission and then consultation is done with politicians and senior judges. At no stage does one party hold veto power over the other. NJAC gave disproportionate amount of power in the hands of the Executive to veto candidates without mandating a reason. This explains why Supreme Court of India declared it unconstitutional.

It was Harid Laski, the iconic intellectual who advocated for the judiciary to have a decisive say in appointments. In 'The Grammar of Politics', he studied the various systems throughout the Western world. His analysis terms the system of election of judges in USA as a method to be "without exception the worst". Regarding appointments done by the legislature, he opined that "an average member of the legislature has no special qualifications" to judge the suitability of the candidate. Laski also studied appointments done by the Executive. He found that this was being done in the UK and the Lord Chancellor was appointing judges who were members of his own party. Similar would happen in India if the Collegium system is dismantled. Laski finally comes to the conclusion that it is the judiciary that is best suited to judge the capability of a candidate. They are not likely to be moved by "political prestige" and are best suited to know the day to day activities of the bar to judge a person.

We must watch this developing story especially the manner of criticism and outburst against the judiciary. However, it is commendable in its transparency, yet it can be disastrous due to the power wielded by the Executive. Judges are appointed on the basis of merit, intellect and ideological lines dependent upon the people in power. This leads to dangerous judgments which can be on a line with political ideology rather than sound legal principles. The judges in the States are appointed by election which has its own merits. The focus of the judges becomes more on winning the election by any means possible rather than the present system on legal acumen.

The chosen system of appointment in the United Kingdom can bring us closer to the idea of a better system.

Looking elsewhere around the world we can learn the good lessons and reject the bad ones. In the USA, the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court is an extremely political and partisan process. However, it is commendable in its transparency, yet it can be disastrous due to the power wielded by the Executive. Judges are appointed on the basis of merit, intellect and ideological lines dependent upon the people in power. This leads to dangerous judgments which can be on a line with political ideology rather than sound legal principles. The judges in the States are appointed by election which has its own merits. The focus of the judges becomes more on winning the election by any means possible rather than the present system on legal acumen.

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Protests across India on MGNREGA budget cut

Reduced job guarantee makes rural workforce restive

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

Ever since the Union Budget 2023-24 was tabled in the Parliament, MGNREGA workers across the country have been protesting against substantial budget cuts for the second year reducing the earlier employment guarantee, thereby making the rural workforce restive. The reduction in budget allocation would adversely affect 15.51 crore active rural workers enrolled under the scheme.

During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the scheme was ramped up and an allocation of Rs.11 lakh crore were made. It provided critical livelihood support to 11 crore workers. However, despite rise of about 4.5 crore workers demanding work from this scheme the Union Budget 2023-24 has reduced allocation from Rs.89,400 crore in the Revised Estimate to Rs.60,000 crore. The MGNREGA Sangharsh Mancha says that this level of allocation can support only 20 days of work in a year as against the 100 days guaranteed under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005.

As per the rules, MGNREGA scheme is a demand-driven scheme aiming at enhancing the livelihood security of rural households. Instead of days of unskilled work every year was guaranteed for anyone who wanted it. These provisions have been exploited by the government by systematically creating an environment in which demand for work is kept as low as possible. The ways to do this included, but not limited to, non-payment of wages to workers for months, and non-payment to the states that does not follow the scheme. The wages were for a long time even kept below the minimum wages, and the process of getting work kept difficult and cumbersome.

It is contrary to the provision of MGNREGA that says, if work is not provided within 15 days from when it is demanded, the worker has to be given a daily unemployment allowance. Additionally, the wages of unskilled workers have to be paid within 15 days and in case of a delay, the Centre has to compensate them.

Against such tactics, in the Swarnajayanti case judgement in 2016, the Supreme Court had ruled that delay in payment and non-payment of minimum wages was an abrogation of Article 23 of the Constitution of India, wherein MGNREGA workers were made to work, given late wages, workers have no choice but to work due to the severe constraints of economic circumstance - amounting to forced labour.

Despite all the problems created for the workforce so as to reduce work, many workers had no option but to demand even under such exploitative work environments. The record shows that about 8.55 crore households demanded MGNREGA work in 2020-21, followed by 8.5 crore in 2021-22, compared to a total of 6.16 crore households asking for work in the pre-pandemic year 2019-20. Economic Survey 2022-23 says that as on January 24, 2023, about 6.49 crore households had already demanded work under the scheme.

Nonetheless, it is a demand-side figure, against 15.51 crore active rural workers enrolled under the scheme. Moreover, as of January 20, 2023, the average days of employment provided per household is just 42 days, while it was 50 days in 2021-22, 52 days in 2020-21, 48 days in 2019-20 and 51 days in 2018-19, much less than guaranteed 100 days, against a demand for increasing to 200 days.

Peoples' Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) and the NREGA Sangharsh Mancha have filed in a joint statement that if the government intends to provide legally guaranteed 100 days of work per household for at least those that worked in the scheme in the current financial year, that minimum budget for it in the upcoming financial year 2023-24 should be at least Rs.72 lakh crore. The Modi government's Union Budget 2022-23 had reduced MGNREGA budget by 25 per cent to Rs.73,000 crore which was lower than the revised estimate of Rs.98,000 crore for the financial year 2021-22. The Economic Survey of 2021-22 had even admitted that the demand for work was still higher than the pre-pandemic level. For the financial year 2023-24, the MGNREGA budget has been reduced by about 33 per cent compared to the revised estimate for the current financial year.

MGNREGA workers have been protesting this attitude of the Modi government for a long time. The year 2022 had also seen protests across the country. However, the Modi government ignored all the protests and made a further cut in allocation in the budget of this year apart from not paying the states their share.

The Union government has recently told the Rajya Sabha that the Centre owes Rs.6,157 crore to 14 states as on February 3, 2023. The payment is due under the material component head of the MGNREGA scheme used for purchase and construction material for skilled labourers. Out of these 8 are opposition ruled states, and West Bengal is the worst offender since the amount unpaid is nearly Rs. 2,700 crore. Moreover, 15 states are yet to pay the Centre, it owed Rs. 4,700 crore in wages to 18 States as of December 14, 2022. The Modi government has taken a stand that the payments are stopped for Supreme Court had ruled that delay in payment and non-payment of minimum wages was an abrogation of Article 23 of the Constitution of India, wherein MGNREGA workers were made to work, given late wages, workers have no choice but to work due to the severe constraints of economic circumstance - amounting to forced labour.

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will likely give a maximum of 8 seats and the BJP 4 seats at the state level. The NPP and the BJP will again gravitate towards the NPP for the formation of a new government. Forget the UDP's mudslinging against the NPP and the BJP's ego house about the NPP's corrupt deeds during their election campaigns. This will be old wine in old bottles yet again and we ordinary folks will have to endure another five years of bad governance or worse. To those well-meaning individuals who earnestly vote for a change, I would like to ask them a simple question: Where is any meaningful choice? The alternative, if any is again to those old players in new uniforms who will sit in the Opposition.

Yours etc., Samuel Sweet, Shillong-2

Action against noise pollution

Editor, Apropos of the letter by HIT Wells captioned, "Open letter to DC, East Khasi Hills" (ST Feb 19, 2023), I wish to write regarding noise and air pollution menace caused by the Hindu Mission, Lower Mawpram, Shillong. The extreme resentment of the residents and student communities around Hindu Mission, this institution has allowed the use of a major portion of its premises as a "parking lot". Initially there were only a few vehicles but now the number has increased to 80-100 vehicles.

Being a private tuition teacher and housewife of a joint family with the elderly folks and toddlers-in-late and six school-going children at home, I bring this issue before the concerned authorities in the larger interest of the residents. By allowing parking of vehicles for commercial purposes in the residential areas, this Hindu Mission has totally polluted the "academic atmosphere". What is most irritating is the noise caused by auto pick-up vans and commercial vehicles. Even late at night, our children are awakened by the entry of these commercial vehicles that emit high pitch sounds. In the morning, before 5 am in summer our sound sleep gets disturbed by the same noise while the vehicles are set on ignition for more than 10-15 minutes. Some drivers recklessly blow horn.

This Hindu Mission has also earned a bad name for other issues raised in The Shillong Times in the past. For organizing various kinds of parties, religious songs are played. Just near the sacred temple, they often organize Bollywood dances which sometimes run for 6-7 hours and extend beyond 10 pm. Does the pollution board give permission to this Hindu Mission to hold parties? No authorities have any right to give permission

to hold frequent parties that put other residents to inconvenience. It may be mentioned that MBOSE, CBSE, ICSE students and some others pursuing higher studies and competitive examination have been heavily victimized. Just near my residence, two other students, who are sitting for competitive examinations, often complain that they are distracted by the music played near the temple.

On behalf of the residents, especially student communities, the elderly and sick people, I request the officers concerned, particularly the Pollution Control Board and Deputy Commissioner to kindly take immediate action against this irresponsible management. This management is now driven by money-making pursuits at the expense of the residents and student communities. As per the Supreme Court ruling, sound pollution and "parking lots" in residential areas should not be permitted since it adversely affects the health and pollutes the "academic environment". No one has the legal right to create noise above 10 decibels in residential areas.

Yours etc., Priyanka Sharma, Via email

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"Making someone laugh is the simplest, most basic positive human connection." —Nell Scovell

The Shillong Times

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Now onus on central forces

IT says a lot about the integrity or lack of it of the State Police when the Meghalaya High Court now has to rely on a wing of the central armed police forces (CAPF). Considering that CRPF has within its set-up the Rapid Action Force (RAF) and Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA), it might be better placed to intercept the coal trucks that have been plying without caring a hoot for the law. This, in fact, is the dangerous part about Meghalaya. The rule of law just does not apply in this state. People actually get away with murder. Conviction rates are abysmally low and an FIR filed on any issue is unlikely to yield any result. Ultimately the person filing the FIR is harassed because he/she has to appear in a court of law to ensure that the case is closed because police cannot piece together any evidence. For 8 long years since 2014, coal has been mined despite a ruling by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) banning that hole mining (a) because of the risks involved for the miners who have descended some 200 feet vertically into a hole and then branch out horizontally to dig the coal seams that are then carted to the top of the mine. Several miners have been buried alive due to sudden flooding of mines when they accidentally burrow into an abandoned mine that is flooded during the rainy season.

That a mining accident happened as late as December 2018 where 15 people died inside due to sudden flooding is information enough that coal mining had never really stopped but was actively happening under the watch of the State. The law and order machinery that should have been used to stop illegal transportation of coal was instead used to facilitate the business in collusion with the truck owning mafia. It is a known fact that each coal laden truck had to pay Rs 90,000 to a set of collectors under the belt of the Home Department. Each transport challan is being used at least ten times. So the Department of Mines and Minerals, the Transport Department, Taxation Department and the Home Department work in smooth convergence in this fraudulent set-up.

It is also surprising that no one questions the makeshift police check posts at Mookyndur and Mukhla where every truck halts and hands over money to the police without ever asking for a receipt. How can such violations of the rule of law be allowed without any consequences? The BJP and TMC have both vowed to root out corruption in Meghalaya. I remain to be seen if these national Parties will make good their promises should they hold the reins of governance in Meghalaya. Lawlessness should end. And the High Court has the onus of ensuring that criminality is arrested.

Letters to the Editor

Ridiculous statements from political pygmies

The comment made recently by the UDP candidate, PT Sawknie that it is time for a Khasi CM clearly demonstrates that his reptilian brain is well developed but definitely not his neo-cortex. With such a 'brain' that is clearly not fully developed, an assumption had how the UDP even felt that he would be the ideal candidate. It is shocking that after 51 years of statehood we haven't yet gotten into Meghalaya's. Clearly when we have people like him, I am not surprised that Meghalaya is languishing at the bottom of the developmental table.

I appeal to the electorate to choose wisely and disregard the mental garbage that comes dressed up as messianic. Such people are Lilliputians and best should be shown the door. Meghalaya needs serious leadership ever more.

Yours etc., Tyrone D'Amis, Tara

Using statistics to predict election results

In response to the letter to the editor of Philip Marwein, senior journalist under the heading, "What's 5-star Meghalaya?" (ST February 15, 2023) I would like to ask Mr Marwein if there's anything wrong in being a staunch supporter of the National People's Party. For his information I never make wild guesses but professionally do my job as a statisti-

cian and work out my math and draw my conclusion from the data of the ECI in respect of Meghalaya which is in the public domain. All you need to do is to visit the ECI website, click the proper data and analyze it and then draw your own conclusion. There are four data sets that I studied and analyzed and then used to draw my conclusion that the NPP will get 33 seats on March 4, 2023, the date before which the election shall be completed. However, I will not share all the secrets since it is my trade secret but provide you only one and that is the strike rate of the parties in 2018. The following is the strike rate of the parties in the election to the 10th Meghalaya Legislative Assembly - NPP 37, INC 35, UDP 17, PDM 15, HSPDP 15, KHAM 12, Independent 5 and BJP 5. Now you can draw your conclusion from this set of data as to what will be the result on March 2, 2023 the vote counting day. I will stick to 33 for the NPP, the party from amongst 8 National Parties, more than 50 States parties officially recognized and 2796 unofficial parties as of January 2022.

Yours etc., V K Lyngdoh, Via email

NPP targeting the wrong person

The NPP is too scared to debate on public platforms thus far and with only two weeks to go before the polling date, but the NPP has made statements upon state-

ments that contradict one another. The Shillong Times reported (ST 13-2-2023) with the caption, "Mukhi's inaction to NGT ban on coal" says the NPP candidate Wailadmi Shylla blaming Dr Mukul Sangma for his inaction on the NGT directive, that had led to the Tribunal banning coal mining.

Politics and current history are inseparable. As a matter of fact, Mr Shylla should be grateful to Dr Mukul Sangma for the following reasons: 1) The far-sighted CM declared in 2019 that 32 lakh tons of coal was already mined in the 3 districts since 2014. The maintenance of records 5 year old is appreciable indeed. And it is a matter of conjecture how that 32 lakh ton is being transported for nearly ten years with no sign of depletion till date. Of course, in the meantime mining tragedies take place, the latest one being at Shillong in West Khasi Hills.

Heavily laden coal trucks commonly called the "high level" trucks because they are being to the wealthy and rich are able to pass through police cordon. The bridge had snapped on two occasions at Mookyndur and two sites in West Khasi and Garo Hills Districts. One hospital and one medical college could have been built with the revenue generated from coal. Also! Illegal mining and transportation of coal means that money goes into the pockets of policemen and politicians.

Let us analyse surgically what would have happened had Dr Mukul Sangma listened to the NGT. Meghalaya is zone V according to seismic survey. The red holes that resonate to seismic disturbances were too few in numbers. In 2014, would not devastate the mined hillocks should the big one strike. With the latest earthquake that hit Turkey and Iran we don't really know where we stand. If the CM Ministry reading the headlines on illegal coal transportation daily still had to defend that there is no mining and transportation of coal to right now in Meghalaya. Finally Chief Minister Conrad Sangma was summoned to Delhi and told that scientific mining of coal is allowed. Two coal barons jumped to the offer but abandoned it after they found that the cost of scientific mining far exceeds the profit to be made with having to pay engineers and accommodating their families. Add to that the cost of machines, operators and maintenance. The trained miners would have to be well paid and labour laws would be in place. This apart there could be demographic change in the coal rich areas. Besides, scientific mining is affordable only by the rich.

This issue becomes more serious when viewed from the global perspective. Scientists in their attempt to clamp the mercury rise by 1.5 degree Celsius by 2030 as agreed at COP26 at Glasgow, had fervently begged all coal producing countries to drastically reduce dependence on coal within a time frame. Green energy like solar and wind are encouraged. Bill Gates donated \$5 billion US \$ to COP 26 for new Green Cement plants. The old cement plant right now are among the 9 world energy intensive industries due coal being fired to generate power and

used in the kilns. The green premium cement would cost 70% more. In Meghalaya a ton of cement costs Rs 400. The green cement would cost Rs 680 - a rise of Rs 280 which is not a huge difference.

After all the above, the NPP along with the 'High Level' transport operators should instead thank Dr Mukul Sangma for having enjoyed the 5 years of mining and transportation of coal right under the nose of the NGT and enforcement agencies. And coal money is what is used to distribute bribes for the last one year until the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) kicked in.

Yours etc., W. Passah, Nongkrem

Reflections on a State Election: Meghalaya 2023

By Nilova Roy Chaudhury

There is something very civilized in the way Meghalaya is gearing up for its state elections. For an observer used to the noise and mud-slinging that has come to be synonymous with electoral politics in the rest of India, particularly the Hindi heartland, the genteel decency of candidates adhering to issues at hand and raising and debating issues of importance to the people was a very pleasant revelation.

In fact, it took someone coming in from outside to start the 'name calling', with the Congress Party's Jairam Ramesh referring to Mukul Sangma, the former Congress party leader who defected to the Trinamool Congress (TMC) last year, as 'Jai Ja Ja'. The analogy would find resonance in the Christian majority state, but, as Patricia Mukhim, Editor of the Shillong Times, told this reporter, was on unfair portrayal because the Congress party needed to introspect on just why Mukul Sangma, who was Leader of the Opposition in the state assembly, felt compelled to leave the party. And correct those issues if it wants to remain relevant.

After all, though it could not form the government, the Congress was the single largest party in the previous (2018) elections, with 21 MLAs, all of whom have now left the party, most of its legislators moving almost overnight to the TMC. Apparently, the 'high command's' decision to bring in Vincent Pala, a 3-term Member of Parliament from Shillong, to head the state unit, caused the local legislators to move out. Pala, from a wealthy coal-mining family, has been valiantly carrying the party flag and, while admitting the party has faced "setbacks", is campaigning hand along with a bunch of young, educated, new people whose vision appears more in line with the requirements of the hill state's younger population.

Some of this vision and democratic best practices were on view when in what can be best described as a town hall meet, leaders of eight political parties and combinations converged at the local Synod College (on February 9) to mind the main components of their political agendas for these polls, due on February 27. It was a bit ironic that the ruling National People's Party (NPP) went unrepresented at this first effort to provide a platform for all parties to lay out their agendas and take questions from students and people who are voters, but all other parties, including the local Synod College (on February 9) to mind the main components of their political agendas for these polls, due on February 27. 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"Fiction reveals truths that reality obscures."  
— Jessamyn West

**The Shillong Times**

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**MDA heavily reliant on consultants**  
THE preparation for the Vision Document for the State of Meghalaya 2030 was commissioned to an outside firm because Meghalayans ostensibly has no expertise on anything. People consulted for preparing this document that are mostly serving or retired government officials and the work was way back in 2009, presented to the Government in 2011. It was revised and then presented to the MDA government. In the rest of the country and the states people are already taking of Vision 2047 but as usual we are a laggard state so there are no surprises. Much of the data that this document relies on are dated 2007-2009. Between then and now things have not become better. On the contrary Meghalaya has slipped further down in education, health and other human development indicators. About 98% of the respondents to the questionnaire are men with just a few officials and nurses being female respondents so we can't imagine how participatory, inclusive and gender-equitable the Vision of Meghalaya is. But we can be sure that a huge sum of money has been paid to the consultant firm.

Most of the consultants are young IIM/IIT and other graduates with a smattering of experience on environmental issues, tourism, marketing, social media management for government et al but with no understanding of the ground realities of Meghalaya. The Departments concerned don't seem to mind this intrusion into their area of work because their officials don't produce any results anyway. They draw salaries but productivity is never measured. Hence the consultants take away a lot of their work. All these departmental officials and clerks need to do is feed the consultants with information, much of those based on assumptions because government employees like to believe they know everything about the state. Schemes like FOCUS and PRIME are the brainwave of these consultants who suggest them without having tested the absorption capacity and readiness of the targeted beneficiaries.

The Vision Document 2030, is not much in circulation so it is being used by the various government departments as a reference point and to guide their interventions: in the rural areas and on which to anchor their development programmes. Evidently not many people have set eyes on this Document. The MDA Government should actually inform the public how much it has spent on paying consultants. Is there no local expertise, no intellectual or social capital in Meghalaya for government to fall back on? Or is government wary that the realities provided to it are too stark and daunting? The Vision Document speaks about private investment but does not mention problems related to this. Private investment in any sector requires land. The Meghalaya Land Transfer Act is a bugbear. Pressure groups won't allow railways to come in. There is large scale extortion and law and order is not exactly conducive to private investments. In fact, this critical issue is never debated at election platforms.

**Letters to the Editor**

**What Laws and Policies will they frame?**

Editor,  
With majority of the electorate now realising the need for lawmakers and policy-makers to represent us in the legislative institutions of the parliament and the state assembly, we also see on social and print media several candidates being interviewed by the press and even during their campaign trail, picking up this trend and rehearsing the same "concern" while there are some candidates who have spilled out the laws and policies they will introduce once they are elected, there are others who are just parroting this public concern that the state urgently needs lawmakers and policy-makers if the state is to move forward and progress, without elaborating what are the laws and policies they will initiate, be it on critical issues like health, education, employment, economy sports and other issues if elected as an MLA.

It is high time for our friends in the media and also the electorate to ask these candidates to spell out just one or two laws and policies that they will help introduce and frame in the next 100 (hundred) days once they are elected to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly so that

the public can judge and vote accordingly or else this sudden "concern" will become just a slogan for someone's political gain.

There is also much talk about the importance of a "corruption free government" but there is no mention about fully implementing the provisions of the Meghalaya Lokayukta Act 2014 which was campaigned for many years by the Meghalaya Right to Information Movement. This Act is a powerful weapon and is one step to bringing about that "corruption free government" which many of these political parties and candidates are promising the people of the state. If they are really serious about this, then they should assure the people of Meghalaya that they will implement all the provisions of the Meghalaya Lokayukta Act 2014 once elected or else the promise of a "corruption free Meghalaya" will not have the desired results as expected by the citizens of the state.

On the other hand, however, it is questionable as to why Wells would prefer to name-shame one particular locality at a time when all of Shillong, including Jaivai, is reverberating to the tune and tenor of music couples with full decibels of a vibrant democracy. His tone also suggests that he harbours ill-will towards the youths and inhabitants of Mawli Nongpedg who are in no way responsible for not gaining the musical vents

Yours etc.,  
Michael N Syiem,  
Via email

**Noise pollution: another view**

Editor,  
In response to HT Wells, "Open letter to the District

administration," on February 10, 2023, I would like to blame the writer for bringing to public notice a very pertinent issue. Wells claimed that the "inept district administration" had ignored his calls which were intended to draw attention to the issue of becoming a forced addressee to loud noise from adjoining areas. It may be reminded that in 2005, the Supreme Court had made it clear that its judgments regulating the use of loudspeakers and timings were based on the legal principle that, "freedom from noise pollution is a part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution."

As a citizen, Wells is encouraged to escalate matters to the Meghalaya High Court and file a petition invoking the Writ of Mandamus against the District Administration for failing to protect the citizens of localities like Jaivai. Unimprobable, that are naming the neighbours of Mawli Nongpedg. However, it is questionable as to why Wells would prefer to name-shame one particular locality at a time when all of Shillong, including Jaivai, is reverberating to the tune and tenor of music couples with full decibels of a vibrant democracy. His tone also suggests that he harbours ill-will towards the youths and inhabitants of Mawli Nongpedg who are in no way responsible for not gaining the musical vents

or seeking administrative permissions. Rather, the blame is squarely on the political parties and political aspirants who organise such events. Perhaps Wells should direct his ire at the people responsible for the noise pollution so that his trade gains currency and garners public support. Otherwise, it becomes a highly optimistic outburst against a section of society that is expected to be unable to offer a return.

Yours etc.,  
FH Shen,  
Shillong - 8

**Meghalaya needs development sans homogenization**

Editor,  
Hearing Amit Shah's speech in Jara just made me realize that the BJP is the only party with a clear vision for Meghalaya. The BJP is the only party that has clearly laid out an economic roadmap for our state. Amit Shah's speech focused on organic farming, the MSME sector and the health sector; none of the political parties as per my knowledge has laid down any concrete steps to develop these three sectors. The growth of these sectors will definitely boost growth and investment and it will also lead to the rapid development of our State. Congress and the numerous regional parties have failed

**Poor Manifesto — Promises and Realities**

By Sumarbin Umdor

Like post elections, this time it's raining promises of freebies and cash transfers in Meghalaya and all major political parties are in the game. Continuing my assessment of these poll promises (see SF dated 7/2/2023), this column examines the Congress and BJP poll manifestos for Meghalaya.

A few days back, India's grand old party presented its 14 commitments to the state electorate which include cash and in-kind transfers (Rs. 1000 to single mothers and roofing materials to HPL families), subsidies (LPG gas cylinder quarterly and 400 units of free power to BPL households), free health care, job creation initiatives, and a guaranteed minimum support price (MSP) for agricultural products. Having governed the state for around 30 years since 1972, the Congress Party cannot escape its share of responsibility for the development gaps and challenges facing the state today. Therefore, the party's commitment to turn Meghalaya in the next five years to Five Star state is a bit farfetched and akin to wishing for the moon.

At present, there are about 4 lakh households in the state that are beneficiaries of NFSA intended coverage and they stand to benefit from the pre-poll promises of cash and in-kind transfers to BPL households made by the Congress party if it comes to power. The promise of cash transfers to single mothers is a fairly decent amount that will directly benefit many deserving households as about 14 percent of mothers in the state are single parents compared to 4.3 percent for the country. While some of the promises like income support to single mothers, free roofing materials, and LPG gas cylinders will not entail too much of a financial burden on the state exchequer, others like free power and MSP will be highly onerous and will put enormous strain on the financial health of the state and the state-owned power distribution company (Discom, MEPDCL).

In 2021-22 state governments in India collectively expended an amount of Rs 132400 crore to subsidise power consumers. In Meghalaya, the power subsidy paid for by the state government in the same year was only Rs 18 crore that went for rural electrification. This amount is just under two per cent of the total revenue of the state Discom. In comparison, Punjab spent Rs. 9657 crore in power subsidy in the same SF date accounting for one-third of the total revenue earned by the state Discom. The Congress party's promise of free power of 400 units to HPL households in Meghalaya will involve a maximum subsidy bill of Rs. 65 crore (for about 2.8 lakh consumers in this category) at the current tariff for DLT consumers). While this may not be such a huge amount for the current year, in the long run the idea of power subsidy will prove a costlier affair for the state's financial health and that of the Discom.

Finally, the power subsidy will inflate significantly in the coming years as the number of BPL consumers increases and the tariff rates are revised. Already many state governments are not able to fully pay up or they delay

in reimbursing the subsidy bill to Discoms contributing to the financial distress facing these companies. The state Discom (MEPDCL) is already in financial distress with losses more than doubling in the last 5 years, touching a staggering Rs. 425 crore at the end of the financial year 2021. The state government is also struggling to bail out MEPDCL of the dues it owes to central Discoms. Adding power subsidy will only aggravate the financial distress of the state government and that of the Discom. Secondly, once power subsidy is introduced in Meghalaya it will be very difficult for any government to withdraw it in the future. In fact, competitive policies may drive parties to extend power subsidies to other categories of consumers which will be disastrous for the state.

An interesting promise made by the Congress party is that of MSP for main crops grown by farmers of Meghalaya. The MSP implemented by the government of India (GoI) for 22 crops does not cover horticulture crops and other produce grown by farmers of the state for which there is another price support mechanism in the form of Market Intervention Scheme (MIS). The MIS is an ad hoc scheme of the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation to implement on the request of state governments for procurement of perishable agricultural and horticultural commodities to protect the income of farmers and prevent distress sales. The scheme requires that state governments share the loss with the government of India on a 50:50 basis (75:25 in the case of northeastern states). Under the MIS, a predetermined quantity at a fixed price is procured by the procurement agencies designat-

ed by the state government for a fixed period or till the market intervention price whichever is earlier. States like Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, among others, have been very proactive in implementing the MIS for commodities such as grapes, ginger, apple, chillies, potatoes, turmeric and pineapples. Meghalaya, however, has not been implementing this scheme since 1972. In fact, the farmers of the state will gladly welcome the implementation of MSP for their produce, it will be helpful if the present state government starts implementing the already available MIS for major crops of the state where such need arises.

The BJP is the last of the major political parties to announce its manifesto containing loads of freebies, welfare schemes, cash transfers and new policy initiatives. The promises of cash and in-kind

transfers made by the party targeted at women and girls, BPL households, farmers, unemployed graduates and state government employees will surely appeal to even those voters who are otherwise allergic to the party. The promise to implement the 7th pay commission will benefit around one lakh state government employees and pensioners, but it will also lead to a similar demand from employees of state PSUs as well as government supported educational institutions. This single-pool promise will have a huge impact on the committed expenditure of the state and will put extra pressure on the revenue accounts in the coming years. If one looks at the present financial position of the state with a revenue deficit of Rs. 5000 crore in 2020-21, it is highly improbable for any incoming government to be in a position to raise the resources needed to fund these promises including Rs. 2500 crore towards capital expenditure. But then these promises are coming from a party holding power in the centre with the ability to loosen the central purse string to accommodate these expenditures.

As said in the beginning, this election is different from what we have witnessed in the past as all major contenders are going all out to woo the electorate with policy vision and initiatives topped with freebies and cash transfers. These poll promises involve considerable financial outflows with the risk of financial crisis in the long run. Further, it is also evident that many of the poll promises are borrowed from other states with some of them not properly thought through. For example, take the Rs. 5 meal promise by the BJP. In a high-cost city like Shillong this scheme will not only end up burning a big hole in the state exchequer but will unintentionally add to the unemployment situation in the state as it will lead to the closing down of many small businesses and related concerns as they will not be able to compete with heavily subsidized government canteens. Further, the Rs. 5 meal may even reach the deserving segment of population but will most likely be enjoyed by the already pampered salaried class. The same also applies to promises made by other political parties.

As far as VPP is concerned, it is a ray of hope for the less served, in the political parties and political aspirants who organise such events. Perhaps Wells should direct his ire at the people responsible for the noise pollution so that his trade gains currency and garners public support. Otherwise, it becomes a highly optimistic outburst against a section of society that is expected to be unable to offer a return.

Yours etc.,  
FH Shen,  
Shillong - 8

communities like the Garos and Khasis.

My personal opinion is that we need a strong regional party and we need to stand on our own feet. I keep going back to the thought of my paternal great grandparents being able to send my grandfather's younger brother to Kolkata for higher education in the 1950s with the poverty line and I think barely 10 percent of Indians could afford higher education. In the 1950s, along with the Assamese, the Khasis were the most educated in the North East; we need to bring back those glorious days and we also need self-belief that we can stand on our own feet but I guess my opinion doesn't matter.

Meghalaya at the moment still needs a huge injection of public funds and if the BJP deliver on its promises, then it is the only party that can take the state forward. Having said that, the BJP will only get the support of the public if it doesn't push forward with its agenda of homogenisation.

Yours etc.,  
Gary Marbanian,  
Via email

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

**India's G-20 Presidency R20 and FoRB**

By Dr. D.K. Giri

Fourth in the series of articles in this column on India's presidency of G-20, it discusses the G-20 Religion Forum, or R20 which, we talk about another complementary socio-cultural global principle called Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). The preceding articles on G-20 were 'resetting the global ethic', 'a unique Indian perspective' and 'advocating a balance'.

A day after taking over the presidency of G-20, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked, "Can we call you a fundamental mindset shift to benefit humanity as a whole?" He then called upon the world leaders to "join together to make India's G-20 presidency, a presidency of healing, harmony and hope".

If one may pontificate on the operationalisation of these powerful emotional words, hearing would entail extending compassion and comfort, harmony would pre-suppose: feelings and actions of togetherness, fellowship, accommodation, co-existence, tolerance and mutual respect etc: hope would involve focussing on global goods like innate goodness of human beings across the world, to be able to stand by each other manifesting pluralist solidarity and recognising woman's capacity for justice and at the same time, their inclination for injustice etc.

In sum, the actualisation of these basic aspirational ideals named by the Prime Minister can be secured, in terms of organising principle, that is, promoting the concept of pluralism in all aspects of life - technology, ideology, economy, language, religion, race and so on. Many scholars in India and Indologists from abroad have appreciated and advocated Indian concept and practice of pluralism. The External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar writes in "The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World": "India has a long tradition of diversity and co-existence. Its intrinsic pluralism helps reconcile conflicting ideas and competing collectives. He adds that India's multi-faith society is an enormous contribution to global stability. In fact, "that is what acts as a firewall preventing the spread of fundamentalism and radicalism from India's West to the East. Indeed, Indian pluralism is an inherent cultural attribute".

While many other aspects of pluralism are often discussed, the role of religions in society and even in politics, is not. On the contrary, the religion is pushed to the periphery of governance; in the so-called developed democracies of the West, by separating the church from the state, and in the largest democracy of the world, India, through a cluttered concept of secularism, which, among other things, formally de-recognises religion as a social or political category. In reality, however, religion is playing a big role across the world, often in a malevolent manner manifesting in radicalism, fundamentalism, majoritarianism, leading to religious hatred, persecution and violence. This has to change. India needs to initiate that change at home and abroad during its G-20 presidency.

Restoring the role of religion in global discourse and governance can involve a two-fold complementary strategy. First, allowing a thorough and widespread of integral that contributes to rational humanism, not fissiparous sectarianism. Only such aspects of religion should be allowed to be discussed in public domain as they are commensurate with the constitution of any country. Religion could inform the public discourse as well as the policy-making in any country that enhances the constitution of that country, not undermines it. It should support the constitution not support it.

The second strategy consists of fully respecting FoRB which is being treated as a human right for individuals across the world. Since it is fairly a new concept in some parts of the world, a small elaboration is in order. In international law, FoRB is a fundamental human right to protect and preserve human dignity. Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration for Human Rights stipulates, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change their religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest their religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." This right is endorsed by many countries by their national laws.

For example, in India, this right is guaranteed in Article 25 of the Constitution. "Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion". This Article is however tempered by Clauses and Sub-Clauses. To note, the Clause 1 adds a rider to this freedom, "Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion". However, FoRB means freedom of conscience as defined by and belief as held by individuals, either alone or in relation to a community. An individual's understanding of religion may conflict with the constitutional principles, or indeed, with other provisions of the Constitution. In such case, the individuals' practice and profession of their religion would remain confined to their private domain. Likewise, freedom of belief may include agnosticism, atheism and any other religious-cultural practices and attitudes. In fact, such beliefs could be allowed as long as they do not challenge the constitutional principles of freedom, equality and justice etc.

Scholars and political actors have commenced on the role of religion in the region under G-20 Religion Forum (R20). They argue that global issues like health, economic and technological have been the global concerns, so have the burning issues like hatred, disharmony, violence and war etc. But the role of religion and culture in eliminating the latter problems has not been fully appreciated. Indonesia, which has exceeded India as G-20 President, had made a notable beginning by bringing in religious leadership into active discourse. The two organisations taking the lead were Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) of Indonesia and the Muslim world of Saudi Arabia.

Indian political and religious leadership maintain that India has the best religion of the world, the satyana dhama which is timeless without a beginning and an end, many a person agrees that many other religions have emerged from it. Arif Mohammad Khan, a scholar of culture and religion, present governor of Kerala, never tires of citing satyana dhama as the eternal religion of humankind that encompasses everyone in India and the world. In a similar vein, Mark Tully, a veteran BBC journalist spending decades in India, writes in his book "Hinduism: A History" that "Hinduism is a Hindu Christian". However, Hindu notice that however Hindu may be, it is not a Hindu Christian. That is the spirit of accommodation with other faiths and respect FoRB.

At any rate, FoRB in a pluralist society and politics is essential to reinforce the role of religion in public constitution of that country, not undermines it. It should support the constitution not support it.

The second strategy consists of fully respecting FoRB which is being treated as a human right

(The writer is Prof. International Relations, JNU, SK)

# Marxists, magicians, murderers: SE Asia through a crime series

By Vikas Datta

It is far from the smallest nation in Southeast Asia but gets overshadowed by its ASEAN neighbours in both name and fame. However, crime fiction, which has shone the spotlight on countries in Africa's trackless bush, teeming Latin American jungles, and South Pacific's scenic but isolated islands, does the same for Laos.

This is courtesy of British-Australian teacher, rights activist, author and cartoonist Colin Cotterill, who, with his Dr Siri series set in Laos of the mid-1970s-early 1980s, evocatively brings out the life, social mores and norms, and politics of this sole landlocked Southeast Asian country.

The time period is equally important in depicting Southeast Asia when it was far from the tourist paradise of today and impacted by superpower rivalry - particularly, Laos, then in the throes of revolutionary change.

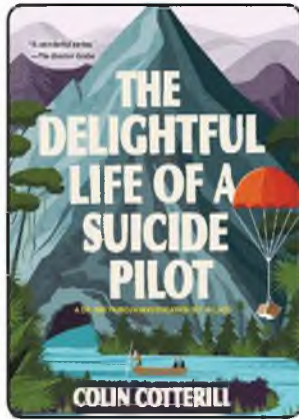
While people usually remember 1970s in South-east Asia for the Vietnam war - and then the Khmer Rouge's depredations in Cambodia, Laos was also impacted. Like its eastern neighbour's Viet Cong, it had a Communist movement (Pathet Lao), also born in France in the 1930s, and active since the end of World War II when colonial ruler France returned to take control. Dragged willy-nilly dragged into the Vietnam conflict, Laos also ended up by turning communist in 1975, like the newly re-united Vietnam - and like it, is still Communist.

This makes an engaging backdrop for the 15 Dr Siri mysteries - where a simple - yet - resilient, mostly peasant people, who hold on to their religious (Buddhist) and folk beliefs - including beliefs in spirits, face a Communist leadership, which seeks transformation on basis of their theories and slogans, and as unenterprising bureaucracy. And then, advisors from fraternal socialist countries - the Soviet Union, but also China - which borders Laos, and of course, Vietnam, play their parts.

The hero of the series, which came out regularly once a year from 2004 to 2020 (save in 2012 and 2014) is Siri Paiboun, a septuagenarian but still spiky Paris-trained doctor and revolutionary, reluctantly serving as national coroner after the communist takeover.

Cynical, outspoken and irreverent, he also hosts the spirit of a 1,000-year-old shaman, which enables him to see ghosts of the unappily-departed - but not communicate with them. His unolicited spirit support also leads to him travel in time and space - mostly in his mind and dreams - where the solution or denouement of the crime before him are reached - though how exactly only becomes apparent later.

Along with Dr Siri is his staff of nurse Dui and oddjob man Geung (who has Down's syndrome), longtime friend and politburo member Civilai, police inspector Phosy, noodle-seller with a chequered past (and later wife) Madame Daeng, and



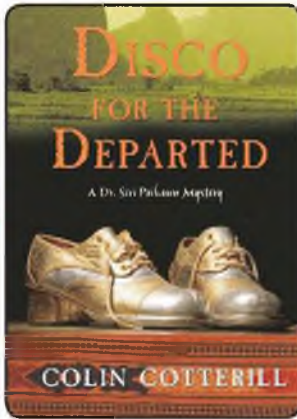
many others, from a puppet-master to a renegade Buddhist monk to a pair of former prostitutes he shelters in his sprawling official accommodation. And the villains are numerous.

All of the 15 adventures deal with multiple - and artistically convoluted - plots of murder and mayhem, with the last few some seeing most characters separately confronting various arcs, which may or may not converge later on, but are skillfully resolved. Though there is a supernatural element, it is not the cause of crime.

Siri debuts in *The Coroner's Lunch* (2004), with his desire to retire now the revolution has succeeded being rudely dashed when he is made coroner, despite no expertise in forensics. But any hope the job may be a sincere is dashed when he has several mysterious deaths to solve - including some literally out of the world!

*Thirty Three Teeth* (2005) also has a brace of plots but affecting its grimness is an episode of superstitious satire where local Communist officials seek to impose regulations on the spirit world, while *Disco for the Departed* (2006) again has all sorts of skulduggery including a touch of voodoo, a Cuban specialist who is not what he seems, while Siri's boss schemes to remove Geung.

*Anarchy and Old Dogs* (2007) adds an attempted

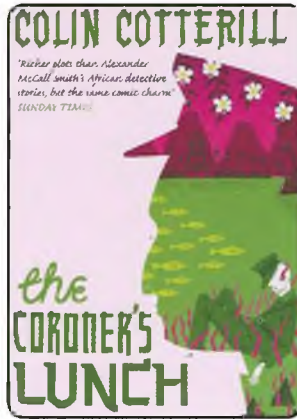


coup to a spate of unexplained deaths and the unwelcome act of confronting an old friend in the wrong, while *The Curse of the Pogo Stick* (2008) deals with the plight of the Hmong people, used by Americans as mercenaries in neighbouring Vietnam

and then abandoned to their fate. *The Merry Misogynist* (2009) is a relatively straightforward race to find a serial killer of young women, but more harrowing is *Love Songs from a Shallow Grave* (2010) which combines a fiendish triple murder (all women) with a fencing blade while Siri goes missing in Phnom Penh where Khmer Rouge under Brother No.1 (Pol Pot) have begun their reign.

A bruised Siri is then joined by several old associates on an ostensible mission to search for a missing American aviator in *Slash and Burn* (2011), which seems a send-off but the good doctor however returns in *The Woman Who Wouldn't Die* (2013), whose title says it all.

*Six and a Half Deadly Sins* (2015) sees a fiendish plot being exposed after some mysterious clues make their way to Siri, and force him to visit the country's north as China invades Vietnam - while he and Civilai fend off a Chinese feint, while *I Shot the Buddha* (2016) has Siri and Daeng on the trail of Sanghraj (Laos' Buddhist patriarch) who seems



to defecting to Thailand, while Civilai goes to probe a possible Buddha reincarnation and falls into something more sinister, among more murky happenings.

Siri and some of his friends accompany the Laos team to the boycott-hit Moscow Olympics in *The Rat Catchers' Olympics* (2017), but complications arise, *Dan's Eat Me* (2018) is an early look at the illegal wildlife trade in the region, and *The Second Biggest Nothing* (2019) sees Siri threatened with murder of his nearest and dearest - and draws into three episodes from his past - a political assassination in 1930s Paris, an art scam in 1950s colonial Laos, and a POW experience in Vietnam in the 1970s - to figure who is behind threat. It also sees one of the crew hit goodbye.

The series ends with *The Delightful Life of a Suicide Pilot* (2020), where the diary of a WWII-era Japanese pilot, sent to Siri, is an elegant yet powerful testimony to the horrors of war and the human mind's response and how the conflict stretches into the present.

A master blend of varying elements, including the fantastic and political, the series are an unforgettable look into a recent, unsettled past, where most of the appliances we take for granted are not there, and nor are the other certainties! (ANS)

# 'History books must be rewritten in the light of the truth'

By Vishnu Makhilan

India is rising again today at the forefront of a new global spiritual civilization with a cosmic vision, says an extensively researched book that provides a fresh perspective on how Indian civilization was impacted by the forces of the West.

Kanchan Banerjee's *The Crash of a Civilization* (Prabhat Prakashan) critically views how the profound and long-term influence of foreign ideologies and forces such as Christian, Islamic, and later colonists, western, and Marxists have impacted India, her society, and people.

He provides a telling insight into the crash of one of the world's oldest civilizations and brings the historical view that explains both why the Indic (Bharatiya), to use the Sanskrit word) civilization has been denigrated and why it is rising again today at the forefront of a new global spiritual civilization with a cosmic vision.

"Indic civilization is founded on the ideals of the Rishis of the past. This is also called a Vedic civilization, a Yogic civilization, a spiritual civilization, a civilization that is the most open and plural in history. But in many ways, the Abrahamic ideas and ideals are the antithesis of the Rishi civilization."

For example, present-day Christianity propagates that we all are sinners due to the 'original sin' of Adam and Eve, and for redemption, Christ was born, and we must follow him as the son of God," Banerjee told ANS in an interview.

"On the other hand, the Upanishads say that we are *Amritasya putrah* - children of immortals, not sinners. Islamic *Azwa* is a call to Namaz clearly stating that 'Allah is the only god and all others are false'. Whereas the Rishi civilization says, *Ekam sat vipraiva bhudha vadanti* - the truth is one but can be realized via different paths.

of books. "My only goal was to find out the truth about India. The book is the result of several years of research, especially the two years Covid pandemic period," Banerjee said.

There is a growing conversation around how India had warriors who resisted onslaughts and raids but over thousands of years it continued to lose its parts bit by bit. How and why is its awakening to the lost history important now?

"So, I have devoted a good amount to understanding the birth, rise, and spread of Abrahamic ideas. Then only one can understand how they impacted India and why," Banerjee elaborated.

Speaking about the research that went into the book, he said from childhood, had read about certain events in Indian history which did not make much sense. For example, Sher Shah built the Grand Trunk Road in five years. But it is a pure myth we know today. He also read that India was the 'Golden Bird', everybody wanted to come to India for wealth, be it Vasco Da Gama, Columbus, or Amerigo Vespucci. According to British economist Angus Maddison, India had the lion's share in world GDP for many centuries.

"After I came to America and saw the prosperity here and wondered what happened to the 'golden bird' and what caused its downfall, that triggered me to explore what are the events that shaped the eventual fate of India as we see it today. For that, obviously, I had to look into the outside forces who were the cause of this downfall," Banerjee explained.

"Not being a historian, he started to do his own research. He was enrolled in several online libraries globally. He sat at Harvard University and other libraries and purchased a number

of books. Indian mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and many other subjects from Indian teachers," Banerjee said.

"The next phase of Islamic history is very bloody. Most countries in Africa, the Middle East, and some parts of Europe fell to the Jihad missions of different Caliphs.

"I took much longer for these Mongol-Turko-Islamist forces to penetrate the borders of India, at that time, first, Afghanistan, Kabul and Zabul fell between in 1027 CE. He had two motives - plundering the riches, especially temples and palaces of the land, and terrorizing and converting the local populations into Islam. His tactics were 'surprise, shock attack' and 'hit and run'. The peaceful kingdoms were unprepared for such out-of-the-blue attacks. However, they gave heroic resistance and often defeated the encroaching enemy Muslim and Marxist historians would call his attacks 'battles' and 'wars' - but many of his attacks were just sudden raids like an organized band of robbers and pirates," Banerjee explained.

Due to Mahmud's attacks, India's western front, especially Afghanistan and Punjab, was overrun with much destruction and bloodshed. Similarly, Khilji destroyed many of India's great centers of learning and innovation, such as Nalanda, the author said.

"We often read in our history books that the invaders defeated Indians. It is a blatant lie. In reality, the invaders had a really hard time in India. From Afghanistan to Assam, Kashmir to Karnataka, they mostly faced defeats and retreats everywhere due to the Indian heroes, Colonial-Marxist-Islamist historians covered up much of it. Only now, slowly, we are finding out about the real heroes of India, not just Shivaji, Rana Pratap and Guru Gobind Singh, but many other great kings

snowstorm changed the history of this region. The Hindu Shahi dynasty ruled over the Kabul Valley (Northwestern Afghanistan), Gandhara (Kandahar), and present-day Northwestern India between 950 CE and 1026 CE. Maharaja Jayapaladeva was the ruler of the Hindu Shahi dynasty from 964 CE to 1001 CE. Both kings defended the land heroically against the invasion of the Ghaznavids.

"Mahmud led 17 expeditions into India. The first one was in 1001 CE, and the last one in 1027 CE. He had two motives - plundering the riches, especially temples and palaces of the land, and terrorizing and converting the local populations into Islam. His tactics were 'surprise, shock attack' and 'hit and run'. The peaceful kingdoms were unprepared for such out-of-the-blue attacks. However, they gave heroic resistance and often defeated the encroaching enemy Muslim and Marxist historians would call his attacks 'battles' and 'wars' - but many of his attacks were just sudden raids like an organized band of robbers and pirates," Banerjee explained.

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across India. On the western front, we had the Saki Kingdom, and Raja Dahir and Jayapala made great sacrifices to protect the land.

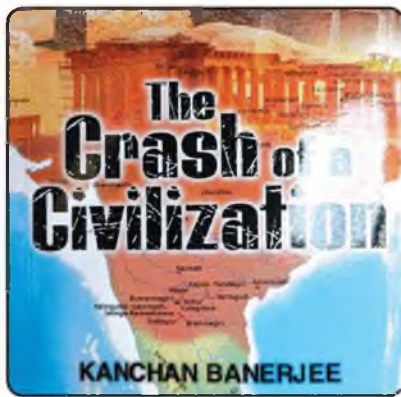
"In Gujarat, Chalukya Solanki Rajput and Queen Nair Devi protected Gujarat during the attacks of Ghori. In Kashmir, Kings Lalitaditya Muktapada and Sangramaraja defended the foreign forces many times. In Assam, Ahom Kings, including Raja Prithvi, Viswa Sharma, and Lachhit Borpukehar, defeated the Mughal attacks 17 times and never surrendered," Banerjee pointed out.

Also, the Nayaka Kings of Telangana drove off the Tughlaqs. Rani Kravanati of Garhwal defeated the Mughals and cut the noses of the captured Mughal soldiers. And even in Bengal, Rani Bhavashankari defeated the Mughal Pathan forces at least three times.

"And also, it is not true that Hindu kings lacked unity. There were innumerable historical instances of great alliances of kings and kingdoms to defeat foreign enemies from the time of the Sakas, Huns, Turks, Arabs, and Mughals," Banerjee said.

Noting that India survived many onslaughts on her land, people, and culture and that Indian soldiers, both men and women fought and gave heroic resistance for centuries, the author said: "Yes, Bharat has lost many territories over a few centuries, mostly due to the increase in the population of converted people, by force, deceit, or allurement for rewards" and yet it survived along with the Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, and most of its sacred places.

"So, the truth must be researched and told to our new generation. History books must be rewritten in light of the truth of our history. After all, India's motto is 'Satyameva Jayate' - Truth Alone Triumphs," Banerjee concluded. (ANS)



"At some point in history, India had great knowledge and trade relations with the Arabs. An example is Baghdad during the rule of Caliph Haroon Rashid (around 800 CE). This was the golden period of Islamic history when knowledge, culture, and arts peaked until the Mongol hordes and children of Chengiz Khan arrived. The Arabs learned

the 8th century. It was around 900 CE when Sindh fell. Afghanistan, then by Mahmud Ghazni around 1000 CE. It was a peaceful Hindu-Buddhist-Zoroastrian state. Due to a lack of military power, it easily fell under the invasions.

"But when the forces came near Sindh, Raja Dahir gave huge resistance against the forces of Bin Kasim. But due to destiny, a



**"With public sentiment, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed."**  
—Abraham Lincoln

**The Shillong Times**

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**Politics of corruption**

**CORRUPTION** pervades all fields linked to the establishment from time immemorial. What's special now is that, with time, its sweep — and the greed of bureaucrats and politics is growing to humungous levels. The free-wheeling corruption taking place today was unimaginable even two decades ago. Lack of strong reform-minded leaders at the helm worsens the scenario. Curiously, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of Arvind Kejriwal that came into being 10 years ago too is today in the shadow of suspicion vis-a-vis the Delhi Liquor Scam. CBI on Sunday granted a plea from deputy chief minister and excise minister Manish Sisodia for a postponement of its scheduled evidence-taking from him vis-a-vis the state's dastard liquor sales policy. The policy introduced in 2021 had been withdrawn following criticism and by citing other reasons. One serious allegation linked to this was that a liquor racket titled South Group had paid Rs 100 crore as bribe to the ruling AAP for use of the party's Goa assembly election campaign. AAP denies this and says the policy aimed only at ending state role in liquor sale and generating more income to the exchequer — Rs 9,000 crore. The CBI has made some arrests and speculations are that even Sisodia himself might be arrested — either on valid grounds or to shame/spite the AAP.

Without doubt, AAP is running a government that is least corrupt. This is evident in multiple sectors, and in most pronounced ways. This, however, is not to give a clean chit to the party vis-a-vis the CBI investigations into the liquor-related case. Whoever is involved in a case is perceived to be guilty unless proven otherwise in a court trial. Fact is also that many criminals escape punishment by virtue of their money power or influence and brand themselves as "innocent." Perceived truth is different from absolute truth. Society is generally helpless. For, the court carries with it the last word. Another aspect that must not go unnoticed vis-a-vis the liquor case is the need for political parties to organise funds for elections. With the BJP pumping money in huge quantities for every election since 2014, the financial requirement for parties to fight polls has spiralled. Once a party enters the fray, its focus is entirely on winning the polls by hook or by crook. Chances of the AAP raising money through unacceptable ways cannot be ruled out. Electoral reforms are still a far cry. The electronic age offers many new possibilities to limit poll expenses. But, the will to effect meaningful reforms is sadly lacking on the part of the Modi government.

**Letters to the Editor**

**Why the subservience to Delhi?**

Editor,  
Gauging by the trends of this election, there is no escaping from having yet another hung assembly. Why Meghalaya throws up a fractured verdict every time is not the real question. The more important question should be: What should the newly elected MLAs do to run the affairs of the state.  
If we see the past record and the misdeed of our MLAs, they have invariably chosen the easiest way out. They have opted for a soft option of being with the ruling dispensation in Delhi. The trend was set by Capt W A Sangma when in 1976 he decided to merge the APHLC with the Congress. Indira Gandhi gave us the separate state but was it our gratitude to her that this merger took place? I don't think so. The answer lies in our economic vulnerability created by our abysmally low resource base. There is an inherent thought that we need spoon feeding from Delhi.  
This psychosis still prevalent among our political masters even after fifty years of statehood. That explains why our regional parties who toutmouth their first allegiance to "Jijamoni" and skillfully display their bravado for standing up against imposition from Delhi, become subservient to whoever is in power in Delhi. This is a paradox, to say the least. It betrays our inability to look beyond to eyeball with the masters in

**Potential Impact of 2023 Election**

By H H Mohrmen

The political scenario in the state of Meghalaya has changed. Except for the VPP, all of the political parties that were members of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) are now seeking change. It is no surprise that the ruling dispensation is now being criticised by its former partners, who were left to fend for themselves. In spite of the fact that parties like the United Democratic Party (UDP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the People's Democratic Front (PDF), and the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP) were part of the National People's Party (NPP)-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government, they talk about bringing change to the state if they are voted to power.

**A case of the "pot calling the kettle black."**  
The question that begs the answer is: If the parties are calling for change, change from what? If they were part of the previous ruling dispensation and will talk about change, does that mean that they are not happy with the performance of the government that they were part of? If the parties who were part of the MDA government also call for change, what does that imply? Can the public then conclude that the government did not perform? Can it be concluded that the partners in the MDA government are content with the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance has failed? These are some of the questions that the citizens of the state are asking. The other pertinent question is: Can these parties, which have been partnering with the NPP to run the government for the last five years, leave the NPP high and dry and put all the blame on the NPP? Can these parties absolve themselves of all the wrongs that happened during the MDA government regime? There are also reports in the media that the BJP, a partner in the MDA, also called the NPP-led MDA government the most corrupt government in the country. This is a startling revelation, and isn't this a case of the pot calling the kettle black?

**New Kids on the Block.**  
This 2023 election is also special when people see the emergence of two new political parties in the political scenario in the state. One of the new political parties in the state that made its first appearance just a few months ago is Ka Kam. The new party introduces a new approach to the political system in the state, and is attempting to bring change to the system by changing the way the campaign for the election is conducted. The party is consisting in three constituencies, more than what it has today to be able to bring some kind of change to the state. The other party, which appeared only recently, is the Voice of the People Party, and the main plank on which this party stands is to bring change to the state. The VPP may be a new party, but it is led by firebrand politicians Arundel Miller, Biswamoyee and Adelbert Sangma, who had defected to the VPP from other parties. Both the politicians were MLAs who had won from other parties, but now they are switching

sides to the VPP. The two new parties also promise to usher in change in the state, but the question is: will they be able to get the numbers to initiate the change they had promised to the voters?

The people also wonder how these two parties, which share the same mission of bringing change to the state, could come together to form a formidable political force in the state. The two new parties have lost confidence in the existing regional parties in the state. They can be a political force to reckon with in the state only if they can come together and unite under one banner to fight against the rot in the state, which is corruption.

**Anti-incumbency factors.**  
Today, the NPP is the target of all insults, and insults come not only from opposition parties, but also, sadly, from ruling partners. The NPP then received attacks for the government's alleged bad governance from certain pressure groups too. Is this just rubbing salt in the wounds, and will the NPP suffer as a result of the anti-incumbency factor? The next important question is: if there is an anti-incumbency factor, is it going to have an impact on the NPP only? What about the other political parties that were part of the MDA government — are they not going to be affected by the anti-incumbency factor?

**Communally change.**  
In Jaintia Hills, the only constituency that needs change led by the communities. In Jaintia Hills in general and Jowai Constituency in particular, the election campaign has always been an anti-caste, anti-religion, and anti-tribe. Parties and politicians hire buses and paid for the fuel of vehicles that are used every night to ferry supporters from one place to another. This goes every night from the day of the scrutiny of nomination papers of the candidates was completed till the day the campaign is over. During the campaign, the candidates also

**BJP faces hurdles in its campaign in Meghalaya Polls against its ruling partner Trinamool better placed to challenge ruling NPP on the issue of corruption**

By Tirthankar Mitra

On February 27, Meghalaya will witness a curious electoral battle. Ever since allies are taking on each other and possibility of horse trading runs high after the results are announced on March 2.

Other curiosities mark the Assembly election in the "Abode of the Clouds". Espousing divergent political ideologies, Union home minister, Amit Shah and Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee are never known to speak in one voice.

Yet the duo is doing so as their political interests coalesce. Small wonder, they have trained their guns and fired broadsides at the same political opponent — chief minister, Conrad K. Sangma accusing him of corruption.

As Shah vilified charges



of corruption against the CM, it is a case of erstwhile political allies turning against each other in the electoral clash. For National People's Party (NPP) to which Sangma belongs along with BJP made up Meghalaya Democratic Alliance which ran the government of this hill state together with United Democratic Party, People's Democratic Front, Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party and an independent legislator. Banerjee on the other hand has accused chief minister, Sangma of being chary of CBI and ED for having allegedly enriched his family at the expense of the state exchequer. The Trinamool leader is one of the leading campaigners for his party which is the principal Oppo-

Holder dispute finds its way in the election manifesto. Trinamool is busy preventing itself being topped an outsider by NPP. It voted to power, it has promised to scrap the bonker pact with Assam. A legal coal mining plagues the state. The BJP manifesto promises a task force to check it and introduce scientific coal mining. Headed by Mukul Sangma, the Meghalaya unit of Trinamool has accused the chief minister Conrad Sangma of being soft and ineffectual. The death of 5 residents of Meghalaya and a Assam forest guard last year in police firing has worsened the situation. In his election speech, Mukul Sangma has accused

**Banerjee on the other hand has accused chief minister, Sangma of being chary of CBI and ED for having allegedly enriched his family at the expense of the state exchequer. The Trinamool leader is one of the leading campaigners for his party which is the principal Opposition outfit in this state.**

Even as BJP hurls corruption charges at NPP, it is forgetful of a fact which ought to have made it have second thoughts. How come it overlooked such shortcomings of NPP or what prevented it from walking out of the alliance earlier.

As one comes down to the nitty gritty of the coming elections, the NPP has the advantage of being the principal coalition partner as it hit the campaign trail. The BJP is contesting in all the 60 seats. Once a formidable political entity in the state, Congress is also contesting in 60 seats. Though Trinamool is the principal Opposition party, its candidates are contesting in 56 constituencies.

Seeking to emerge as the main political player in Meghalaya, the BJP has corruption charges hurled against Conrad Sangma. It is coupled with lack of development of the state during his chief ministerial tenure. If a Reserve Bank of India report is anything to go by, Meghalaya is developing at the slowest pace in the country, Shah has contended. But it again focuses on his party's role in the coalition government it had formed

Delhi. Somewhere, Meghalaya's brave leaders at home tend to buckle when it comes to taking a decisive and firm stand while dealing with the Central government. And that is why, the regional parties like UDP, HSPDP, PDF etc explain their compulsion to fall in line with Delhi: "We need money from Delhi." It is a common refrain. To me this is a poor and weak argument. Look at the political map of India today. There are as many as ten States and one Union Territory which are being ruled by non-BJP parties. Are they not surviving? Arguments may be made that these states are resource rich and capable of managing on their own. May be it is a valid argument to a large extent.

As far as a small state like ours is concerned we need to understand that the matter who rules Delhi, the state's share of devolution of funds from the central kitty is non-negotiable. GST share, Income Tax share etc, are already in place. Also being a tribal predominant state, Delhi has constitutional obligation towards Meghalaya and other NE states.

There are a plethora of central schemes specifically tailored from tribal milieu. We have a ministry exclusively meant for tribal beneficiaries. We don't need to be politically aligned to leverage them. Therefore, it is a convenient action for our regional parties to seek proximity to Delhi in the name of bringing largesse from the coffers of Delhi. And what largesse have they brought, pray? To me it is the plain inability of our regional party leaders to stand up for who they are. In this

context, TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee's calling our leaders "spineless" cannot be dismissed as mere election rhetoric.

Come to think of it, we are muddled in our heads. On one hand, we seek to dig up the Instrument of Accession from its grave, and on the other, we know to powers that be in Delhi. This is a double act that betrays our shameless lust for self and pelf. Our political masters have done grave injustice to the state by short selling themselves to Delhi.

It is my strong conviction that we do not need to display this impoverished mentality to Delhi. For whatever it's worth, we need to be our own — simple, honest and different than all tribes are. By all means maintain good rapport and extract all that is due and fair but for heaven's sake do not compromise with the basic interest of the people you promise to serve.

I hope this election heralds a new dawn in Meghalaya and the people are not betrayed by collective insincerity, inefficiency and selfish motives. God help us!

Yours etc,  
Name of the writer, request, via email

2023] has drawn me into sharing some of my thoughts on school education. The writer raises very pertinent matters regarding school education in rural areas. I'm in agreement that schooling in villages need a different approach — different syllabus and textbooks, and so on. Subject choices must be explored and expanded to incorporate the interests of rural children. Yes, students learn better when the reference point is from their immediate surroundings — where they can relate to and identify with a deeper clarity, depth, and perspective.

Sadly, our approach to education is stupidly rigid. Like some of the answers of a question paper: Only what is given in the marking scheme is acceptable even though there are options! Our education system seems to educate the child to fail, to give up, to feel frustrated, to feel helplessly dejected and to say, "I can't do it!"

Yes, the government needs to make an honest, in-depth study on the teaching learning process in villages across the state. And guided by the feedback, statistics obtained, operational and strategic plans must be drawn up that are workable to reinvent schooling so that learning becomes excitingly challenging. Correlation of all subjects through cross-curricular studies at the primary level is best suited for rural learning. Learning is activity based both for the individual and group. Learners have flexibility. Learning can ride the wave of a child's curiosity, excitement, infectious enthusiasm, a desire to explore, etc., provided

it is appropriately planned, scientifically structured and executed efficiently and effectively. Learning is not confined to the four walls of a classroom. Independent learning is encouraged through observations, trial and error, simple home experiments, etc. Learning goes beyond the school classroom and schedule. Children belong to the world. This goes every night from the day of the scrutiny of nomination papers of the candidates was completed till the day the campaign is over. During the campaign, the candidates also

textbooks are to be used in their affiliated schools. Let us hope that the new government gives education the priority it deserves. As it is, Meghalaya is at the near bottom of the index. The new government has to address all shortcomings in education with an honest, aggressive, hands on, shoulder to the wheel approach.

Yours etc,  
Kevin Philip  
Via email

**Conflict of interests**

Editor,  
Two retired government officials are in the fray in the North Shillong Constituency. The UDP fielded a former Director of Health Services, Dr Aman War while a retired IPS is contesting from BJP. During the campaign, the two candidates highlighted the achievements of the Health and Police Department while they were in service but utilized the same as their personal achievements. It is not a "conflict of interest" for public servants to use their service while in government employment in such a way as to reap electoral benefits as retirement should be. It is not a cooling off period of government officials waiting to contest elections?

Yours etc,  
Marshallang Rymbai,  
Via email

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

"To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect."

— William Blum

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya's moment of shame It took the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah to tell the people of Meghalaya that they are citizens of the most corrupt state in the country. But if Amit Shah thinks this revelation is new, he does not know this State enough. Corruption in Meghalaya started in the late 70's just a few years after it attained statehood. Corruption has only spiralled as if this is the natural trajectory. Now corruption has taken a new meaning under the NPP-led MDA Government which in the first instance withdrew general consent to the CBI for investigating cases of graft in March 2022. The MDA Government did this to stave off the CBI from investigating the illegal coal mining and transportation scam, the Saubhagya scam, rice scam and then the Assembly dome scam. Shah might not have realised the extent of under-development in the state until he reached Garo Hills and saw tell-tale signs of a region lagging behind in human development and infrastructure both.

Amit Shah is aware that the two BJP MLAs who are part of the MDA Government have been rendered mute spectators to the crimes taking place in Meghalaya. For what is corruption if not a crime against the people? They should have blown the whistle louder since they have the tacit support of the government at the Centre. But their's was a muted response. Charmed by ministerial perks the two MLAs preferred to ride on with the MDA till date. When the Saubhagya smart meter scam where a preliminary report by the C & AG revealed excess payment of Rs 149 crore for procurement of Chinese made smart meters was called out by the media, Sainam Global the firm responsible for the scam filed a defamation case against a section of the media. Following a public outcry an enquiry commission was formed to investigate the matter. A retired judge from UP was handpicked and so too members of the Committee. How could a government involved in a scam be allowed to handpick people to enquire into the scam? This was a dead giveaway that the Government was leading the people of Meghalaya on a wild goose chase.

Then came the rice scam where rice meant for Meghalaya's poor were diverted to some other states from a godown in Assam. Again a factal committee was set up to go into this scam too, but without a free and independent agency looking into the matter it was a foregone conclusion that it would become a non-starter where the MDA government would have and is having the last laugh. With so many scams the coalition partners of the MDA Government namely the UDP, PDF and BJP should have been on the defensive but public memory is so short that the above parties are not batting an eyelid. It remains to be seen if the public will punish the scam-tainted parties or vote them back so they will deal a death blow to the state.

Letters to the Editor

Hypocrisy of BJP!

Editor,

There is an interesting perception amongst the non-tribals of Meghalaya that if BJP comes to power or if it gets more seats their fortunes will take a paradigm shift and will empower them with equal rights. But it's time the non-tribals, especially the Hindu community of Meghalaya learnt that BJP is in the habit of taking Hindus for a ride and takes revolutionary decisions in favour of them only when it assures them of electoral benefits by some means. The moment they realise that the same Hindus will not garner them Lok Sabha seats in respective States, it disregards them with step-motherly behaviour and leaves them unattended for 5 years and this is repeated in Kashmir, Bengal, Kerala or Meghalaya. I would like to ask a humble question to all the non-tribals who are blind supporters of BJP if there has been any positive change in their standard of living in the last 5 years? In

spite of the fact that Meghalaya had the MDA Government (with BJP as an active coalition partner) and a BJP government in the centre with absolute majority, what benefit did the non-tribals get vis-a-vis their rights, social respect, security and ease of doing business? The bitter truth is non-tribals remain 2nd class citizens who are always the soft targets to be beaten up and harassed at will. They remain to be voiceless, unattended and disgraced no matter which government comes.

But having said that, we must also give credit to the BJP where it's due. Whether they win or lose, they will definitely give their best effort always when it comes to promoting moves which highlight the atrocities against Hindus as we saw during the release of the movie "The Kashmir Files," 32 years down the line, the Kashmiri Pandits are still targeted, killed or living in exile till date which is the biggest example of BJP's inefficiency and hypocrisy. So even if nothing happens on the ground, the non-tribals can rest assured, one day they will get the op-

Elections 2023: Money the irresistible factor

By Albert Thyriang

Meghalaya is the fifth-poorest state in India and the poorest among the states in North East with 32.65 per cent of its citizens described as multidimensionally poor but 14.64 of 293 candidates from major political parties are multi-dimensionally rich (corrupt). That's makes for a whopping 50.51 per cent of rich people contesting elections. The 'Abode of Clouds' also has the tenth-highest percentage of mal-nourished people among all the states but all candidates feed crowds of supporters during election trails. Let us continue to enlist the irony.

55.96% of the population (sixth-highest position) in the state have no housing facilities but our candidates have palatial buildings. 29.88% of Meghalaya's population (second highest) are deprived of assets but the aspiring MLAs possess numerous assets - movable and immovable. 9.16% of population (fourth-highest percentage) have no bank account but the contestants to the Assembly hold multiple accounts. 76 per cent of rural households alone have no land but the aspirant legislators own huge farm lands.

Rt Bhoi is the poorest district (46.31%) but the super-rich business tycoons flock to the district to fight this election and previous elections. The mining-rich twin districts of Jaintia Hills (46.16%), East Garo Hills (41.78%) are the second and third poor, respectively but the districts houses the wealthiest individuals, some of whom have moved to other parts of the state to compete and contest with their cash.

The NPP has emerged as the richest force in this poor state with 75% of its candidates (43 of 57) being corrupt, amounting only 14 of them (25%) are not corrupt. No wonder the party, according to public confessions, attempted to purchase (and might even have succeeded in some cases) candidates from other parties gifting them at least Rs five crores. The UDP has also grown its riches by notches after being in power for five years. 65% of its candidates (30 out of 40) are proud corrupt pairs. It is obvious that only 10 of them have not crossed the envious figure. The 'Drum' party can no longer accuse national parties of taking its voters to their side by financial attraction. The regional party is second only to its friend, and now foe, in terms of wealth. The Congress has 42% (25 of 60) because 80 per cent

of its candidates are youths and first-time voters. The CM, the offspring of the grand old party, has impressive record of 45% of its candidates (27 of 56) as corrupt. The BJP is at the bottom with 36% of its candidates (23 of 60) in the corrupt list primarily because the saffron party's acceptability rate in the Christian majority state is still low.

The analysis concludes that a whopping 50.51 per cent of Meghalaya candidates are corrupt. With this sort of record we can say that the most motivating factor in February 27 elections, as it has been in the past, is MONEY. Only the rich can contest and win elections. This is common across the political spectrum. In rallies candidates from different parties accuse each other of using cash to vote buyers but the data shows that everyone is the same. All use money for to influence voters. Some more some less! Privately, individuals confess they are given cash ranging from Rs. 3000 to Rs. 10,000. The dances, shows, the songs, frenzy, the ramaSha, the festivity in the run up to the voting date are mammoth intoxication. Rally attendees are given free rides plus a day's wage at least. Only rich candidates and political parties can organise massive rallies and exhibit the show of strength.

This is not democracy. It is a rule by the rich. The story does not end there. The rich do not spend their money for free for charity. They invest in elections in hopes of gaining more, post victory. They know that politics can be lucrative. Here the poor is only a lullaby. The primary objective is for self. Take the example of Laimikhrab MLA Amparen Lyngdoh whose story came out in the press in 2018. Her wealth swelled over 100 times in 10 years. Even the much maligned Dasakhabibi, Lamare and his family who often boast of being generous with the needy know well that in politics avenues are for the taking to grow even richer. So the PWD building minister and Mahabir 'desert' openly distributed money to families in Nongkrem constituency with the intention of furthering his cause. If politics is not financially

lucrative what explains the fact that as many as 375 candidates are vying for a mere 60 seats? 315 (220%) of them will lose. For the five seats in Rt Bhoi 34 are in the fray! If the theory of plutocracy of politics is wrong then how many have become poorer and remained the same after being an MLA or a minister?

The electorate is to be blamed for the trend. We flock to the rich candidates. The public see elections are a bonanza for freebies, especially cash. A pressure group has complained that no change will take place in the state as long as elections are a bonanza. The voters take money from candidates. Candidates themselves appeal to everyone to pocket the money. They eat and drink. Crowds dance, shows are staged, to their hearts content. Rallies and campaigns turn to a frenzy. The atmosphere is no more a thinking ambience. It is purely emotional. If we exercise our franchise with our emotions rather than with our intelligence, then little good will be expected for our state. The corruption charges against the MDA government and its partners, the various scams during the NPP-led regime, the illegal coal mining and transportation, the killing of ex-NLC leader (L) Cheristerfield Thangkhuang, CAA, ILP, teachers issues, the border MOU fiasco, the border imbroglio, the protests, the gas taxes and the rest are forgotten. Money is the deciding factor.

Put back the clock to three to four months ago, the NPP was thought to suffer anti-incumbency the vote but now the 'Book' party is confident of securing a simple majority on March 2. The UDP, the largest coalition partner too is expected to lose ground on the failure of its Home and Education minister. The same applies to minor allies. They may get away with blaming the NPP though they were part and parcel of the unpopular government. With all the protests post the alleged murder of 'Bib Ch' one would have thought that the NPP and UDP would stand absolutely no chance in Mawla, but both are serious contenders. This is because money is short and real issues are not primary considerations for voters. Another consideration is election ideology. This too has taken a back seat. The BJP has made inroads in

the state because many are taken up by the development rhetoric of the saffron party. Its dangerous ideology is overlooked. A few Christian leaders and the faithful have become fans of Narendra Modi. BJP's ultimate aim is Hindu Rashtra. Its objective is a country purged of secularism; a country of one religion, culture, one language and one law. Hence the push for the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). This core ideology may be side lined and development claims are given prominence. Every government does development. We must certainly see development with one eye with the other, we must keep track of the democratic values like freedom, equality and justice. These organisations are anti-minorities including Christians. The recent demand to strip Christians of their ST status in Assam, the numerous atrocities against Christians throughout the country are ample proofs.

Not all of them. The BJP might increase their tally and vote share significantly because of the resources that it has at its command. Voters in Meghalaya might flip prey to it.

All is not lost. There are some really poor candidates like Arbiangkam Khar sohmait from Amarelam of the Congress who has only Rs. 9000, Thonshengeba A. Sangma of Republican Party of India from Raksamgre constituency who possesses just Rs. 22,000 and eight others who have shown Rs. 50,000 or less in their affidavits. May a couple of them win to demonstrate that the poor too have a place in the world's largest democracy.

We also see a silver lining in VPP and KAM with their clear visions - fighting corruption and installing a clean government. Both have declared the use of money in election. Both have pledged to fight election on values while not compromising on secularism. Had my vote remained in Laimikhrab I might have had to waffle between Ayesha Pariat and Waryanbun Kharyntiew. Probably the soft spoken but articulate Pariat has an edge. But since I shifted to my birth place, Mawkyrat, where there is neither VPP nor KAM candidates I will have to keep secularism uppermost in mind. The NPP is cosy with the BJP. It voted for CAA. The regional parties are the same. The message is not to let money decide who you press the button for.

Return to Lok Sabha with majority may not be easy for BJP in 2024 polls

Regional political parties and Congress gaining ground

By Nanton Banerjee

Much of BJP's chances to return with clear majority to Lok Sabha after next year's national election may depend on how the party fares in eight state assembly elections during this year. They offer a big test for BJP. Only two of the eight states — Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh — are ruled indirectly by BJP. Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan are governed by the Indian National Congress. Telangana, another major state, is ruled by K. Chandrababu Naidu of Bharat Rashtra Samiti, a regional party.

Four more assembly elections are due in April, next year involving Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim. They will be held with the Lok Sabha polls. BJP's political opposition is working strongly to contest the Lok Sabha poll into an aggregate of state elections. BJP may find it tough to fight regional parties on the campaign ground. BJP has become too Modi-Shah centric with both the leaders coming from the state of Gujarat, which has been in saffron hands since 1995. The party lacks strong regional faces, except probably Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Assam chief minister.

The results of three of these assembly elections will be known on March 2. Presently, all the three non-eastern states — Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland — are governed by BJP with coalition partners. In tiny Meghalaya, BJP has as many as three political partners, namely National People's Party, United Democratic Party and People's Democratic Front. In tiny Nagaland, BJP is in the government with the support of two local political parties. While Tripura and Meghalaya have two Lok Sabha seats each, Nagaland has only one LS seat. BJP hardly matters to the initial groups in Nagaland and Meghalaya. The rest of the assembly elections in these three states may have little consequence on BJP's Lok Sabha election prospects from the centre.

Nonetheless, the state of Assam, which is currently ruled by BJP with two other political parties as coalition partners, Assam has 14 LS constituencies. Nine of them are currently represented by BJP. The election results from Karnataka in May, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh in November and Rajasthan and Telangana in December should provide a somewhat fairer picture of the political opinion trend, in general, ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Significantly, the number of non-BJP governed states is as many as 14 out of the country's total 31 states including Jammu & Kashmir now under the president's rule. These non-BJP states are: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and West Bengal. On the contrary, the number of strictly BJP ruled states are only four, namely Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Under such circumstances, Union Home Minister Amit Shah's assertion while campaigning in poll-bound Tripura, last week, that there is "no competition" for BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections sounds rather hollow if not pompous. He said the people of the country are wholeheartedly moving with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as his interests and he have led to marked change in their lives. "During the small period of eight years, we have tried to raise the standard of living of 60 crore people. There have been many achievements. There are major changes in the railways. There is a new policy in the space sector...."

I feel that in 2024, there is no competition and every one in the country is moving ahead with PM Modi. The people of Tripura probably wished to hear more about the job prospects of the state's young unemployed youth, new central projects in the state, a more harmonious life between its tribal and non-tribal population and its faster growth with the rest of the country. Consumers in Tripura — using anything from battery powered single rickshaws, the biggest single source of employment in its state capital Agartala, to small grocery and stationery shops — are becoming increasingly dependent on Chinese supplies. The ordinary people are more concerned about their personal security, employment, income and price inflation than about the growth of the country, international status and technological prowess. Instead of coming close to the people with initiatives at the grassroots level, BJP has become too Modi-Shah centric with both the leaders coming from the state of Gujarat, which has been in saffron hands since 1995. The party lacks strong regional faces, except probably Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Assam chief minister.

An authoritarian style of government is never popular in a liberal democratic system. Periodical political changes in the country serve as an essence of democracy. Political freedom carries more weight than the improved financial health of a country. The growth of the economy, international status and technological prowess. Instead of coming close to the people with initiatives at the grassroots level, BJP has become too Modi-Shah centric with both the leaders coming from the state of Gujarat, which has been in saffron hands since 1995. The party lacks strong regional faces, except probably Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Assam chief minister.

However, most ruling political parties in India like they are states or at the centre — refuse to learn. The longer a party or a political combination is in power, the more ideological control it tends to become in its operational style with little regard to the people's choice. It fails to fathom the public sentiment at the bottom of the pyramid. India's constitutional federal structure to keep the country united in the face of sharp divisions and diversities in terms of language, religion, culture and culinary practices, holds liberal ideology as its biggest strength. Lately, Narendra Modi had asked party workers to reach out to every corner of the country, including the marginalised and minority communities, "without electoral considerations", in general, sincerely connect with "Pasmandas, Bohras, Muslim professionals and educated Muslims", to hold votes. BJP has "intensity to build confidence".

Elections have never been easy in India for any political party or political combination, especially since the end of the national emergency in 1977. Several high performing prime ministers and state chief ministers failed to steer their political parties to repeated election victories as the distance between the people and the government widened with one party or a political alliance remaining in power for too long. However, there have been a few exceptions both at the state and national levels. Jawaharlal Nehru was India's longest-serving prime minister whose tenure lasted 16 years and 286 days.

Next came Indira Gandhi serving 11 years at a stretch and again, after a gap, for four years, until she was gunned down by a security man at her official residence in Delhi. Both the politicians belonged to the Indian National Congress. At the state level, Gujarat under BJP, Odisha under BJD, West Bengal under TMC and Delhi under AAP are recent exceptions. (IPA Service)

portunity to be featured in a movie called "The Shillong Files", and the BJP leaders would go all guns blazing in sticking the posters of the same in the whole country with great pride!

Your etc., Name withheld on request, Via email

Meghalaya Decisive Election 2023: Vote for Change

Editor, With elections around the corner in Meghalaya and two other states, a number of politicians are busy distributing gifts, and who knows still others might even distribute money to woo the voters. Interestingly and just recently we saw in the local media a lady from Shillong returning the gifts she has received from the candidates who sought her support, telling them that it is her personal wish to vote for. This is a fact that everyone knows. Voting is purely a secret choice given to us on the polling day through

facilities, good infrastructure, peace at the borders and the prominent recognition of our indigenous identity and uplifting the reputation of our state at the national and international levels. Let's remember to Vote for Change and not for money nor temporary benefits. Thank you so much and God bless. Yours etc., Pastor CM Umfong, Kuli-Apphri, Shillong.

Elections and choice of candidates

Editor, Voting day is fast approaching and the election is nigh. It is reaching its zenith. It's everyone's guess who will win. Some have decided whom to vote for but the majority are still confused. Candidates who have their own programme of action which seems no different from the other. The ultimate choice is between the old candidates and the new ones. Some have termed it as old wine in new bottles. Some have said they are all

the same; it is only a change of uniforms. Others are questioning the new entrants as greenhorns. Someone has referred to an old story in Aesop's fable where a man was sitting on a stool watching the flies sucking from his bloody wound. His friend tried to chase away the flies. The man pleaded not to do so because he said, "These flies are already filled, if the new ones come which are hungry, they will suck me out dry." Human nature has not changed as prophet Jeremiah (17:9) said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?"

The moot question is which button shall I press on February 27? Does the Bible have anything to say about it? Yes. Deuteronomy 1:13 - Choose some wise, understanding and respected men as your leaders. Yours etc., Tomst Mark, Via email

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

*"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."*  
— Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times

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**Tainted bureaucracy**

INDIA'S Civil Service, fashioned on the world's best administrative system perfected by the British, still retains a halo around it even as every system in Independent India experienced shocks and rusted over time. Instead of injecting new vigour to the governance system, successive governments since the 1970s did their best to undercut the authority of the bureaucracy, bent them to their will or colluded with them for mutual personal gains. The much-less-educated political class derived a vicarious pleasure from belittling the bureaucracy and turning them into their orderlies. Many bureaucrats who started off with good intentions got corrupted to extremes either on their own or under the influence of the political leadership. Their sense of discipline got limited to obeying their political masters. The ugly public spat between two wamla bureaucrats – one IAS and the other IPS – in Bengaluru is a sign of the times and has drawn much public attention. So far, the male bureaucrats were seen pulling the legs of their colleagues, at times, publicly. Between the IAS and IPS cadres, there always existed an uneasy calm.

The Bommai-led BJP government in Karnataka, in response, issued a warning to both Roopa Mougil IPS and Rohini Sindhuri IAS against "further violation" of service rules and transferred them. The former has released personal pictures of the latter – where she shares a coffee table with a ruling party MLA at a restaurant. Allegations of corruption by the senior official were already doing the rounds on social media. Socializing by itself is not a rule violation but a public spat is. The entire row helped only to further bring down the image of the bureaucracy. Unholy links between bureaucrats and politicians are common. In the interiors of the power edifice, they might operate to their mutual advantage. Fact is, when the political bosses who sit on a pedestal higher than the bureaucrats err, they lose the moral courage to discipline the bureaucracy.

Disciplining the bureaucracy is no small job. They are well-entrenched, organised under various overt and covert shades and enjoy the protection of service rules. To add to this is the political patronage at individual levels. Most inquiries against bureaucrats for wrong-doings are seen as a sham. Officials investigating the officials tend to adopt a sympathetic attitude. Most such inquiries so far ended up in no action as there is no will on the part of the political bosses to act. In most cases, after a suspension, the accused official sits back at home for a couple of years and returns to service with full back-wages for the suspended period. Political bosses running governments for five years are game to these shenanigans.

# Voters affected by Political dopamine

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Dopamine is a chemical present in the human body and is responsible for adrenaline and how we behave. It spikes when we experience something fun, pleasurable and accordingly dictates how we react to situations. Everyone has their own dopamine. Some are pleased by sports and this explains why they enjoy it. Others are triggered by emotional movies and hence are more attracted to them. Many are driven by success and achievement and this acts as their dopamine. This is the reason why dopamine is also known as a "happy hormone".

In relation to Meghalaya MLA election 2023, the voters are widely affected by a political dopamine. The events in the political space and especially in election meetings drives out any thinking, reasoning and rational behaviour. Meghalaya's political dopamine is driven by songs and dance, joy and merry-making, cheap one-upmanship and the worst of all, name-calling. For example, Congressman Jiram Ramesh calling Mukul Sangma a modern-day Judas is unbecomingly driven by his own nadir. But, there was hardly a voice of condemnation. On the contrary, the political rivals took advantage of it and added humour to this uncouth name-calling. Amidst this type of dopamine surge, the voters have by and large taken their eyes off the ball. The real meaning of elections and what it purports to achieve is seemingly lost.

Three months ago when the election discourse started in society there was a lot of conscious talk on the need for good governance through a visionary government, change and holistic development, being responsible and far-sighted voters, etc. Less than one week before voting day, all good intentions and ideals are lost to one simple desire: 'my candidate to win'. The problem is that there is a tendency to look only at the constituency while remaining oblivious to what government would be formed. It is time to realize that each and every voter also determines government formation. So, while analysing constituency also include how our votes would influence governance of Meghalaya. Needed are

knowledgeable, efficient and brave lawmakers who would uphold the Constitution of India and work with honesty and dedication for the people. Vote for the constituency but also factor coal mining, Meghalaya Assam border issue, railroads, hospitals, education, safety and security, law and order, unemployment and under-employment, etc. It is required to think of a government which would act decisively and dedicatedly on these issues. A vote is a personal choice but the consequences are always public. However, the dopamine-driving voters today is an equation on how do I benefit if my candidate wins?

If social media comments are taken as votes, then the new parties with a breath of fresh air would be winners. They have garnered a formidable support base



in the virtual space. The majority are the youth who have been unhappy with the previous government. This also shows the degree of discontentment that exists in Meghalaya today. The young are screaming for change. While the popularity of the newer parties are driven by the fact that they have not been tried and tested, the grander and older parties are driven by their own media and propaganda cells. But, the question is does a positive negative comment about a candidate and/or party translate into for-against votes on polling day? Positive comments do act as a dopamine, but do not be misguided. Positive/negative comments are not directly related to victory/loss. Say, there is five candidates (A, B, C, D) and E) and

suprisingly they will take up again once the government formation dust settles. What is the dopamine that drives their silence? Is there some sort of tacit understanding with the political parties? The pressure groups are apt at complaining of a growing trust deficit from the society. Well, if this is how they function then why bother complaining at all? The only ones who have come out to speak are HJTB. But, on listening and analysing HJTB's rhetoric there is a suggestion of it being linked to some candidates party.

The most disappointing aspect of this election is the negative campaigning. The political discussions and deliberation are more tilted towards pin-pointing the ills of the others while focusing

on their own. This is a period of deindividuation. This can happen through taking a step back, relaxing and introspecting. This is political soul searching to be done. Shut off all the news, negative dopamine, trivialising of issues and candidates parties. It is only then that we might see the real meaning of an election and the selection of the best representative combined with an effective government. Unless we step back from the current hubbub, the clear picture will not emerge. Discuss and not just through social media. Many studies have shown that while social media helps in bringing people together, it lacks potency in bringing change. This can only happen if people are actually mobilised to come together and have face-to-face frank and blunt discussions (read a 61 million person experiment in social influence and political mobilization by Bond et al. in 2020). This is the best time to do physical interaction in homes, streets, tea shops, localities, etc.

In the end, political dopamine is good! A person who is politically dead is also sociologically dead. What is required is for the voters to be guided and driven by a positive dopamine. A dopamine of positive campaigning, honesty, integrity, dedication and ethics, all of which will lead to the much craved after growth and development. (The writer teaches at NEHU. Email - benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in)

## Formal job creation declines further in India EPFO data reveals severe distress in labour market

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

The latest Employment Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) data reveals the sharp decline of 1.5 per cent in payroll enrolment in December 2022 compared to November. The month of October had registered the lowest monthly enrolment since May 2021. Only a little improvement was registered in November, and that too wanted in December dashed the hope of the people, particularly the unemployed who were in search of decent

from 3,29,858 in June this year. Among 22-25 years of age, it fell from 3,73,343 to 3,60,188 during this period. It shows that India is failing to provide formal jobs to people between the age group of 15-25, which are generally first-time job seekers. For the workforce above 26 and above the data shows little improvement in enrolment, which may reflect the continuation of the earlier enrolment in the EPF.

The data pertaining to establishments registering first ECR in the month shows a figure of only 3,140 in the country, which was 5696 in May 2022. It shows that the number of companies providing fresh employment to the workforce has sharply declined.

December data shows that 3,81,673 members exited from EPF while 2,02,250 were newly enrolled. The number of members who exited, rejoined and reabsorbed was 10,74,454. The Net payroll members were

slashed jobs. The actual number of new formal jobs, as reflected in the monthly subscribers enrolment under the EPF, went down in December 2022 to 8,02,250 against 9,37,780 a year earlier in November. In October, new enrolments were only 7,80,170. It was a great fall from 10,59,724 in April 2022, and from 11,59,350 in July 2022.

Of the new EPF subscribers added in December, a total of 446,358 are in the 18-25 age group, down by 15.5 per cent from 528,484 in November. It shows that job opportunities for the workforce entering the job markets for the first time are declining.

The data also springs a surprise or gender development. The number of new male subscribers fell more (14.9 per cent) than female (12.9 per cent) in December 2022. It is a matter to be watched closely in the coming months.

It must be noted that this data is provisional and is continuously revised, and when final data comes, it proves to be provisionally overestimated. We can take the example of the year 2021-22, for which we have both provisional data and the annual report. There is a big difference – provisional data tried to show formal employment rising by almost 20 million while an annual report, based in the Parliament of India revealed a fall of 2.58 million, which was a fall of about 5.3 per cent. The provisional data therefore must be seen in this background. EPFO had started bringing out formal employment using payroll since April 2018, covering the period since September 2017.

The data shows that enrolment of the workforce less than 18 years of age fell to 5676 in December from 6185 in November, and 9630 in June 2022. If the age group 18-21 fell to 2,77,343 in December

from 3,29,858 in June this year. Among 22-25 years of age, it fell from 3,73,343 to 3,60,188 during this period. It shows that India is failing to provide formal jobs to people between the age group of 15-25, which are generally first-time job seekers. For the workforce above 26 and above the data shows little improvement in enrolment, which may reflect the continuation of the earlier enrolment in the EPF.

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**Answers to the inquiry**

### Mighty "High Level" in Meghalaya & Lawless State

Editor, While the whole state is reeling under the election mood and busy preparing for voting, very quietly what is today called the "High Level" and Coal Mafia are having their heyday as there is no one to disturb them. Crews of rippers are lauded every night without paying taxes to the Government. Recently 6000 MT of the Coal India Ltd auctioned coal was allowed to be transported and lifted from the designated depot. Surprisingly more than 6000 coal laden trucks were allowed to transport the coal to Assam via the Ratacherra check gate of Meghalaya. How can this happen? The successful bidder and the so-called High Level did not lift the coal from the designated depot. Instead they transported coal from illegal mines and the same papers were used repeatedly by various coal trucks to transport their coal.

posed, within a fraction of time someone from the High Level immediately appears at the Police Stations along with the challans to prove that what is being carried is legal coal. Whenever a coal truck is shown to be caught by pressure groups or police, false (not fake) challans are produced. The challans are false in the sense that the registration number of the coal truck caught by the police or pressure groups does not match with the truck number of the GPS number mentioned on the challan produced by the High Level. This is a big scam in which the officers at the higher levels and the mafia are involved. The auctioned coal is still lying at the designated Coal India Ltd depot in East Jaintia Hills. The coal transported by the successful bidder was not lifted from the Depot but from illegal mines. The challans are easily renewed several times again and again as per the wishes and choice of the High Levels. The quality of coal mentioned in the auction notice and the quality of coal transported by coal trucks are different. The seized coal recently auctioned by the Deputy Commissioner, East Jaintia Hills District is also transported in the same way. The Coal Depots which are not even approved by

the competent authorities already have coal stacked in them without any transit permit or permission to store coal in them. Even the origin of such coal is questionable. Every night more than 300 illegal coal trucks carrying illegally mined coal are allowed to exit from Meghalaya to Assam via Ratacherra Checkgate of the Meghalaya Government in East Jaintia Hills District. This is done under the direct supervision of the "High Levels" and the assistance of the officials. Each truck is charged Rs. 1.30 lakh (One Lakh Thirty Thousand Rupees) by the High Level for easy passage all through their journey.

It is high time that some locations, especially the business activities of the High Level are being put under surveillance by Central Agencies. The place where they enter the truck numbers at East Jaintia Hills where the payments are made etc., should be raided regularly. Surprisingly, or perhaps not surprisingly there is a widespread rumour that the private vehicles with fully tinted glasses and sometimes the policemen are the couriers of illegal mining which is being transported to safe locations during this time. Unless and until some

of the officers along with the member of the High Level are sent to jail, this menace will continue and very soon the State will go to the dogs. It is only the Hon'ble High Court that can save our State from the grip of corruption and the fist of slavery. It is high time for the Meghalaya High Court to direct the Central Agencies to raid the places of the suspects and bring some of the criminals involved in the scam to book. Even a preventive detention of all the members of the "High Level" and officials involved will help.

Yours etc., Name withheld on request, Via email

### On EVMS VPAT challenge votes

Editor, At the outset it is the prerogative of the Election Commission of India to advise the electorates to hear no rumour and spread no rumour. The EVM machine is not linked to the internet and cyber tampering is impossible. That all buttons stamp on the BJP's lie. One needs permission and combination of millions to achieve that level of accuracy if at all that's possible, especially in our country with a dozen or more candidates from a

consensus. However, the experience of the three voters in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls needs clarification from the ECI. Yes, as had been written in this paper, it was unfortunate that despite the order of the Supreme Court on two occasions, the ECI sat on those orders until the poll results were out. We the voters, showing the democratic process are eager to exercise our rights. And when we press the button in favour of the candidate, the VPAT has done a marvelous job to give us the correct outcome. But on complaint that the VPAT did not show the symbol and name of the person we have voted for, the ECI challenged us voters instead to prove the veracity of our complaints by challenging with a certain amount of money for the task of verification to be taken up. Why would anyone risk paying money, no matter how big or small the amount is, on a machine which may function perfectly well? This challenge on voters is unconstitutional.

The manner in which the three persons were treated over this matter has not yet been reconciled and should be a function of the EVMS and ECI. A machine is a machine. Please reply to what is being done as far as the fault of the VPAT in the last LS poll is concerned. If it is not rectified the stigma

will never leave the voters and might discourage other voters.

Yours etc., W Pasah, Nongkrem

### Money power is real

Editor, Albert Thiyang's Special Article "Election 2023: Money the irresistible factor" (ST Feb 21, 2023) made interesting reading and he has rightly sent a message, "not to let money decide who you press the button for." But there is a big problem. Why do you accept that worthless piece of paper? The reason is, you have a faith whether you are secular or not that when you take that piece of paper to someone they will also accept it and give you something real that you want. If you feel that nobody will accept that paper then you won't accept it either. In the words of Prof. Walker Hicks "Money is what money does".

Yours etc., VK Lyngdoh, Via email

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"Pride works frequently under a dense mask, and will often assume the garb of humility."

— Adam Clarke

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 15, No. 192 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2023

Done with the name-calling

FOR the past two months all that the public of Meghalaya has been reading about and hearing are vicious tirades by political parties targeted at their opponents. The Tripartite Congress has laid bare the scams of the outgoing MDA government and so has the BJP. But if these parties believe that such revelations matter to the voting public of Meghalaya they are mistaken. In no other election has money power played such an overarching role. For the first time ever, assistance meant for farmers' collectives under the aegis of the Farmer's Collectivisation for Upscaling Production and Marketing Systems (FOCUS) programme have been disbursed to non-farming individuals who received Rs 5000 in their bank accounts. Even the PRIME (Promotion and Incubation of Market-driven Enterprises) scheme has been randomly distributed with the intent of garnering public support. Needless to say this would not have been possible without the active assistance of the bureaucracy. No wonder it is said that a politically aligned bureaucracy is a danger to democracy and how!

In India today we are witnessing the erosion of virtues that the IAS/IPS officers were imbued with during their training period. Virtues such as integrity, political neutrality, courage not to stray from the path are showing signs of rapid decay. Civil servants are seen to be involved in partisan politics because they have developed an easy relationship with their political bosses. It also true that civil servants have often had to pay the price for their integrity and those involve punishment postings. So what's the incentive for them to walk the straight and narrow path? Also there's no transparency involved in transfers and postings especially when it comes to police officials. Hence many have lost the spine to take on the system. It's easier to go with the flow. The transfer of the above benefits to non-deserving individuals could not have happened without cooking the books and that's not the job of politicians but of the bureaucracy. Here lies the rub. It's a systemic fault and it's the reason why administrative reforms are stymied at every occasion.

There's only four more days to go before the people of Meghalaya will elect their next government. All talk about change and about cleansing the system will remain rhetoric because the more things change the more they remain the same. About the only respite that citizens will have after March 2, is the silence they long for. Needless to say, 'thinking' and 'voting' are poles apart. Voters appear to have decided to keep their thinking under temporary suspension. This is what democracy has done to the cognitive domain of the voters. Partly it's the noise and din and the largesse that has robbed people of the ability to make an informed choice. It will be no surprise therefore to see the same set of people back at the helm.

Letters to the Editor

Price rise a non issue during polls

The hullabaloo has sets in with all the political parties making tall promises like MYP, card, We card, the 5-star Meghalaya, the FOCUS and not to forget the clean politics etc, etc, and the list goes on and on. We have witnessed many hollow political debates, by all political parties debating various issues without substance. What really saddened me as a common man in the streets is that no political party dared to touch on the important subject of price rise. The question is why these wannabe political honchos totally ignored this very important issue. Perhaps the answer lies with us the electorate since we easily fall prey to froebies and tend to shy away from the real issues that really make these so-called crooked political leaders to feast in. Where are the NGOs and the pressure groups of the Jaitibyners? Are they afraid to take up this issue fearing that their fingers will get burned. People of the state knew very well the modus operandi of these so called promoters of the Jaitibyners and through their double standard they fooled the general public. I really doubt that the National Party like BJP should not have the right tools for rebuttal? Think these are cheap gimmicks by the candidates to woo and fool the non-tribal voters which are size-

able in this constituency and some other constituencies. Dear non-tribal friends, don't get fooled by these cunning rhetoric of the candidates projecting themselves as your saviors. These are the same people who don't care about the plight of our own Khasi-Pnar-Bhoi-Garo brothers and sisters and given a chance will loot all our share of development. If you look at the nooks and corners of the State, almost in every constituency represented by tribal MLAs, you will see the glaring display of public representative's apathy towards their own so-called 'My People/True' when it comes to development. How do you expect them to take care of you when they are least bothered about their own tribes? They only care about themselves and that is why, while their properties/assets will grow up to 100-500% in 5 years if they win, you will only get sufferings in equal proportion. The ones who truly care about you or use you only as a vote bank. You should vote for someone who considers you as equal partners in the process of development of your constituencies and the State as a whole, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or community. Right now, everyone is pretending to be a saint and the protector. Once they win, bring very few of them, it will be 'Baap Hada Na Bhaiyya, Sabhe Bada Rupak' (loosely translated to 'Money is superior to everyone'). We all have seen it for decades how it gets played out after the

Tribal-non-tribal issue a cheap gimmick by candidates to fool voters

Editor, I am flabbergasted to see the claim of BJP candidate of North Shillong constituency M. Kharkrang that regional parties should not seek non-tribal votes (SF, dated 17/02/2023). By that logic, will it not be appropriate to connumerate that National Party like BJP should not have the right tools for rebuttal? Think these are cheap gimmicks by the candidates to woo and fool the non-tribal voters which are size-

Electors and philanthropist traits

By Toki Blah

quite severe and even now well past the 15th of Feb, the cold still lingers and has refused to leave. The electoral philanthropists one spoke about earlier have been quick to take role of this change in climate. Can't let the poor voter die of cold before they cast their votes. I am told that an enterprising candidate, contesting from one of the colder constituencies, has ordered a containerful of those lovely fluffy Chinese blankets to distribute in his constituency. The sudden lull and concern for the poor has to be seen to be believed. The change of heart, tolerance and open-mindedness for the welfare of the poor and the underprivileged is conspicuous to observe, however brief and transitory it might be. One hopeful, of a past election, confessed how he came home one night, tired and worn out after a day of campaigning simply to find two of his supporters, dead drunk, reeking of the local booze, snoring away on his bed. He didn't have the heart to offend them by waking them up and so he ended up sleeping on the sagging and lumpy spare bed kept in his garage. Said to add that he lost the elections but the scar of the incident remained and he later bitterly complained "Ka jingsew sobhat te phlan yndei por election me lah kyrdem laduh ba kh dalah to mh eit. " (Had it not been for the elections I would have kicked the \*\*\*\* out of them! Ah, one should not underestimate the power of the vote to invoke compassion, social tolerance and understanding for the unfortunate of society, even for reeking foul smelling stinks occupying your bed. I never had the nerve to ask where and how his wife spent that particular night!

The reader might also be surprised at the medicinal properties of elections. Candidates suddenly develop improved eyesight and all of a sudden start noticing leaking water mains, appalling roads lined with potholes and broken drains, unnamed PUs and CUCs especially in the rural areas, leaking school buildings and the general breakdown of infrastructure that has remained neglected and overlooked for years. The Govt of the day suddenly finds that it has plenty of unutilized funds that need to be spent. Units of Govt schemes are suddenly rediscovered and District Magistrates and BHOs are suddenly swamped with packets that demand immediate implementation. As a side-line, I would be very much interested in the percentage of survival of those piglets distributed to thousands of farmers a few months ago. Perhaps some large hearted and curious RTI expert might like to find out. MLAs also suddenly wake up to the fact that they have money to spare from the MLA funds that they have been hoarding and sitting on like brooding hens for the past four years. Work orders for repairs then start falling like confetti at a wedding party. That desire to do good to be charitable; to be benevolent; to be compassionate and to bring forth that humanitarian streak that lay buried so long in our selfish natures can only be prodded and awakened by elections. Therefore it is no wonder for some over-enthusiastic hopefuls to proclaim that "he and his family will find themselves someday sitting on a front pew in some mansion beyond the pearly gates!"

Let me remind the reader that decades and even centuries of preaching could not have had such a phenomenal impact in converting people to love their fellow beings as elections can. Yes Lakshmi not forget to shower her love on those who gave away thousands in charity (if only during election time of course) to the poor, in the expectation to make careers for themselves in the rural areas. The only tragedy is that

this "new found love for thy neighbor" is expected to last only till the 27th of February 2023. After that it's back to normal, every man for himself and even if scores should perish under illegal conditions, it's the fault of the poor themselves for venturing into such dangerous places. The rich will continue to remain above suspicion.

It is claimed that Meghalaya is a predominant Christian state or so I am told. Politicians have never lost sight of this aspect and have always been quick to refer to the bible, its quotes and its parables to strengthen any particular pitch they wish to impress their audience with. In the current polls a particular party has been lambasted for using the tune of a religious hymn to prop up their electioneering limerick. Well I guess all's fair in love and war. Lessons from the bible to love one another, to practice charity and to help the poor have been referred to above. One of the more used references is to forgiveness where the candidate seeking votes for himself does not forget to ask forgiveness for any wrongs of omission and commission of his past. Shame, What shame! Another quote from the bible book often used in poll campaigns is the under attack. "The 'deceitful narratives' made concentric circles around Narendra Modi's name, gave a 100% nights to everybody in the Modi government. Linking India's growth story to Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the essence of the 'Save Modi' campaign."

Most of us have attended and heard these passionate excerpts from the Bible and the pulpit amongst us have lived to rue the day we swallowed such crap. Some might call such practices opportunistic but lets allow the poor souls this chance to practice their art of oratory because once elected, in the Assembly, most prefer to clam shut and remain dumb as mannequins. Yes politicians have quoted all the Bible verses to hype up their image, but how come not one of them have ever referred to mentioned Zacheas, the man who returned back to the public work that he had stolen from them?

PM has put all his cronies on the job to protect his brand image

By Sushil Kutty

Protection of democracy and protection of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's standing have become the No 1 priority of India's growth wagon, and not necessarily in that order. From the Vice President of India to the External Affairs Minister of India, everyone of any standing has been put on the job.

Of course, sycophancy must be in the curriculum vitae. Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces enemies galore, including foreigners, non-Indians and non-Indians. The 'non-Indians' are Indians but harbour ill-will for India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in particular. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is said to be a victim of "dumping of information", which is nothing but another form of aversion. One that calls for immediate neutralization because India's growth story, of which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the chief architect, is under attack.

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Most of us have attended and heard these passionate excerpts from the Bible and the pulpit amongst us have lived to rue the day we swallowed such crap. Some might call such practices opportunistic but lets allow the poor souls this chance to practice their art of oratory because once elected, in the Assembly, most prefer to clam shut and remain dumb as mannequins. Yes politicians have quoted all the Bible verses to hype up their image, but how come not one of them have ever referred to mentioned Zacheas, the man who returned back to the public work that he had stolen from them?

both hurt, and are willy-nilly intertwined. Both will be protected.

There cannot be a sacrificial lamb and a circling vulture. Modi has been truly slandered, and for reasons that are difficult to prove they were doctored. The question is should somebody, ever so high, be allowed reversion for a crime just because he gets spoken of in the same breath as "democracy should be protected?" Perhaps democracy will survive, and will live to fight another time, if action is taken against the one using the cloak of democracy to overstay his welcome. Does anybody have the impression that this democracy will not survive Narendra Modi? Is he indispensable for India's growth story?

Deep down in their hearts and in their arteries through which free flows the lifeblood of youth will soon begin to ask why an entire ecosystem has been geared to help one person escape the vagaries of his own mistakes? The person in question why cannot he face the inquisition, even if it is an inquisition, so be it!

Far how long will the villain of the piece hide in the folds of democracy's skirt? To say that Hindenburg played dirty, and then a repeat of the same set of accusations by somebody else, where does belief turn to acceptance? In here, in the dumps of information, where do the elements of truth to unearth, right? Has anybody in government denied any of the

"The Government of India is putting everything it has into neutralizing the anti-Modi information dumps. Modi's enemies no longer hold the surprise advantage. The entire government machinery has been put to fight Modi's enemies. Talk has got around that the enemies of India, and of India's democracy, are the same who have been slandering Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is different from 'India is India...', but essentially the same, the unspoken 'Modi is India...'"

accusations made by Hindenburg or George Soros? The first one has been declared unethical and therefore unbelievable because 'he' short-sells; the second accuser dismissed because he is not only 'old, rich and opinionated' but also "dangerous!"

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Talk has got around that the enemies of India, and of India's democracy, are the same who have been slandering Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is different from 'India is India...', but essentially the same, the unspoken 'Modi is India...' Be it the BBC documentary 'Modi The Question', or Hindenburg Research's revelations about Adani that made people dump Adani shares in bloody haste, India's democratic credentials and Modi's reputation were

both hurt, and are willy-nilly intertwined. Both will be protected.

elections. I know it's very difficult for the candidates who are trying every trick to win the election to be honest enough, but the fact of the matter is development of an arc constituency or the State as a whole cannot be implemented in line of communities; rather it should be a holistic one-development for everyone. Perhaps, M. Kharkrang has forgotten their tallest leader's mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas and Sabka Vishwas', summed up as 'Jan Bhagidari (Taking all together for inclusive development through collective trust and participation)' in the developmental process. Honourable Modi ji, beware! Your party men are betraying your ideology in Meghalaya!

Yours etc, Prof. Lakshmi Lawson Khatun

Will the electorate give a clear mandate to Meghalaya?

Editor, We have elected legislators and political parties supporting the legislators in the past without weighing the capability of thinking for the future of the state and its citizens and hence results in negligence of education leading to poor development and the state we are in today. The rise and the development we could see in the United States of America,

leading European countries, and the developed states of India, etc., arose from the preference to include education as first priority of the government. I am sorry to say that we have not understood yet the role played by education in the development of our state. Now, with our sense from media reports that in this Assembly Election 2023 the people are being misled by the wrong government leading to a better governance, but from the interactions we had with the electorates in almost all the constituencies in Khasi and Jaintia Hills it is anticipated that there will be a change from a bad to the worse government. May I request the electorate to be responsible by rethinking for a better tomorrow during these few remaining days before the election from Feb 27, 2023. Let us not put ourselves into a decision for a chaotic state that will bring disharmony and in our way of life.

It will not be difficult for anyone to predict the result of the election on March 2, 2023 and the outcome of it will be the formation of a coalition government that will still neglect education leading to development. MDA government we have experienced so far. I bet that with the new government we will experience more problems (especially in employment, improvements of educational and health levels, repayment of loans taken by the past governments and other development activities, etc.) as they have been created by the past governments. The beginning

of rough days ahead are waiting for us so we have to be prepared for accepting the challenges whatever be the hardship it puts us through. Our mindsets who are shortsighted will suffer (however short it may be) for the betterment of the future of our children and grand children or be ready to accept the blame that we are the one who have brought out all the hardships in their life.

Again, with our past selection of legislators, we have not got the authority to carry out a policy or course of action, regarded as given by the electorate to a party or candidate that wins an election, so we have been experiencing worse governments ignoring the importance of education for the past fifty years plus with negligible developments in all sectors of our state, so it is important to review our decision now that we don't regret in future. The decision we make now will be so important and crucial that it may save us from becoming the Frankenstein who will be a creator of future problems. I am 100% sure that if we make correct decision at this stage, we can hope to see good governance with full concentration on education leading to development in all spheres which can give us peace and harmony in our lifestyles.

Yours etc, Louis Pyrragh Ratsimballah

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"A person who never made a mistake | never tried anything new." — Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 151, No. 193 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2023

Old party, new life

IT'S quite unpredictable as to whether the Congress party can return to lead the nation in the near future. But the pan-India organizational network - not strength - of the party is matching with that of the governing political establishment, the BJP. This may be in a dominant state in some regions but retains the inner strength to revitalize itself at the appropriate time. The three-day, 85th plenary of the Congress party beginning today in Nava Raipur in Chhattisgarh might not come up with any earth-shaking decisions, but the presence of some 15,000 delegates trends the meeting a charm of its own.

The Congress party's relevance today is that democracy requires the presence of a strong opposition. The regional parties, mostly run by greedy dynasts, are incapable of effectively facing the BJP or giving reassurance to the nation even if they group together without the involvement of the principal Opposition, the Congress party. This is clear as sunlight. Apart from discussing political linkages, the plenary would decide on the major recommendations of the Udaipur Chhinn Shivir held eight months ago after which new president Mallikarjun Kharge holds the reins of the party. This meant the "first family" chose to stand aside in a technical sense, but not keep apart from the running of the party. Even today, the party cannot do without the overarching influence of Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi. This is in the DNA of the tri-colour party since a long time after Indira Gandhi split the original Congress and later formed her own outfit, which eventually paraded itself as the present Congress Party.

Significantly, the Nava Raipur meet aims to make the party younger by facilitating the induction of a sizeable numbers of people below age 50 - meaning the eventual gaining of an upper hand for the youth in the grand old party. If India must change substantively its old guard, the deadwood, must either stand aside or be dumped. A change of mindset is what the governing establishments require today, first and foremost. Ageing men cannot think anew. Youths require freedom to perform and inject the animal spirit in the nation's growth process. It is here that the relevance of Rahul Gandhi, 52, must be emphasized. The run-of-the-mill uniformed politician with his jaded and greedy mindset is the curse of the nation. Those with a modern mindset must step in and lead the people. In this context, a global citizen like Shashi Tharoor's presence in the CWC may be facilitated. India must discard its antiquated styles and catch up with the changing world.

Letters to the Editor

A glimmer of hope, finally!

Editor, As the build up towards the upcoming poll is having, there is a "shot in the arm" with the emergence of fresh ideology, that come in the form of 'fresh young Tony, Englishman, Mayboms and the like in numerous constituencies. Their new ideas shattered through several platforms viz. community common platform, interviews etc. I am certainly caught up with many voters. They are promising to say the least, and the fact that many of them have sacrificed their budding careers to enter politics. We cannot deny we had one of the worst groups of electoral representation in 2018, which brought about much anguish and despondency among all of us. The offshoot of these young leaders stemmed from an air of melancholy that has surrounded us for a number of years now, and whether, these energetic Mayboms come out triumphant or not on the March 2, 2023 matters very little for many disenfranchised citizens like us, but one thing is sure, they have given us a glimmer of hope, which we are desperately in need of. We also hope there will be a comeback for a number of the "now well-oiled leaders" that lost in the last polls, fearless law makers who will usher in the much-needed change.

Yours etc., Lawrence Pheriaz Sumter, Via email

Freedom is priceless! Wake up voters

Editor, Apropos of the special article, "Voters affected by political dopamine" by Benjamin Lyngdoh and the headlines, "NPP leads to poll seats CM face" (ST February 2023), Lyngdoh's excellent article is a wake-up call to the politically conscious to ponder and act. I agree with Lyngdoh that, unless we step back from the current hullabaloo, the clear picture will not emerge. Discuss and not just through social media. A media that sways, fools and impacts them by anxiety, headaches, sadness and muscular strain, causing their lives to fall apart or more for throwing life into disarray. As to the headlines, the National People's Party has taken a sound decision that the "new elected NPP MLAs will sit together immediately after the counting of votes and elect a leader, indicates the maturity of NPP leaders.

Yours etc., VK Lyngdoh, Via email

Nearing the end of the crazy season

By Patricia Mukhim

The noise, the rhetoric, the singing, dancing, gyrating et al will end on Saturday. To top the eleven desire to be outrageous at public platforms. Fancy this! A BJP candidate says in a public platform that he can enter right inside Narendra Modi's kitchen because as a BJP member he is like the youngest son of Modi. Such utterances make one wonder why they have not been taken leave of their senses during this period when we should all actually be more circumspect because we are determining the fate of our State and the future of our younger citizens. These young citizens need to see that ray of hope in the distant horizon but the thinking lot who are becoming a small majority in Meghalaya are already disenfranchised by what they see. Frankly speaking, they see no hope when they scan through the names and faces of the contestants, hearing the few bright sparks whose chance of being elected by people bribed to their necks with money and booze, seems distant.

This rapid collapse of trust and the rise of animosity against a system that defies change are emotional, not intellectual problems. And as a society have not yet learnt to appreciate that emotions are often more powerful and override the intellect and that most of our decisions are not based on reason but emotions because we humans are wired that way. The only people who seem to understand this are politicians even though we may write many of them off for not being educated enough. The point is they have learnt the art of managing our emotions. They can inflame passions as will look at how we have been taken by their eloquent speeches that we have to be fearful of the "outsider", the alien who will take away everything from us. But at the end of the day it's the politician, not the non-tribal aristocrat who takes away what's due to us in all five years. It's politicians who have the last laugh by coming us into believing them.

American journalist and poet Carl Sandburg once said that politicians must wear three hats - one for talking

through it; one for throwing in the ring and one for pulling rabbits out of it. In Meghalaya, some politicians are doing all three but the first one - talking through their hats because they don't have anything of substance to say. They have on their voices through cheap wise-cracks and initially some represent constituencies that are supposedly intellectually superior than most. But perhaps we are wrong in assessing that intellect. It shuts down during this season because there's only that much that the mind can process especially when we are bombarded by social-media every minute these days and we see women hanging currency notes in their hands and dancing away wilelessly or some politician spewing out some outrageous drivel. We have had much too much of the banishment of the senses this election and one wonders what effect this will have on our collective psyche post March 2.

There's a laundry list of seams against the NPP-led MDA government, the latest one being the land scam in the Urban Affairs Department. There could be many more; that we are not aware of because the lid is not yet broken and they are not just the seams committed by the NPP but by their partner-in-crime the UDP which is now locking at a Khasi Chief Minister so as to facilitate more loot in this region. Sometimes these mindless claims make us feel exasperated because we know the devious intent of these people and because they think we are cretins, needing to be tutored in politics.

At the time when Covid hit us all felt vulnerable and even politicians who claim to be selfless felt so. Days ago we lost one candidate in the midst of the campaign almost as if to shake us out of our stupor of complacency. But humans are impervious to these life lessons. They continue with their pursuit of wealth and power without being moved by the rhetorical uncertainties of life itself. After March 2, when the

and dust settles, hopefully after some rain (it has begun to rain cats and dogs in Sohra) as a citizen that and a media person later my attention will be on how the prospective decision-makers are creating events but on how people perceive these events. In a state like Meghalaya, with its subterranean moorings and non-overlapping lenses, the process by which people make these decisions is more important than the event itself. The election this time has become a soap opera in which all of us have willy-nilly acted our parts. Those with concern for the future of Meghalaya have failed to step out of their comfort zones to hit the streets to counter the falsehoods and call out the lies of those who have treated the state as their personal stronghold from which to draw the money to burn. In covering this election one has seen from close quarters how power inequality shapes people's lives. There's both ideological and emotional polarisation. Campaigning has been loud and jarring. Candidates have been plying over each other even at podium platforms instead of having conversations. The political vocabulary this time has been a spate of terms like "women and women saying one thing but meaning something else. Do these lectures matter to the enslaved mind of the apathetic people who are paid to attend these meetings? No, they don't. People here are still innocent enough to remain loyal to the one who pines for them.

Ultimately the election is a wound that never heals. If the same coalition shindrig returns with BJP leading the umbrella then the people of Meghalaya have not used their experiences to vote freely. Their choices have been short-circuited by the money power demonstrated with such vulgarity this season. It is said that experience is not what happens to you but what you do with what happens to you. Clearly, from what can be gathered so far the people

under OPS, a class 3 staff on superannuation gets Rs 22,000 per month whereas in the New Pension Scheme (NPS) the same category may draw less than 50% of the said amount. Hence, government is being urged to explore a sustainable formula with which the state government would not have to bear any financial burden to cater to a sustainable pension scheme. And, contextualised in the government argument that OPS can be a veritable presence in the state's exchequer, the employees' union have argued that this effect can be viably made good to a significant extent.

Either way, at the end of the day, Maharashtra being controlled by the Saffron government at the centre the former has had to follow to a text the command of the latter. The employees may have got wind of it; hence on February 27th next they have proclaimed a state-wide strike to press for their demand for OPS.

Regarding our state of Meghalaya, there is a wide spread belief that in the forthcoming Assembly elections if a next government is helmed by NPP, BJP and a conglomerate of regional parties, the OPS dream of the state's employees who join services after March 31st, 2010 is bound to be utterly nipped in the bud.

Yours etc., Jerome K Lyngdoh, Shilling-2

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

Will Meghalaya choose development?

By Sujit Kumar Mohanty

On February 27th, 2023, Meghalaya will hold its 11th General Election to elect representatives for its 60 assembly constituencies. It marks a long journey from its creation as a separate hill state on January 20, 1972. Despite its initial impetus to unite the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo communities in the preservation of their racial identity, language, and culture, Meghalaya still faces significant economic and social challenges even after 50 years of existence.

According to the Reserve Bank of India's 2023 annual publication, Meghalaya's contribution to total tax revenue of the nation for 2021-22 was only 0.3%, while newly carved states such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand contributed 2.3%, 2.0%, and 1.1% respectively. Furthermore, Meghalaya's outstanding liabilities amount to a staggering Rs. 17433 crore.

One of the reasons for Meghalaya's poor economic indicators can be attributed to the prevalence of xenophobic politics. Despite the world embracing neo-liberal policies, Meghalaya struggles to detach itself from the negative consequences of xenophobia.

The idea of Meghalaya being a state of people having "pure blood" is espoused by various militant organizations, which is like the ideology of the Third Reich under Adolph Hitler. The rise of xenophobia in Meghalaya can be attributed to the strong sense of group identity, where individuals identify with their own group and view outsiders as a threat. This has led to a "us vs them" mentality and the demonization of outsiders.

The taking up of business opportunities by non-native individuals and playing a significant role in the economic welfare of the state leads to frequent unjust demand of ousting established economic activity. This in turn results in frequent skirmishes, resentment and hostility towards immigrants. However, branding outsiders for social problems is not a sustainable solution. The native civil society needs to take matters into their own hands for the upliftment and development of the state's citizens. The presence of an entrepreneurial mindset among the natives could potentially help alleviate the problem.

The unfounded threat of indigenous culture being under threat from immigrants is totally unfounded as the major threat is from western influence on the indigenous culture. Therefore, it is important to increase contact and interaction between different groups to reduce xenophobic tendencies. Positive experiences with those from other cultures can help to reduce negative stereotypes and increase understanding and acceptance. The recent violence in Shillong in November 2022 following killings in the Assam-Meghalaya border demonstrates the level of unacceptance that non-native individuals or more commonly known as DYKs have to face in Meghalaya, highlighting the urgent need to address the issue of xenophobia in the state.

Secondly, the prevalence of an unhealthy nexus between the state apparatus and mafia has led to a situation where the state's natural resources, including its forests, rivers, and minerals, are being exploited for personal gain rather than for the benefit of the state and its people. This exploitation has also led to environmental degradation, with rampant deforestation, pollution, and other negative impacts on the natural environment.

Moreover, this exploitation of natural resources has exacerbated the already high levels of unemployment in the state, particularly among

its youth. Instead of creating jobs and opportunities for the state's citizens, the profits from these resources are being siphoned off by a few powerful individuals, leaving the rest of the population struggling to make ends meet. To address this issue, there is a need for increased transparency and accountability in the management of natural resources.

The state's youth population is a significant demographic, and it is essential to provide them with opportunities that allow them to contribute meaningfully to the local ecosystem. It is crucial to actively explore avenues to enhance employment prospects for its young citizens, particularly in the natural resource management sector, which has vast potential for growth. Creating job opportunities, particularly in the natural resource management sector, such as forestry, agriculture, and wildlife conservation and supporting businesses that operate in these sectors can create spin-off employment opportunities for young people.

A new government should prioritize natural resource management because of the abundant natural resources available in the state, including forests, minerals, and water. These resources can provide significant economic benefits if managed sustainably and responsibly. By creating employment opportunities in these sectors, the state can improve the livelihoods for its youth population but also support the sustainable management of natural resources.

There are many individuals in the state who possess the necessary education and skills but are unable to find employment opportunities that align with their qualifications. By tapping into this untapped potential and providing a skilled workforce that can contribute to the development of the natural resource management sector.

This is the existence of customary laws within a constitutional framework can pose significant challenges in the execution of major development initiatives. These unwritten rules and practices that have been passed down through generations and are deeply rooted in local traditions, cultural values, and social norms. They can perpetuate discriminatory practices, particularly against women and marginalized groups.

This is due to their lack of transparency and accountability, which makes it difficult to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and justly. One of the most pressing issues arising from customary laws in Meghalaya is the high percentage of single mothers, child marriages, and sexual offenses against children, which is a cause for concern and puts a dent in Meghalaya's matrilineal social structure. The traditional practices that govern inheritance and property rights also pose a challenge for women, who often find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing land and other resources.

Customary practices may have a glimmer of hope in Meghalaya, but empowering the people through better educational institutions, better job opportunities and alternative livelihoods may be more effective in preserving the culture and identity.

On 3rd March, 2023, it will become clear whether the people of Meghalaya opt for a goes and great priorities development or one that clings to the traditional mantle of cultural preservation at the expense of progress.

Sujit Kumar Mohanty is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Fashion Technology, Shillong. The views expressed are personal. He can be reached at sujitkmo@gmail.com

NPP gains maturity

Editor, Apropos of the special article, "Voters affected by political dopamine" by Benjamin Lyngdoh and the headlines, "NPP leads to poll seats CM face" (ST February 2023), Lyngdoh's excellent article is a wake-up call to the politically conscious to ponder and act. I agree with Lyngdoh that, unless we step back from the current hullabaloo, the clear picture will not emerge. Discuss and not just through social media. A media that sways, fools and impacts them by anxiety, headaches, sadness and muscular strain, causing their lives to fall apart or more for throwing life into disarray. As to the headlines, the National People's Party has taken a sound decision that the "new elected NPP MLAs will sit together immediately after the counting of votes and elect a leader, indicates the maturity of NPP leaders.

Yours etc., VK Lyngdoh, Via email

Shocking incident at Umroi constituency

Editor, I am shocked to learn from reports appearing in the print media about the most painful and unfortunate incident that took place in Labasang and Nongkhay under Umroi village on the night of February 20, 2023, which has caused physical harm

and injuries to the TMC candidate's wife and his brothers-in-law. From reports it is clear that the incident took place in connection with the current elections in Umroi constituency. Those responsible are definitely goons and hoodlums used by certain rivals of the TMC candidate to stir criminal intent of causing physical harm and fear psychosis not only to the candidate, his family members, his party workers but also his supporters. This Bihar and UP types of politics by employing goons and criminal elements are foreign in Meghalaya. This is highly condemnable and stern action should be taken against the perpetrators. Such actions must be shunned here in our state which had witnessed peaceful elections during the last 50 years. Let all of us Meghalayans, wherever we are, disallow and rebuff such kinds of evil in society.

Yours etc., Philip Marwein, Senior Journalist, Shilling-2

Maharashtra to revert to Old Pension Scheme (OPS)

Editor, The election results to the Member's Legislative Council (MLC) in Maharashtra announced on the first week of this month has ended with a 'red face' for the BJP and is a lie both at the state and the centre for being comprehensively defeated by the opposition in three out of five seats. These constituencies are traditionally





"Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of an uncompleted task."

— William James

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya seals its fate

EXIT polls predict a comeback of the NPP-BJP plus combine in Meghalaya. But exit polls are largely based on interviewing urban voters. How people vote in the rural outbreak where development has bypassed them for the last fifty years will determine the fate of the candidates. While money has played a major role in this election and laggard MLAs have relied on money power and other inducements to woo voters. Election day was uncharacteristically quiet and lacklustre compared to the noise and fanfare of the past month. The queue at most polling stations indicated a certain lack of interest especially by the male section of the population. The queue for women was much longer at every polling station. Does this mean that women consider voting to be more important in deciding their future? Alternatively, why do young men not queue up to vote? This needs some study to understand voting behaviour in Meghalaya or rather among the tribals. In non-tribal dominated areas men of all age groups were seen crowding outside the polling stations discussing politics and perhaps trying to make sense of which candidates is likely to win from that particular constituency.

The exit polls also reveal that these conducting the surveys do not have a nuanced idea of the popularity enjoyed by parties like the United Democratic Party (UDP) which has been lumped as the "Others." The UDP will still be a factor when the next government is formed in Meghalaya. Much has been discussed about Nagaland and Meghalaya being Christian majority states and how the BJP has now jumped from getting a toe-hold to getting a foothold in these states. The hard fact is that people are caught between a desire for development and the fear psychosis created around the BJP as the anti-minority Party wanting to establish a homogenous culture, religion and language. In its 5-year partnership with the NPP, a national party with its base in the North East, people did not witness the BJP imposing any of its hard-line stance such as the beef ban or any assault on religious minorities. The BJP in this region seems to rely a lot on the local leadership and their stances. In fact the BJP's mantra for this region is "Vikas" (development). This is evident from the push for infrastructure which include roads, highways, power and medical educational institutions in states ruled by the Party and using these as models of development that other states can aspire to.

March 2 will reveal whether people have voted for change or whether they prefer to give the same set of leaders a second chance.

Letters to the Editor

EACI should maintain data privacy

Editor,  
At the outset my heartfelt thanks to Bab Mahalingang Rymbai for his illuminating letters to the editor, namely, "Is a secret ballot actually seen?" and "How money power during elections become efficient?" (ST Feb 23 and 27, 2023). The content is rich and valuable. Mr Rymbai has correctly observed that in absence of a Data Privacy Act, access to the election data by the privileged few tantamount to violation of the principle of natural justice as far as data privacy of the individual voters is concerned. He has rationally appealed for us to the Election Commission of India "to ensure that even after counting day, there is restricted access even by the district and sub-divisional officials to rooms where the Control Units and the VVPAT Slips are kept, until the day all this voting data is to be deleted and destroyed". I hope the bureaucrats in the ECI take cognizance of these letters in the interest of an unflawed democracy.

Yours etc.,  
V.K. Lyngdoh  
Via email

Online voting facility

Editor,  
The fundamental prin-

ciple of democracy lies in exercising voting rights by all citizens. For a healthy democracy, one needs to cast a vote judiciously. But unfortunately, many layabouts just loathe to stand in queue and they do not bother at all to participate in this democratic process. This trend is quite catching. However, it is a delight to see many people returning home from Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, and Kolkata to exercise their franchise with gusto. Even in my locality, many people have arrived to vote for their beloved leaders. These conscious citizens certainly deserve appreciation from the Election Commission. Of course, each citizen should contribute to making a strong government for a better future. ... hopefully, we have genuinely eligible candidates in the fray.

Nevertheless, rushing back to the home state for mere voting sounds quite a chaotic in this digital age. This involves lots of expenditures and more sensible in electing the deserving candidates.

Yours etc.,  
Saij Giewali,  
Shillong

RSS has major role in B.P poll campaign in three North Eastern states

Sangh Parivar fighting with its back to the wall in Meghalaya, Nagaland

By Arun Srivastava

The central leadership of the BJP has been focusing its attention on the north eastern states of the country since the coming into power of the Party in 2014 and in its expansionist efforts, the main vehicle has been the RSS. In the present phase of the assembly polls to the three states Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland, all senior leaders of the BJP have campaigned including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. The polls in Tripura took place on February 16, the polling in the other two states was completed on February 27.

North East is the most favourite destination for the RSS, and of course its political wing BJP. The party which till two decades ago was alien to the people of the region has emerged as the only ruling all India party and has been virtually dictating the political discourse. Like any other state the expansion and growth of the BJP owes to the Congress factor. Former Assam Congress leader Himanta Biswa Sarma shifting his loyalty to the BJP helped the party open its account in the North East, after defeating the Congress in the Assam assembly election.

The wrong handling of the Assam movement launched by the All Assam Student Union by the Congress provided the much needed opportunity to the RSS to enter into the mainstream politics through L.K. Advani in early eighties. In recent times, riding on the crest of the election victory, taking inspiration from Assam win, the party managed to expand into Christian dominated states like Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram besides the Hindu dominated state of Tripura.

Apparently BJP's slogan of Hindutva and communal politics preached by the As- sam leader of minister Himanta Biswa Sarma laid the foundation for ascendancy. But it was the silent work and sustained campaign converting tribals into Hindus by the RSS since India attained Independence that moulded its growth and provided the ready-made forum to take on Congress.

After Tripura, the two other states that will go to election are Nagaland and Meghalaya. Both these states will have elections on February 27, to elect its representatives, Meghalaya has a

population of 59.67 lakh with 74.59 percent Christians, Hindus constitute 11.53 percent while 4.4 percent are Muslims. The Congress had won 29 seats in the 2013 state poll, the BJP had won none. The political spectrum changed fast in the state. RSS started operations in Meghalaya with scng first shakha in 1946 under Vasant Oak in Shillong. The state was then a part of Assam. It attained full status on 21 January, 1972.

After that they started working among Gars, Jaintias and Khasis. They also started programmes for the Hajong and Koch communities which are plain tribes. It was their social engineering made them acceptable in the region. At present the RSS has 6000 swamyas or waks. This number is quite encouraging since the state is dominated by Christians. In 2016 they had held "Know

"Though RSS has developed some amount of base in Meghalaya, it is unlikely that it is sufficient to ensure electoral victory to BJP in the state. RSS enabling the BJP to form North Eastern Democratic Alliance in 2016, a platform of non-Congress parties in the region with the avowed aim to keep the Congress out of power has not proved to be so effective."

RSS" programme which was attended by 300 teachers out of which 125 were Christians. At present, there are 46 shakhas, 30 mandals (weekly meetings), 35 mandals (monthly meet) in Meghalaya.

Winning the assembly election is issue of life and death more for RSS as BJP losing the election will hasten up the process of peoples' action against the RSS. In Tripura also the emergence of BJP as the ruling party owes to the avowed devotion of the RSS. The feedback from the think tank of the RSS helped erode the base of the CPIM. Former Tripura chief minister Manik Sarker had successfully converted the state into a Left bastion initially but the CPIM could not motivate the party cadres and leaders to listen to the peoples' groaning.

The long CPIM rule under Sarkar led to stagnation and acute unemployment. RSS exploited the situation and BJP came to power.

Although the Naga Peoples Front (NPF) is an alliance partner of the BJP at the Centre, Manipur and in Nagaland, the BJP is yet to make any significant progress in this northeastern state. With 88 percent of its population being Christians the RSS has been finding a tough proposition to penetrate the region. The fact remains that it is sufficient to ensure electoral victory to BJP in the state. RSS enabling the

BJP to form North Eastern Democratic Alliance in 2016, a platform of non-Congress parties in the region with the avowed aim to keep the Congress out of power has not proved to be so effective.

Stakes are high for the BJP, but more than that of the RSS. BJP will lose the electoral battle, but the RSS will face erosion of its base. In early years the people of the region, especially the tribals and Christians had not perceived the RSS as a major threat. However, the recent attack of the RSS and BJP on their social and cultural bases have scared them of losing their identity. Obviously for the RSS and BJP it is a do or die situation. They cannot lose the gains made during these years. The nature of the stakes gets reflected in party's track record and long term planning for the forth-

coming Assembly elections in Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland.

Though the North-eastern states have emerged as a strong base of the RSS and BJP, the fact remains that it is still tough for emerge as the major ruling party in the region. The BJP had put a strong fight in Tripura and it is going to do the same in Nagaland and Meghalaya where the elections will be held on February 27. True enough the 2023 assembly polls in Northeast are a seminal to 2024 general elections.

The alliance between the BJP and the National Peoples Party (NPP) in Meghalaya has been quite fragile. The BJP had supported the Conrad Sangma-led NPP to form a government. But both are fighting separately. Meghalaya has a legacy of political instability with constant changing of parties by the MLAs. In the state BJP is not a major player. The Garo and Khasi division in the state affects the voting patterns. With about 75% population being Christian and about 12% population Hindu, the Congress has enjoyed a hold over the Shillong region and the NPP has had a hold over the Tura region.

In Nagaland, meanwhile, the key issue is peace and security. The maverick stand of the BJP has turned the regional outfits not to rely on it. The ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) has been trying to negotiate a peace agreement with various militant groups, and the outcome of these negotiations will be a key factor in the elections. They nursed the impression that Union Home Minister Amit Shah would announce complete abrogation of the AFSPA (the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act). But it has not happened.

The state has also been facing demands from seven tribes for the creation of a separate "Frontier Nagaland" by carving out 16 districts. Recently, the central government held meetings with the Eastern Nagaland Peoples Organisation (ENPO) to find a way out of this problem.

As in Meghalaya, in Nagaland, BJP is a second-rate player. The National Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio depends upon help from the BJP to frustrate the efforts of Naga Peoples Front (NPF). (Ipsa Service)

Parliament has lost the essence of democracy

By Derek O'Brien

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke for almost three hours in Parliament on two days of the Budget Session. In Rajya Sabha he spoke for 85 minutes. How many times was he interrupted? Not even once! In contrast, the Leader of the Opposition, Mallikarjun Kharge, spoke for 88 minutes, and he was 'interrupted' by the honourable custodian of the House an unprecedented 32 times (yes, I was a few seats away and counting). Digvijay Singh spoke for 33 minutes and he was interrupted seven times. I spoke for 18 minutes, and was interrupted by the Chair three times.

The Prime Minister led his way through the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha without even touching any of those five issues: unemployment, price rise, irregularities in a minister's scam, economic blockade of States, and communal harmony.

A global survey carried out by Ipsos 'What Works in the World' for the month of January 2023 highlighted that unemployment is the topmost worry for Indians. As per CMIE data, the unemployment rate in De-

that it is tasked with three principal objectives: (i) To protect the interests of investors in securities; (ii) To promote the development of the securities market; and (iii) To regulate the securities market. Markets of MFIs in the Opposition made the argument that all this affects crores of Indians who have invested their life savings into institutions like LIC and SBI. Mum's the word.

Far removed from the billion-dollar racketeering, there is the story of the 70-tonne dome of the under-construction Meghalaya Legislative Assembly building that collapsed last year. Guess who was constructing the dome? Uttar Pradesh Rajkya Niman Nigam Ltd. Mega, mid or mini scams the gentleman who gives the Opposition homilies on corruption decided to brazen it out in both Houses.

The speeches by the Prime Minister in both Houses lasted 173 minutes. His domestic critics to serious concern raised about the economic blockade of States. The man who was once a Chief Minister for twelve years, leads a Union government that is



February 2022 stood at 8.30%, the highest in 16 months. This means that almost four crore Indians are without a job. The state with the highest unemployment rate is Haryana at 33%. Pan-India, the urban unemployment rate stands at 10%. And for all the hullabaloo about women empowerment, over

now queueing non-BJP run states of funds. For MN-REGA alone, the Union government owes states over the 10,000 crores. Cess and surcharge as a part of gross Union tax revenues has now gone up from 10% in 2012 to 20% in 2023. Cess, as is common knowledge, is not shared with the states.

"Three hours on the floor of Parliament and not a sentence about price rise.

Fuel prices. LPG cylinders. Retail inflation at a three month high, beyond the threshold of the RBI limit. Sharp rise in essentials like spices, cereals, milk, and eggs."

two crore women quit both Houses of Parliament had a powerful sentence: "A Bharat whose diversity is even more vivid and whose unity becomes even more unshakable". The PM, in both his speeches, very conveniently ignored any reference to multiple incidents taking place that contravened the essence of this sentence and Article 25 of the Constitution: the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion.

What no political party—not the Trinamool Congress, DMK or SP or Congress or AAP or Shiv Sena or CPIM could do, one YRF film did. Words written nearly 75 years ago by Dr Ambedkar and his team had been turned into movie magic by director Siddharth Anand and India's biggest global ambassadors, Bollywood. On the floor of the Rajya Sabha we praised the blockbuster that celebrated India's diversity. K. Han, Padukone and Aishwarya had shown this government and its cronies the power of incorporating into popular culture - serious messaging about true patriotism, diversity and constitutional values. The Prime Minister chose to look away.

Three hours on the floor of Parliament and not a sentence about price rise. Fuel prices. LPG cylinders. Retail inflation at a three month high, beyond the threshold of the RBI limit. Sharp rise in essentials like spices, cereals, milk, and eggs. Two wheelers sales, which many consider to be one of the practical indicators for measuring the health of the economy, have witnessed the lowest sales in a decade.

We did not hear a word in either House from the PM on the monstrous scam. During my intervention in Rajya Sabha, I flagged the preamble of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) which states

Bonglaigon diocese, should remind all commuters that our roads are not safe. In spite of the four-lane highway, the fatal accident toll place, all because of a truck driver floating a traffic cone. It is too common to hear of truck-related accidents in our state. How many lives have been lost on our highways? Whenever heavy loaded trucks ply the roads there have been regular fatal accidents. Take for example the Shillong by-pass highway, how many people have lost their lives along this road just in less than a decade. The massive number of lorries plying between Jaintia Hills and Guwahati makes our highways potential killers. The nature of our hills roads where there are innumerable bends is another factor that causes more accidents by reckless drivers. How many more innocent lives should be lost before any decisive action is taken to eliminate these bends? It is time to ignore the demands of selfish lobby groups.

As the old saying goes, "a stitch in time saves nine." I would paraphrase it as "a step in time saves lives." It is time when appropriate action is taken to address these issues, one can avoid any fallout or undesired complications. When it comes to road safety, it is evident that the only lasting solution to truck-related accidents would be the construction of a railway connection. In my opinion, what we urgently need is not a railway line to Bynrhait but a railway connection

from Jaintia Hills to Assam through Karbi Anglong. Considering the fact that Jaintia Hills is presently the area that exports the largest amount of coal and cement, it is reasonable that a railway connection from here would serve best the purpose. Having a railway connection at Bynrhait or even Nongpoh would still mean that thousands of trucks need to ply on our highways which would defeat the very purpose of it. The railway facility from Jaintia Hills would definitely eliminate such inconveniences. However, one wonders if such a necessary step would be taken by the government knowing that a powerful lobby of truck owners would oppose such a move. It is evident that if a railway line comes up, 90% of these trucks would be off the road. Finally everything builds down to monetary gain. People and even the government would rather sacrifice innocent lives for material gain. How did we come to such a level of moral degeneration that we value money more than lives? I hope we get a morally upright government that would dare to ignore the demands of selfish lobby groups.

Apart from this, the failure of the government to implement rigorous traffic rules especially related with speed limit and weight limits, puts commuters in greater dangers. Our highways do not have speed-monitoring cameras and no traffic police station

to control speed offenders like in western countries. Therefore, the solutions to this threat to life could be: i) strict monitoring of speed on highways. This could be done also by installing a highway patrol police; ii) by a strict monitoring of weight limit of coal or cement carrying trucks; iii) by constructing strong and high centric road dividers on all bends along the GIS highway; iv) and finally of course the permanent and sure solution would be the railway connectivity between Jaintia Hills and Assam.

We have just voted for our representatives to our legislative assembly and soon we will get the results. We hope to get a less corrupt government and a more development and people-oriented government. Safeguarding the precious lives of the citizens is the most fundamental duty of a government. Let us hope and see if the next government would take to heart this important suggestion. We do not know which government we are going to get after the 2nd of March, but one thing we would like to hear this important suggestion. We do not know which government we are going to get after the 2nd of March, but one thing we would like to hear this important suggestion. We do not know which government we are going to get after the 2nd of March, but one thing we would like to hear this important suggestion.

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Yours etc.,  
Barnes Marwite-gh  
Via email