

"All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope." —Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

Vol. No. 133 No. 211 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 1, 2023

The Manipur Drama

ON July 25, Manipur Chief Minister, Biren Singh met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi. While the contents of the discussion are not known to the media, it can be surmised that Shah wants matters in Manipur to be brought under control immediately. On June 29, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi landed at Imphal alight late in the day... 56th day since May 3 when violence first broke out in Manipur...

On the 57th day violence has not abated and gunfights continue in isolated spaces even while people are still being killed in retaliation. That the peace committee formed recently is a non-starter only makes things murkier. Till date there is no proactive group/groups to attempt a peace-building process in Manipur...

Union Territory with Legislature: Only Way to Permanent Peace!

By C Thangmingal Doung

With the violence between the Hill (Kukis) and Valley (Meiteis) in Manipur showing no sign of abatement, the demand for Separate Administration from the State and Centre...

en the notion of national cohesion rather than pose a threat to national security as purported by certain people. Furthermore, separation will result in national integration into the larger Indian State rather than the dissolution of the Union of India...

How Plausible is the Demand?

It is the explicit discretion under Article 3 of the Constitution to put an end to this exigency. And the most plausible way of the implementation to this perpetual problem and ensure lasting peace is Separate Administration...

Population Component: Manipur is the 25th most populous State in India (Handbook of Statistics on Indian States). The total population of Manipur as per 2011 Census is 28,55,794. Of this, the rural population is 17,36,236 and the urban population 8,34,558.

Ethnic Elements: In India, the establishment of States based on cultural and ethnic considerations is not new. The establishment of Linguistic States represented our nation's first democratic political test.

Taking into consideration the above facts, it is clear that the establishment of a Union Territory with Legislature is not only a just demand, but also a pragmatic one. It will ensure the well-being of the people of Manipur and contribute to the national unity and integrity of India.

Centre clueless on how to end the continued violence in Manipur. Rahul Gandhi's 2-day visit should help facilitate dialogue among feuding tribes

By Sushil Kuty

Police stopped Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Manipur and without being asked "what next for Manipur?" the disqualified Congress Member of Parliament said, "Manipur needs healing"...

In addition, it is important to acknowledge the role of Kukis in India's independence movement. By far they made up the largest contingent of 188 freedom fighters that fought alongside the INA against the colonial British...

Conclusion: According to Karan Thapar of 'The Wire', "Sometimes when differences run so deep and last for so long, maybe it is best to separate."

By this 'Pradhan Sevak', who mouths "Sakha Saath, Sakha Vikas" and then doesn't make a "prayas". The question "Manipur what next?" should have rolled the Prime Minister's mind for months. Instead, he was everywhere including hobnobbing with the mummies in Egypt's pyramids...

What next for Manipur? It is a question left hanging for an answer in TV debates. But ask "what next for UCC?" and every anchor has the answer! The UCC is the Bhamaiya Janata Party's Latest reports suggest that Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh may resign. Even if he does so, will it facilitate the process of establishing a truce between the feuding tribes...

to exact revenge, avenge the wrongs done to the people by those who should have done the right things but did not. Violence begets violence but revenge will come via the ballot box. If polarization is the key, then the job has been done and dashed with "What next for Manipur?" was the answer in 2024, not just in Manipur, but across the entire north-east; people will vote their answers.

On June 30, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Delhi University on the sesquicentennial anniversary and spoke of nostalgia, "grip-shaking with colleagues"; about "which film is in town" and "which OTT look has owned some time again" to Manipur is the complaint, but what about Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sakha's elected minister "Father of the Nation", the man who can make a world of difference to Manipur lives, especially that of the humbled, who are desperately crying out for healing, but who have been left to fend for themselves...



all the time? Rahul Gandhi has no such compulsions. They say Rahul Gandhi's ratings have gone up double in the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Will Manipur visit will suffice! The panic in the Modi-Shah camp is why UCC has made its entry. How UCC will make a difference to the Meitei and Kuki will never be asked. "What next for Manipur?" is a question left hanging for an answer in TV debates. But ask "what next for UCC?" and every anchor has the answer! The UCC is the Bhamaiya Janata Party's Latest reports suggest that Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh may resign. Even if he does so, will it facilitate the process of establishing a truce between the feuding tribes...

Letters to the Editor

What an apathetic society

I was looking forward to reading comments on 'Education today: Challenges before Meghalaya' by Patricia Mukhim, (ST June 23, 2023), because education touches all. But alas, fairness seems to sit strongly in us! I believe teachers of yore will relate to and identify with the writer's observations, even though it's harsh, but true. It is not to be frank in saying that a lot depends on the head of a school. If the persons in the state are honest, truthful, absolutely fair and just and set an example themselves instead of being the problem, believe me more than half the battle is won. So, whether teaching is a last resort or part time till something better turns up (a universal truth) the head must utilise their efficiency and effectively I disagree...

with the suggestion to leave the urban elite schools to themselves. They need to be reinvented or restructured both administratively and educationally to be a pride and not an embarrassing shame to the state! In fact, all government city schools need a massive overhaul! Otherwise, what has been playing out over the years in Pine Mount and now Tura Public School, will continue with a greater vengeance and destruction! And in the rural areas, 'Education must factor in a changed approach taking into account the social and domestic weak points. And herein lies the exciting challenge of the existing learning outcomes that use the beautiful outdoors to make learning one big adventure. Automatically, innovative, improvised, acquisitive methods of teaching learning will come into play. Children will take their education beyond their prescribed books and scheduled class time. Because they are so caught up with their surroundings! I'm surprised to learn that no 'parent teacher interface' takes place. I'm sure it is mandated in the Affiliation Bye Laws! It is certainly a recorded event with other School Boards. So too it is in conducting special workshops in teaching skills, classroom management, home assignments, examination skills (including question paper setting and marking scheme), use of technology, etc. Again, I go back to the school head. If the person applies himself/herself diligently to the administrative responsibilities, wonders can be done. And yes a passion is what teachers must inculcate. But that too won't work totally! I submit that teachers must first LOVE their profession and children genuinely, then you'll witness the miracles in your students! Teachers, all are fully aware of how they are exploited, deceived, cheated, mocked, and given no importance. I wish to share Friday's message in Our Daily Bread where, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation; Philipians 4:12 might bring comfort to our dear teachers. In closing, I will repeat, "...that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1).

Kevin Phillips, Shillong - 19

Are non-tribals foreigners in Meghalaya?

As we know, India is a secular country. It is every person who's a citizen of this country is vested with Constitutional Rights such as the right to follow one's religion; right to care, freedom of speech etc., but are these rights applicable to Meghalaya, where all non-tribals who were born and brought up in this State are treated as outsiders. I don't see any secularism in this state and the Government does nothing to ensure that the rights enshrined in the Constitution of India are implemented in letter and spirit. We are mercilessly beaten up during rallies; even children and women are not spared and there's very little done to punish the culprits. We cannot do business due to restrictions by the District Councils especially the KIAAC. Even after providing all documents that every Indian has to submit in order to get a simple trading licence, we are kept waiting for years. Only after bribes are given can I expect to get a trading licence and this is a fact that is not even hidden by law makers. People go through depression just waiting for their trade licences. There are shopkeepers made against us, but we are not allowed to pay to most pressure groups out of fear, whereas every...

small incident against tribals in mainland India becomes a headline. What wrong have we done to receive so much hatred? Like any other person we are only interested to provide a good life to our family. It's really sad that we call ourselves a Democracy which are not. I am indeed sad that my ancestors came here in the first place. One day we will leave; must have left. Hence I don't understand the demand for ILP. Tourists are scared; must leave with bad experiences; the Bengalis are specially called 'Hangleddies'. Well, I believe in God and Karma will one day give justice! Yours etc., Ganesh Vasishth, Shillong - 2

Manipur what next? The panic in the Modi-Shah camp is why UCC has made its entry. How UCC will make a difference to the Meitei and Kuki will never be asked. "What next for Manipur?" is a question left hanging for an answer in TV debates. But ask "what next for UCC?" and every anchor has the answer! The UCC is the Bhamaiya Janata Party's Latest reports suggest that Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh may resign. Even if he does so, will it facilitate the process of establishing a truce between the feuding tribes...

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

Here's why you should keep your distance from wild animals

By Julian Avery

For anyone who enjoys nature, summer is a fascinating time to be outside. Animals are on the move: Turtles are nesting, baby birds are testing their wings, snakes are foraging and young mammals are emerging.

In central Pennsylvania, where I live, last year's hatching painted turtles have overwintered in their nests and emerged looking like tiny helpless snakes for raccoons and ravens. I've already rescued a baby killdeer — a shorebird that nests in parking lots — that ran off the road and got stuck in a grate. And I've watched an eastern chipmunk prey on a nest of towhee chicks.

I moved the killdeer to safety because it had fallen into what we call an "ecological trap." Humans create these traps when we degrade habitat that looks suitable to animals. For killdeer, parking pads and roofs give off all the vibes of a great nesting site — except for the drains and they have less natural habitat available there days.

But I didn't intervene with the towhees. Their exposed nest site may have been a bad parental decision, or perhaps the chicks' begging called too much attention. Either way, natural selection helped ensure that these birds and their genes were unlikely to survive. Ultimately, that may be better for the population and species than if I had intervened.

As a wildlife biologist, I know that relocating animals can be bad from a scientific perspective. It also can easily harm the creature you want to help.

Based on my experience as a scientist and university teacher, I've developed guidelines for when to get involved in the lives of animals I encounter outside. When I do intervene, it is after carefully considering the potential reasons for the animal's situation, the species' population status and the potential harm my actions might inflict upon the whole population — not just on one adorable creature.

REASONS FOR CAUTION

Wild animals have genetic associations with specific habitats that have evolved over many generations. Relocating them can disrupt these connections.

Moving animals means they can't contribute their offspring and genes to the local population through breeding. That could be catastrophic for species with slow population growth, like many reptiles, who may take years to mature and might only

manage a few successful broods in their lifetime.

For species like these, mature females are critical to keeping population sizes high. When populations are small, they lose genetic diversity that helps them resist environmental change.

Moving wildlife also may introduce new genes elsewhere, leading to genetic shifts over time that didn't evolve through natural selection. Animals that are successful in a region tend to leave more offspring, and the heritable genetic variation tied to that success becomes more common and associated with the local environment. These are important relationships to safeguard.

Moving animals also can cause immediate harm. Transported animals often can't survive in a territory other animals have already claimed, or the new arrivals may do damage — for example, by preying on vulnerable local species. Wildlife managers may have to move them into captivity or even euthanize them.

Some species can spread pathogens to other wildlife or humans. At a minimum, moving animals can disorient them and make it hard for them to settle, find food and water or avoid predators.

IT'S USUALLY BEST TO KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

In general, your default choice should be not to interfere or interact with wildlife. Knowing that humans are nearby stresses animals. It makes them move away or forage and behave differently, and it can harm their body condition by triggering stress responses that ultimately reduce their fertility.

It's especially common for people to see baby animals or birds, seemingly alone, and feel compelled to help. In fact, the parents may have secured their young and be actively caring for them, or the young animals may already be independent.

The amount of parental care that different species provide ranges from zero to a lot. For example, once a female turtle chooses a nest site with warm temperatures and the right amount of soil moisture, she lays her eggs and moves on. Hatching turtles don't need help unless they're near pits or roads.

Rattlesnakes will bask in the sun to help their embryos be born live and healthy. Many mammals hide their young during the day and care for them for months.

Bluebirds and tree swallows work tirelessly to feed their young, even after fledging. In



contrast, other birds kick their young out at an early stage so they can start the next clutch.

Whatever the species, young and inexperienced animals without parents nearby may either be learning how to navigate or have been left hidden by their parents on purpose.

Parents do occasionally abandon their young. They may do it on purpose because their offspring are unfit, or because the parents aren't fit enough to raise them. Or perhaps the parents have gotten lost. Whatever the reason, natural selection likely means these individuals and their gene complexes will not continue forward — and that benefits the species overall.

PUT THE ANIMAL'S NEEDS BEFORE YOUR OWN

It's well established that getting close to nature is good for people's mental health. I believe it's very important to foster hu-

man connections to nature and facilitate these connections for people who have little exposure to the outdoors.

I advocate a mindful and hands-on approach to being outside. For example, I don't touch animals that are rare unless it's part of my research or covered by permit. If I handle an aquatic animal, I make sure my hands are wet and free of chemicals.

However, animals' needs should come first. Whenever humans are active in an animal's habitat, they can degrade it and lead the animals to seek other space.

Some wild animals may be abandoned or alone acting strangely because they are sick or generally unfit. People who handle these animals risk contracting zoonotic diseases, such as rabies, plague and avian influenza. Sometimes an unhealthy animal needs to be left alone to avoid spreading infection.

There also are animals that

pretend to be injured or dead as a defense strategy. A casual observer may think a rescue is necessary, but don't make assumptions. For example, Virginia opossums play dead in an involuntary fixed response to fear called defensive thaotaxis. They can't control it, but within minutes to hours, they're up and back to normal.

WHEN AND HOW TO HELP

Here are some guidelines for when and how to intervene in ways that minimize harm to wildlife.

First, don't relocate animals over significant distances. An animal that accidentally hitches a ride over long distances, such as a treefrog under your bumper, shouldn't be released in a new host area.

Helping an animal cross a busy road is OK if you move it in the direction in which it is already headed. This is particularly true for animals that live a

long time and reproduce slowly, like box turtles, which are declining across North America. Ensuring the survival of a single adult female box turtle can be very important to the success of a local population.

Second, respect the rules at national, state and local parks. Parks often protect at-risk species that can't safely interact with humans. For example, desert tortoises may urinate as a defense when picked up, which reduces their internal water supply.

Learn to identify common species that can handle human curiosity and make good ambassadors for biodiversity. Many state agencies have a website or atlas for major wildlife groups that will help you learn which species are widespread or more rare. Most ponds have a common frog that's sure to catch your eye.

Third, if you think an animal is truly in danger, call a local game warden, wildlife officer, rehab professional or park ranger for advice. If the animal is immediately at risk from a pet or approaching car, and you can reach it safely, put on some gloves and help it — but leave it traveling in the same direction it was moving, or near its local area, so that it doesn't become disoriented and try to disperse into dangerous habitat.

Fourth, get out and explore. But remember that you're a guest in the animals' habitat — tread softly and respectfully. A fallen log can shelter all kinds of creatures. Look underneath, and then place it back as it was so that it continues to be a home for them. (*The Conversation*)

(The author is Associate Research Professor of Wildlife Conservation, Pennsylvania State, USA)

ADIPURUSH IS A MINEFIELD OF MISADVENTURES

By Kavya Dubej

Within a week of its release, the Ramayana-inspired *Adipurush* has had the interest of the audience crash and nearly die down for a number of reasons.

To begin with, those who grew up following Hindu culture, whether or not they explicitly identify with the Ramayana-oriented belief system, are bound to raise eyebrows at this *Om* Ram misadventure touted to be an adaptation of the epic.

And those who are not from the community, but wish to know a thing or two about 'Hindu culture' by way of casually watching a movie will be comically misguided if they go by what they see. Poor dialogues are only the tip of the iceberg.

Ravan was a great demon king — yes, great, because even though he was a demon, his merit was incontestable and even the gods acknowledged it.

His kingdom was situated in the tropical region of the Indian subcontinent and notwithstanding the vagaries of climate change, the Lanka of Ramayana would have been much greener than we can imagine — not black!

The details in the film, which could have been a mark of great cinematic finesse, are but a displeasing imitation of some iconic details from Hollywood films: the Harry Potteresque death eaters that float about Lord Ram (Raghav); the Game Of Thrones-style gait of Ravan (who has uncharacteristically neatly cropped and gelled hair) and his dragon-like bat for a vehicle; a charcoal-finished Lanka looking like the evil twin of Thor's Asgard; the Planet Of The Apes replica 'vanar sena', inclusive of a King Kong here and there; and costumes and hairdos of the villains that are just not Indian by any stretch of imagination.

These striking details were lifted without much



effort to customise them to fit the context of Ramayana, which is not just an object of fancy but a deeply revered cultural heritage.

Even Hollywood would have had exotic goblets, instead of those gold-streaked black wine glasses, knowing that it is a story from ancient times.

This Rs 500-crore film could have been otherwise justified for its visual effects, which were impressive but terribly misplaced in an incredibly wrong storyline that just rushed to conclude. This amounts to a mockery and an insult to our cultural heritage.

As far as common filmmaking goes, there may be no limit to imagination, but with regard to depicting an established piece of work, especially one that has religious sentiments attached to it, it becomes an obligation to accomplish such an

undertaking much a sense of responsibility.

The inepit recitation of a part of the Tandav Stotra by Ravan before Sita, when he says that he will climb on to Ram's chest and do the Tandav, only betrays the embarrassing lack of research by the makers — Tandav is a dance form (the divine dance performed by Lord Shiva), and Tandav Stotra is a hymn composed by Ravan in praise of the god — it is not a victory jingle!

The series of blunders and misrepresentations simply don't end. Several depictions are factually incorrect, upon being exaggerated, Ravan, instead of immortality, earned the boon of invincibility and immunity from all gods, demons, heavenly spirits, serpents, and wild beasts from Brahma.

So, he died at the hands of a human — Lord Ram. But the film mixes up mythological char-

acters from across scriptures and depicts Ravan enjoying the death-evading boon, which was actually granted to Iliranyakashyap, the demon king from the Puranic texts, who was killed by Lord Vishnu in his Narasimha (half man, half lion) form.

Further, the occultist warrior prince Meghad is nearly fictionalised with that 'swarna jheel' innovation. Treating Lakshman with what looked like a stallion near Sanjeevani juice bath in the middle of a war at its turning point was going overboard without any care for common sense.

Even the very name of the film, *Adipurush*, is incorrect and utterly mindless. The word, literally meaning 'the first man', has no significance in the context of Ramayana.

Among several Ramayana-associated actors who have come forth with their criticism, Arun Govil, who portrayed Lord Ram in Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayana* (the 1987 TV series), made a valid point when he said that the Lord and Ramayana are beyond 'modernisation' and that there is no need to attempt that and disrespect people's devotion.

Away from the screens, various Hindu religious outfits and political parties have joined the chorus to ban the film. It is important to recall here that last October, monks from Ayodhya had raised objections to the 'distortions' seen in the film's trailer.

No doubt, *Adipurush* is a thoroughly disappointing misadventure, but one might wonder what is the point of such a film at all. Also, how did the Censor Board not feel the need to 'regulate' its content?

So, does the Indian audience not know Ramayana enough to be educated about it (or entertained) through commercial cinema? Or does it serve some other purpose by keeping people engaged in a circular discourse and have them enforce their Hindu identity on the pretext of Ramayana for reasons that warrant another discussion? Let us wait and watch! (*IAS*)

Paris riots: Who shot a teenager dead...

Riots have broken out in Nanterre, a suburb of Paris, following the lethal police shooting of a 17-year-old boy named as Nahel M. An investigation into his death is ongoing but the situation has already triggered protest and anger. Whatever the investigation concludes, the incident forms part of a complex, deep-rooted problem.

It raises the memory of the violence that spread across the city's suburbs in 2005, lasting more than three weeks and forcing the country into a state of emergency. Many of the issues behind the unrest back then remain unresolved to this day and have potentially been aggravated by ever-worsening relations between the police and the public.

During my extensive fieldwork in the suburban estates of Paris, Lyon and Marseille I have seen and heard first-hand the grievances that are now being cried out on the streets of Nanterre.

THE SUBURBS AND POVERTY

Certain suburbs of large French cities have, for decades, suffered from what has been labelled the worst "hypermarginalisation" in Europe. Poor-quality housing and schooling combine with geographical isolation and racism to make it virtually impossible for people to stand a chance at improving their circumstances.

Evidence has long shown that people living in poor suburbs can expect to face discrimination based on the very fact of living in those suburbs when they apply for a job. Even just having a certain name on your CV can rule you out of employment thanks to widespread racial discrimination.

Discontent among young people in these places has been brewing for decades as a result. The first riots of the kind currently happening in Paris took place in Lyon as far back as the 1980s.

And yet, outside moments of crisis, there appears to be practically no discussion by French leadership about how to tackle the problems that drive so much anger in the suburbs.

President Emmanuel Macron presents himself as committed to re-industrialising France and revitalising the economy.

However, Macron's vision does not include any plan for using economic growth to bring opportunity to the suburbs or, viewed the other way round, to harness the potential of the suburbs to drive economic growth.

In two presidential terms, he has failed to produce a coherent policy for solving some of the key problems of the suburbs.

POLICE BRUTALITY

Police brutality is a topic of great concern in France at the moment, beyond the Nanterre incident. Earlier this year, international human rights organisation the Council of Europe took



the extraordinary step of directly lambasting the French police for "excessive use of force" during protests against Macron's pension reforms.

Policing appears stuck in an all-or-nothing approach. In a recent interview I helped conduct for a documentary in the suburbs of Marseille, residents pointed to successive cuts to community-based police officers based in the estates. As key reasons for increases in tension between the population and the police. Protests, meanwhile, are met with tear gas and batons.

Successive governments have used policing to control the population to prevent political turmoil, eroding the legitimacy of law enforcement along the way.

And yet, the police are extremely hostile to reform, a stance that is aided and abetted by their powerful unions and Macron himself, who needs

the police to crush opposition to his reforms.

MACRON VS SARKOZY

Former president Nicolas Sarkozy is infamous for inflaming tensions during the 2005 riots by referring to the people involved as "scum" who needed to be pressure washed from the suburbs. Macron, too, has been repeatedly criticised for striking an arrogant, tone during his political career, making numerous gaffs including suggesting an unemployed worker only needed to "cross the street" to find work.

However, his conciliatory response to the death of Nahel could not be further removed from Sarkozy's stance. He has called the killing "inevitable" and held a crisis meeting to seek a solution to the crisis.

A trip to see Elton John perform while the riots

occurred was perhaps not advisable and comments about young people being "intoxicating" by video games were somewhat misguided, but Macron has at least tried to calm tensions and not inflame them.

A key problem for him, however, is the diffuse, de-centralised nature of the protestors. There is no leadership to meet and negotiate with, and there are no specific demands that need to be met to defuse the tension. As in 2005, the riots are occurring spontaneously, sometimes estate by estate.

That makes escalation very difficult for the government to stop. And it underscores the need for a far more wide-reaching, thoughtful response to tackle the entrenched, decades-old problems of poor social prospects and police brutality in the suburbs of French cities. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Aja! Bhambi Sunday, JULY 2, 2023

BirthDay Forecast
Moon in Venus or your return moon will give good results. You will successfully see to it that you will get your share. A good news will let your partner. People will be both in you and will help in your success. The planetary position will become favourable. Success will be yours with full vigour and concentration. They will get success in exams in service. You will have better relationship with your boss and senior officers. You will make people happy with your honesty and get your work done with ease. You will get a promotion in your job. You will succeed in all the social and family life. You will get praised by people. Matters related to court will be resolved with mutual consent and mediation. You will have wonderful relations with your spouse.

This week for you
Aries: (March 21 - April 20) Your deed will bring worthy reward for you. You will receive very good news and your name will come up for award far and wide. You will catch attention of your boss and your ideas will get preference. You will remain close to your partner and will spend a lot of time with him/her. You will achieve a lot of success because of your hard work. You will have no shortage of funds and you will use your expertise to get new clients on your business. You will be successful in your efforts. It is time of a new era as you may touch peak of success and it is going to be very fruitful phase. You will also get success in some fields. Take adequate care of your health.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You will be committed to your work. It is going to be a wonderful time for you. You will feel material comfort. Money inflow will be smooth and continuous. You will enjoy vehicle and property comforts. You will also get attention of your parents. You will be engaged in the job. You will take care to discharge your domestic duties and responsibility but your professional work will not suffer. You will receive in heart. You will see an effective dialogue with everyone. You will get much satisfaction from your work. Love affairs will be successful. You need to be careful of your financial health. You will get a reward. You cannot afford to neglect the emotions of your partner as that is a very important for you. You will remain alien with your time and energy. Your character or personality will be on the peak and you will progress fast.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) It is going to be a terrific week for you. You will get into happiness and will have fun with your family members. You will be in a jolly mood and will be satisfied. Matters related to money will be the main cause of concern but you will come up with them well. You will spend time in reading knowledge enhancing literature. There will be monetary gain for you. You will also be an asset to your income or earnings. You will be happy to spend time with your family. Your business deals will be successful. The obstacles in your partnership will be cleared out. You will try and work according to your wishes. All your plans will be successful.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) You will be peaceful and happy week for you. Superior Venus will bring blessings in your marriage. Partners will understand expectations and feelings of each other well. You will have a monetary gain. You will spend a lot of time with your family. The time is full of good tidings. You will avoid hot discussions in your family as it may deteriorate family peace. You will give preference to peace and happiness in the family. Those giving exams will give fair best. You will have no shortage of money. There will be an improvement in the situation at your work place. Your life will get back on track and gather momentum.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) Your time will be happy passed. At this time your outlook, values and behavior will undergo a positive change. You will bring about an increase in respect and prestige. You will go on a journey with your family. You will prefer to visit a hill station or go abroad. You cannot afford to spend your time. You may get an important responsibility in your job that will make you happy. You might have to make lot of efforts in order to get admission in the course, school and college of your choice. In the end, result will be good and will come up to your expectations. You will have no shortage of money and funds.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23) You will do well in your job work. You might be involved in some interesting work. You will also after the family will and will be involved in buying and selling activities. A major shift will be seen in your business. Besides work, you might take some interesting things. You will spend a lot of your time in laughing and playing and having fun and entertainment with your family. You will also take part in some interesting activities. You will also participate in some social event. You will be happy to have guests at home. You will also work with full concentration and sincerity. You will also not do too many mistakes in the matter of money and heart. You will have good bonding with your life partner.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23) Things are moving in the right direction. You will be getting along well with others. You will get promotion in a sudden in your job. You will be in a major income inflow which will handle to be best of your abilities. Your name and fame will spread far and wide. It means that you may feel up set as some person may ignore you. But that is not the reason to get disheartened. You have your own importance in the eyes of others and they value your work. Those who are planning to take some examinations will work hard and will get wonderful success. Love birds will have great time and they will enjoy each other's company. You will have no health problems.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) You will get a chance to show your talent on a bigger and wider platform. Your efforts will get recognized which will help you a lot. You will be under no hurry to finish your task and will take your own time. Your boss will have high hopes from you and you will come up to the expectations of one and all. You will have no shortage of money and will spend lavishly on luxurious items. You will be caught in a dilemma and will be in two minds as to how to go about the things. But you will remain ever watchful and cautious and in the process you will take advice of your well wishers. Husband and wife will have wonderful understanding with each other.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) You will be getting exceptional results this week. All that you do will be successful. You will be in a good mood. But it is a bit of a worry for you. You will be getting a good job offer which you had never imagined. You will be enjoying good times and will be in a good mood. You will do well. You will think about your work and will pursue your own hobbies and interests. Your economic side will be strong. You will be devoted to your work. Those giving tests, interviews will get success. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time. Those who are single will plan to get married.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This week will prove to be lucky for you. You will get appreciation and your hopes and expectations will get fulfilled. You will have a shortage of work but demand will have a beneficial time period. New sources of income will develop. You will remain committed to your work. You will do some new work, which will give you new peace. You will see with your partner all remain strong. You will get happiness from your child. You will remain busy in shopping and see how to improve them for your new home. There will be no loss of concentration will be finalized on it. But you will undertake new work with caution.

Monsoon hair care routine

Managing and maintaining healthy tresses can be a constant struggle. A simple rule of thumb that we tend to overlook with regards to hair care is that a healthy mane begins with a healthy scalp.

While skincare and the multiple layered routine is all the rage, we must follow a basic step by step routine to ensure a clean scalp that translates into a lustrous mane!

Scalp care is definitely the new skincare and the start of Monsoon rains, and the range of problems that this weather brings, following the right scalp care routine is the urgent need of the hour.

Sebastian and System Professional bring you the ideal set of products to complete your hair care routine from start to finish, giving you a squeaky-clean scalp and frizz free, lustrous hair all through the season!

Step 1: Pre wash
Ideal for the scalp, the Pre-Shampoo Clay by System Professional helps to detoxify the scalp by absorbing impurities and sebum build-up and leaving you with a clean refreshed scalp.
Price: Rs 3,000/- for 200ml

Step 2: Shampoo
The Sebastian Professional Dark Oil Lightweight shampoo cleanses the hair while adding natural body and shine, without weighing down. Infused with a special blend of Jojoba and Argan oils, this shampoo is suitable for all hair types.
Price: Rs 2,300/- for 125ml (*TIANSIje*)

and leaves the hair up to 3 times smoother and shinier.
Price Rs 1,600/- for 250ml

Step 3: Condition
The Sebastian Professional Dark Oil Lightweight conditioner is infused with a special blend of oils and works well to smoothen and detangle the hair whilst keeping it lightweight and full of body. The conditioner is suitable for all hair types.
Price: Rs 1,900/- for 250ml

Step 4: Hair Masking
The Professional Dark Oil Lightweight Mask is a deeply nourishing mask that is made with a special blend of Jojoba and Argan Oils. This mask makes the hair silky smooth and shiny while maintaining its natural texture.
Price: Rs 1,900/- for 150ml

Step 5: Replenish your scalp
The Scalp Fluid by System Professional helps to protect your scalp from pollution and provides a gentle, cool and refreshing feel. Made with 95 percent natural origin ingredients, the fluid has a calming effect on an itchy, dry and red scalp. It also helps to protect the scalp from free radicals, leaving it well nourished. Made with niacinamide, the Scalp Fluid has anti-inflammatory properties. Use this Scalp Fluid right after your hair is patted dry.
Price: Rs 2,300/- for 125ml (*TIANSIje*)

"No matter how dull, or how mean, or how wise a man is, he feels that happiness is his indisputable right."

—Helen Keller

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 133 No. 27 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 3, 2023

Why road deaths

THE expressways and highways built by India, in recent times, "are better than the American roads or it would be so by next year." This is a claim being made by Union Roads and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari time and again. He presided over the grand transformation of India's highway systems – the beginnings of which were when AB Vajpayee headed the nation from the late 1990s. The Modi government took this forward with more seriousness. However, the large number of accidents on these roads are a matter of serious concern. Last year, there were as high as around 1, 60,000 road deaths in the country. The latest major mishap was in Buldhana district of Maharashtra that took 26 lives. The passengers were charred to death in the fire caused by the Nagpur-Pune private bus that hit a divider and burst into flames.

Notably, the officials were quick to cover up the reasons. They are adept at inventing 'reasons' like road 'hypnosis', or citing slippery driving, drunk driving, or burst of tyre, etc., as the reasons. All of these are possible. But, what they often mischievously try to hide are their own faults, as should also be the case now. Speeding vehicles hitting road dividers abruptly is quite common. This is due to the failure of the road authorities to demarcate such spots and alert motorists well in advance through precautionary steps and warning lights. White markings at the approach and erection of boards in a manner visible at night too are not often done. Neither the contractors nor the engineers ensure such safety steps are in place. The sense of irresponsibility and dereliction of duty are all too evident. Worse, they get away with their act. In the present case too, the road stretch and the poorly laid divider were an invitation to disaster. However, officials misguided the media with other theories – "road hypnosis" and much else to cover up the actual reason or reasons.

The tendency on the part of the government is to launch an inquiry. When senior officials are appointed to do the inquiry, their obsession is predictably to save the errant officials. An inquiry or the announcement of ex-gratia or compensation to the families of the deceased and to the injured – a paltry two lakhs from the Centre and five lakhs from the state government in the present case – does not help much. The bread-winnings of the families themselves have perished. When the road ministries earn a whopping amount by way of huge road taxes, a more comprehensive insurance scheme for all such accident victims should be put in place. It must be ensured that the money reaches such families without fail and in a speedy mode.

Letters to the Editor

Regressive mentality

for adding stimulus to trade and commerce which relies heavily on transportation. Lower transportation costs also mean essentials will cost lesser and help the consumers. Notable examples of how during calamities the railways have helped communities in distress and also propelled the state's economic contribution are plenty. Those who shout for development and employment don't seem to be able to figure out the situation in the 21st century which is fast-paced. The regressive mentality of blocking development means that the end result would be more unemployment and lack of infrastructural improvement.

Editor,
There was a time I believed that if not a hundred percent at least some politicians and political parties of Meghalaya had a vision and a constitutional duty to think and plan for the overall welfare of our state. I should even mention politicians have zero understanding of the state's economy and how the state GDP increases or decreases. The subject of allowing railway networks for goods and essential commodities needs to be debated publicly and government has to think of the long term interests of the large majority of citizens. Goods trains are much needed

daily I would like to request the Transport Department and Police Department, Government of Meghalaya to take strict action against those vehicles both government and private that are using the siren illegally. It is such a nuisance and a great disturbance to everyone passing through the busy roads of Shillong. These days with the innumerable traffic jams and congestion all over the city, the siren is a menace created by these self-styled lords and powerful people. As daily commuters in the busy streets of Shillong we are fed up of this nuisance and it is the duty of the government to see to it that these very people are brought to book.

Then there is this menace of vehicles with dark-tinted glasses moving freely in the streets of Shillong. Although dark tinted glasses have been banned some years back but today their numbers have increased by leaps and bounds especially the government vehicles. What is the Police

Department doing? Is it turning a blind eye to these law breakers? If the police charge heavy fines from vehicles parked in "No Parking" zones, is it not equally justified to also put a heavy fine on these law breakers? I wish the government listens to the voices of the people and that there is respect for the law and that everyone is treated equally.

Yours etc.,
B. Syiem, Shillong - 8

We should vote to end corruption

Editor,
As the parliamentary elections are due in 2024, I would appeal to the general public to make your vote count. Don't vote as if the candidate is your favourite film star, or someone whose personality you like. Vote for the public good. I have personally

Is the poor quality of undergraduate curriculum in Meghalaya hindering students' achievement?

By Samarbin Umdor

The steady deterioration in the quality of education in Meghalaya is a matter of serious concern to academicians, policymakers and the general public with a lot of focus on the falling standards of school education attributed to the lack of trained teachers, poor pedagogy, poor school infrastructure and an outdated curriculum. Successive governments and NGO surveys on the status of school education in India (Performance Grading Index & Annual Status of School Education) have placed Meghalaya among the lagged states in terms of achievement in learning outcomes, quality of teaching and governance.

While school education in Meghalaya has had more

papers comprising CC (14 papers), DEC (4 papers), GEC (4 papers), and 2 papers each under SEC and AEC. The curricula of the above colleges are as per the UGC minimum course curriculum for UG courses under CBCS which UGC had recommended a few years back. It stipulates that a 3-year UG Honours programme should comprise of 14 papers under CC, 4 papers each under DEC and GEC (interdisciplinary), and 2 papers each under SEC and AEC.

The above comparison clearly reveals how the present UG curriculum followed by NEIU-affiliated colleges is well below the

UGC Curriculum and Credit Framework for 3-year UG Programmes of 2023 under the New Education Policy (NEP) that has also been adopted by NEIU. Colleges have cited a lack of quality teaching, non-sound infrastructure and limited time among other reasons. In the new framework, the total number of papers to be taught will increase from the present 18 to 32, with 15 of these being major papers under CC, 6 papers under minor and vocation courses, 3 papers under SEC, and other papers under AEC, value-added and multidisciplinary courses.

The new NEP curriculum is a huge jump from what is being taught under the present UG curriculum in Meghalaya both in terms of the number

of papers and the variety of courses. However, not adopting the NEP curriculum would mean that our UG course would continue to be below par and our students would continue to languish behind students from other states. Had we even partially adopted the earlier UGC minimum course curriculum under CBCS, the transition to the new NEP curriculum framework would not have been much of a challenge.

This is precisely the reason why states like Mizoram, Nagaland, Assam and Delhi (to name a few) have been able to switch over to the NEP curriculum as it involves the addition of only a few papers and courses. While there will be a tremendous challenge in adopting the NEP curriculum in Meghalaya, particularly for single-stream colleges in rural areas, not doing so would put our students at a great disadvantage as it would severely hinder their learning outcomes. Moreover, there is a real danger that our UG degree may not be acceptable elsewhere if it does not conform to the new UGC-mandated course and credit requirement. The time has come for our colleges to fully shift to the new NEP curriculum even if it entails a lot of challenges and difficulties in the initial period. NEIU and the State government must also play their part in supporting them through concrete plans and support.

This huge gap in our UG curriculum is the reason why many of our students find it difficult to clear the CUEE-PG, and it may also be the reason why they find it difficult to clear the central government's group A and B competitive examinations. The question that arises is why NEIU did not adopt at least the minimum syllabi of the core papers (14 papers) of the main subject (4 papers) and GEC (4 papers). Additionally, there are 2 papers under the Skill Elective course (SEC). UGC curriculum of Meghalaya University covers 32 papers comprising CC (14 papers), DEC (4 papers), GEC (12 papers) under SEC and AEC. Delhi University's curriculum covers 36

minimum course curriculum recommended by UGC and those followed by colleges in other states. Students in Meghalaya study only 8 core major papers (with no additional electives) which is less than half of what a DU student covers in three years (14 core-major and 4 DEC papers). Even students in Mizoram and Nagaland are studying more core-major papers (12 to 14 papers). Further, skill papers are not part of the UG curriculum of NEIU. The total number of papers (18 papers) covered in 3 years by UG students in Meghalaya is way below when compared to what his or her counterpart studies in Mizoram (24 papers), Nagaland (32 papers), Assam and Delhi (26 papers).

Today, we find ourselves in the same situation as there is a request from colleges to defer the adoption of the

Are Management Consultants taking over Meghalaya?

By Avner Pariaat

The big management consulting firms like Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG, Boston Consulting Group make billions of dollars every year by selling corporate expertise and government leaders how to do their own jobs. Consultants can be a very valuable resource if they are giving advice in an area that they have a lot of experience in. They are supposed to be brought into a role for a short time to help the administration fix a problem, streamline operations or enable the staff to acquire new skills. These "technical" Consultants are not the ones who have been promoted both in terms of the number

of papers and the variety of courses. However, not adopting the NEP curriculum would mean that our UG course would continue to be below par and our students would continue to languish behind students from other states. Had we even partially adopted the earlier UGC minimum course curriculum under CBCS, the transition to the new NEP curriculum framework would not have been much of a challenge.

This is precisely the reason why states like Mizoram, Nagaland, Assam and Delhi (to name a few) have been able to switch over to the NEP curriculum as it involves the addition of only a few papers and courses. While there will be a tremendous challenge in adopting the NEP curriculum in Meghalaya, particularly for single-stream colleges in rural areas, not doing so would put our students at a great disadvantage as it would severely hinder their learning outcomes. Moreover, there is a real danger that our UG degree may not be acceptable elsewhere if it does not conform to the new UGC-mandated course and credit requirement. The time has come for our colleges to fully shift to the new NEP curriculum even if it entails a lot of challenges and difficulties in the initial period. NEIU and the State government must also play their part in supporting them through concrete plans and support.

There are three reasons we must be careful regarding the grand claims made by these MC firms:

1. Specialist/technical Consultants typically give advice coming out of their years of experience in their line of work. They are generally looking forward to retirement. This means that the pool of people that can potentially give experience-based advice is small and expensive.

Management Consultants are the exact opposite. They are hired almost exclusively out of prestigious colleges under the supervision of a managing director. They are actually very inexperienced and have a ground working knowledge of ground realities. It doesn't help that they are almost exclusively locked up inside the Secretariat, MBMA or similar offices. They are supposed to be out in the field searching the local cultures and local contexts in order to create better plans and policies but sadly this is rarely the case. Additionally in India, caste in addition to class backgrounds plays a big role among the consultant set. I've met a number of consultants in Meghalaya who just smugly of class arrogance and caste privilege. All of this is in spite of the fact that these MCs are forced to work themselves to death for their firms with very little chance of going up the corporate ladder. With an average ascension of 2-3 years, vertical ascension is not going to be an achievable goal. They forego this big salary with not much more at the end of the day.

The second problem with MC firms is that they will take on any and all assignments no matter how

ill-prepared they are to deliver good results. In "The Big Con", Mariana Mazzucato (my personal fav) and Rosie Collington discuss how much damage this strategy can do especially on government contracts. In 2019 and 2020 the British government spent roughly 1.3 billion dollars on a "Brexit strategy". The authors argue that it was difficult to understand what these MCs were really doing because nobody had any experience in a situation like that. They didn't add anything that couldn't or shouldn't have been done by elected public servants. MCs have in effect "infantilized government" as Theodore Agnew, a UK Cabinet minister said before he resigned over the very issue mentioned above. I believe it's very much the same here.

The third problem with these Consultants is that there is no control over their skills to the local community/society. After all, why would they want to make themselves irrelevant over time? From a public point of view, it's not clear to do what they do then what would set them apart from the rest? How would they justify their large bills, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

Management Consulting not only costs governments crores of rupees every year in direct fees it could be costing us crores more through misdirected fund allocations and unnecessary expenditures. In the short-run, MCs make it seem that the state is saving money but over the long-run, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

Management Consulting not only costs governments crores of rupees every year in direct fees it could be costing us crores more through misdirected fund allocations and unnecessary expenditures. In the short-run, MCs make it seem that the state is saving money but over the long-run, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

Management Consulting not only costs governments crores of rupees every year in direct fees it could be costing us crores more through misdirected fund allocations and unnecessary expenditures. In the short-run, MCs make it seem that the state is saving money but over the long-run, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

Management Consulting not only costs governments crores of rupees every year in direct fees it could be costing us crores more through misdirected fund allocations and unnecessary expenditures. In the short-run, MCs make it seem that the state is saving money but over the long-run, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

Management Consulting not only costs governments crores of rupees every year in direct fees it could be costing us crores more through misdirected fund allocations and unnecessary expenditures. In the short-run, MCs make it seem that the state is saving money but over the long-run, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

Management Consulting not only costs governments crores of rupees every year in direct fees it could be costing us crores more through misdirected fund allocations and unnecessary expenditures. In the short-run, MCs make it seem that the state is saving money but over the long-run, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

Management Consulting not only costs governments crores of rupees every year in direct fees it could be costing us crores more through misdirected fund allocations and unnecessary expenditures. In the short-run, MCs make it seem that the state is saving money but over the long-run, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

Management Consulting not only costs governments crores of rupees every year in direct fees it could be costing us crores more through misdirected fund allocations and unnecessary expenditures. In the short-run, MCs make it seem that the state is saving money but over the long-run, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

Management Consulting not only costs governments crores of rupees every year in direct fees it could be costing us crores more through misdirected fund allocations and unnecessary expenditures. In the short-run, MCs make it seem that the state is saving money but over the long-run, (as many studies in other places have pointed it) that might not be the case at all. We actually lose more. But because the Management Consultants have in effect come to dominate governance throughout the country and the world itself.

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

Yours etc.,
Raj Yashini Shillong - 3

"None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free."

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 15, No. 22 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 4, 2023

Political retrofitting before 2024
TIF Maharashtra drama that unfolded since Sunday is bound to have ripple effects across the country. NCP strongman, Sharad Pawar used to run the party like his fiefdom but that sort of control now has limited appeal, in the wake of the BJP's relentless bid to win over allies before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. By taking Ajit Pawar, the nephew of Sharad Pawar, to its side and offering him the post of Deputy CM, the BJP has dealt a body blow not just to the NCP as a party but also to the current aspiration of Opposition unity where Sharad Pawar is playing a significant role. The BJP has now learned the ropes and also knows how to pull the rug from the feet of other political leaders running their parties. In 2019, Sharad Pawar had executed a similar coup by allying with the Shiv Sena and Congress and had stitched up the Maha Vikas Aghadi, thereby leaving the BJP stunned, since the Shiv Sena had been a BJP ally in the past.

Politics has never been about service to the people or about development. It is about power and those who have tasted power, feel the pangs of being out of it. Political observers attribute this upheaval in Maharashtra politics to Amit Shah's master strategy in winning friends and influencing people. But Amit Shah succeeds because politicians treat each election as a matter of metaphysical survival, may a clash of existential identities and this defines what's happening in Maharashtra today. The NCP is ideologically broken although there's not much it has by way of ideology. Attempts to repair this brokenness is futile as the ugly war of claims and counter claims makes both sides more recalcitrant.

The loss of Karnataka has made the top BJP duo Modi-Shah do their internal chinook bathik. Ajit Pawar apparently attended a meeting chaired by Amit Shah where CM Eknath Shinde and Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis were present. The BJP play is to checkmate Shinde who is asserting himself in the coalition and wants more berths for his MLAs. Besides, Shinde's case of breaking the Shiv Sena is still being heard and the verdict could go either way. If Shinde loses, the BJP would be in a spot. Having a buffer in the NCP would give the BJP some respite. Between now and May 2024 the BJP will be using all the tricks of the trade to win all state elections so as to secure its place for a third term in government at the Centre. The BJP will brook no hindrance to its plans. Meanwhile, the much talked about opposition unity seems destined to falter now that the NCP has split. After all, Sharad Pawar played a major role in trying to coalesce a disparate group.

Letters to the Editor

Conflicts of interests in Meghalaya

Editor,
The recent order of the Hon'ble Meghalaya High Court capping all constructions around water bodies to be beyond 50 meters from the high water or land level has put some of the bigwigs in the Government in a spot of bother. It is public knowledge that the elder brother and ex-MLA of the present Dy. CM of the state owns a huge chunk of land in Pynhaurumkra which is a flood plain of the Wah Umkra. The Dy. CM holds the important Urban Affairs Department portfolio and therefore has an important say in the affairs of building construction and granting of permission through the Chairman of the MUDA who is his brother-in-law the Jovak Mili. It is also known that the Dy. CM has purchased the KL complex at Demscinching which is itself another big plot of land and therefore has a huge stake and may be keenly watching the court proceedings.

It may not be a coincidence that certain officers of the MUDA have been transferred, bringing in officers who are assigned to posts not due to them. An incompetent MCS officer issuing an absurd order and the 30 year old Chief Engineer who is known for being close and cozy with the Minister of Urban Affairs ended out by a

recent Government Notification barring retired government officials to hold office beyond 70 years of age, as reported in local dailies. It looks like the MUDA has become a personal fiefdom. Besides the above, another senior bureaucrat also has a plot of land somewhere in the BR Colony. Umpting, where apparently there is a river passing adjacent to the plot which is also affected by the above order.

Though many may say that the Court order is too little, too late since there are already existing houses and buildings in close proximity to the water bodies, certain relaxations and conditions need to be imposed and distance needs to be maintained from the high flood level of the water bodies. Let's take the case of the BDW school in Pynhaurumkra where three compound walls have been constructed and flood waters are unable to penetrate. The consequences and ramifications of that are experienced by the surrounding localities, families and homes. More so will be the consequences once construction is allowed for the above persons.

Therefore, at this juncture, it becomes imperative for all the high level functionaries of the state, the Minister, Chairman MUDA, senior bureaucrats with vested interests to be relieved and detached from their present positions and to allow the domain and technical experts to bring in the required laws with justice and without fear or favour. That's the least

When Indigenous Knowledge stands in good stead

By HH Mohrmen

The unfortunate accident which shocked the world but was not adequately reported in Meghalaya was the plane crash in Columbia which killed all the adult passengers of the ill-fated aircraft. This incident was however much discussed over social media. It was on May 1, 2023 that a 6-passenger single-engine Cessna plane crashed in the middle of the Amazon rainforest. The rescue operation was able to locate the plane two weeks after the incident and to recover only the adult body from the crashed site. The children who were passengers on the plane were nowhere to be found. The rescue team used their flair and the sound box to play for the children's grandmothers' voice with the hope that they would hear her voice and respond to the rescue team. But the efforts went futile. Forty days after the plane crash, the four siblings, the eldest aged 13 years and the youngest who was only eleven months old were found hungry, dehydrated but alive.

A different kind of miracle
Rathindra Roy, a friend shared in a WhatsApp group, a Facebook post by Vihath Ratan about how Eliran Arazi, an anthropologist who had worked with the indigenous community in the area had his own interpretation of the entire incident. Eliran Arazi stated that the discovery and rescue of four young indigenous children, 40 days after the aircraft they were travelling in crashed in the remote Colombian rainforest, was hailed in the international media as a "miracle in the jungle". It is unbelievable how the kids survived all by themselves in those forty days' ordeal in the dense Amazon rainforest. But as an anthropologist who has spent more than a year living among the Andoque people in the region, conducting ethnographic fieldwork, he said that one cannot simply label this as a miraculous event. At least not a miracle in the conventional sense of the term, he said. After reading the piece I agree with the interpretation and can see how explanation connects and also resonates with customs and practices in our society.

It is not just pure luck. Ratan believes that the survival of these children can be attributed to their profound knowledge of the intricate forest and the adaptive skills passed down through generations by Indigenous people. He said that during the search operations, he was in contact with the sister of the children's grandmother who expressed her unwavering belief that the children would be found alive. She illustrated the example of natural instincts and physical resilience of children in the region. It is a common practice like anywhere else in the indigenous community that children in the area would accompany their parents and elder relatives in various activities such as gardening, fishing, making plants, hunting, and gathering honey and wild fruit. In this way, the children acquire practical knowledge and skills, such as those demonstrated by Lesly, Solomy, Fier, and Cristian during their 40-day ordeal.

Indigenous children all over the world learn from an early age how to open paths through thick foliage and dense vegetation, and how to differentiate edible from non-edible fruits. They know how and where to find shelter, water, build fire stoves, and even set animal traps. They can identify animal footprints and scents and they even know how to avoid predators on the prowl in the forest. They may not have toys and games that children in the cities have, and they have only stuff from nature as their playthings, but that is what is important. Nature is their playground which helps them become adept tree climbers and make any kind of tools from natural materials available in the vicinity. They know which plants can be used for what purposes and are expert in skinning and handling game animals, which has certainly helped them in the entire episode. It is also a common practice in the indigenous communities for the parents and relatives to take their kids while they traverse through the jungles which would then help children learn how to navigate a forest's dense vegetation by following the location of the sun, the moon or the stars in the sky. Such trips also help them understand the interrelationship between plants; they know the kind of trees under which edible mushrooms grow, small animals that can

be trapped and eaten, and how to catch fish.
Nature the Keeper and the Caretaker
Indigenous cultures are around the world weave stories; compose songs and create myths about what they see around them in nature. These are not just stories, songs, or myths, but they are mediums by which indigenous knowledge is passed down from one generation to another. Among the first Nation peoples' cultures, natural phenomena and animals were depicted as fully sentient beings, engaging in many human activities, and even saving each other's lives. Non-Indigenous audiences may not be able to comprehend these kinds of beliefs and some may even dismiss them as superstition, but these customs that can only be found in the tribal community depict the complex and profound relations that the people have with the forest's countless non-human inhabitants. It is the indigenous understanding of the interrelationships between humans, plants, and animals that helps people preserve the environment and prevent irreversible ecological harm.

Through songs and stories, indigenous children are taught from early childhood this knowledge that becomes second nature to them.
Nature's spirit and their animism
In my previous article, I wrote about the indigenous people and their beliefs in nature deities. Every indigenous community believes in the spirit of nature that are called by different names and in our community although some nature deities have their names, they are generally called by "nyingka" or "ka kisa". They are believed to be the caretakers and the protectors of the people and in the area where the plane crashed, Eliran Arazi said that they are known as duetos (towns) in Spanish and by various names in native languages such as "Ibo ka", meaning "persons of the Spirit of Nature". They are believed to be the protective spirits of the plants and animals that live in the forests. Children are introduced to the spirit of nature when they conduct sacrifices to pay obeisance to them. They are not only made aware of the presence of the spirit but the idea is embedded in their psyche.

During the entire 40 days grueling episode, the elders and the shamans mediated with the spirits and gave offerings for them to partake and to leave the kids alone. They tried to persuade the sacred deities that the children do not belong to them, and prayed that they take the offerings and give the kids back to their relatives.
As Eliran Arazi said, it may be a challenging task for non-Indigenous people to embrace these beliefs and practices but the Amazonians attributed the children's survival to these spirits. It is the belief in these traditional ideas which had instilled in the children the faith and emotional fortitude crucial for persevering in the struggle for survival he said. The children knew that their fate was not to die in the forest and that their grandparents and shamans would move heaven and earth to bring them back home alive. It is also the same belief that encouraged the Indigenous people to search for them and not to give up hope but to continue searching even when it took them more than a month to find them.

Caring and looking after each other
Non-indigenous people may wonder in amazement how, after the death of the children's mother, her 13-year-old daughter Lesly was able to take care of her younger siblings, including Cristian, who was only 11 months old then. But this comes as no surprise to the indigenous people as elder siblings are expected to act as stand-in for their mothers in their absence. Till today an image of a boy or a girl playing with their father with their baby brother or sister piggy-backing on their backs is a common sight in the villages. Till the early nineties, this was teaching in a School as Purnam-LP schools started at 7 in the morning and had to be over by 10 am. If the school hours extend beyond 10 am, then parents who are ready to attend their fields will line up in front of the schools with young kids toiling along.

Children has toughened Lesly which enabled her to provide what her brothers including the 11-month-old baby needed. Sadly, this traditional knowledge that has enabled Indigenous people to not only survive but thrive in the forest is gradually dying.
MPs and MLAs on July 5 to demonstrate his strength.
The contours of the latest battle would become clearer in the next few days but the muds have already begun. Amid the unfolding political upheavals, the NCP has appointed Jitendra Awah as the new Chief Minister (CM) in the Maharashtra Assembly and the party's chief whip in anticipation of the next rounds in the Speaker's chamber and the Election Commission. The appointment was necessitated by incumbent Lok Ajit Pawar's resignation last Friday as a prelude to his switchover. The vertical split has set the stage for a test for claims and counter claims to represent "the real" NCP in Constituent forums.
The ultimate judges of the legitimacy of a political party are the people," Pawar said. The veteran Maharashtra strongman also made it clear that unlike those who have switched sides and support Narendra Modi's BJP, he would continue his efforts to forge a unity of Opposition parties in the run up to 2024 elections. Meanwhile the country watches the unfolding events with a keen eye to know what will be the fate of this political thunderstorm.
Yash Pal Rathian,
Via email

there may be a reshuffle in the Union Cabinet and Praful Patel may be inducted into the Cabinet along with some more leaders from Maharashtra who may find their berth in the Union. This way the BJP will rebuild its election plans in the present political developments in Maharashtra. Opposition parties are also disintegrating on the issue of UCC and it is likely that they will further disintegrate due to their own differences on various issues.

Meanwhile the Maharashtra NCP President, Jayant Patil has said that his party has moved a disqualification petition against Ajit Pawar and eight others who took oath as ministers in the Eknath Shinde led state government. He also said that the Congress and the Nationalist Democratic Front which comprised several opposition parties on July 19, 1978.
The present political developments in Maharashtra will definitely have an impact on national politics and BJP will gain from it. The NDA will get the maximum number of seats from the State in the coming parliamentary elections. The next meeting of opposition parties will be held on July 13 at Bangalore where Sharad Pawar has been playing a very active role but the developments in his own State will adversely impact the opposition unity. In this regard the TMC Lok Sabha member had expressed his views that there is no need of an alliance with the Congress in the state.
As per media reports

the NCP patriarch has called a meeting of the NCP functionaries. MPs and MLAs on July 5 to demonstrate his strength.
The contours of the latest battle would become clearer in the next few days but the muds have already begun. Amid the unfolding political upheavals, the NCP has appointed Jitendra Awah as the new Chief Minister (CM) in the Maharashtra Assembly and the party's chief whip in anticipation of the next rounds in the Speaker's chamber and the Election Commission. The appointment was necessitated by incumbent Lok Ajit Pawar's resignation last Friday as a prelude to his switchover. The vertical split has set the stage for a test for claims and counter claims to represent "the real" NCP in Constituent forums.

The ultimate judges of the legitimacy of a political party are the people," Pawar said. The veteran Maharashtra strongman also made it clear that unlike those who have switched sides and support Narendra Modi's BJP, he would continue his efforts to forge a unity of Opposition parties in the run up to 2024 elections. Meanwhile the country watches the unfolding events with a keen eye to know what will be the fate of this political thunderstorm.
Yash Pal Rathian,
Via email

The Snake Charmer

By KC Paul

Sligh knows that and once a minister under Congress and now a chief minister under BJP, he too has learnt how and when political winds of change takes place.

Biren's search for ideology has made him turn to his ethnic identity as a Meitei; his practice of Sanamahism found popularity among those advocating for a resurgent Kangleipak; his patronage and role in the so-called cultural organisations like Arambai Tengol and Meitei Leepan has provided him a pedestal and a fanbase, at the level of a deity. He is viewed and lionized by his kin as a protector of Meitei interests and a champion of racial supremacy in Manipur.

Manipur was steadily recovering from decades of insurgency and impoverishment, fortune had favoured Biren. He came at a time of uninterrupted power supply, broadband internet was changing life in small towns, brands like Reliance were setting shops in the interior of the state. Massive high-rises were taking place in Manipur, what can be seen from reports is, both sides have pre-set conditions for peace. The latest under President's Rule to be imposed so that the central forces can rein in the toxic mix of state forces, valley-based insurgent groups, armed women groups and coming have collided and interlaced into a cohesive unit.

On the other hand, the societies that are residing in the valley of Manipur, too want peace, however, it is hard to understand and make out what it is they exactly want, besides the ST demand. The society seems to be fragmented with no clear leadership and initiative, when not clashing with the tribal, they resort to snacking their own elected representatives' homes, blockade central investigation agencies and most recently impeded on the central forces to secure the release of a dreaded militant with the blood of an Indian Army personnel in his hand.

What are we witnessing in the valley of Manipur is the dispiriting faith of the public in the Indian constitutional machinery, more so exacerbated by events when state forces and armed organisations exact wracking spree are contained by central forces. The feeling of loss and powerlessness in a state which they presume they own - a government which they control is unable to wiggle and unleash the might of the state against a tribe of tribal volunteers. This gives rise to a new insecurity among the public. Loss of devotion and action, have made them lean to Meitei harcouring proscribed Meitei militia groups for protecting their interests. The power vacuum is getting fuelled and recent examples can attribute to the emergence of various seditious groups with xenophobic dislike for the tribals, and that animosity prevails the current mayhem when both communities could still live together, now, to imagine, that future looks bleak.

This power shift will revive the era of the 90s of Manipur. The desire for tribalism should not let the society regress to what it has achieved as one of the fastest growing states in the North West of India. Skill, Sports and Academia. If history were to repeat itself with an upgrade, Manipur will become India's new Kashmir with many things in play and among them, an unstable Myanmar and subversive interests that lies beyond the banks of the river Imphel. Either the strike of a champion, politician with no ideology, who chameleons between branches whichever more greets to office. This form of juggling is short acting one as career snakes and comes with no loyalty base in the long run. At a political youth of sixty, Biren

Sligh knows that and once a minister under Congress and now a chief minister under BJP, he too has learnt how and when political winds of change takes place. Biren's search for ideology has made him turn to his ethnic identity as a Meitei; his practice of Sanamahism found popularity among those advocating for a resurgent Kangleipak; his patronage and role in the so-called cultural organisations like Arambai Tengol and Meitei Leepan has provided him a pedestal and a fanbase, at the level of a deity. He is viewed and lionized by his kin as a protector of Meitei interests and a champion of racial supremacy in Manipur. Manipur was steadily recovering from decades of insurgency and impoverishment, fortune had favoured Biren. He came at a time of uninterrupted power supply, broadband internet was changing life in small towns, brands like Reliance were setting shops in the interior of the state. Massive high-rises were taking place in Manipur, what can be seen from reports is, both sides have pre-set conditions for peace. The latest under President's Rule to be imposed so that the central forces can rein in the toxic mix of state forces, valley-based insurgent groups, armed women groups and coming have collided and interlaced into a cohesive unit.

On the other hand, the societies that are residing in the valley of Manipur, too want peace, however, it is hard to understand and make out what it is they exactly want, besides the ST demand. The society seems to be fragmented with no clear leadership and initiative, when not clashing with the tribal, they resort to snacking their own elected representatives' homes, blockade central investigation agencies and most recently impeded on the central forces to secure the release of a dreaded militant with the blood of an Indian Army personnel in his hand. What are we witnessing in the valley of Manipur is the dispiriting faith of the public in the Indian constitutional machinery, more so exacerbated by events when state forces and armed organisations exact wracking spree are contained by central forces. The feeling of loss and powerlessness in a state which they presume they own - a government which they control is unable to wiggle and unleash the might of the state against a tribe of tribal volunteers. This gives rise to a new insecurity among the public. Loss of devotion and action, have made them lean to Meitei harcouring proscribed Meitei militia groups for protecting their interests. The power vacuum is getting fuelled and recent examples can attribute to the emergence of various seditious groups with xenophobic dislike for the tribals, and that animosity prevails the current mayhem when both communities could still live together, now, to imagine, that future looks bleak. This power shift will revive the era of the 90s of Manipur. The desire for tribalism should not let the society regress to what it has achieved as one of the fastest growing states in the North West of India. Skill, Sports and Academia. If history were to repeat itself with an upgrade, Manipur will become India's new Kashmir with many things in play and among them, an unstable Myanmar and subversive interests that lies beyond the banks of the river Imphel. Either the strike of a champion, politician with no ideology, who chameleons between branches whichever more greets to office. This form of juggling is short acting one as career snakes and comes with no loyalty base in the long run. At a political youth of sixty, Biren

"A man must be big enough to admit his mistakes, smart enough to profit from them, and strong enough to correct them."

— John C. Maxwell

The Shillong Times

Vol: 54 No: 133 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 5, 2023

Build-up for polls

WITH less than ten months to go for the next parliament polls, or General Elections, the mood is set for a major battle. The Opposition was taken unawares by the strategy of the ruling BJP to come up with a Uniform Civil Code for the nation. The Opposition parties that met in Patna and set the ball rolling for a united fight in the 2024 polls, would be meeting in Bengaluru on July 17 and 18 to take their campaign against the BJP forward. In between, there was shock as the NCP of Sharad Pawar split at its base in Maharashtra with a majority of the party's MLAs siding with his nephew Ajit Pawar to also effectively bolster the BJP chances there. Pawar's bravado might not work this time as age is not on his side and his daughter -- anointed the second-in-command in the party -- does not have the same hold as father Pawar has in politics.

Pawar having emerged as the adviser-in-chief for the new opposition alliance at the Patna meet, the hit below the belt in Maharashtra he received at this crucial hour might work to his as also the national opposition's disadvantage. Alongside, a Union Minister has claimed that what happened in Maharashtra could now happen in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, meaning a further break-up in the opposition ranks. This and PM Modi throwing his hat in the form of Uniform Civil Code have confused the Opposition vis-à-vis cobbling a common front against Modi and the BJP. The Congress party itself has stopped short of strongly opposing the UCC proposal for fear it would be playing into the hands of Modi. The Congress can ill afford to antagonize the north-Indian Hindu belt, which in terms of numbers decides who should rule the country. Predictably, again, the Left has come out in full support of the Muslims in opposing the central move. In other words, the July 17-18 meeting will be keenly watched as to how the Opposition unity would survive such odds.

Several states are already in election mode and the build-up for 2024 has begun in right earnest. The EC issued its notification for the 2019 LS polls in March hence the next notification can be expected in about nine months from now. The assembly polls in a few states by the end of this month could well be a dress-rehearsal for the LS polls. If the Congress retains Rajasthan and wins MP, the game will change in surprising ways at the national level. The morale booster that the Congress might thus get will be more than what the ambitious regional satraps can chew.

Individual, which is not only influenced by religious belief, but also by what the religion's scriptures provide for in day-to-day living. The underlying threat, which is obvious, is that this will bring closer to fruition the right-wing ideology of one nation, one religion, one language and one custom, destroying the hailed diversity of this great country and bringing further suspicion, division, and friction among the communities.

Reading the news item on the ST of 4th July 2023 where the Chief Minister is waiting to study the draft bill before making further comments (after reportedly earlier expressing opposition to the UCC), one thought comes to my mind. Even if the tribals of Northeast are exempted from this Civil Code, it does not solve the larger issues facing the rest of the country's communities. We can't live in isolation. And what guarantee is there that tomorrow it will not be extended to our tribals (who in any case, are minuscule in numbers and together elect only a few MPs)? And should we Northeast tribals be so myopic and say we are fine with it so long as the UCC is exempted for us? This is our country, and we live in it, and what happens outside the boundaries of the Northeast area will have its impact and effect us.

(One question also begs an answer: Will the Uniform Civil Code be applicable to the individual citizen only or be extended to have a territorial applicability? If applicable to the individual only, then being a tribal, what law

Uniform Civil Code: Good or Evil?

By Kittor H. Blah

Is the UCC good or evil? First of all, there is a wrong and a right way to look at UCC. The wrong way to look at the majority community to impose its ideals on the minorities. This narrative is not only factually wrong but also divisive, and it is such a polarization that is politically beneficial to some sections of the political class. But what is lost in this narrative is the history and principle of the UCC. The right way to look at UCC is in the context of Fundamental Rights because it is there that we will find its true history and principle.

The UCC made its way to the Constitution of India through the Sub Committee on Fundamental Rights and the Fundamental Rights are what define a Constitutional Republic. Democracy is often said to devolve into mob rule. Fundamental rights exist to protect the rights of every citizen, and to prevent the nation from degenerating into mob rule. To this end, the Sub Committee was entrusted with the task of drawing up a list of Fundamental Rights to be incorporated into the Constitution from its basic structure. These Fundamental Rights were to ensure the political freedom of the citizens and to protect them from intrusive State action. But they were also aimed at securing social and economic freedom for every citizen. Thus, we can say that the Fundamental Rights were aimed at securing political, social and economic freedom for every citizen. And it is in the draft submissions of this Sub Committee that the UCC entered as one of the provisions.

The Sub Committee was locking at making a distinction between justifiable Fundamental rights, i.e. those rights which can be enforced by the Court, and non-justifiable Fundamental rights, i.e. those rights which cannot be enforced by the Court, but which are retained as a Fundamental Principle of State Policy. The UCC was placed outside the purview of the Court, but it was retained as a Fundamental Principle of State Policy. The reason is because Fundamental Rights are enforceable by law, while non-justifiable rights were provided as Directive Principles of State Policy. The reason UCC was provided as a non-justifiable right, and then as a directive principle, was because of religious sensitivities. The Constituent Assembly deliberated on the UCC on November 23, 1948 and the provisions for UCC were adopted into the Constitution of India as Article 44, under the 'Directive Principles of State Policy' with the words: "The State shall endeavor to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India".

What is lost in the current political climate and divisive narrative is that the UCC was provided and debated in the context of Fundamental Rights, to secure social and economic freedom for every citizen while the Fundamental Rights were to secure political, social and economic freedom for every citizen. Therefore, the UCC cannot conflict with any of the Fundamental Rights, including the Right to Freedom of Religion, as provided in Article 13(2): "The State shall not make any law which takes away or abridges the rights conferred by this Part and any law made in contravention of this clause shall, to the extent of the contravention, be void".

Second, what is also lost in the current narrative is that the UCC, as one of the Directive Principles of State Policy, is non-justiciable, i.e. it is not subject to enforcement by the Court. Article 37, in the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution, states: "The provisions contained in this Part shall not be enforceable by any court, but the principles laid down are nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws". Thus, neither the Government and the Parliament of India, nor the Governments and Legislatures of the states, nor any legislating body such as the Autonomous District Councils, can be forced to implement the UCC.

Third, what is lost in the current narrative is that the states are not obligated to set aside any existing laws relating to marriage and inheritance, as they are listed at point 6 in the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Fourthly, the UCC itself is an integral part of the Constitution, and therefore, it cannot be unconstitutional in any way. Hence the provisions of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution will also apply to the UCC, meaning that the protection afforded to the tribal areas through the Autonomous District Councils with regards to their ability to make laws relating to marriage and inheritance in paras 3(b) and 3(c) of the Sixth Schedule and the tribal areas through the provision of Parliament para 12A(b) of the Sixth Schedule, shall also apply to the UCC.

Fifthly, it is the fact that no draft of the UCC has even been presented, which means that in effect, we are merely debating the idea of UCC without any content or substance. This is like putting the cart before the horse. Lastly, and most importantly, the UCC can bring equality to many disadvantaged groups, like women and children. For example, why should Muslim women suffer under forced polygamy even while remaining monogamous themselves? We cannot say that such suffering is condoned in the name of secularism. I believe that all conscientious Muslims will

agree that there must be a remedy in the Court in case such customs result in the violation of the Fundamental Rights of any woman, such as equality before the law and the protection of life and personal liberty, which then results in the deprivation of social and economic freedom of any citizen.

Therefore, based on the above considerations, we can see that the UCC is not binding on any state, even if passed by the Parliament. But a UCC can serve as a guiding principle to the states in securing the social and economic freedom of every citizen. We have also seen that the principle of the UCC is rooted in Fundamental Rights and freedom of the individual, and not to infringe on the religious freedoms of any community, or to impose the ideals of one community on another community, but to allow for a reform in such customs which violate the social and economic freedom of a citizen.

Thus, in this end, a draft UCC should be prepared, with thorough deliberation of all communities to arrive at a common basic agreement to ensure that no citizen is deprived of his or her personal liberty and social or economic freedom by ensuring that a remedy exists in case such religious and social customs are wrong.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that UCC is the embodiment of the Fundamental Rights and freedom of the individual, and not to infringe on the religious freedoms of any community, or to impose the ideals of one community on another community, but to allow for a reform in such customs which violate the social and economic freedom of a citizen. In view of the above considerations, it may be said that the present divisive narrative on the UCC does not reflect any government attempt by any political party, on either side of the issue, to skew the facts regarding the history and principle of the UCC. But since no draft UCC has been presented, it is not clear if the present government is even attempting to do this, in spite of the pollaring narrative. So, with all of the aforementioned facts, the question remains: is UCC

good or harmful? The UCC is good in that it can bring about a uniform protection of individual rights and personal liberties that could otherwise not be afforded due to religious sensitivities. It is a truth that those norms, customs, and religious and social customs are no exceptions. A religious tradition or social custom can be used for abused to deprive a citizen of his or her social and economic freedom. The UCC need not necessarily outlaw a religious tradition or social custom. But a UCC may allow for an aggrieved person to seek remedy in a court of law, if that person is deprived of his or her social and economic freedom, in the name of a custom or tradition. In other words, UCC is good in that it may allow remedy to a person whose personal liberty is violated, that may not otherwise be possible due to religious sensitivities. An instance is that of a woman who may be forced into a polygamous marriage, which she is suffering from, in the name of religion, be left without a remedy. The Child Marriage Act, 2006, is an example of a law that was enacted to protect the rights of children, which may be violated by tradition.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that UCC is the embodiment of the Fundamental Rights and freedom of the individual, and not to infringe on the religious freedoms of any community, or to impose the ideals of one community on another community, but to allow for a reform in such customs which violate the social and economic freedom of a citizen. In view of the above considerations, it may be said that the present divisive narrative on the UCC does not reflect any government attempt by any political party, on either side of the issue, to skew the facts regarding the history and principle of the UCC. But since no draft UCC has been presented, it is not clear if the present government is even attempting to do this, in spite of the pollaring narrative. So, with all of the aforementioned facts, the question remains: is UCC

Attacks on Gandhi reveal a deeper crisis

By Jagdish Rattanani

Gandhi thought, institutions and the Mahatma himself are under unprecedented attack today. From positions of power in the government to poisoned minds among activists and a wide variety of loose cannons, Gandhi and his ideas are routinely run down and presented using narrow lenses designed to misrepresent and even denigrate the Father of the Nation. It is no surprise that Gandhians are agitated. But there is also a sense of despondency, fatigue and resignation at the ferocity of the attacks and the sheer volume of venom that is spewing out across media channels. What should Gandhians do? How should they respond?

Ironically, these were precisely the questions at the centre of a discussion for a conference that was planned and scheduled by Mahatma Gandhi himself to be held at Wardha on Feb. 02, 1948. The conference was postponed three days before that day -- to consolidate efforts in post-Independent India. Gandhi was assassinated three days before that conference, which then was rescheduled to March and carried the theme: Gandhi is gone. What should we do now? That conference from March 13-15, 1948 marked the birth of the Sarva Seva Sangh among those present were Prime Minister Jawahar Nehru, education minister Maulana Azad, Congress President Rajendra Prasad as the Chair, and those like Acharya J B Kripalani, J. C. Kumarappa, Jayaprakash Narayan, Vinoba Bhave, who spoke "with candour, self-criticism, and a refreshing objectivity that did not exempt even their martyred mentor," as an account in the book "Gandhi is Gone. Who Will Guide Us Now" (Editor: Anand Kulkarni, published by Permanent Black) put it. Sarda Vallabhbhai Patel was to attend but died due to ill health. The Sarva Seva Sangh would keep away from party politics and work with the aim to usher in a social order based on truth and non-violence if refused by human and democratic values which were free from exploitation, tyranny, immorality or injustice and which offer enough scope for human personality development" in the words of its constitution.

It is this Sarva Seva Sangh and its facilities in Varanasi that are now fighting a demolition notice in the High Court against the local administration and the railways who claim to have the title of the land of the Sangh sites. The notice disallows the institution's records and assertions of the of validity of sale deeds in a proceeding dated 15 May 1960, 09 May 1961 and 20 May 1970 that show the land was bought from the government. The demolition notices and the dies filed for the actual razing have come up with lightning speed, quite unlike the way the government has been acting in the past. The chief highlight of the member's id is "the plight and the threat Gandhian organisations are facing today". As he put it: "Sarva Seva Sangh in Varanasi is under attack. We are doing everything to save it. If the richness of its history, the purity of its intention (truth in public life) and the galaxy

of leaders who got together to give the impetus that became the organisation could not sustain themselves from moving to demolish Sarva Seva Sangh buildings, then almost no one from among those left of the Gandhian movement can be considered safe.

There is no question that this anti-Gandhi doctrine is despicable. Every effort must be made to resist it. Deep, rich and evolved thought that nurtures the best of us and speaks to our heritage and ethos is being brought to a level that lowers the stature of the Gandhian movement. It is spewing out across media channels. What should Gandhians do? How should they respond? The question that is the question stung us in 2023: the only difference is that "our" government is now accused of the same strategy, of fostering disharmony and creating divisions that strike at the root of Gandhian thinking and fill up the air with the question over a 75-year journey tells us a lot about us as a people and about the Gandhian movement. But don't look good. We can and must blame the powers that be, those that shape the narrative and fill up the air with hours of artifice and social media buzzes to sell the idea that Gandhi is not our real hero. But there is little dispute that as the Gandhians of an earlier generation aged and moved on, there has been a lack of new energy (barring a few exceptions) to build Gandhian thinking and offer it to a new generation for a new world. The Gandhians of the youth mentored Gandhi's messages for a formal exam but never really internalised it. They accepted the thinking, let alone internalising it. The charge of paying obeisance to Gandhi while disregarding all that he said and stood for continued to play out in the Indian mind. In this modernity, more of a liberalisation and an economic boom riding on consumerism as a key motto, the Gandhians recently but the trendline has been in the direction of the slide for Gandhian thinking. Some trace it back to the rejection of Gandhi's ideas in 'Hind Swaraj' by Nehru. Today, violence is rampant, bedded in the Indian State, increasing exponentially over the years. Justice is difficult to get, particularly for the underprivileged. Power speaks and the reality is that truth can be crushed with this power, at least in the short run. The latest examples is the political shenanigans of the Maharashtra Nationalist Congress Party in Maharashtra, where those who are called Congress scams and under investigation have been welcomed to a BJP. The defector Ajit Pawar has been honored as the Deputy Chief Minister while others from his side take on ministerial berths.

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

Letters to the Editor

UCC a problematic issue

Editor, The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) has been raked up every now and then in the past decades, but this time, the tone of the push is aggressive. The call for the UCC takes strength from one of the Directive Principles of State Policy under Article 44 of the Constitution of India. Presently, citizens are governed by various personal laws related to customs, marriage, divorce, inheritance etc. The UCC aims at replacing this across all religious communities with a common law.

My personal opinion is that this will infringe on the personal choice of the

individual, which is not only influenced by religious belief, but also by what the religion's scriptures provide for in day-to-day living. The underlying threat, which is obvious, is that this will bring closer to fruition the right-wing ideology of one nation, one religion, one language and one custom, destroying the hailed diversity of this great country and bringing further suspicion, division, and friction among the communities.

Code, it does not solve the larger issues facing the rest of the country's communities. We can't live in isolation. And what guarantee is there that tomorrow it will not be extended to our tribals (who in any case, are minuscule in numbers and together elect only a few MPs)? And should we Northeast tribals be so myopic and say we are fine with it so long as the UCC is exempted for us? This is our country, and we live in it, and what happens outside the boundaries of the Northeast area will have its impact and effect us.

will prevail? Will they be governed by the respective Hindu, Muslim, Christian personal laws or the UCC, especially when they are outside the Northeast? Won't this be discriminatory in nature where, for example, a Christian, Muslim or Hindu tribal is exempted from the UCC while other Christians, Muslims and Hindus will be governed by the UCC? And if territorially applicable, won't the northeastern tribals be boxed in within the north-eastern areas, and once out of these areas, the UCC will prevail? Perhaps, the policy of segregation and isolation suit some people!

I leave these questions related to this contentious UCC to the legal experts and the state political leaders. Yours etc., Eugene D Thomas, Via email

Action against rude highway toll collectors

Editor, Highway driving is not always pleasurable. The 4-lane tollgate takes a toll on travellers on a regular basis. This Sunday was no exception. I was one of the witnesses to that. While returning from Guwahati, the toll collectors brought our car to a halt. Despite the rule book of the NHAI not outlining proper job employee hiring procedures? Why are they not strictly followed? There's something fishy here, otherwise, such disrespectful people would not have been recruited. I believe the state administration should bring a case before the concerned officers of the NHAI. No traveler should be inconvenienced

they spoke to the driver very "disrespectfully". What we experienced is not an isolated incident. Do such instances not leave a bitter taste for our visiting tourists right at the entry point to the state? This is a matter of serious concern. Here I would blame the negligence of the National Highways Authority of India. Why do they hire such "impolite" jerks for the job? This is totally unbecoming and unprofessional. Does the rule book of the NHAI not outline proper job employee hiring procedures? Why are they not strictly followed? There's something fishy here, otherwise, such disrespectful people would not have been recruited. I believe the state administration should bring a case before the concerned officers of the NHAI. No traveler should be inconvenienced

Of accident-prone roads

Editor, Now that the monsoon is well and truly on, it is anticipated and accepted that our roads be riddled with potholes. However, the road from Lapang to Rynah till MES junction is a nightmare which is an odd one. One wonders as to how the road can be dug in the middle to lay cables and be hurriedly covered with stones and soil, thereby causing untold misery to commuters who travel that road. Coupled with the rain, the red soil that fills the road is often so slippery that

many times drivers of two wheelers find themselves skidding off the road into the path of oncoming vehicles. That school children are often caught in these situations is a disaster waiting to happen. Pray who then will be accountable: the cable layers or the department entrusted with maintaining our roads. How long can we silently bear the brunt of these untold miseries that we face in our daily commute. I hope the powers that be do not wait for a disaster or a tragic event before they start swinging into action.

Yours etc., Anon Warri, Via email

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

"Suffering is the positive element in this world, indeed it is the only link between this world and the positive."

—Franz Kafka

The Shillong Times

Vol No 155 No. 211 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 6, 2023

Mukroh a forgotten saga

IT is a common feature of Meghalaya that every killing incident in the borders with Assam where people of Meghalaya are invariably killed have been forgotten. Those killed are poor villagers and the relatives they leave behind do not have the voice or the political clout to raise a political storm. Mukroh was never in the agenda of political parties and it never featured in the last election. Today even the Shillong-based pressure groups that had raised a minor storm in November 22 last year have moved on to other agenda. The only group that raised their voices were the Hyniewtep National Youth Awakening (HNYM) who took a different route and started arming the villagers as a defence mechanism. This is at best symbolic because bows and arrows are weapons of the past. But some group or the other always appears to take up issues but abandon them halfway when some other more politically populist issue comes up.

Meghalaya's problem is that it does not have a thriving civil society. Its people depend on pressure groups to take up their issues. On their own they are unable to take up any issue including those that affect them directly. This is a problem that haunts Meghalaya. There is no group that can withstand political pressure and will not succumb to it. Not that Mukroh is the only border issue that besets Meghalaya. There are issues in every border area with Assam. The ongoing border talks between the chief ministers of Assam and Meghalaya had become an election issue in 2022-23 but are now almost forgotten with intermittent statements from one or the other political party. But none of them have pursued any issue with the consistency that is needed.

Those families in Mukroh that had lost their family members to the gunshots fired by Assam Police also happen to be among the poorest. They were given some preliminary assistance from governments of Assam and Meghalaya but when a breadwinner dies the tragedy is felt over a long time. Governments have washed their hands by a one-time payment. No one really cares about the welfare of the children of the deceased and whether those kids will be able to continue with their studies or have dropped out of school. Meghalaya is in that sense not a welfare state. It is an uncaring state that does not care for its citizens. There is a clear division between the affluent few and the growing army of the poor. Governments run on autopilot without a heart for the poor. Was this why Meghalaya was born!

Letters to the Editor

Not a Government of the People

I would like to draw attention to a Public Notice published on page 3 of your newspaper dated July 5, 2023 issued by the Secretary, one man inquiry commission under Justice R.K. Phukan (Retd.) looking into circumstances leading to the firing that resulted in the loss of six lives at Mukroh.

The notice inter alia mentions that the government of Meghalaya has been directed to produce witnesses, documents, etc., but there has been no representation from the Meghalaya side. Neither documents nor witnesses have been produced before the Inquiry Commission. On the other hand, as per the above public notice, the Commission has already

obtained written statements from various witnesses including the Government of Assam, district and police administrations and aggrieved persons, etc., and also recorded their evidence.

Although the government of Meghalaya has utterly failed in its duty towards its citizens, the above Commission in the interest of justice has now given one more opportunity "to interested and willing persons having knowledge of the incident to give before the Commission."

Is this not a case of the Government failing its citizens yet again? Why has the Government failed to represent itself? Why were

Manipur Conflict: Echoes of History & Perils of False Narratives

By Lalminhang Kipgen

The outbreak of the Manipur conflict over two months ago between the majority Meitei community and the minority Kuki-Zo tribal community of the state has claimed at least 135 lives and over 1000 individuals are left injured. The repercussions have been profound, displacing more than 70,000 people who now find shelter in about 273 refugee camps, or other parts of the country. The conflict has caused a deep demographic and geographic division between the warring groups, with the Kuki-Zo fleeing to the hills while Meiteis move in the opposite direction. It is within this backdrop of turmoil that Samrat Chaudhury,

of the world to incite passion, hatred and xenophobia in the Meitei community has recently bestowed the term 'narcoterrorism' upon the tribals. The origin of this term can be traced back to May 30 when a self-proclaimed NGO called People's Alliance for Peace and Progress, Manipur filed a PIL in the Supreme Court, urging the government to take action against 'Kuki militants' engaged in 'narcoterrorism'. This move followed Chief of Defence Staff Anil Chauhan's assertion that the violence in Manipur has nothing to do with counter-insurgency op-

erations but is due to a clash between ethnicities. The Constituting Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), the apex body of civil society organizations representing Manipur's Meitei majority, has declared a 'national war' against the 'Chin-Kuki narcoterrorists'. Home define 'narcoterrorism' as engaging in illegal drug trade and armed struggle (insurgency). It becomes undeniable that these issues, along with rampant corruption, have plagued Manipur for a long time, cutting across ethnic lines. It would be far from the truth to attribute these problems solely to a specific community.

Manipur is highly vulnerable to illicit drug trade due to its porous border with Myanmar, the world's second-largest producer of opium. Additionally, socio-economic challenges, including high unemployment rates and limited economic opportunities, have contributed to Manipur's history of poppy cultivation. Poppy is cultivated by people living in the hills, including Kukis and Nagas. When considering individuals arrested for illegal drug trade, the past five years indicate that 59% are valley-based Meitei speakers, while 34% are Kuki-Chin. Even top politicians in the state have been implicated in the illegal drug trade. A notable case involved a decorated police officer, Thanaujiam Bhrinda, who alleged pressure from Chief Minister N Biren Singh to release a drug lord named Lhukhosei Zau, whom she had apprehended with drugs worth Rs 27 crore in the international market. In protest against the non-conviction of the drug lord, the police officer returned her zalamny award.



Author of 'Northeast India: A Political History', draws a poignant comparison between Manipur's plight and the tumultuous aftermath of World War I and the phenomenon of 'unmixing of people'.

Regarding the connection of any offending content, but it is a common principle that established democracies should frame policies and regulations rooted in fairness and natural justice, and not impose undue curbs on freedom of speech and expression. Section 69A of the IT Act, which sets out the power to issue blocking orders, was upheld by the Supreme Court in Shreya Singhal (2015) mainly on the grounds that it came with adequate procedural safeguards.

Yours etc.,
Md Tauqeer Ahmad
Chennai

Why this indifference?

Editor,

The news roads in Shillong are in a pathetic state. Some roads leading to localities beyond the Shillong Municipal Board have become killers. People riding on two wheels face a greater danger. Their wheels sink into the potholes

that have become characteristic of Shillong today. It is disheartening to note that governance in this blessed state has turned from bad to worse with each passing year. No one seems to care about the fact that basic requirements for leading a decent life are not available in this state. Politics has become the worst game played in this state where the citizens are victims of this foul play. But what can we say about a state where there is never any protest over issues of development? It is only politically relevant issues that give brownie points to political parties that become popular. We the public are dispensable rubbish. We are dismissed.

Yours etc.,
Paul Kharkongor,
Via email

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

Sharad Pawar faces toughest battle in retaining NCP under his fold Political standing of Maratha strongman at stake before 2024 LS polls

By Sushil Kutty

How should Sharad Pawar be addressed? What is his status in India's political spectrum? Is he still Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) Chief and patriarch of the combined Opposition? The NCP founder has promised to restore the mangled NCP to its pre-split glory in three months flat. Isn't that acknowledgment that the NCP split is full and final? Uncle Pawar and Nephew Pawar we cut from the same cloth and it is unlikely either of them will back off at the insistence of the other.

The elder Pawar is, however, in a position of weakness post-split. His statements betray him. For example, Sharad Pawar says the Congress should hold the Lof's post because the Congress has the maximum number of MLAs in the MVA. Isn't that admission that Aji Pawar's NCP has more NCP MLAs than Sharad Pawar's NCP?

Shouldn't that automatically give party 'symbol' and party 'flag' to Aji Pawar's NCP? Sharad Pawar says "as per my information, Congress has the maximum number (MLAs) currently and if they ask for it (Lof post) then it's a valid demand." Does of war, let's talk peace". Ironically, the PM has yet to speak a word about the 'civil war' happening right in his own country.

The propagation of false narratives intended to incite passion and hatred against a minority community has played a significant role in the violence witnessed in Manipur. It is important to acknowledge the role played by CM N Biren Singh in this context. On June 11, the CM advocated for peace by stating, "Jo ho gaya so ho gaya. Let's give peace a chance." However, merely a day later, he characterized the conflict as one between the government and illegal immigrants.

This is deeply concerning, given his prior use of terms such as 'outsiders', 'illegals', or 'foreigners' to describe the Kukis. This follows his failure to portray the conflict as one between security forces and 'Kuki terrorists', based on his own fabricated account of security forces killing 40 Kuki militants on May 28.

To comprehend the motive behind the smear campaign targeting the Kukis, it is imperative to examine the underlying cause of the conflict. In a revealing interview with 'The Wire', Meitei MLA Nilambikan Singh Sarangi, Chairman of the Committee on Privileges and Ethics in the Manipur Legislative Assembly, stated that the conflict primarily revolves around land. It becomes evident that labelling Kukis as 'terrorists', 'narcoterrorists', 'illegal immigrants', or 'foreigners' serves no purpose other than undermining their legitimacy, subjecting them to discrimination and providing a justification for their dispossession from their rightful land.

(Lalminhang Kipgen, PhD, is an Associate Lecturer at Arden University, Berlin and can be reached at kkipgen@arden.ac.uk)

that not validate Aji Pawar's claim on the NCP? Sharad Pawar now says many of the NCP MLAs who joined Aji Pawar in the BJP camp have been calling him up and telling him they have 'given up their ideology and that they would declare their stand at the right time.' This is standard defence of the losing side in any dispute. The best in Sharad Pawar minus power is as helpless and hopeless as Aji Pawar without power.

The next question is, will Aji Pawar and his eight cohorts be able to avoid disqualification under the anti-defection law? Sharad Pawar's take on this is not a confrontational stance. He believes in the "misguided youth" principle and trusts his own experience of handling such predicaments. The octogenarian, with 50 years of political experience, says he doesn't believe in a "show of strength" because strength has the habit of going up and going down.

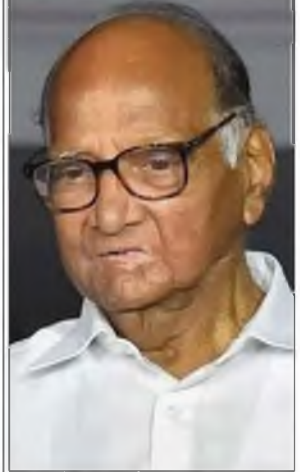
And he has restored balance in his party many times before, too. In Sharad Pawar's book, those who have left the NCP will lose in 2024, and there is no two ways about that. Sharad Pawar is speaking the language of a man of the Opposition. It does not matter from which party, and who, he is speaking. Sharad Pawar is the common refrain is to come 2024. "The people will vote to defeat Narendra Modi" - that

the 2024 battle will be "people of India versus Narendra Modi", it does not matter how many political parties are awarded and split.

Both vanquished supreme Sharad Pawar and the disqualified Congress MP Rahul Gandhi believe it will be a "people versus Narendra Modi" in the 2024 general elections. The defectors of Aji Pawar and his cohorts including Praful Patel and Chagan Bhujbal does not count. Irrespective of engineered defections and manufactured splits, the granddaddy of the anti-Narendra Modi sentiment, anti-BJP public mood will sweep everything out of the path.

So, Sharad Pawar has reverted to the old ways. He is meeting people face to face and when the supreme leader talks one-on-one with the grassroots, it is a different kind of equation. The chemistry is instant and the effect remains. "Around 80 per cent of the total people who came to meet me (on July 3) were youngsters. These youngsters will work for the secular ideology and strengthen Maharashtra with whatever it takes."

There's a feeling Aji



Sharad Pawar, Chhagan Bhujbal, Praful Patel, DilipPatil, Hazan Musafir, Dhananjay Munde, Dharmarababa Aram, Aji Pawar in the BJP camp have been calling him up and telling him they have 'given up their ideology and that they would declare their stand at the right time.'

Sharad Pawar's political standing and public meetings. It is a feeling similar to what happened after Ek Nath Shinde's defection with the bulk of Shiv Sena MLAs. Chief Minister Ek Nath Shinde is now apprehensive and scared to hold the overdue Mumbai municipal elections.

On July 3, Sharad Pawar's daughter and NCP working president, Supriya Sule expelled Praful Patel, Sanjay Tankare and Aji Pawar from the NCP for "anti-party activities." With that, the battle for the party begins in earnest. At stake is the party symbol and the party flag, not to speak of the party name.

And at stake also will be Sharad Pawar's political status and acronym. Sharad Pawar is considered the grand old patriarch of Indian politics with even Prime Minister Narendra Modi accepting Sharad Pawar as his "political guru". It is the same "chela-shishya", the same Narendra Modi, who called Sharad Pawar in the back and the aging Maharashtra strongman is in no mood to forget or forgive. (IPA Service)

"Whenever nature leaves a hole in a person's mind, she generally plasters it over with a thick coat of self-conceit." — Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The Shillong Times

Vol 90, No 267 SHILLONG, MIZOAM, JULY 7, 2023

Urinating on a Tribal

WE never tire of boasting about India's ancient "aarsha bharat sanskaar" and more prominently the Hindutva brigade under the RSS umbrella. Juxtapose this with the "urination" incident in Madhya Pradesh, where a "representative" of the local BJP MLA peed on a hapless tribal labourer. The heinous nature of such an act cannot simply be covered up by an outreach by chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who invited the labourer to his official residence, draped him in a shawl and washed his feet in a "show" of penance. The urination atrocity is demonstrative of the larger society's ugly underbelly: a kind of barbarity that is widely prevalent across states and worse, in the Hindi belt. Inapless humans are treated worse than cattle.

Chouhan has been running Madhya Pradesh repeatedly for several years. The state is notorious for its feudalistic culture mixed with acts of lawlessness and dacoity. The media there has been in a captive form, its personnel enjoying the patronage of the establishment and having no commitment to the society. The social media that exposed the despicable urination act on the tribal man could, however, not be "purchased" with government largesse as it is composed of a large army of ordinary individuals or activists across the spectrum. In normal course, this would have been dismissed as just another intemperate or condemnable act and the matter put to rest. But, the chief minister crawled on his knees this time to wash the feet of the poor labourer for the obvious reason that Madhya Pradesh is at the doorsteps of the assembly elections and votes of the SC-ST communities are important for him and his party to win it and retain power. After performing this "escape act" and self-publicizing the visuals of him hosting the labourer at his official residence, Chouhan could be trusted to give a decent burial to the whole matter.

The case filed against the perpetrator, or the police demolishing a portion of his house on the contention it was illegally built, were all for public consumption. The BJP "representative" might face no serious repercussions for his notorious act as has been the trend with most cases of atrocities against those in the lower rungs of the society. The RSS that lords over the nation's ruling party is well within its rights to concentrate on campaigns like Ghar Vapsi or on several mundane topics unmindful of what's happening right under its nose. But, the question is who will clean up the Augean stables. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two terms in office were marked by a disinterest in changing India for the better in most respects.

Letters to the Editor

Verified badge vs Safe Digital Space

Editor, Not very long ago, Twitter and Meta rolled out verified badges: globally, including in India. It was only recently that the country's social media users started to cling to the opportunity of having the badge next to their usernames. This badge holds a lot of value. As the very hint of a social media ecosystem, well-known personalities, like actors, spokespersons, politicians, singers, big organizations, government officials, journalists, and many others, are the privileged ones to get the badge. It was a matter of pride; and the presence of this badge makes the account, whether public or private, legitimate or authentic. According to history, Twitter first uses the blue tick in June 2009, followed by Google+ in 2011, Facebook in 2012, Instagram in 2014, and Pinterest in 2015. Once a person has 100,000 or more subscribers on YouTube, they can request a verified on badge. It also includes an "official artist" logo for musicians and bands, and Google just

added blue ticks for Gmail accounts. The question for the hoi polloi is, Is this a matter of content? Will the common people benefit from it? Does this benefit help in certain ways? Is the blue tick fee a way of extorting people's money? Why is there a need for everyone to have access to the badge? Who should subscribe and who should not? Is Rs 699 worth spending? Any social media user can subscribe to it and unsubscribe as per their will. Everyone has the right to do whatever they feel is right for them. We live in a world of digital technology where even a toddler who can hardly utter a word or two has an account on Instagram or not Facebook. Today's world is totally different: a friend's Humpty Dumpty fall in a schoolyard is being viewed by hundreds of other digital strangers. Every move we make in the twenty-first century is known to at least a hundred or thousand people; keep in mind, they are simply virtual acquaintances if not friends. We shoot our moments, release them online, and

G20 meet in Shillong: So much to learn

By Patricia Mukhim

There are many who ask what does India stand to gain from heading the G20 Presidency? Well, for one, the members of the G20 have in this period travelled the length and breadth of India and know this country better than at any other time in the past. It is true that not all the delegates visited the same states but nevertheless more people in the world today know about Meghalaya than at any time in the past. In their visits to places beyond Shillong, foreign and Indian delegates will witness the clouds coming home to roost and carry those memories. However, they will also observe the flip sides such as our lack of capacity for managing waste at tourist destinations, although I am quite sure that the sites which the delegates will be visiting will be cleaned up before they land there. And that is perhaps one reason why we don't find solutions to our problems. We hide our flaws instead of calling for help. When the Global Gateway team of the European Union was here they had stated that they have expertise in waste management. We need to tap on that expertise and be upfront about our problems and challenges. Let's cry out for help and learn from countries that have solved the intractable problem of garbage. Let's not pretend that everything is alright with our world.

For Meghalaya today the most delicate problem is garbage - which constitutes disposable plastic bags, plastic packets, aluminium food packages used by companies selling potato chips and a host of junk food. There are people who dispose of even electronic waste like mobile chargers etc., along with their garbage. Here we need to understand that non-biodegradable garbage is a modern problem. Hence it will need modern solutions. Traditional knowledge systems have nothing to offer in terms of solving our modern-day garbage problems. In the past we did not use plastic carry bags and had very few plastic utensils. We did not have the concept of bottled drinking water. Now plastic water bottles are ubiquitous in hotels and restaurants because we have more faith in bottled water than in filtered water served by hotels/restaurants. Only a few bio-sensitising rants in Shillong have kept bottled water out of bounds. It is impossible to gauge the

course the ubiquitous clouds. But he also said that a colleague of his who is from Meghalaya had told him that if there is ever any need to look for any solution (I presume environmental-ecological solutions) to any problem then Meghalaya is the place to turn to. Really? And how does Meghalaya qualify to be that solution offering space? Of course Mr Saran had to be kind to the host state but it's a little over the top to suggest that Meghalaya has solutions to the problems of the country. We are groping for answers on how to manage our garbage; to revive our rivers; to regenerate our highly polluted rivers. Sadly the G20 team will not be taken to East Jaintia Hills to witness the devastating effects of coal mining on the surrounding hills. At least two rivers the Lunak and Lukha rivers there. Or a visit to Shella to see how limestone is mined in the most unsustainable way. That is the disadvantage of being part of a government which is not committed to the environment. You will not see the problem! You will only be given a taste of the carefully curated sights and sounds.

Of the many speeches in the course of the day, I felt that the Chief Secretary, DP Wahlang was the most grounded and a locally relevant example of climate change. He said 35 years ago he knew what a refrigerator was in Meghalaya. Now that has become an essential part of every home to keep food fresh because temperatures are rising. Not only that. Now offices have fans and fancy air conditioners too. Wahlang also raised an important point - the said places in Meghalaya have not managed to produce oranges plenty now have to buy oranges. On many occasions when he has visited those orange growing regions one noticed that the earth around the trees was dry and desiccated. When I asked the farmers if they ever added organic or any kind of manure or fertilizer to the trees after the fruits were harvested, they replied in the negative. Without caring for the fruit trees how do farmers expect to reap a continuous harvest? But isn't this what the Horticulture Department is for? Also, the orange trees have since several years

been infected by an ailment following which they die a natural death. Again, one wonders what the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) is doing on this front. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said solar energy is the way forward because thermal energy leaves indelible carbon footprints. He said someone in Delhi recently told him that the Arctic would melt by 2040. What was jarring about the Chief Minister's speech is his defence of coal mining followed by an assumptive statement that 'lakhs and lakhs' of people are affected by the ban on coal mining. Why? We need a reality check here. The ban on coal mining has only hit those with deep pockets and they are in the ministry. No one has had of starvation after the ban on coal mining. So what's the way forward? Don't we all have to practise what we preach at these elevated platforms?

I was impressed by one speaker - Olga Chelianskaya - in the panel on Scaling Nature-Based Solutions For Synergising Biodiversity and Climate Action. Chelianskaya is Founding Director of the Centre for Sustainable Development, UNICIT, France. She touched on an important subject that needs to be seriously considered which is the need to supply cities and regions in climate change adaptation and mitigation with locally relevant solutions. Engineering solutions are capital sinks and cannot be a sustainable solution. However, citizens must raise their voices to demand traffic decongestion and to be safer on the streets. Also cities must decongest by creating other hubs and parks and avoid over-concentration in a single city centre for instance. Also important was the presentation by Smriti Bhattacharya of SEWA who spoke of how village women were given alternatives to firewood by way of bio-gas which is provided by two coxes for each household. In Meghalaya in the winter months, villagers have a community tree cutting programme where firewood for the entire year is cut and stored at every household. Think of the number of trees that are cut for firewood. Do we in Meghalaya have an alternative to this? It's a question we have to brainstorm on and perhaps get ideas from other states and developing countries. All in all quite a lot of learning for one day!

users who verify their accounts verified is the only way out because it protects their accounts from the risk of getting hacked. There are several instances and cases that have evolved in the digital world that have ruined the lives of many because of fake accounts. Many have lost contact with their friends, others have been looted in different ways, and the list continues. What Mark and Elon did with their platforms is not really a matter of debate and is definitely a bane or a boon for many users. They have, in a way, addressed this negative debated digital problem in digital space but rolled it out to consumers in a bad way. The perks of being a subscriber are many. For example, if you are a twitter blue subscriber, you get: ✓ A verified blue checkmark. ✓ The ability to post longer Tweets and videos. ✓ Reach and engagement. ✓ The ability to cancel a Tweet before it is sent. ✓ A stream of Top Articles about topics you follow and the people they follow. ✓ The ability to alter some Tweets during the first 30 minutes, and many

Modi's big claim in US on religious freedom in India proven wrong

Left and democratic forces have to mobilise to defend the minorities

By R Arun Kumar

All the claims made by Prime minister Narendra Modi on the absence of discrimination based on caste, creed, religion, age or geographic location in India, during his rare interaction with the media in the US were immediately proven wrong. A spate of attacks on religious minorities centring around Eid and the overt or covert protection to the perpetrators of such attacks by the State, sharply brings to focus the huge gap between the claims and deeds of the BJP government. Barely 24 hours since the PM's claims, on June 24, a major of Indian Army killed his men into a mosque in Zaldora village in Pulwama district, Kashmir and forced the people to chant, 'Jai Shri Ram'. Allegedly, they had also vandalized Jamia Masjid, the largest mosque in this south Kashmir valley, trampling on the right to religious freedom. A detachment of a secular institution like the Army acting in such a partisan manner, violating the Constitution, speaks volumes about the erosion of State institutions under the current ruling dispensation.

While Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was busy defending Modi from the former US President Obama's criticism and putting up a case for the government's policies of tolerance, a youth was lynched (June 25) 50 kms away from Mumbai on the ostensible reason that he was carrying beef. This is the second such incident taking place in the same area - between Mumbai and Nashik - in a short span of 15-days. In both these incidents, it was Pasmanda Muslims who were attacked, exposing the duplicity of RSS-BJP, which are trying hard to project themselves as champions

of the Pasmandas' interests. The victims are daily labourers carrying meat and vegetables, and come from a poor background. They were attacked by a group of 10-15 self-proclaimed 'gau rakshaks', who moved under the banner, Rashtriya Bhyantra Dal.

In yet another example of the impact of the Sangh Parivar's ideology on the government machinery and the deepening religious bias, the Maharashtra Police have booked a case on the victims under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, while the fact is that they were not carrying animals. Under the Shinde-Fadnis government, the vigilantes have been further emboldened. The result is, from carrying out attacks, gau rakshaks have now graduated to murders - a first in Maharashtra.

Incidentally, two days after the second incident in the Speaker of the Maharashtra legislative assembly issued a directive to the police (which he has no authority to do) asking them not to harass cow vigilantes under 'false charges'. This in itself shows how involved they are in throwing their weight behind 'gau rakshaks' and using extra-constitutional positions to ensure their protection. The alacrity with which such lynchings are taking place across the country is worrisome. Few days after the incident in Maharashtra, there was another attack ear-

ried out on the eve of Eid in Bihar's Saran district. Here a 55-year-old disabled Muslim driver who was carrying animal bones to a nearby factory was lynched to death. These bones are meant to be used in the manufacture of medicines in a factory, which has been running there for the last 60 years. In Uttarakhnd, after the targeting of Muslim shopkeepers in Purulia, forcing them to close their shops and leave town, the remaining Muslims are still being hounded. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad directed Muslims not to gather and offer a major of Indian Army killed his men into a mosque in Zaldora village in Pulwama district, Kashmir and forced the people to chant, 'Jai Shri Ram'. Allegedly, they had also vandalized Jamia Masjid, the largest mosque in this south Kashmir valley, trampling on the right to religious freedom. A detachment of a secular institution like the Army acting in such a partisan manner, violating the Constitution, speaks volumes about the erosion of State institutions under the current ruling dispensation.

"Spreading religious hatred is now no longer confined to the fringe. When people like Himanta Biswas Sharma, the chief minister of Assam say they would 'prioritise taking care of the many Hussain Obamas in India', the distinction between 'fringe' and 'centre' ceases to exist. He makes it amply clear that Muslims are no more considered equals, but are only second-class citizens."

the many Hussain Obamas in India', the distinction between 'fringe' and 'centre' ceases to exist. He makes it amply clear that Muslims are no more considered equals, but are only second-class citizens. As the above discussed incidents happened around the celebration of Eid and they are not coincidental. Whether it is Hindu festivals or Muslim festivals, the attacks carried out by the Hindutva forces are intended to deliver a chilling message to the minorities - 'you have got no rights and to survive, you have to act according to our dictates. Nothing is going to protect you'. It is a deliberate policy of the RSS-BJP to immovably polarise the society and reap political dividends. As the elections approach, such activities gather more pace. Using State power, they are spreading their ideological influence through various sections of bureaucracy and officials and making them part to their cause. The prime minister's utterances on democracy and tolerance to cater to the international audience, cannot make these attacks on minorities. The defence of democracy and secularism requires that every attack on the minorities must be opposed and resisted. The Left and democratic forces must necessarily work for a pan-India mobilisation against the violent enclaves of the fascist Hindutva forces. (IPA Service)

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

"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning."
— Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 44, No. 326 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 8, 2023

Opposition rendered immobile

A Congress MLA has been given the Leader of Opposition (LO) with a rider perhaps. Ever since the MLA assumed that position he has had nothing but words of praise for the government. He even lauded the efficiency with which the police are functioning and this after he attended the State Security Commission meeting for the first time. Perhaps the LO has forgotten that the High Court has been rapping the police in the knuckles for the illegal mining and transportation of coal. But that is inevitable in a state where conflicts of interests have dominated politics. The same Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly is working in tandem with the NPP in the District Council where he is also a member. This half-hearted opposition role is going to cost the state heavily because the Opposition in the Assembly has now been effectively reduced to 10 MLAs. Perhaps the LO has trained himself to walk the tightrope. In a sense the LO has compromised on the principles of the Congress Party that are adhered to in the rest of the country. The Congress is virtually non-existent in Meghalaya. Perhaps the five Congress candidates who won recent elections did so on their own strength and therefore do not feel obliged to consult anyone for the moves they make and the decisions they take. It will be interesting to watch what moves the sitting Congress MP from Shillong Constituency makes and whether he will contest from the same party that he presides over.

Of the 36 constituencies that make up the Shillong Parliamentary Constituency, the Congress won in only 4 constituencies; the UDP has 12 MLAs, the NPP- 8 (plus the other 3 of MLAs of the PDF: that joined the NPP recently; hence 11) and VPP- 4. The others are small players with 2 MLAs each. Going by this strength the NPP and UDP both stand a strong chance of winning should they set up Lok Sabha candidates. If the NPP and UDP, the two allies in the present MDA-2 government, can decide to work together and set up a common candidate, that person is likely to win hands down. In the present scenario the sitting Congress candidate has no chance of making it to parliament in 2024 unless he makes it on his own steam and popularity and the work he has done. But politics being what it is, that seems unlikely.

The Congress has remained silent in the face of all that's not happening in the state. It has not said a word on the power scenario. Today only the VPP and TMC are playing their roles as the Opposition and calling out government lapses even though the Congress leader has been appointed the LO. This is a travesty that must be addressed especially in the light of the recent changes in the KJiAD.

Letters in the Editor

UCC should not be hurriedly implemented

Editor,
In Manipur schools have reopened after the 2-month long ethnic clashes. Will the issue of Uniform Civil Code (UCC) not again disturb the normal situation in Manipur? The Government has to decide whether peace in the State is a priority or UCC? It is the decision of the BJP to implement the UCC but the party cannot wish this like in two other promises of Ram Temple and abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir which form part of its core manifesto. The party may want to push through with the UCC with the same enthusiasm before the general elections of 2024 but it must recognise that the UCC is different because intricate processes of persuasion and negotiation must follow before deciding on the matter since it touches all citizens and reaches deep inside their ways of life for generations and also their personal spaces. It requires a patient engagement and intricate processes of per-

Circumspection at the Frontlines: Comforting the Pneuma during Conflict

By Jasajit Ashangbam

"You tremble, carcass? More if you knew where I am taking you. These were the lesser known but highly introspective words that the great general of Napoleonic France, Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne also known as Turenne, uttered to provoke himself when fear oozed inwardly and unto his psyche as he stood in the frontlines. One may have to enquire upon the homonetics elated within this string of words for it may sound counter-productive to taunt oneself in this manner at an initial reading. But try to understand the sight of blood oozing from the bodies of those who were once considered friends and now understood as foes, ensuing in a tantamount termination of men vastly alienated by ideology, only to be unified in death; what Turenne might have meant by this.

Etched beyond its superficial frontier prominence is the reminder towards a necessity: the necessity to take charge and have control when faced with fear, to overcome it and to prompt oneself if found in a state of furloughness, again and again, that fear was never, nor shall it ever be the master. And though the body may tremble, it makes no difference. The individual decides who the master is. Clearly, we understand from this assertion, at least a unilateral aspect of the psyche is there that associated to participate in the war. Panic stricken and yet the compulsion is earnestly heartfelt. If need be, one must be willing to chant what I would call Turenne's chorus, for that is the requirement in this hour of bloodshed.

However, war was never preached nor ketected in contemporary Manipur, at least outwardly. But when every daybreak is met with crestfallen apprehensions of death and shrapnel piercing one's frame, the same frame that each one of our own guardians once nurtured with utmost care and concern then one must stop to think. Before any venture, let alone a confrontation of this magnitude, the mother tenderly gnaws at the back of the palm of her child and sits on the head, as a ritualistic cementation of spiritualisation so that the child is no more desired upon the spiritual realm. This is the Meitei way of assuring deliverance from evil. Now imagine this happening at all four corners of the imperial valley, unbeknownst to the mother or her son, now a soldier by calling and not by choice, whether they would be fortunate enough to chance upon each other again in this walking life. The moment the son steps out of those doorways so familiar,

as well as objectives become the inconspicuous and neat concealment of heinous activities committed by those that they consider 'theirs'. On that account, every other evidence and scrutiny that does not prove beneficial to each one's cause are voiced as fabrications. Observing in a war, through the eyes of those that you hope to be saved by, neither you nor matter; nor does this conformity nor the other, carry any weight. Evidence and scrutiny that does not prove beneficial to each one's cause are voiced as fabrications. Observing in a war, through the eyes of those that you hope to be saved by, neither you nor matter; nor does this conformity nor the other, carry any weight. Evidence and scrutiny that does not prove beneficial to each one's cause are voiced as fabrications.

Secondly, looking at it from a metaphysical prism, it reveals a case of deliverance of the 'innocent' from the 'void', the lamb from the wolves. And allegorically speaking, it is the deliverance of 'Honjunahla', the daring lad from the Moirang Kangleim from the 'Saronigamri'. The emblem of all that is evil and foul. And if frailty is demarcated by uniqueness in their customs, laws, and rites for as laid out by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, that it should adhere to 'indications of primitive traits' and 'distinctive culture', this in itself is one of the many prima facie accounts of the linkage or traces of the Meiteis' profound rootedness in tribality. Whether entities of bigotry and prejudices within and outside the state find the circumstances being in contradiction to their imagined aspiration, that is a subject of the judiciary of federalism to decide. Furthermore, within a government, when a certain well-known delegate of the legislature bemoans the judiciary for the eruption of violence, knowing quite well that the faults and errors appear everywhere else but there, irrationally and more importantly, misperception surrounding the disorder intensifies, rather than simplifying it. Certain questions arise out of course of analysis of such cases as an analysis. For one, if the cause of the chaos is alleged to a particular judiciary, then why did the other judiciary apart from that one not do so? If the belief across all communities affected that even an ounce of sincerity in the method of investigation shall expose all instances, which a great deal of shadow has been cast upon until this day.

Now more than ever, there is great necessity in the moment of all that are affected to cease partaking in the carnage. Inhumanity cannot be condoned. Inhumanity shall not be justified. Riddled in identity politics, the individuals that bolster the group's identity need to critique as singular unique consciousness, not to be dictated nor influenced by speeches of hatred and bigotry. For Nietzsche once wrote, 'the snake which cannot cast its skin has to die. As with the animals which are prevented from changing their opinions; they cease to be minds.' And conclusively, let not one community project fear unto the other and vice versa. If not, Turenne's chorus shall echo indefinitely in the perimeters of the valley and hills. Let us pray for those that have been preyed upon.

Another scholar holds the view that the issue can no longer be in the cold storage and the opposition must spell out its stance on the matter. The issue cannot remain on the back burner, now that the election season is once again upon us and the many Opposition groups are searching for unity. Let each Opposition group spell out its position on UCC. The Muslim clergy has spoken in one word. And it is a big and firm no.

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

Round The States

By Insaq

Maha Shiva Oram Ideology in danger

Maharashtra sadly may end up having the dubious reputation of splitting political parties, or should it be said the honour would rest on the BJP instead. A year after the Shiv Sena broke into two factions with Eknath Sule joining the BJP, the NCP fattered in 1999, now shares the same fate. Since Ajit Pawar and eight of his colleagues joined the Shiv-BJP government on July 2, NCP supreme Shrihari Pawarists "am the president of NCP" and he would "work more effectively." Earlier said than done, as on July 5, NCP chief A. J. Patil met with only 18 MLAs. The NCP crisis will now be handled in Assembly and Election Commission which Aji has approached for the party name and symbol. The NCP is of course hitting back and draws attention to Narendra Modi recently calling the NCP as 'Natural Corrupt Party', and asking how will the BJP benefit from bringing NCP politicians into the Maharashtra government? Several of those who have joined are accused of corruption and are being investigated by Central probe agencies. More importantly, the NCP is questioning Aji and group about their social credentials and whether they disown the socialist and Aji's AICC General Secretary said, "There's one more option before us...the Supreme Court. The party will seek that option, because it's more convincing." Rahul ji is a fierce voice that takes the Modi government head-on. No force can silence him; the truth will triumph and jus-

Gujarat Says No To Rahul Plea

Two court verdicts, one on "Modi's conduct and another on 'abusive language against Prime Minister Modi' are noteworthy hitting headlines. The first is the infamous case which has led to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's disqualification as an MP. On Friday last, the Gujarat High Court dismissed the petition seeking a stay on his conviction in a criminal defamation case over his 'Modi surname' remark. Reading out the operative part of the judgment, the judge said the sessions court order refusing to grant a stay on his conviction earlier is "just and legal". Observing that the court is "an exception, he said no injustice will be caused to Gandhi if the conviction is not stayed." Congress is studying the verdict and its AICC General Secretary said, "There's one more option before us...the Supreme Court. The party will seek that option, because it's more convincing." Rahul ji is a fierce voice that takes the Modi government head-on. No force can silence him; the truth will triumph and jus-

No End To TN Row

Tamil Nadu Raj Bhawan refuses to let go. The show-down between Chief Minister Stalin and Governor Ravi is far from over, even after the latter had to withdraw his order dismissing Minister Senthil Balaji, arrested last month by the ED in the cash for jobs scam in 2015. On Tuesday last, Ravi refused to oblige the DMK government by sanctioning

prosecution against former AIADMK ministers saying, "With respect to BV Ramana and Dr C Vijaya Baskar, [gulfus scam] the cases have been investigated by CBI and these are under legal examination. Asregard DVAC case against KC Veeramani, the same couldn't be acted upon as government has to submit a duly authenticated report for further action." This response to Law Minister came in a 'release' after Regupathiyan letter to Ravi urged "no further delay" in the sanction and clearance of 13 Bills pending his exit. Complete silence on the latter. This despite, state BJP President Annamalai criticising Ravi's actions saying these are 'inadvertently helping DMK... a Governor shouldn't talk politics... Will party headquarters take note or is the Centre running with the hare and hunting with the hounds?'

MP, India's Shame!

The shocking incident of a man urinating on a tribal woman in Madhya Pradesh's Sidhi district should make heads hang in shame. The accused, Traveshi Shukla was arrested, his father's house partly demolished (illegal construction), NSA and provisions of SC/ST Act have been initiated against him, and Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was seen washing the feet of the tribal as an apology in a photo-op. Actions taken following the outrage after a 10 second video went viral on social media, though the incident reported to be 'several months old'. The Opposition rushed to condemn the inhuman outpouring 'he's your (BJP) MLA's said;

Not Sedition, Karnataka HC

In contrast to a sedition case against a school management for abusive words against Prime Minister Modi in January 2020, the Karnataka High Court on Thursday last said that while utterance of abusive words that prime minister should be hit with footwear is derogatory and irresponsible, it doesn't constitute sedition. Adding, however, that 'constructive criticism of government is permissible, but the constitutional functionaries cannot be insulted for having taken a policy decision, for which, certain section of people may have objection.' It quashed a case of sedition by New Town Police station, Bidar, against 4 management persons of Shaheen School, saying the ingredients of IPC's Section 153(A) (inciting disharmony between religious groups) are not found in the case. The case followed an FIR by an AHPV activist against a play by children against the state and NCRC. Noting the allegation that the play criticised government enactments and "if such enactments are enforced, the Muslims may have to leave the country," the court said it was enacted 'within the school premises. There are no words uttered by the children inciting people to resort to violence or create public disorder.' A lesson to remember for governments alike. --/INFA

Time to rework economics of filmmaking

By Vinod Miran

Looking at the first half of the year, January to June 2023, one would believe that the film industry has yet to come out of the Covid-19 lockdown effect. The films just don't seem to work. Nor do the top-billing stars.

Were it for the Covid-19 hangover, how does one explain the blockbuster success of *The Kashmir Files* and *The Kerala Story*? How does one account for the success of *Pathaan*, *Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar*, *Zara Hatke Zara Bachke*, and the last year's release *Drishyam 2*?

As against these successes, what explains the failure of such massively budgeted vehicles such as *Adipurush*, to cite the very recent example? Looks like the Hindi audience is not lured by films that are mainly made on computers with VFX!

Indians miss the human story, emotions, humour and music. Something closer to their heart, what they can identify with. The viewers want normal fun and entertainment in their films.

Of course, *Ramayana* is closest to most people but not the way it was presented in *Adipurush*. Just don't take your audience for granted. People are lured by their favourite stars initially, then by the film and its content.

So, it may be wise not to make your hero fly, kick 10 people in one go. Hollywood films are doing it and so are some of the South Indian films. Only, the South Indian films make sure they include family emotions and give the hero a cause for his flying kicks.

The operative word in the film industry is 'trend'. And the trend seems to be changing, veering towards stories that appeal to all, or what was referred to as a film with universal appeal. That is, a film that appeals to masses as well as classes, frontbenchers as well as the gentry and Hindi belt as well as the other assorted linguistic states of the country.

The 1950s, 60s and 70s had numerous hits every year. And all those films catered to audiences of all kinds all over the country. There are too many to list here. Of course, they also made action films and they were rated as B-grade cinema, made for a specific audience. More than the film and its action, what excited the viewer was the background sound of *dishoom... dishoom* in the yesteryear action films!

I think it was post *Zanjeer* and *Dewaar*, both Amitabh Bachchan films, that the barrier between action and family films was finally demolished.

The top-billing stars did not indulge in doing such films. Their films saved action for the climax, where the hero dealt with the villain. By the time the action scene would take place, the viewer would have started detesting the villain so much that he would be cheering the hero as he beat up the bad guys. Today, it is koshier for every big actor to do action movies.

Zanjeer and *Dewaar* paved the way for all



actors to do action films. Still, the fact remains that even the tough guys, the men and the ones labelled as action heroes (such as Dharmendra, Vinod Khanna and Salman Khan) have had a better record with love stories or family films and not action films.

There came a phase when the so-called corporate houses came and turned the multi-lakh film production business into a multi-crore enterprise. And the multiplexes turned the film-viewing experience from a Rs 2 to Rs 5 outing to one priced from Rs 200 to Rs 2,200! The era of creative individual filmmakers was over. Films were now being made for the multiplexes; audience taste was incidental.

The fun lasted for a few years as some films worked and many did not. The economies of filmmaking had gone haywire! Every actor wanted to make an action film. Even the romantic hero as he was branded, Shah Rukh Khan, came up with his personal version of *Ek Tha Tiger* with *Pathaan*!

The problem was the *Baahubali* effect on the Hindi filmmakers. Each one of them wanted a *Baahubali*-like blockbuster of his own. Though dubbed from Telugu films, the franchise shattered all box-office records. The idea was to make visually grand films, preferably with top stars.

There, however, came the catch: The film had

to have a huge budget to afford the extravaganza. Top stars and top budgets were expected to do the trick along with spectacular visuals and special effects.

So we had the first project, *Thugs Of Hindustan* (2018) followed by *Padmaavat*, *Vikram Vedha*, *Sooryavanshi*, *Samrat Prithviraj*, *War*, *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*, *Bajirao Mastani*, *Katank*, *Somerset*, *Brahmastra: Part 1* and the recent *Adipurush*. Some makers preferred to make films based on a chapter from history or mythology; at least that would provide a semblance of a story.

As it turned out, the bigger the budget, the louder the thud with which they fell. Ironically, while many top-billing Hindi films failed, the intermittent dubbed versions from the South, such as *Pushpa: The Rise*, *RRR* and *KGF* grossed in multiples of crores.

You may want your multi-crore grosser and invest high. But, with high budgets, such projects also entail high risk. You make a big film for the sake of it, *Thugs Of Hindustan* or *Brahmastra*, but if the viewer does not identify with the subject, a disaster is guaranteed.

That makes one think: Why are films such as *Zara Hatke Zara Bachke* or *Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar* are scoring big at the box office? If one takes films from the time *Baahubali* released in

2015 and some filmmakers tried to match it, there have been a number of smaller films that have proved to be hits.

These films are: *Tanu Weds Manu*, *Drishyam* and *Drishyam 2*, *Aye Dil Hai Muskhil*, *Hindi Medium*, *Toilet Ek Prem Katha*, *Badrinath Ki Dulhania*, *Sonju*, *MS Dhoni: The Untold Story*, *Golmaal*, *Chhichhore*, *Badhaai Ho*, *Padman*, *Good Newz*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, *Rhool Bhulaiyan 2* and *Juggugg Jeeyo*.

Zara Hatke Zara Bachke is a nice mix of the old and the contemporary. The problem a newlywed couple face in a small accommodation was seen in Rajshri Production's *Pyaar Ka Ghar*, which has been very well done in this film, and blended with the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana to give it a contemporary touch. These films are acceptable to all, family and youth, middle class and upper class. The advantage with these kind of films is that it limits the risk factor, and quickly recovers the investment. What is more, it need not be viewed on the big screen. They are as much fun to watch on an OTT platform, where they can be enjoyed with family and kids.

It is time to go back to your roots — to films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Jab We Met*, *Dum Lagu Ke Haishe*. (IANS)

Reduce your children's screen time with these audiobooks



Grandma Mei's Fantastic Folktales (Series 1)

Written by: Allan Penderleith and Narrated by: Louise McNewberry
Kids love tales passionately and this Audible podcast is an adventurous treat for your children. In Lellobee City, best friends Ella and Rishi play together on Lellobee City Farm and enjoy the company of their wonderful Grandma Mei who narrates to them fantastic folktales collected from her travels around the world! Transport your children into the alluring and picturesque stories set in a Brazilian rainforest narrated by Grandma Mei complemented with realistic atmospheric background scores used in this podcast.

Dolly Parton's Billy the Kid Makes It Big

Written and Narrated by: Dolly Parton
The exemplary music singer Dolly Parton recounts a story about her god dog, a French bulldog 'Billy the Kid' who is trying to make it big as a country music star in Nashville, Tennessee. This audiobook is a delightful interpretation of standing up to people who put you down and finding the drive to achieve your dreams. Billy has a scuffle with his fellow barking friends and is dismayed due to his melancholic condition. This led him to rely on his favourite country music and the singer Dolly Parton to regain his self-confidence. This motivational tale with a pet protagonist will inspire your young ones to face their challenges head-on as they embark on their journey to achieve their dreams.

The Islands of Elsewhere

Written by: Heather Fawcett and Narrated by: Mia Hutchinson-Shaw
Mixed with magic and plenty of adventure, this seaside story of siblings on a treasure hunt is perfect for fantasy fans. The Snolly sisters discover three islands in their backyard while vacationing in their grandfather's seaside property, The Misty Coven for the summer. Bec Snolly and her sister begin to believe in magic as these mysterious islands withhold a secret that helps the siblings assist their ailing grandfather on the path of recovery. This is a wonderful allegory to teach your children the values of faith, gratitude, and responsibility, so make sure to tune in.

10 Most Inspiring Stories for Kids

Written by: Hans Christian Andersen and others
Narrated by: Katie Haigh
Classic tales and stories are fundamental to children's cognitive and creative development, as they awaken the imagination and bring essential teachings. These stories inspire children through important archetypes and symbolic imagery; they help children envisage fantastic worlds, full of possibilities and wonders. This specially designed compilation includes classic folk tales, and famous stories by Hans Christian Andersen and provides children with a formative overview of the best of children's classics. The audiobook is an impeccable compilation of classic literature you must indulge your kids in. (IANSLife)

The development of technology and the unpredictability of Covid-19 requirements have had a significant negative influence on many young lives. In a 2022 study, 57 per cent of kids said they preferred watching TV.

Due to the increased availability of kid-friendly, interesting material on OTT and TV, kids now spend a lot of their spare time riveted to digital displays. However, too much screen time is bad for their eyes and general growth. Motivate your children to listen to audiobooks, podcasts, and audio series.

Here is a collection of captivating tales available only on Audible, including literary classics, folktales, fairy tales, and fables spoken by famous people.

Little Baby Bum: Time To Dream (Series 1)

Written by: Angela Salt and Narrated by: Sian Brooke, and Scott Reld
Gently drift off your young ones to sleep with Audible's Little Baby Bum: Time To Dream, with soothing nursery rhymes welcoming little ones into a peaceful night's sleep. These quintessential nursery rhymes on Audible are perfect for parents who can't always make time for a bedtime storytelling session for their kids. Curated for children aged 1-2, these narrations transport listeners into a magical world of tranquil soundscapes with calming scores and lulling ambient sounds.

The smell of success



Do you remember the first time you used perfume? Was it as a shy, blushing teenager at 13, hoping to get attention, or a young, scrawny kid hoping to look like an adult?

That seems like ages ago, doesn't it? Well, the first time perfume was used in India was ages ago. The paper trail of fragrances leads us back to the Indus Valley Civilisation, around 3500 BCE when fragrances were called 'Itar', thriving at the disposal of the rich and nobles. Gradually, kingdoms fell, and towns entered the picture. As time and art progressed, so did the tastes and chemical industry. Perfumes became complex and then came the iconic Chanel no.5, the world's first abstract fragrance, an unmistakable scent that took its place as the centerpiece of class, and luxury.

But, as interest arose, fragrances transformed from a status symbol to a personal statement. They became intimate, expressed identities, and now it's all about the scent that speaks to you, and for you. From strictly natural ingredients to the current time when you can customise your own unique scent, and gift it to a loved one, perfumes are no longer on the backseat, but rather, take the stage before you.

2023 is the year of breaking barriers - we snap open the boxes, jump across the bridges, and break through the glass wall! It is the year we break out of conventions and break into who we really are - and push ourselves to see who we can become. Which is why, finding your scent is of the essence. You need a perfume that is as bold, and daring as you are, a perfume that blurs the line between expectations and identities and lets you unapologetically be you.

Here is a list of unisex perfumes curated by experts that let you blur the lines - in all the right ways:

GUENS Gold Eau de Parfum: Inspired by the free-spirited, this is a floral fragrance with notes of mandarin, jasmine, and sandalwood. A perfect accessory for long summer days, that dares to ask - why should girls have all the fun?

Chopard Malaki Mask Eau de Parfum: Leave a strong impression with the rich smell of musk, cedar, black pepper, and leather.

Savane di Seta Eau de Parfum: Launched in 2021, this woody spicy smell has notes of Carrot Seeds, Orris and Sandalwood.

Alyssa Ashley Ocean Blue Eau de toilette: Let this fresh marine accord delicacy with a bright, sunny citrus accord be the perfect companion to your vibrant energy.

Amber Malaki Eau de Parfum: Enticing amber notes lay at the heart of this decadent fragrance with spicy notes, lending a seductive quality to this intoxicating scent.

Now that we have given you the holy grail of fragrances, go check them out now or visit CREO Store for more curated guides to add to your cart this season. (IANSLife)

Threads a shrewd move but is Meta credible?

By Wasim Ahmed & Mariann Hardez

Mark Zuckerberg's new social media platform, Threads, has been released in smartphone app stores (although not in the EU). Zuckerberg, who is chief executive of Threads' parent company Meta, says that at least 30 million users signed up in the app's first day. According to some speculative reporting, Threads might be a reliable alternative to Twitter.

Since the acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk in October 2022, Twitter has developed a reputation for making hasty decisions regarding user data, safety and the reliable functioning of the site. There have also been the saga around replacing the traditional "blue tick" verification system with a paid-for version.

Concerns have also been raised around relaxed moderation policies and the removal of free access to Twitter's API - the program interface that allowed third-party developers and academics to interact with the platform. There has also been speculation that Twitter's troubles may put off some advertisers.

It might look shrewd to launch a Twitter alternative amid the current turbulence. However, early numbers from the app suggest the likelihood of longer-term and wide-scale public interest in Threads is not guaranteed. However, it is important to note that Meta has a substantial user base and robust staff infrastructure on its side.

If widely adopted, Threads could potentially challenge Twitter's dominant position and significantly impact its operations. According to the Pew Research Center, the majority of Twitter users in the US have taken a break from the platform in the past year.

Social media platforms have global reach, but the way they are structured and how owners make commercial decisions is still based on grabbing territory. This may, for example, be seen in the way that users with particular views or interests are targeted for advertising. From this perspective, advertising tensions between different platforms are not a passing phase but are instead central features of the way that social media works.

MASS MIGRATION
A mass migration has already begun. Many users are leaving Twitter for decentralised and community-run systems like Mastodon.

In November 2022, 130,000 users signed up daily to use that platform. Mastodon is a "non-federated" system, meaning that each computer server is run by a different administrator. Unlike Twitter, Mastodon users are not subject to the

and the largest online marketplace for exchanging goods and services.

Instagram (owned by Meta) is popular for sharing photographs and meme-based content, especially among users who are older than TikTok's main user base. Threads will instantly take information from an Instagram account, like followers and contacts, and use it to make a user profile.

which the consulting firm harvested data from millions of Facebook users without their consent) brought to light the problems with a commercial model that is based on data harvesting. Again, degrees of distrust underscored Meta's market offering, along with allegations of the amplification of fake news and concerns about spreading Russian propaganda and political bias via shared content during the last US presidential election.

According to researchers at Northwestern University, trust in Twitter dipped slightly after Musk took over. However, a new social networking proposition from Meta will not, by itself, enhance trust in Meta, and this is crucial for increasing Thread's unique users.

Social media users may desire a Twitter-like platform that's free from irrational and erratic behaviour. Today, Twitter is a complex environment to navigate, where verified accounts are given preferential treatment. For example, through extended character limits and additional visibility.

Twitter's future may be limited to serving as a specialised platform catering to a specific community, similar to apps like Parler and Truth Social, which have gained popularity among people with extreme ideologies. There have been instances of racism, misogyny, antisemitic rhetoric and abusive speech towards the LGBTQ+ community on Twitter.

Recent in-depth investigations by the BBC, Forbes and the Washington Post have argued that the system for reporting hate speech on Twitter is ineffective.

The key to commercial viability is convincing advertisers that there is a robust market offering for Meta - one that is more stable and dependable than Twitter's. Meta must reassure users that their data is secure in Threads and that the new platform creates a safe environment within which to sustain another social media profile. (*The Conversation*)

Wasim Ahmed is Senior Lecturer in Digital Business, University of Shillong. Mariann Hardez is Professor Digital Culture, Business and Computing at Durham University Business School and Advanced Research Computing, Durham University.



whims of a chief executive. Meta, meanwhile, benefits from an established user pipeline for ad revenue as well as the potential to synchronise cross-platform data sharing and the subsequent opportunities for third-party commercial gain.

The phenomenon of user lock-in is a primary factor driving widespread adoption of these platforms. Lock-in is where businesses make it difficult to switch to rival platforms. Facebook is the predominant platform for community groups

One way to beef up the user numbers could be to replicate user IDs across all Meta products, not just Instagram. Then, users with existing Facebook, Messenger or WhatsApp profiles will automatically have access to a Threads account.

TRUST ISSUES
Yet the primary roadblock for Threads is that Meta lacks significant credibility in many people's eyes. The Cambridge Analytica scandal of 2018 (in

and dependent than Twitter's. Meta must reassure users that their data is secure in Threads and that the new platform creates a safe environment within which to sustain another social media profile. (*The Conversation*)

Wasim Ahmed is Senior Lecturer in Digital Business, University of Shillong. Mariann Hardez is Professor Digital Culture, Business and Computing at Durham University Business School and Advanced Research Computing, Durham University.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhanbi Sunday, JULY 9, 2023

'Birthday Forecast'
Moon semi-orbit is signifying your health and will give amazing results. Your position in society will rise. There will be an increase in your happiness and prosperity. You will have no shortage of money. Your business contacts will prove beneficial for you. You will get complete benefits for your work and efforts. You will be well respected by family. Luck will support you a lot. Your financial position will be strong. You will be having relations with your life partner. You will be having fun time for eating good food, shopping and having fun with family members. You will make a balanced budget for your household expenses. Students will get success in exams and interview. Aspiring actors and actresses will be taking place.

'This week for you'
Aries: (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be a wonderful week for you. You will be busy in social business activities. You will have money in your hand. Also you will feel happy and prosperous. The expectations that people will have from you will not get asisted and you will work with lot of responsibility. Your name and fame will increase. You will have profits in your business as you will work with concentration. Your life style will also get better as you will have no shortage of funds. Property related disputes will get resolved. Your hard work will pay off well. All your work will get completed on time. Husband and wife will have better understanding.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You will be kept busy. You want to change your job or business maybe this is the right time. Your health will keep getting better. You will perform well in your job. Even your enemies will get defeated. You will be able to gain your view on others. You will have attraction for the opposite sex and will mix freely with them. Your time will be spent peacefully with your family members. Your siblings and children will give respect to you. Your relationship with your life partner will grow nearer. You will also see your eyes on your targets and goals. You will also work hard to increase your income. And will get success too.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) You will have monetary gains. You will be putting your best efforts to fulfill your dreams and ambitions. Your hard work and dedication will indeed bring success for you. In the job you will be cooperative and will get the support of your boss and subordinates. Your importance and strength along with work will grow. You will make good progress in your job/business. Where ever you will go you will carry on your good luck. You will work to your strength and acquire new knowledge. You will plan to go out of station with your mate and will share your feelings for him/her. You will remain in good spirits and a happy mood.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) It is going to be an amazing week for you. You will work with much tact and wisdom. As a result, you will be able to complete your work with ease. People will be looking forward to work along with you, and you will be able to establish an effective dialogue with everyone. You will get much satisfaction from your work. Love affairs will be successful. You will be able to conquer in all your financial deals. And you get cheated. You cannot afford to neglect the relations of your life partner as health is very important for you. You will remain alert with your aim and targets.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) Time is great. You will get benefits from your friends, colleagues, associates and even friends. You will get good results of your work. You will have no shortage of money. You take it and work will also get appreciated. Physically and emotionally you will be in a very good mood. You will amaze everyone with all the efforts that you put. You will receive some benefit from inheritance. A person may fall in love with you leading to a union and personal relationships. You will get all the like proper care of your health. Your investments will bring you good results but do not start any new work without taking proper advice. You will plan to go on a trip with your family.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) The week will prove to be beneficial for you. Your stellar work will be completed. As a result, you will have lot more confidence in your abilities. Your meetings with some people will be meaningful. You might have to change some decisions that you had taken earlier. Your respect in society will increase. You will also respect the feelings of

other persons. Meeting with some person will be beneficial. You will also have a new meeting in your life. There will be an improvement in your health. Your strong personality will have a mark on others. Your efficiency will be commensurate. You will suddenly get a new job offer which will come as a big surprise to you.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) You will have a great week. A person will extend his/her help when you need it most. He/she will prove to be a great asset and a big guiding influence on you. The relationship between husband and wife will be cordial. They will understand the feeling of each other. You will take a great decision in your work/business. You will get noticed for your great talent and performance. You will take care of the future of your children and also plan other things well. You will make best use of your talents and earn lot of money. You will make contacts with new persons. You will devote maximum time to your family.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23) Your relationship with your seniors will be good and they will give you a lot of support. The advice of a friend will indeed make things easier for you. You will have luck on your side. You will be creative and skillful and will do your work with ease. You will also earn well. Your enemies and opponents will be unable to prevail over you. You will keep a distance from clever people. You will be busy in preparation for festivals. Your financial situation will be satisfactory. Certain matters will keep you occupied but you will not let your focus waver. You will do some plan talking and will let other persons know your view point. You will be in no great hurry to start your work.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23) You will get promotion in your job. Some positive developments will bring about a big change in your personality. Your thoughts will also undergo a positive change. You will be a new woman in your work/business. You will also have no unnecessary tensions in your personal relations. You will obtain lot of wealth and happiness. It is a brilliant time to meet your friends and other people. You will get money from your talent. You will also prove your worth in front of others. The time is experimenting on you, and you will have to work hard to be successful. Your destiny will favour you a lot. Love birds will have a great time.

Capricorn: (December 23 - January 20) It is going to be a fantastic week. Some old friends will meet you all of a sudden by chance. Some old events will make you happy and you will remember your good days. You will get a chance of going to meetings and conferences. You will take your work seriously and will get favourable results. A good news will fill your spirits. You will get lot of mental peace. Your children's marriage or engagement can get fixed. There is also the possibility of buying land or property. You will enjoy your loving relations with your partner. However, you need to pay attention to your health.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 19) The week will bring in lot of happiness and bliss for you. And you will be on a great rise as your work gets done with ease. It is possible that you will start your work done through your officials. You will not start a risky venture. You will have good time with your family. A marriage function can take place. The works that you had planned will get completed. Students will be enthused as they get success in their exams/interview. You can also get invited to a relative's place in the presence. You will enjoy time at someone's house. The time will be spent peacefully. You will regain your prestige. You will be full of self confidence.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) You will be able to finish all your tasks in quick time. You will have no one to worry. Happiness and bliss will fill your life. New opportunities will come to you. You will also be able to achieve the target you have set at all your work. A property dispute will get resolved. You will receive no support from your job/business. Success will be yours in some competition or contest. A meeting with an influential person will bring in lots of opportunities for you but you will be selective in your response. You will choose the very best. A person may develop a liking for you. You will go on a trip to a beautiful place with your family. You will have some monetary benefits.

Burnout & work-related stress? Here's how to deal with them

Hustle culture refers to a competitive environment where employees feel pressured to work strenuous hours and achieve results quickly. This type of atmosphere can lead to high levels of stress and employee burnout. Employees may be reluctant to take breaks or vacations, resulting in workdays that are extremely and unremotely long. Working excessively long hours can cause physical and mental exhaustion, making it difficult to stay productive and complete tasks to the best of one's ability. Furthermore, the pressure to succeed in such a competitive environment can lead to feelings of inadequacy, leading to further stress and burnout.

In today's fast-paced and demanding work environment, burnout and work-related stress have become prevalent issues. However, there are effective strategies supported by research that individuals can utilize to manage and reduce burnout and work-related stress. Let's explore these strategies, along with data and figures that highlight their effectiveness.

Set clear boundaries: According to a study published in the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, employees who set boundaries between work and personal life experienced lower levels of burnout and higher job satisfaction. Research conducted by the American Psychological Association found that 44% of employees who set clear boundaries reported better well-being compared to those who didn't.

Practice self-care: A study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine revealed that engaging in self-care activities, such as exercise, reduced the risk of burnout among employees. According to the American Institute of Stress, 28% of workers who practiced regular self-care reported lower stress levels.

Foster a supportive work environment: Research published in the Journal of Applied Psychology suggests that employees who perceive their work environment as supportive have lower levels of burnout and higher job satisfaction. A study conducted by Gallup found that employees who feel supported by their managers are 70% less likely to experience burnout.

Prioritize workload and time management: A survey conducted by the American Psychological Association found that 49% of employees who felt they had too much work experienced higher stress levels. Research published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine indicated that effective workload management and time prioritization reduced burnout among employees by 41%.

Take regular breaks: According to a study conducted by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, brief mental breaks during work can enhance focus and reduce stress. The Society for Human Resource Management reported that employees who took regular breaks experienced increased productivity by 33%.

Seek social support: A study published in the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology found that employees who received social support from colleagues had lower levels of burnout and higher job satisfaction. The Mental Health Foundation reported that having a supportive network at work can reduce stress levels by 30%.

Practice mindfulness: A meta-analysis published in the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology revealed that mindfulness interventions were effective in reducing burnout and increasing overall well-being among employees.

Utilize assistance programs: Employee assistance programs provide resources and support for employees dealing with burnout and work-related stress. The International Employee Assistance Professionals Association reported that EAPs have been shown to reduce absenteeism, increase productivity, and improve employee well-being.

Promote work-life balance: A survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management revealed that 89% of employees considered work-life balance an important factor in reducing burnout and work-related stress. Regularly assess and adjust workload: It's important to regularly assess workload and make necessary adjustments to prevent burnout. This includes delegating tasks, redistributing responsibilities, and seeking help when needed. Research published in the Journal of Applied Psychology found that employees who had control over their workload had lower levels of burnout and higher job satisfaction. In conclusion, implementing strategies to manage and reduce burnout and work-related stress is crucial in today's demanding work environment. Setting clear boundaries, practicing self-care, fostering a supportive work environment, prioritizing workload and time management, taking regular breaks, seeking social support, practicing mindfulness, utilizing employee assistance programs, promoting work-life balance, and regularly assessing workload are all effective approaches. By incorporating these strategies, individuals can enhance their well-being, increase job satisfaction, and combat burnout and work-related stress. (*IAN/STF*)

"Creativity is the power to connect the seemingly unconnected."
—William Plomer

The Shillong Times
Vol No. 155 No. 321 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 10, 2023

PM, Pawar play

WHEN the Prime Minister openly stated that the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) indulged in corruption to the order of Rs 70,000 crore with specific reference to a scam in a Maharashtra-based bank, the question on many lips was "...and what did he do about it?" While the corruption graph in the country is growing — mainly at the level of the bureaucracy and regional parties, what is well-known is also that PM Modi has soft-pedalled the issue in his two terms. True, there have been no serious charges of corruption against Union ministers, unlike during the Manmohan Singh-led UPA period. Those exposures came as the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) raised big questions. A safe assumption today is that Modi controlled corruption at his ministerial and party levels at the apex. Yet the BJP government in Karnataka scripted a different story. Allegations of huge corruption riddled the reputation of the BJP governments there.

As for the NCP, the prime minister had, during an election campaign in Maharashtra in 2014, branded it as the Nationalist Corruption Party. Stories of huge cuts had spread in Delhi when its leader Sharad Pawar was Defence Minister in the Congress led Government. Pawar had to pack his bags and return to Maharashtra in a huff. He or his family has made too much of wealth allegedly through dubious means and he presides over an empire within an empire. Pawar having installed daughter Supriya as successor, his close associates Ajit Pawar and Praful Patel have broken ranks and built bridges with the BJP to share the spoils of power yet again. A couple of years ago, stories had spread about the demand from an NCP home minister — a close Pawar aide — to the Mumbai police to collect Rs 100 crore as bribe from the bars in the metropolis every month. That case is ongoing.

By all reckoning, not just Sharad Pawar but Ajit Pawar as deputy CM in the past and Praful Patel while as Union civil aviation minister, had been accused of stretching the limits of corruption in this country at ministerial levels. Now, both Ajit Pawar and Patel are breaking bread with the BJP. Like Sharad Pawar, most regional satraps are allegedly looting the exchequer and giving a free hand to bureaucrats too to loot, the slush money allegedly ending up in real estate ventures within or tax havens abroad through dubious means. By making public pronouncements, the Prime Minister confirms the kind of organised loot that's taking place in the country, but also proclaims silently that he as leader of the nation is incapable of stemming this rot.

Who is to blame?

I am grateful to N Marak for his letter, "Turn a capital is inevitable" (ST June 13, 2023) in reciprocation to my letter, "Winter capital vs MROSE" (ST June 12, 2023). In response I wish to objectively assess that my submission is not in the least pedantic on hypocritical/sarcasmous stance. What I have penned therein was in toto a verbatim discourse I had generated with assorted sections of people irrespective of their communities, ethnicity et al. Hence, such reflections are invariably not my subjective presentation. In essence, my periodical missives to newspapers are not based on yellow journalism but painstaking fact-driven ground-work.

The allegations to denigrate Goro as backwards, illiterate etc., against fellow citizens belonging to the same state are unfortunate. Furthermore, it is stated that in course of these 51 years Goro candidates had got appointments in 27% to 34% of the 40% of the officially allotted target, but Marak must recall that the major share of the post of Chief Ministership has been held by the representatives from Goro Hills from the very

inception of Meghalaya as a State in 1972, to date in 2023 when even today we have a Chief Minister from the Goro community. Additionally, we have had a great number of Goro officers who had been and are holding key governmental departments dealing with job-creations. Importantly, we have had no less than six Chairpersons of MPSC belonging to the Goro community, like GC Munim, who was the first reservation policy, whereby the canker could have been nipped in the bud right from the initial stages. Now who is to blame?

Presently, we are given to understand that since many Goro job applicants have been denied appointments in government departments based on the quota of Reservation policy effective since 1972, so the backlog reserved for them, being undone hitherto, ought to be filled by Goro applicants, henceforth. Thus, the job-applying youths from Khajiantia Hills will have to look askance at this overall

Nature solves because Nature loves

By HH Mohrmen

The recently concluded G20 meeting has 'Nature Solves: A new framework for our sustainable future,' as its theme. It is good that nature has reached a higher stage at the G20 2023 summit organised by the Government of India. Government of Meghalaya, the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), and Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA), Meghalaya which is the main host of the event showcased nature-based initiatives that the government has taken up in the last few years. These projects undertaken by Community-led Landscape Management (CLLM) can be described as the government's Green Meghalaya initiative. Whether the recent meeting will enable Meghalaya to mitigate policies and projects which could make the state the leader in green deals, is another question.

Unique Geological History of Meghalaya
The geological history of Meghalaya spans millions of years and is characterized by dynamic tectonic activities, and diverse rock formations, which help in the shaping of unique landscapes. The North East region is situated on the eastern margin of the Indian subcontinent, where the Indian plate collides with the Eurasian plate, resulting in complex geological processes. Around 200 million years ago, during the breakup of the super-continent Pangaea, this region was part of Gondwana. Over time, the area experienced extensive tectonic activity, leading to the formation of basaltic lava flows known as the Rajmahal Traps.

Around 60-65 million years ago, the collision between the Indian and Eurasian plates initiated the formation of the Himalayas. This tectonic event had a profound impact on the region, resulting in the uplifting of the ancient rocks and the formation of the Fold Mountain. The Shillong Plateau, where Meghalaya is located, is a remnant of the ancient Indian shield.

Meghalaya itself is known for its unique geological formations, such as the Khasi and Jaintia hills. These hills are composed of sedimentary rocks, including sandstones, shales, and limestones, which were deposited during different geological periods. The region's abundant rainfall and unique topography have given rise to breathtaking landscapes, including deep gorges, cascading waterfalls, and vast cave systems, such as the famous Mawsmai and Krem Liat Prah caves.

Devesh Wallia of NEIU on an expert on the subject believes that the movement of the landmass in its 70 million years journey is also the reason that the state has so much diversity. In the over 70 million years journey of the landmass, it has moved from the southern hemisphere and crossed over the region with equatorial climatic conditions to reach its present location. This has also influenced the kind of diversity the region has. The state's strength via its nature-based solution

The geological history of the state is also the reason for the forest cover that Meghalaya has in the different regions of the state. In Meghalaya, the forest cover in the state is 17,118.79 sq km which is 76.36% of the state's geographical area. This is again another strength that puts Meghalaya in the driver's seat of leading from the front in matters relating to nature-based solutions. Although only 1,113 square km of the forest area is under the direct control of the state government, the light at the end of the tunnel is the traditional natural resource management that was practiced since time immemorial. Since a large part of the forest is under the control of the community, the state needs to take the community on board if any Natural Resource Management (NRM) or a nature-based project the government initiated is to succeed. Meghalaya not only has a rich traditional knowledge of the NRM system in place but the traditional farming practices by farmers is rural farming by default. These are some of the strengths that the state and its people have to put Meghalaya in the driver's seat of leading the country and the world in green deals.

Green Meghalaya Initiatives
The Government deserves to be patted on the back for introducing game-changing nature-based projects like the Payment for Ecological Services (PES), the Seed Ball program, Forest Management plans, and other projects. It is also encouraging when the

audience at the G20 meeting was also informed that more than 1900 applications for inclusion in the project were received from the community. But it is also important that the government should not ignore the traditional knowledge that has helped protect these forests in the first place. It is an accepted fact the world over that the indigenous people who live in the territory that covers about 25% of the world's land surface, and has a population of 370 million only, are the custodians of about 30% of the global biodiversity. Even though the indigenous people comprise a small population of less than 5% of the world's population, and living in just a quarter of the world's total land surface, they have been able to conserve the biodiversity in their respective regions. From the Amazon to the northeast region of India the areas where the indigenous people live are biodiversity hotspots of their respective countries. It will be the government's loss if it fails to take cognizance of the

"The North East region is situated on the eastern margin of the Indian subcontinent, where the Indian plate collides with the Eurasian plate, resulting in complex geological processes."

state government, the light at the end of the tunnel is the traditional natural resource management that was practiced since time immemorial. Since a large part of the forest is under the control of the community, the state needs to take the community on board if any Natural Resource Management (NRM) or a nature-based project the government initiated is to succeed. Meghalaya not only has a rich traditional knowledge of the NRM system in place but the traditional farming practices by farmers is rural farming by default. These are some of the strengths that the state and its people have to put Meghalaya in the driver's seat of leading the country and the world in green deals.

The Government deserves to be patted on the back for introducing game-changing nature-based projects like the Payment for Ecological Services (PES), the Seed Ball program, Forest Management plans, and other projects. It is also encouraging when the

Why people fear doctors these days?

It's not strange these days that many people fear doctors as much as cars fear old water. This fear is rooted in the perception that some doctors mercilessly prescribe medicines and treat their patients with a monetary profit motive only. The increasing cases of adverse "side effects" of excessive anti-worming medicines leading to irreversibly deteriorating patients' health have further annoyed the general people.

It is noteworthy that "certain" unscrupulous doctors even have a penchant for recommending many unnecessary "medical tests" to poor people struggling to make end meet. These poor people, clad in tattered clothes, and worn-out slippers, not having even a five hundred rupee note in their pockets, are compelled to spend between Rs. 3000 to 5000 for the minor ailments of their child. As they are completely illiterate, they have no option but to borrow money from their relatives or friends. Their only concern is to get their child cured. Only God knows how they finally manage to repay their loan. This case has become very normal in every town and village.

A new breed of entrepreneurial doctors also have the knack for recommending expensive medicines and "particular pharmaceutical companies" despite the fact that similar medicines with the same combinations, from other companies, are available at far cheaper rates. Very few doctors prescribe generic medicines from Janasudhi. Is this not an inhuman act? Undeniably, greed for money has made some doctors engage in activities that are least expected from them. Such cunning doctors discreetly establish cozy relationships with nursing homes and diagnostic centers. This is predominantly prevalent in major cities. These alliances are grounded on a foundation of kickbacks and commissions. The doctor gets a hefty cut, and the diagnostic center gets a steady stream of patients. Video recordings of such outrageous racketeering involving doctors and nursing homes often go viral on WhatsApp on a regular basis.

Doctors from private hospitals in Guwahati, point out the faults of doctors from Shillong nursing homes while doctors from Apollo Hospital, and CMC Vellore accuse the private hospitals in Assam of wrongdoing. Most patients complain of being heartlessly exploited

regenerative farming. Meghalaya is already one step ahead in natural farming which is a traditional practice.

Meghalaya the hub of green initiative
During his inaugural address at the G20 meeting, the Chief Minister also informed the gathering that in a very short time, the government will announce the Chief Minister's Solar Mission. However, the Chief Minister is not consistent in his stand as at times he sounds like he is for green energy, and a few moments later, one would hear him say that the government cannot stop illegal coal mining in the state, which is disappointing. The silver lining in all this is the fact the government has the best intentions at heart.

The other idea that was shared at the meeting was that perhaps Meghalaya can lead the country in imitating green entrepreneurship. The state can organize a national or international event to promote green entrepreneurship. The other nature-based livelihood activities that the state can take a lead in is sustainable tourism. Right now the tourism that we have in the state is mass tourism, which is not sustainable; perhaps more emphasis is needed on high-end and sustainable tourism.

Given the strengths of the state, Meghalaya can also be the model state where indigenous knowledge for environment conservation and climate complement each other. The need of the hour is to document all these IJKs which can then be studied and shared with others.

The Sacred Relationship
As the theme says, the attempts to put the state at the forefront of green deals, the efforts will succeed only if nature takes center stage in Meghalaya, the state does. The chief minister also mentioned balancing livelihood with conservation but more often than not, we find that every time we face such situations, nature always takes the back seat. Nature is brushed aside to give way to human interest. The situation demands that there should be no compromise, and if the world is to have a future, nature should take precedence over everything else. Meghalaya has become a place of change in the nature-based initiatives if we only realise that nature can solve because it evolves and moves more importantly because of the mutual love between nature and creation. Meghalaya can be the model where this sacred relationship is respected.

consumption and UPI transactions and rural depend on cash to recover, the pace can be hit by increasing geo-political stress, volatility in global systems, sharp correction in global stock markets, deep impact of El Niño, modest trade activity and lower FDI inflow owing to frail global demand.

"In 2022, emerging market economies (EMEs) remained subdued and volatile as geopolitical uncertainties rose. Global slowdown in investment flows to EMEs led to India's net FDI inflows dipping in FY23", the report says. Despite this it says the GDP growth continued to remain around 7.2 percent. The current account deficit, it adds, is unlikely to improve much and will be sustainable if only it is financed by normal capital flows."

These investment blues have given sharp jitters to the foreign portfolio investors as the Indian and French tax authorities meet in Paris. It has set off alarm bells among FPIs based in France. During the course of the meeting on double taxation avoidance agreement between India and France has led to apprehension among foreign funds that India may soon renegotiate the treaty to eliminate capital gains tax exemption. Currently, France and The Netherlands have major exemption on capital gains as per treaties with India for share sales. This comes ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Paris in the coming week. In 2017, India renegotiated similar tax treaties with Singapore and Mauritius, ending capital gains tax exemptions. Similar provisions with Cyprus were also removed.

Consequently, many foreign banks and large funds shifted their India equity trades away from Mauritius and Singapore to France, which is the tenth largest source of FPI funds to India. It holds Rs 1.2 lakh crore sec-

FDI Flow In Farmland DEA cautions, FPI jittery

By Shivaji Sarkar

These are interesting times, trying times and growth times. But these have pauses. India's FDI in greenfield projects have risen to \$49.3 billion, India cannot rest on laurels, says the Union Finance Ministry. And the end stage has sent jitters down the foreign portfolio investors (FPI), reveals a tax authorities meeting at the sidelines of G20 meeting in Paris. Quite a scenario, indeed.

The World Investment Report of UNCTAD has come with good news that FPI in greenfield projects have increased by \$5 billion investments in 2022 from a previous of \$4.4 billion. Apart from a sharp increase in foreign investments in greenfield or new — projects in India, the report also noted the country was the second largest recipient of international project finance in the world in 2022. Looks good. But is it really so?

Greenfield projects occupy the share of 19.31% in foreign investments, have minimal to no structure. So, there are no expenditures associated with the clearance of farmlands at the greenfield sites. In short, these are farmlands close to cities and have many strings attached. Farmers have reason to feel concerned as say in the Jawar group of the state government in Noida in Uttar Pradesh.

The Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) of the Finance Ministry has issued a significant caution in the pre-poll year. In its Annual Report 2023, it says despite growth, resilience in urban demand conditions with higher auto sales, fuel

the purchasing capacity and lead to a thaw in the growth process. It is also an indicator that rising capital expenses largely on constructions and rebuilding of structures is not boosting the economy to the desired levels. It has miscalc. cement and other essential, expensive, but it calls for a study whether the benefits are percolating down.

The Finance Ministry observations could be challenged as well if the GST collections at Rs 1.61 lakh crore are taken into account. It means financial and economic activity has grown, but why is it not seen in manufacturing and other activities? The Purchasing Managers Index also shows improvement. Still economic happiness is not a general trend. But it is said that all GST collections may not be exact. There are reports of leakage. Or it may be that the refunds that are to be made for GST are also shown as collections. It is a flaw in the system. The monthly figures agreement between India and France has led to apprehension among foreign funds that India may soon renegotiate the treaty to eliminate capital gains tax exemption.

Consequently, many foreign banks and large funds shifted their India equity trades away from Mauritius and Singapore to France, which is the tenth largest source of FPI funds to India. It holds Rs 1.2 lakh crore sec-

curities in the Indian market as on May 31. If this happens, the FPI flows would shift elsewhere and the exposure to Indian markets may get reduced. The UNCTAD report also notes that the inflows into India in 2022 were, however, significantly lower than what was seen in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, during which \$64 billion of FDI entered the country."

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and that of The Shillong Times.

Yours etc.,
Sally Gwali,
Shillong

Art begins in imitation and ends in innovation.

— Mason Cooley

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LXV No. 328 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 11, 2023

Meghalaya fares abysmally in PGI
THE performance grading index (PGI) for schools in India was introduced in 2017. It measures the status of school education across States and Union Territories (UTs). For two successive years Meghalaya has performed abysmally ranking last among all States and UTs. It is time therefore for the State to admit where it's going wrong and carry out serious and honest soul-searching so that the gaps can be addressed. The new PGI structure covers 73 indicators, focused more on qualitative assessment besides including digital initiatives and teacher education. The grades/levels obtained by States/UTs in the previous edition of the PGIs are thus not comparable to the grades/levels obtained by States/UTs in this new edition.

The PGI 2.0 structure comprises 1000 points across 73 indicators grouped into 2 categories viz., Outcomes, Governance Management (GM). These categories are further divided into 6 domains, viz., Learning Outcomes (LO), Access (A), Infrastructure & Facilities (IF), Equity (E), Governance Process (GP), Teachers Education and Training (T&T). It is said that only the very best and most learned became teachers. In India since time immemorial teachers were accorded the status of 'gurus' and society respected them because they gave their all. These teachers passed on their knowledge, skills, and ethics to their students. It is correct to say that only the very best become teachers in Meghalaya? Over the years much has been heard of teachers being appointed in government schools through the back door, with each politician recommending names of his favoured candidate. This was bound to hit at the very foundations of teaching. The problem with the teaching profession is that once employed, teachers are never tested whether they have kept up and improved upon their teaching skills or have remained static. With the advent of technology, teaching is no longer mere dissemination of knowledge but a co-learning process where teacher and the taught learn from one another. The internet has become the greatest informer. What the teacher needs to do today is to answer issues and lead students come up with problems - not just one correct answer but many. The students would then explain why they gave their respective answers.

Our education system has measured learning outcomes based on examinations where students vomit out answers learnt by rote without using their reasoning skills. Howard Gardner's theory on multiple intelligences of which 9 are critical to education require to be adopted in Indian schools. Gardner names them as - Verbal-linguistic intelligence (well-developed verbal skills and sensitivity to the sounds, meanings and rhythms of words); 2. Logical-mathematical intelligence (ability to think conceptually and abstractly, and capacity to discern logical and numerical patterns); 3. Spatial-visual intelligence (capacity to think in images and pictures, to visualize accurately and abstractly); 4. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (ability to control one's body movements and to handle objects skillfully); 5. Musical intelligences (ability to produce and appreciate rhythm, pitch and timber); 6. Interpersonal intelligence (capacity to detect and respond appropriately to the moods, motivations and desires of others); 7. Intrapersonal (capacity to be self-aware and in tune with inner feelings, values, beliefs and thinking processes); 8. Naturalist intelligence (ability to recognize and categorize plants, animals and other objects in nature); 9. Existential intelligence (sensitivity and capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence such as, "What is the meaning of life? Why do we die? How did we get here?" Will the government take this matter to heart? After all, the future of young Meghalayans is at stake.

Presently, there are two cultivated rice species: *Oryza sativa*, known as Asian rice, which again has two subspecies. *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica*, also commonly known as African rice. The latter is said to have originated in West Africa around 3000 years ago, where it is still being grown. *Oryza sativa*, on the other hand, is accepted to be the oldest and economically the most important. In fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

The China origin theory has been discussed by Brian L. Gross and Zhijun Zhao in their 2014 paper, "Archaeological and genetic insights into the Origins of Domesticated Rice". According to them, domestication of *Oryza sativa japonica* happened around 6000 years ago in the Yangtze River valley of southern China. At the same time, there appears to have been an independent origin for the cultivation of ancestral indica or proto-indica rice taking place in the Ganges plains as well. But the plant was completely

What rice can tell us about our history

By Bhogtram Mawroh

Rice is one of the most important staple food crops in the world. Together with maize and wheat, it provides more than 50% of the world's energy intake. And as such, there has been a great deal of debate regarding its place of origin and domestication, with both India and China laying claim to it, with claims and counter-claims. However, what does not get much visibility in these debates is the contribution of indigenous peoples like the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo, who might have played a very important role in either the domestication or, most probably, the spread of the crop throughout the subcontinent. In fact, their plan in the rice story can also reveal a lot of their own history much of which is not known because of the lack of written records or the availability of archaeological sites, which are still very few and far between.

Presently, there are two cultivated rice species: *Oryza sativa*, known as Asian rice, which again has two subspecies. *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica*, also commonly known as African rice. The latter is said to have originated in West Africa around 3000 years ago, where it is still being grown. *Oryza sativa*, on the other hand, is accepted to be the oldest and economically the most important. In fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

The China origin theory has been discussed by Brian L. Gross and Zhijun Zhao in their 2014 paper, "Archaeological and genetic insights into the Origins of Domesticated Rice". According to them, domestication of *Oryza sativa japonica* happened around 6000 years ago in the Yangtze River valley of southern China. At the same time, there appears to have been an independent origin for the cultivation of ancestral indica or proto-indica rice taking place in the Ganges plains as well. But the plant was completely

domesticated only when domesticated japonica arrived from China and hybridised with it about 4,000 years ago. This view was referred to by Iwan Galloway in his story 'The Birth of Rice', published in Nature, the world's leading multidisciplinary science journal. Bhiswajit Thakur, Anja Saxena and Indrebir Singh in their 2018 paper, 'Paddy Cultivation during the Early Holocene: Evidence from Diatoms in Laharudewa Lake Sediments, Gangaj Valley, published in Current Science, which is India's leading inter-disciplinary science journal, however, argued that based on the diatoms of diatoms (microorganisms that in land, are found in rivers and lakes), the date of paddy domestication in the Gangaj valley is earlier than those recorded in China, i.e., around 9000 years ago. The debate regarding the antiquity of the antecedent species, therefore, continues to the present in fact, is a hybrid of the japonica with an already existing Indian, most probably semi-domesticated species. The question is: "What hybridization happened? Is there that the story of the Garo and the Khasi-Jaintia becomes important."

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

domesticated only when domesticated japonica arrived from China and hybridised with it about 4,000 years ago. This view was referred to by Iwan Galloway in his story 'The Birth of Rice', published in Nature, the world's leading multidisciplinary science journal. Bhiswajit Thakur, Anja Saxena and Indrebir Singh in their 2018 paper, 'Paddy Cultivation during the Early Holocene: Evidence from Diatoms in Laharudewa Lake Sediments, Gangaj Valley, published in Current Science, which is India's leading inter-disciplinary science journal, however, argued that based on the diatoms of diatoms (microorganisms that in land, are found in rivers and lakes), the date of paddy domestication in the Gangaj valley is earlier than those recorded in China, i.e., around 9000 years ago. The debate regarding the antiquity of the antecedent species, therefore, continues to the present in fact, is a hybrid of the japonica with an already existing Indian, most probably semi-domesticated species. The question is: "What hybridization happened? Is there that the story of the Garo and the Khasi-Jaintia becomes important."

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

On the 12th of January 2009, the Financial Express published a story '6,000-year-old species of rice discovered in Meghalaya' in fact, it is replacing *Oryza glaberrima* in its areas of erstwhile dominance. When it comes to *Oryza sativa* itself, there are intensely competing claims regarding its place of birth. There are two competing theories: the single-origin theory, which suggests that *Oryza sativa indica* and *Oryza sativa japonica* were domesticated separately in different parts of Asia. Even if both theories are correct, it raises the question - "Who was first?"

Bengal Panchayat poll violence points to shifts in TMC support base

By Arun Srivastava

The nature and character of the West Bengal panchayat poll violence, which claimed 17 lives, two less than the 2018 poll violence, underscores an ominous development for the ruling Trinamool Congress which was at the receiving end of the brutality. This also underlines a significant shift in the pattern of the violence, as the common people who are rioting and attacking and mingling with the police, who are the 17 persons who died in violence, nine were from TMC. Usually, the ruling party does not suffer basic casualties. But in this election, TMC's lost could be described as substantial.

Electoral violence has been endemic in Bihar and West Bengal, as an instrument for seizure of power. In the past, the dominant caste, for preserving its class interest, has been using elections as an effective tool. A deeper analysis of the electoral violence would make it distinctly clear that the OBC and Jatis, who have been traditionally denied their rights, resorted to violence to assert their identity. In a way, electoral violence symbolises the fight for assertion and expression of marginalised identities.

But of late, the nature and character of violence has undergone a sea change. Like a consumer commodity, the violence is also being marketed. The media, which has abandoned its ethical commitment, has been playing a significant role. Earlier, the electoral violence was a means to have a share in the political decision-making; now it is used to get a share of the government development money in recent years, allocation for rural development, to be spent through panchayats, have seen many-fold increase.

Expense of corruption cases involving massive government funds have been regularly unloading out of the government enquiries and files. All political parties are desperate to tap into this stream of huge fund. Obviously, the leadership has to engage in some violence. Only twenty years back, a panchayat chief would be seen moving around barefoot or on a cycle. But now having a luxury car has become a political necessity to demonstrate muscle power.

Governor C V Anand Bose adopting proactive stance just ahead of the election and steadily humiliating the SEC Rajiv Sinha and publicly admonishing him for his failure to ensure a free and fair election, has already sent a clear signal that the BJP will resort to all kind of devices to win the election for exercising its authority and wrest control of rural Bengal. After his daylong visit to the villages where elections were held, Bose said, "This political hold with human blood has to end." Over the last fortnight, the Governor visited Bhargava, Pannang and Basani in South 24 Parganas, besides Dimbata in Cooch Behar district. For the first time, Raj Bhavnan paid an active role in ensuring that a "violence-free election" takes place. He had opened a "Peace Home" to address complaints of the zam admi. But his move failed to yield any result. At least 39 deaths had been witnessed during the 2013 panchayat election process, 36 in 2004 and 70 in 2003.

In the election, Bengal is the only state where its rural population has been the target of the BJP BJP might have adopted a more aggressive posture in the state, if the party sees not only ventrally on the lines of uncorrupt and original cadre, this division has in fact come as a boon in disguise for the TMC to restrain the grip in other parts of the state. The original BJP cadres having a strong base, laid down by RSS, managed to swing the voters especially in the region of West Bengal.

The signal that the going would get tough for the TMC was also sent across by Md

Salim (CPM-state secretary), Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury (Congress state unit chief), and Sukanta Majumdar (BJP state unit chief), through their cumulative threats of violence against the common people who are rioting and attacking and mingling with the police, who are the 17 persons who died in violence, nine were from TMC. Usually, the ruling party does not suffer basic casualties. But in this election, TMC's lost could be described as substantial.

Analysts and political circles nevertheless hold the deployment of Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did not undertake extensive campaigning. Yet another factor which pointed to people getting disenchanted with Mamata Banerjee had sensed well before the electoral process was launched that a section of its support base was shifting away to its parent party, which was why she did

The most violent element in society is ignorance.
— Emma Goldman

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 138, No. 338 SHILLONG, WHEATSTONE, JULY 12, 2023

Shame on Bengal

A mix of poverty and politics creates lethal situations. This is the case with West Bengal, where the gram panchayat elections resulted in the murder of over 40 persons. Most of these, if not all, were from poor backgrounds. Like flies to fire, they were drawn to aggressive politics. What however added to this poignant situation were the reckless and irresponsible stances taken by the state election commission. Despite directives from the high court to call in central forces for deployment in sensitive areas, it dragged the matter and responded late. Its decision to hold the three-tier polls across the state on a single day also resulted in the present chaotic situation. Worse, the ruling TMC's internal problems added to the acts of aggression in the streets. Hence the elections proved yet again that the ruling party is unbeatable across districts. It is a debatable point whether this election exercise added another feather to Mamata Banerjee's political cap or heaped shame on her.

West Bengal is today among the poorest states — a far cry from what it was even in the post-Independence days. Bengal led this nation in the first phase of British rule here, after the East India Company established its base in Calcutta. Bengal was regarded for long as the intellectual capital of the nation, thanks to the presence of those like Tagore. Politics has much to do with its degradation to being a picture of poverty, want and political fights for the past several decades. The people there, even the Bhadrakols, breathe politics. Arguments where no argument is needed are the norm. The undoing for West Bengal started with the installation of a Communist-led government in 1977, which through repeated terms lasted till 2011. Its beginning was on an inspiring note with a Western-educated Jyoti Basu taking charge as chief minister and initiating progressive steps like land reforms. Fighting the Centre, then run by the Congress, was the Communist governments' main objective, knowing little that this had the potential to undercut the state's growth in the economic and infrastructure fields. Curiously, a few years after the Trinamool Congress of Mamata Banerjee took charge of the state, she too eventually raised the ante against the Centre.

Politics in Bengal has undergone a sea change, though. The once-powerful Congress and the formerly well-entrenched CPI-M are today a pale shadow of their former selves. Communists had engaged in verbal crusades for the poor and showed no matching obsession to uplift them. Industries fled the state due to the culture of strikes at the behest of the reds. Job opportunities have shrunk. Uplift of the state today is easier said than done.

Letters to the Editor

Tribute to a legend

Fidlar,
I read yesterday that one of our most talented artists, Pribhal Singh Sedhwa affectionately known as Ladi, had sadly passed away. I first met him in 2016 while co-curating the tenth (and sadly final) edition of CEC's 'Arms of I-Creativity'. He came in late, all a huff and a puff. We talked for hours in Shantnar Barua's room. He and Shankar — the founder of CEC — were old friends and both children of Shillong, though as both lamented, most in Shillong cared nothing for them. I felt a deep resentment and gain from them both. I could only imagine what they had encountered.
Last year, while on my campaign trail, once again met Pribhal. It would, it turned out, be the last time. It was Diwali and he had someone over putting up his lights. After this was done we sat in his office and talked to him about what we could do together as a community for the locality and constitu-

Shillong a violent city

Fidlar,
Off late, considering the violent activities in the city, Shillong has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. Violent activities here refer to the deliberate and random verbal abuse and physical assault of the non-tribals at the hands of tribals without any apparent reasons. These violent acts have been in vogue for many decades and have risen sharply in the last few years. In these modern times, where education is the paramount objective of the society, violence is naturally supposed to reduce (with increase in tolerance) with the passage of time. However, especially in Shillong this has been proven wrong. In fact, Shillong has become a very violent city with hardly a day passing by when physical assaults are not reported or observed. What is driving this hate? Why are the non-tribals looked down upon and called outsiders? Why are they always the target in spite of unfavourable state laws imposed on them?

Wild Mushroom: When ignorance is not bliss

By Melanie Passah

Every mushroom season there are reports of rural folks falling sick and, in some cases, even dying of mushroom poisoning. This article attempts to create awareness about one edible wild mushroom found in certain areas of Meghalaya. Mushrooms are macrofungi with outstanding fruiting bodies that can be hypogeous or epigeus, large enough to be seen with the naked eye, and can be picked by hand (Thang S T & Miles 1972). Macrofungi such as Mushrooms serve as an important dietary food in many countries (Gholagade J. 2006). According to Hawksworth (2012) at present there are approximately 3 million fungi of which only 140,000 species are known.

Mushrooms are not only prized for their splendid taste but they also serve as a good healthy supplement. In addition to proteins, sugar, glycogen, lipid, vitamins, amino acid, and card fiber, mushrooms possess some essential mineral nutrients which are considered key factors for the normal functioning of the body (Gholagade Ajay A., Oku J., Wankasi D 2006) (Kalae P 2009). Mushroom is a general term used mainly for the fruiting body of the macrofungi (Ascomycota & Basidiomycota) and represents only a short reproductive stage in their life cycle (Kanad Das 2010).

They are immensely diverse in terms of morphology, host preference, fruiting period, etc. Whenever rains arrive, mushrooms appear soon after, flourishing in suitable habitats (Kanad Das 2014). Mushroom is an environmentally friendly forest product because it can be harvested without harming the environment or to the ecosystem where it is found. Mushroom collection is also another source of livelihood for rural and urban folks engaged in this activity. Since mushrooms occur in a particular season it is a seasonal activity for the practitioners. More importantly, since this activity is also commonly practiced by women it is also therefore an activity that helps women earn seasonal livelihoods.

Although the Plains of Meghalaya has since time immemorial been consuming varieties of wild edibles which include many varieties of mushrooms, no proper study has been done on this subject. There have been several cases of people dying after consuming poisonous mushrooms, hence it is very important to understand the traditional knowledge asso-

ciated with identifying edible mushrooms from the poisonous ones. The local mushroom collectors have inherited this knowledge from their ancestors. Although only a few of the 70-80 species of poisonous mushrooms are fatal when ingested, many of these deadly fungi bear an unfortunate resemblance to edible species and are thus especially dangerous (Males P, Yezzeralli, Encyclopaedia Britannica). Mushrooms are unique and delicate plants and the weather, climatic condition, and altitude of the area have a major influence on the life and growth of mushrooms. Therefore to understand the factors that influence the growth of mushrooms, there is a need to include the study of the weather, climatic conditions, and altitude of the area, in one chapter of the project. This chapter includes information about the topography of the area from where the samples were collected. The altitude of the area from where the samples were collected is between 1125 meters above sea level to 1350 meters.

Rainfall distribution in the study areas varies between 3320.50 mm and 3745.60 mm. Regarding temperature, mushrooms grow at a temperature between a maximum of 30.76°C and a minimum of 15.45°C. It also grows where the humidity level is between 2611 Morning - 1907.34 Evening - 864.48. For a mushroom to grow all the above factors need to be in a proper proportion and at the right time. The study revealed that the area is rich with wild edible mushrooms which are found in abundance in the area. Wild edible mushrooms are a source of nutrients for the local people in the area. Besides, the collection and sale of mushrooms is an income-generating activity for the locals.

A total of 13 species of wild edible mushrooms were documented during the study period and these are some of the wild edible mushrooms found in the study areas in the West Jaintia Hills district: Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae), Tik khleehsoo (Russulaceae).

The non-tribals hardly have any demands and without expectation are working hard even with all the limitations and paying taxes including income tax. All they want is to live in peace and respect. The violence and hate-mongers are now so emboldened that they have no fear of the law or of law enforcers, and can even assault them. Why don't these people use their muscle power and intimidation ability at the international borders to keep India safe? The state government has not displayed any practical maturity in reducing the atmosphere of violence and hate, perhaps fearful of the various pressure groups. It does not matter to them as the non-tribals altogether are a very crucial vote bank. The state police has also been unable to check the occurrence and spread of violence and arrest the guilty. There is practically no patrolling in the city which they do by day or night. The bulk of the force are engaged in protecting the VIPs with hardly any man power remaining for the public. Also, police professionalism is at its lowest and

whatever exists, if any, is best utilized for saluting each other and the VIPs. Religious bodies and civil societies in the city have also been unable to reach out to the victims of violence. They should have used their influence to check on the perpetrators of violence. People at large in the city are also silent and do not feel encouraged to raise their voices against the violence and phobia and are comfortable by simply listening and watching. Taken together, the law and order condition in the city is dismal and the non-tribals are left to fend for themselves. But the question remains as to how long such violence and hate will be perpetuated?
Yours etc.,
Dr HS Ranhotra,
Shillong

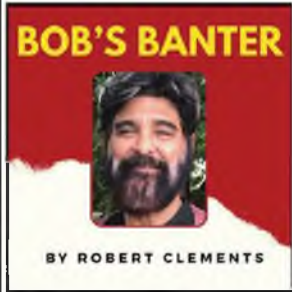
Kudos to Meghalaya High Court

Fidlar,
I wish to thank and congratulate the Meghalaya High Court for its pro-active steps in taking up people's burning issues like water problems in Shillong and in the state as a whole, the dilapidated roads in the state, the daily acute power problems, the prolonged environmental issues of illegal coal mining, illegal transportation of coal and illegal coke factories in Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills and elsewhere in the state. Moreover, the Hon'ble High Court has issued orders in respect of the above to the Meghalaya Government to act accordingly but the State Government has in the past got away with other orders of the Court and I am sure that these orders will face the same fate where they are not implemented on various occasions. I appeal to the Hon'ble High Court to be ready to draw contempt proceedings against the State Government if found wanting in this regard.
Yours etc.,
Philip Mameich,
St. James, Shillong

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Of Pathless and Umbrellas...
Not getting too many invitations to go out, I was pleasantly surprised to get one for a dinner and decided I'd need a good umbrella as the monsoons were quite relentless. I decided to go over to the umbrella store and choose a good sturdy one to beat the monsoons. I was a little surprised to see a much wider range than they had the year before.
"Are you a wrestler sir?" asked the pleasant looking salesman inside the store.
"What difference would that make?" I asked quickly.
"The wrestler umbrellas have extra strong steel ribs inside that are able to withstand a lathi charge, especially if you decide to protest against someone high up in the government," he said without a change in his pleasant face, "and instead of cloth we use tarpaulin to withstand water cannons when they try to drive you away from your place of protest!"
I told him I wasn't a wrestler, and we moved into the collection of the store. I said I wanted a normal collection trip and this is true of all the different varieties of mushrooms. Sometimes boys accompany their parents and siblings on mushroom collection trips.
Cow herders also collect mushrooms when they take their cows for feeding in the forest. But unlike the women folk, the cow herders collect mushrooms mostly for their consumption.
Consuming wild mushrooms is part of the culture of the tribal people in Jaintia Hills and people have traditional knowledge of distinguishing edible from poisonous mushrooms, which is why there are several reports of food poisoning from consuming toxic mushrooms. However, this is not a complete list of wild edible mushrooms consumed by the people in the area also because the different varieties of wild edible mushrooms are also growing in different periods; the study might have also missed some of the mushroom varieties which grow during other parts of the year.
Wild mushrooms are seasonal plants and generally mushrooms grow only two times a year in the Khasi Jaintia Hills, i.e., the two seasons the mushroom grows are spring and autumn. It may be mentioned that a study can even be conducted on the poisonous mushrooms found in the area because its toxic properties can also have some medicinal value.
(Melanie Passah has a Master's degree in Ecology, Environment and Sustainable Development from IISS and she is currently working with Foundation of Ecological Security as a Assistant Project Manager)



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

"New just imagine," I said to the umbrella man next to me, "what these two people would have done if umbrellas did not give an opening?"
The man quickly moved away and another took his place. I decided to continue, even though I did look like the raincoat shop owner. "There's so much excitement in umbrellas," I said.
A friend of mine who spends most monsoons climbing the Himalayas told me, "Bob, there's adventure right here in the city, you fall into a pothole and like mountain climbing, your whole life is at stake." You're not sure you'll come out with broken limbs, malaria or chikungunya. No mountain could ever take you on such an adventure, such danger. From now on, the potholes for me!
I continued, even as the raincoat shop owner moved away and the host came to me and I continued, "An American who got off the International Airport told me, 'You guys are into water sports in a big way huh? I need to warn our Olympics team about that! With so many swimming pools you chaps should walk away, sorry swim in away with the gulls.'
"Potholes," I continued to the host, "helps make us a hardy people. Be always grateful to a government who year after the other has helped produce strong, tough countrymen! After a falling in a pothole episode, our people are able to handle overcrowded buses, accident prone trains, lack of pavements, unhygienic slums, overflowing garbage, flooded roads, communal riots, flash strikes and bank blazes!"
Suddenly I realized that the two people standing next to the host and looking at me strangely were the umbrella salesman man and the raincoat shop owner. They both helped the host put my raincoat on and led me to the main door. "Why are you throwing me out?" I asked.
"Looks like the rains have clouded your brain," said the host who after the other two slammed the door after me!
The Author conducts an Online Writers Course. For more details send a thumbs-up to him on WhatsApp 9802272863. bobshanter@gmail.com
"For a change, don't just stare at your hands!" said

"The coward only threatens when he is safe."
— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 137 No. 331 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 13, 2023

Shameful Attack on Lady Minister

THIS is perhaps the first time that any minister is being attacked physically. The reasons for the attack are perhaps politically motivated as the Health Minister, Ampareen Lyngdoh has reportedly been threatened by the same person during her election campaign too. This is an attack on Meghalaya's matrilineal culture. The assumption that women are safe and respected has long dissipated. Matriliney was under assault when Agnes Kharshing and Anita Sangma were viciously attacked for following the illegal coal mining and transportation trail. A matrilineal society is not necessarily safe for women judging from the number of cases of domestic violence, rape and molestations that do the rounds regularly. Also there is a societal expectation—a sort of paradigm that is well defined that women ought to behave in a certain way and if they stray from that defined path they are no longer the "dornburn" or respectable—a term that immediately creates a social rift.

The questions that many have raised is whether Health Minister Ampareen Lyngdoh was attacked on Tuesday on account of her stand on certain issues that happened in her constituency a few days ago. Also, Ampareen is one of the more vocal ministers of this Government who is not averse to talking to the media regularly while most of her colleagues prefer to maintain a studied silence on even the most pernicious issues afflicting society. If there are right wing fundamentalists in the rest of India who believe in a rigid ideology where there is in this tribal society, similar right wingers that believe in purity of descent and who regularly thrive on "othering" Indian citizens who have been born and brought up in Meghalaya; contribute to its economy and its social energy and bring diversity to its ecosystem. It is only through social interface with people of diverse thought processes that a society evolves from its "narrow domestic walls" and learns to embrace a pluralist culture.

It is also observed that the right-wing section of tribal society does not appreciate women who have strong views especially on "political" issues. Khasi society says this in so many words when it terms a woman who takes a political stance as a "hen that crows," thereby implying that a woman can never engage in politics. In other words, a woman is only considered fit for unpaid domestic work. Although quite a few women have transcended these boundaries, they are still judged by yardsticks of tradition which will not permit women to hold office in the Dorbar Shingng, no matter how capable they are. The dichotomy of the Khasi matrilineal society is that its legislature has only 3 women legislators. Whether these sort of attacks on women who speak out and speak up become the order of the day is a troubling thought for a matrilineal society.

Meghalaya's politics of placating pressure groups

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

In understanding pressure groups one cannot help but have a negative feeling. This is to some extent flawed as pressure groups are mandated to take up good works for the benefit of society. The inherent nature of pressure is to force those in power to act for the progress and well-being of all, across economic, social and cultural needs. On the contrary, with every passing day the functioning of pressure groups has taken a negative turn on account of being insensitive to the suffering of the masses. They are increasingly seen as being hurdles to development rather than responsible partners. They normally lose sight of the big picture. This is the inference that can be drawn from Meghalaya's government with no conviction to deal with the pressure groups, be it in terms of dialogue or action. Increasingly the stand of MDA 2.0 can be classified as placating or aggression. There is no one to take them on and the common man is held ransom.

It would be far-fetched to say that the pressure groups mean like a parallel government. That point has not been reached. But it would be plausible to say that the pressure groups hang like a Damocles sword over the government. One move against their wishes and the government would have to deal with a law and order problem. Safety and security would be compromised. Their main strategy is to use fear as a weapon. This strategy has worked so well that they can pick and choose on what issue to speak on and on what to be as silent as the grave. For example, that illegal coal mining is rampant is common knowledge, but not to the pressure groups. They are silent on it despite its harmful impacts on the environment and possible loss of lives. Any thinking person would realise that such illegality could not have been possible without the involvement and collusion of many. With the pressure groups remaining silent does it mean that they are privy to the processes and thereby complicit in something going on under the table? The much talked about railways has become a

sentimental issue. It touches the heart but apparently not the brain. The "jaibanyuk" is equated with railways as if it is a poison and that death would befall. In any case, the due course of time the common man will die of inflation and shortage of food. Yet still, the government will placate the pressure groups to no end.

In times where unemployment is rife, everyone is talking about the importance of skills, so as to engage in meaningful occupations. Entrepreneurship and small business is the buzz-word on many lips. There are many motivational speakers and trainers who motivate the youth on these lines. This is fine. In addition, there are many pressure groups who themselves hold felicitation programmes for students who do well in various school and college examinations. This is also commendable. In one such event, the students were exhorted "to continue to work hard and do well and work on their skills to stand on their own two feet". The importance is laid on soft infrastructure. But here lies the problem, soft infrastructure is incomplete and meaningless without hard infrastructure. It is like a computer. The software is of no use without the hardware. What is the point of the youth being well trained with capabilities for self-employment and growth without the backing of roads, railways, airports, special economic zones, manufacturing service hubs, etc? Where will they work? Where will they live? Where will

"Their main strategy is to use fear as a weapon. This strategy has worked so well that they can pick and choose on what issue to speak on and on what to be as silent as the grave. For example, that illegal coal mining is rampant is common knowledge, but not to the pressure groups. They are silent on it despite its harmful impacts on the environment and possible loss of lives."

school infrastructure in the rural areas. There is no pressure from their side on how to make school education better in terms of syllabi and extra-curricular activities. Drugs are a serious problem taken by the pressure groups who end up victim to drugs and students. It is found that many pharmacies in Shillong (Polo area) sell syringes to any youth who comes asking for it on one pretext or the other. Why not raise voice on these issues? Inflation has skyrocketed to the point that many eatables are beyond reach for the common man. It is a wonder if any of the pressure groups has done vegetable marketing. If they do so they would come to know of the ground realities

and then maybe stop being insensitive to the real and burning issues. It would be good if the pressure groups retreat and revisit on their vision and missions. Re-evaluate and reassess. It is high time that they reposition themselves and start tackling the issues that matter. Then see and enjoy the support and backing of the masses.

All said and done, the starting point of change lies with Meghalaya's politics. This placating (be it in cash or in kind) of the pressure groups has to stop. Look at the bigger picture and realise the bigger problems. Perhaps cannot afford to be cut-off from the national mainstream. It will be death in isolation. Our youth will have nowhere to turn to and they would blame this generation of leaders and teachers for being irresponsible and short-sighted. For example, UDP supported the call of pressure groups to oppose railways by giving its own justification. Enough is enough. This is vote bank politics the worst kind. It is politics of convenience and all political parties indulge in it. This convenience is the reason for backwardness of Meghalaya across education, health, employment, economy, etc. Taking a cue from job reservation policy, perhaps an expert committee is required to study the functionality of pressure groups and their recognition. The mushroom pressure groups may not be recognised as such in their own justification. The other hand, the placating has to stop or maybe and if seen fit the Hon'ble High Court may step in and assess the government machinery in placating pressure groups. Then all skeletons (known and unknown) will come out of the closet.

In the end, today the transaction cost of doing business in Meghalaya is too high. The pressure groups hold too much bargaining power. They hold all the cards. As a result, project implementation suffers and the political class has no will to care. All they do is placate at the cost of the common man! (The writer teaches at NEHU. Email - benjamin@nehu.ac.in)

Musings on World Population Scenario

By Ajit Ranade

One sixth of humanity is in India, which is the most populous country on this planet. Seven of the eight billion people who live in the world today, were born just in the past two hundred years. This is how rapid the growth of world population has been in a very short span as compared with the long time span of millennia. The world population will stabilise at around 11 billion people in the next hundred years.

Some of the mega trends regarding population are as follows. First is the rapid fall in fertility rates. Just fifty years ago, the total fertility rate (TFR), i.e., the average number of children born to a woman of child-bearing age was 4.5. This has fallen to 2.5. This is the world average. A TFR of 2.1 is called the replacement rate, after which the population size becomes static, as the growth rate becomes zero. Rich countries have a lower TFR while poor ones have high ones. The TFR number is as low as 0.84 in South Korea, 1.18 in China, 1.5 in Russia, 1.64 in the United States and 2.05 in India. Higher TFRs are mostly found in the poorer countries of Africa with Niger at 4.6 and Democratic Republic of Congo at 5.8. The 54 countries of Africa together have a population roughly equal to India, and the economic size is also comparable in dollar terms. Economic growth in Africa is around 6 percent and might grow in the coming years.

The second mega trend is the increase in lifespan. It was believed (wrongly) that more people are alive today in the world, than were ever born. But this statement even though wrong, makes the point quite dramatically about the rapid rise in population. India's own life expectancy has doubled from under 40 years before independence. This has an implication for the increase in the elderly population. In India, since the elderly have very little income or health security in their old age, it is a big social burden that we as a society have to bear."

"India's own life expectancy has doubled from under 40 years before independence. This has an implication for the increase in the elderly population. In India, since the elderly have very little income or health security in their old age, it is a big social burden that we as a society have to bear."

Below 2.0 the replacement rate, these are typically higher in per capita, higher in female literacy and mostly located in the South or east. But some of the States in the Hindi belt continue to have higher TFR leading to a wide area average of 2.05. In the coming years we will see large scale migration of labour from high TFR States to lower TFR States. This freedom of movement will fill the gaps caused by labour shortage. Secondly the delimitation exercise is due in 2026, which will be for changing the overall size of parliament and also the number of representatives across states of India. The variation of representation of current members of parliament is too extreme. Where an MP may represent a constituency whose population can vary from ten thousand to ten lakhs. Thus Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have roughly the same population but very different number of MPs (49 vs 39). Thirdly India's demography is advantageous when it comes to dependency ratio, but that presupposes that it is able to generate and invest five to eight million new jobs every year for a few decades. Thus, economic growth is both a prerequisite as well as a consequence of India's demography. The coming years will reveal whether our young demography is a boon or bane. Wishing India a happy World Population Day.

(The writer is a noted economist) (Syndicate, The Shillong Press) (Email: editor@shillongtimes.org)

Letters to the Editor

Why should the public suffer for administrative lapses?

The recent order given by the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills instructing shops establishments and fast-food eateries to close by 10 pm has come as a shocker to many local earners who actually sacrifice their sleep to feed their family as most of them sell beer at night. Seizing up fast food joints at night is not a choice but a compulsion especially recovering post covid situations and we all very well know they cannot open in the day time due to congestion. The food available in KhasiZard as well as Laitumkrah police point is helpful those who visit hospitals to wait on patients who are in emergency and those who work late nights as most online jobs are better off at night considering network issues and load shedding compulsion. But one stray incident that transpired from a drunken brawl has prompted the administration to issue the order putting a blanket ban on night eateries. At a time when the smart city project is being implemented and as we all know, safety and security forms part of this project through city surveillance. But where are the CCTVs promised to be installed under smart city to be monitored and operated by the police department? If nightlife in Shillong can be curtailed just on one mis-

calculated stray incident what message are we sending to our townsmen?

When will our police act maturely to tackle a mob of 20-30 trouble mongers? As expressed in this column by a citizen, a call to the police station to complain of crimes is landing in deaf ears. On the one hand citizens are losing faith in the police while on the other side lawbreakers take advantage of the incompetent system. Is this governance? Is Meghalaya another UP Bihar of the 90's in the making? Hope our Hon'ble CM takes into account all these aspects as these ignored isolated incidents will surely take a toll on tourism and compromise our security. We condemn the incident that happened at Laitumkrah PS and strict action should be taken against those involved. Henceforth police should send a loud and clear message to all trouble mongers, that disturbing peace will and shall not be tolerated in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
Iba Khamaier
Shillong-1

Streetlight Effect

The Streetlight effect or the drunkard search principle is a type of observational bias that occurs when people only search for something where it's easiest to look. A policeman sees a drunk man searching for something under a streetlight and asks what the drunk has lost. He says he lost his keys and they both look under the

streetlight together. After a few minutes the policeman asks if he sure he lost them here, and the drunk replies, no, and that he lost them in the park. The policeman asks why he is searching here, and the drunk replies, "this is where the light is".

This same phenomenon plays out in the recent politicisation of the government bringing shops to open by 10 pm. Ironically on the same day the Karanidom government announced that all shops can open 24/7!! Drunken brawls in public, traffic violations, street fights etc., are "symptoms" of a disease; they are not the disease. Do doctors treat us for symptoms, they find the root cause. Similarly, these symptoms lay bare the genesis of the complete lack of law and order in the state. Yet when symptoms spurt the knee jerk reaction will always be misdirected towards a different solution often as in this case at the cost of us.

Now consider what happens when a government decides to "Regulate" something in the "Public Interest". This is not an unenviable God-like force that works in society's best interest. Politics is an interplay of power and money and those in power have always been captivated by special interests. In a democratic republic, the people should be in charge, and the government should serve. The only legitimate role of the state is to protect the rights of its citizens and that's what law is for. And yet, in this inversion of roles that we have accepted, law becomes the tools by which our rulers

keep us in check. The mere rule of law is never enough for this state as the state always seeks to expand it with that magic word "regulation." We accept and encourage this whenever we encounter a social or an economic problem and more importantly, we believe that the solution must lie with the government and demand regulations. To grant the government more power increases the malignance and gives them more impunity to abuse it. The state has always treated us as subjects and not citizens. We have no rights except those that our rulers are kind enough to grant us. Since the British left, we have a procedure of electing our own rulers - but we remain ruled.

The 10 PM deadline for shops and other economic establishments goes against the very tenet of a progressive society and it's an economic and social assault on us all. It exposes the complete lack of thinking and governance of the state to fulfill its duty towards its tax paying citizens and yet in the same vein it enforces us with a 10 billion dollar economy in the making. You cannot think about interior designing when your basic foundation is not in place. When jobs are scarce and entrepreneurship is being pushed as an alternative, this notification reveals the stark truth of a government that has no clue what it says or does. The only solution it comes up with, is unleashing its power as an alternative.

In the end, like the drunkard under the streetlight, those in power will look and come up with nonsensical quick-fix answers that justify their failure.

Yours etc.,
Robert R Khongmber
Via email

Shillong in unsafe hands
Editor,
I was disturbed, yet amused, when I read the headlines, 'Shillong unsafe, admits govt.' Such an admission, although candid, is also a candid confession that the administration is either incompetent or inefficient or both. The police too, admittedly, cannot deal with the problem of night crime like drug peddling and usage and other nuisance, either because the highest posts are not serious, or because there is not enough personnel or both.

Therefore, the headlines would be even more candid and accurate if it read, 'Shillong unsafe hands, admits govt.'
Yours etc.,
Amia Khartohmi,
Shillong

persons, is to order people to close all businesses after 10 pm! Who is she to regulate human behaviour on this scale? What is the justification for such an order that actually violates our Right to Freedom?

The justification she gives is that police cannot be present everywhere. So, by admission, this order itself will not solve any of the problems mentioned by her. By admission, the District Administration has failed to deal with drug users and rowdy persons. How can that incompetence be made to be borne by the general populace?

The District Administration should rather empower and recognise the Dorbar Shingngs and work with them. This will solve most of the problems, as it will be a very organic way to deal with these lawless activities at the grassroots level, and it will boost the morale of the general conscientious populace. If the police and the DSAs are empowered to carry out the arrest of lawless citizens and detain them, it will most effectively deal with drug users and peddlers and night nuisances. But the government is not willing to do this, because it is either not serious or it is incompetent to tackle these problems. Instead, it passes such idiotic orders on a whim.

Yours etc.,
John Saikhdoh,
Shillong

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

"You can't break what's broken already."

— LeAnn Rimes

The Shillong Times

VOL 64, NO. 232 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 14, 2023

Sans issue, sans leader

WHILE the Opposition is planning its second meeting in Bengaluru to push for unity of the non-BJP parties, what they lack is a central issue or a set of issues to whip up the public mood against the BJP or the Modi government. Granted that the PM has given them one on a platter in the form of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), the Opposition only sniffed around and would not catch the bait. It faces several constraints. One, the BJP's mischievous intention of uniting the Hindus could work to the Opposition's disadvantage; two, the Opposition is not united in opposing the UCC for the same reason that they cannot altogether ignore the majority community's sentiments; three, as large segments of the minorities do not vote anyway for the BJP, the UCC by itself would not make a difference to the existing electoral landscape in ways as to harm the saffron party. The BJP and Modi understand as much. Hence there is the likelihood of the UCC bill being introduced in the coming session(s) of parliament.

The Opposition also faces a problem of fielding a leader matching the wit and stature of Prime Minister Modi. The nearest one can think of is Rahul Gandhi, but he has been "fixed" through the legal mechanism. The regional stragglers angling for the PM post have a serious problem. They have no fan-following in states outside their territory. Even Mamata Banerjee cannot fancy attracting a sizable crowd outside her state, should she address a public meeting on her own. It is here that the Congress and Rahul Gandhi tower over them. They have a pan-India appeal reaching down to the farthest village. Quite understandably, the Opposition conclave wants to skirt the principal issue of who should stand in the front and lead them. It is safe to assume that if they win a majority, the dog-fight for the PM post would begin then and there.

The South is where the BJP is the weakest. The five states send about 130 members to the Lok Sabha. Now that the party has lost Karnataka too, no magic can help it to win a sizable number of seats from the South. Hence the BJP is shifting its strategy there. That would involve pinning hopes on a friendly Jagan Mohan Reddy in Andhra Pradesh and softening its campaigns against K C Chandrashekar Rao in Telangana for future support. Rao might be game too as he dreads the possibility of an arrest of his daughter, former MP Kavitha, in the Delhi liquor scam and of sending her straight to Tihar Jail. To save skin, KCR is developing cold feet over his PM ambitions.

Letters to the Editor

No lawful business at night?

Editor, Remember how when pressure groups were not content with the government, they would call a bonfire or a picketing or road blockade? Well, remember no more. Now, the District Administration has brought that '90s trend back in. Because of an incident of lawlessness by some group, the government is banning all shops after 10 pm. What did the handbys accomplish, apart from affecting daily wage earners and businesses? I'm not sure, but I'm sure the present ban by the government will accomplish just as much. What exactly are the shopkeepers made to suffer for? If not as a punishment for the lawlessness, then is it as a punishment for the inefficiency of the administration? Or maybe the administration is still hung over from the COVID shutdown? Is this the side effect of the vaccine finally kicking in? While we are talking about lawlessness, is this not the same government that the Hon'ble High Court of Meghalaya has stated is allowing the illegal trade of coal from the State to Assam and back into the state again? Nothing is done regarding

the ghostly night trade at Khyadialad. Nothing can be done regarding the menace of drugs, as admitted. The CM recently admitted that illegal mining is unstoppable. And the solution to all this crime infested environment is to ban all commercial undertakings after 10 pm? Oh! I see! The night is where only unlawful transactions can take place, right? The Night is safe.

Yours etc., Kidnar H. Hlah, Shillong

Centre has failed the non-tribals

Editor, There have been a series of letters in the past few weeks depicting the atrocities against non-tribals in the state of Meghalaya. While I am in total agreement with the state of Meghalaya, I fail to understand what steps have been taken by not just the state government but also the central government to safeguard their citizens in the state. It is an open secret that all date, there has been no punishment given to any perpetrator across the last few decades for any of the hate crimes which non-tribals have had to face. But what disturbs me the most today is the fact that the

majority of non-tribals in Shillong who belong to the Hindu community happen to have a specific deviation for the so-called pro-Hindu government in the state, led by their beloved leader, Narendra Modi. But may I ask them, what has that pro-Hindu government done for their loyal Hindus back in the state of Meghalaya in the last 9 years of their rule?

While some may argue that law and order is a state subject, it is evident that, in spite of all the eye-wash of federalism, it's the central government that calls the shots in India, especially for tiny and dependent states like Meghalaya. Every now and then we see the state government approach the centre for the release of various funds from the different ministries in New Delhi. So, in such a scenario, can't the Centre issue some basic guidelines or Ordinance for the protection of their non-tribal brethren back in the state? The great Modi government is known to take bold and fearless steps when it comes to reforms for larger interests, but they have made any law to give the Hindus or non-tribals the minority rights which they happen to be in a minority, while the other minorities enjoy in the core in this state, they are only living in a fool's paradise by being blind supporters of the incumbent regime in the country, which is into its

Delhi Police which comes under Central Government, has constituted the Special Police Unit for North Eastern Region (SPUNER) for safety and security measures from the Central Government, but the non-tribals who don't even have the courage to file an FIR as that would target them further.

The same applies to the Autonomous District Councils of Meghalaya which were established to safeguard the interests of the indigenous but take immense pride in trampling on the basic constitutional rights of that of the non-indigenous, which ironically also generate the bulk of the revenue for the state. It is laughable that even for District Councils, a significant amount of funding comes from the Central Government, but the remitters of those funds in Delhi have only taken a deal cut to the place and feeble steps when it comes to bring sub-sets of reforms in their state, especially the online issuance of the trade and labour licenses.

All in all, I am forced to say, while the non-tribals have been victimized to the core in this state, they are only living in a fool's paradise by being blind supporters of the incumbent regime in the country, which is into its

Rule of law in a broken society

By Patricia Mukhim

go from meeting to meeting, if not in Shillong then in Delhi or abroad, needs to be informed that discontent is deeply rooted in society today. The malcontents too want to have their share around a heavily congested public space to relax with friends and speak their hearts out. The old "prata kyaid" or local pubs that used to serve locally brewed liquor are all dismantled as a "holier than thou" society that does not approve of their menfolk drinking. A society steeped in hypocrisy that believes that if these pubs are dismantled then drinking would stop. Well, drinking hasn't stopped. Drinking happens in dark spaces or in cars. When the drinking and feasting is done the bottles are discarded for people in those localities to pick and dispose of. When such guys go home they are snatched and don't really care about the foul-mouthed shouting and upbraiding they get from their partners/wives etc. They are too sloshed to care and this drama is repeated every day, day after day until they begin to complain of feeling unwell and the diagnosis is amongst other things - a damaged liver.

What is it that pushes people to drink in order to get drunk? Well, that's for psychologists to answer - especially those in rehabilitation and drug and alcohol addiction centres. But if one spends enough time to listen to these malcontents there is always a story of an undressed need which could be a family that's constantly bearing the person; a family that shows no empathy; a family where no one cares to listen. It is almost an accepted fact that alcoholics and drug addicts lie through their teeth just so they can get their next fix. But is there anyone with enough patience to hear them out? I guess there are too few, people today with a listening ear. Poverty is saring many in the face and the opportunities to get out of that poverty are too few. One needs to be fortunate to have passed Class 10 or 12 to be considered even for a driver's job. With the number of high school drop outs rising every year it is there a system in place to skill such people for a meaningful livelihood? All our systems are designed to serve those that are, at the very least, Class 12 passed.

A large majority of our youth are therefore a disillusioned lot who feel cheated by the system and hence have no stakes in it. That is why they are disruptive and hate the idea of law and order. I would not like to label them as law breakers because they don't even fall in the category of those that know the law. You have to be educated to know you are breaking the law and committing a crime. When these young dispondent youth see those in positions of authority break the law with impunity and get away with corruption, they argue that what's good for the powerful should be good for the powerless too.

When the National Green Tribunal (NGT) came up with the ban on coal mining in April 2014, it did so because it found several miners trapped inside mines without their deaths being reported. The mine owners could not be bothered to search for the dead bodies of their workers in case of a mine flooding. To say that this is a gross violation of human rights is an understatement. The role of the NGT had every right to shut this model of coal extraction. But that the successive governments of Meghalaya from 2014 till date allowed illegal coal mining to take place and that coal to be transported illegally is not a state secret. It is known to all but the malcontents judge this even more severely because they are constantly reminded that they are delinquents. Their contention is if those in government can commit crimes in broad daylight why do their acts become criminal? After all, the law should be equal for all. These double standards exhibited by society and its many institutions including churches and law enforcers is what is galling to these youth that have fallen between the cracks.

The recent order by the Deputy Commissioner East Khasi Hills that all shops should close by 10 pm could've had more been aggravating for the street food vendors, many of them supporting families and earning their money. Many tend to label the rejects of society who come to satiate their hunger because street food is so much more affordable than the food in restaurants. Sometimes even those who have emerged from the expensive bars, where they have their expensive drinks find street food faster than the usual restaurant fare. Street food vending is a livelihood for many women

that are single parents. One woman was seen talking to the electronic media with a little child on her back. And they are unlikely to give up their right to a livelihood without a fight.

One is appalled that the district administration could come up with rules that prohibit an honest livelihood by imposing a timing on businesses - some very small, others small and still others of a medium scale. This is why it is so important to be grounded. Sitting in an office and listening to juniors reporting a situation and then acting on it is not good administration. In a society where the brahms and fights and malcontents are constantly testing the waters. If they find the law alien and uncompromising they may not take too many liberties as they do now.

For many in Meghalaya today, poverty is a daily experience. It's pointless telling people what they need to do so that they can overcome hardship when they can hardly afford rice and dal; one or two tiny pieces of meat and hardly any vegetables. Let's not even talk of fruits which are unaffordable even by the middle class. The prices of vegetables and essentials have spiraled sky high with no one keeping a tab on why this is happening. Surely the markets cannot always decide the prices. Some regulatory mechanism is needed else resentment against the system are bound to pile up.

A system that is seen to be tilting towards the affluent will have many working against it. When the balance tilts, the rule of law will be challenged beyond its capacity to deal with the growing delinquencies. The population growth in Meghalaya amongst the poorer section continues to scale the graph. Teenage girls are becoming mothers before they know what parenting is all about. In fact women are becoming reproductive machines in this state, but is anyone serious about addressing this insidious problem? No, in fact the institutions have failed women in this state. Why then are we surprised at the growing population of malcontents in Meghalaya?

Perhaps we have closed our minds to the problems afflicting society and find them boring. These problems that we break up into the carpet will haunt us. But by then most of our politicians would have migrated to foreign countries to settle there. Why should they care?

Name withheld on request. Via email

Why is Shillong unsafe?

Editor, The State Administration says that Shillong is unsafe then who will come to the safety of citizens? It is really shameful on the shoulders of the Hindus but they have completely failed to make any improvement in their miserable state of affairs in Meghalaya.

After the MDA 2 came into power the day to day increase in violent activities by the miscreants are reported and no action by the Government is forthcoming to punish them for their crimes.

On the one hand the Government is unable to contain the situation and on the other they are trying to lure tourists

to the electronic media with a little child on her back. And they are unlikely to give up their right to a livelihood without a fight.

One is appalled that the district administration could come up with rules that prohibit an honest livelihood by imposing a timing on businesses - some very small, others small and still others of a medium scale. This is why it is so important to be grounded. Sitting in an office and listening to juniors reporting a situation and then acting on it is not good administration. In a society where the brahms and fights and malcontents are constantly testing the waters. If they find the law alien and uncompromising they may not take too many liberties as they do now.

For many in Meghalaya today, poverty is a daily experience. It's pointless telling people what they need to do so that they can overcome hardship when they can hardly afford rice and dal; one or two tiny pieces of meat and hardly any vegetables. Let's not even talk of fruits which are unaffordable even by the middle class. The prices of vegetables and essentials have spiraled sky high with no one keeping a tab on why this is happening. Surely the markets cannot always decide the prices. Some regulatory mechanism is needed else resentment against the system are bound to pile up.

A system that is seen to be tilting towards the affluent will have many working against it. When the balance tilts, the rule of law will be challenged beyond its capacity to deal with the growing delinquencies. The population growth in Meghalaya amongst the poorer section continues to scale the graph. Teenage girls are becoming mothers before they know what parenting is all about. In fact women are becoming reproductive machines in this state, but is anyone serious about addressing this insidious problem? No, in fact the institutions have failed women in this state. Why then are we surprised at the growing population of malcontents in Meghalaya?

Perhaps we have closed our minds to the problems afflicting society and find them boring. These problems that we break up into the carpet will haunt us. But by then most of our politicians would have migrated to foreign countries to settle there. Why should they care?

Name withheld on request. Via email

Why is Shillong unsafe?

Editor, The State Administration says that Shillong is unsafe then who will come to the safety of citizens? It is really shameful on the shoulders of the Hindus but they have completely failed to make any improvement in their miserable state of affairs in Meghalaya.

After the MDA 2 came into power the day to day increase in violent activities by the miscreants are reported and no action by the Government is forthcoming to punish them for their crimes.

On the one hand the Government is unable to contain the situation and on the other they are trying to lure tourists

Is shutting down shops at 10 pm the answer

By Taki Bhal

The Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills (DE KHI) District recently imposed Section 144 CrPc on the whole of Shillong City and also stated that all shops in the city be closed by 10 pm every night until further orders. To say that the above order has been well received by one and all would be the understatement of this century. In fact, the above order forms the subject of controversial debates and discussions all over town. Many see it as an uncalculated forerun. In attempting to trace the cause for such an order it appears the nefarious activities of delinquents, anti-social elements and criminal's increase with the progress of the night, much to the discomfort and distress of other innocent citizens of this city. Once darkness falls one then starts to find groups of bikers or youths in cars parked in dark and lonely places of a locality where the occupants quench themselves of their thirst for drinks and other intoxicants. It has been proved time and again that it is under such circumstances that trouble begins.

Quarrels among themselves or with innocent passers-by that pops up is why aren't such places patrolled by the police and the potential trouble makers shooed away? This doesn't happen because most Durbars, ah-hor police, patrolling within their respective areas of jurisdiction. "Their syngkie ki kymhah lada rung u pulit shapho dong" (The entry of police into the shing long will scare the day-lights out of the women and children). Why and how this could happen has never received a reasonable answer. But the answer is not hard to find. It's the local gundas of the locality and not the local women and children who are troubled and apprehensive of police patrolling inside shinglongs. They are the ones who coerce the authority of the shing long in not allowing entry of police. Also in the past almost all the shinglongs in Shillong hosted illegal booth dens whose interest lay in not allowing any presence of the law near their moonshine shops. But times have now changed and they demand that we too keep up with the times.

If we seek to preserve the tranquility, peace and the law and order in our shinglongs and of Shillong, there is no

other solution than regular patrolling by some authoritative force, which in some instances have even led to fatalities. Law and order breaks down; the innocent especially women and children are affected and in the process the locality and the city itself attains a bad reputation. Having said that I fail to see the effectiveness of

opening or closing of shops towards better social interactions. So if not on shops in the night then from where and how do these social ailments begin? Let's try to analyze and break down the root cause of this puzzle.

Firstly lets accept that it's not shops whether they open or shut that cause these problems. These issues come about because of other reasons. In most localities clandestine and surreptitious drinking by gangs under the cover of darkness is the main cause. Local gundas of a locality identify ideal places or roadside corners for them and their friends to make merry in the night. Visit some localities and when you come to a roadside spot scattered with empty liquor bottles, you will instantly know what I am talking about.

Secondly both the Police and the Durbars share a common goal - preservation of law and order plus discouragement of delinquents and anti-social elements. Why they fail to work together in cohesion towards this common goal is a million dollar question that still remains unanswered.

I strictly believe that the time for Joint Community Policing; patrolling together of localities by both police and durbar authorities working in tandem with each other and not against one another, is now urgently called for. Thanks can soon be sent to the details with Durbars under their jurisdiction. Today Meghalaya has a Chief Secretary for whom a lot of people have a lot of respect for. Hence it to his wisdom, if he is convinced of the above arguments to bring the Durbars and the Police to work together towards the betterment of the citizens of this city. The least we can do is give Joint Community Policing a try.

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



"Research is creating new knowledge." — Neil Armstrong

The Shillong Times

Vol No 15 No 33 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 15, 2023

At last, coke towers demolished THE Meghalaya High Court has pursued the issue of illegal coal mining and illegal coke units in the state with relentless zeal. The people of Meghalaya particularly those who have had to put up with the smoke and grime emitted by coke factories in Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills have been at the forefront in seeking the court's intervention. The Court has responded and in doing so has given hope to millions of citizens that justice is not beyond their reach. For years people living around the coke factories have inhaled the toxic smoke released from the factories and many have complained of respiratory ailments. This was what pushed the Environmental Co-ordination Committee (ECC) of Sutnaga, East Jaintia Hills to pursue the matter assiduously and now they see the result of their honest pursuit. Before that the coke mills in Shillong, West Khasi Hills were also brought down.

Coke is a by-product of coal and the fact that large number of coke units are running, some without any environmental clearance means that illegality in the State is a norm. Coal mining has been banned in Meghalaya since 2014 but coke production has carried on for nine years even without any of the regulatory bodies bating an eyelid. It means therefore that there has been state collusion in all these years saying a word about it. Both coal and coke have been used by the cement companies based in Jaintia Hills. It would have been expensive for them to import coal from outside the state. The cement furnaces do better with coke since most of the impurities have already been removed from it. Coke is a fuel used in blast furnaces that produce iron from the ore and is also used as a reducing agent in the extraction of metals such as zinc and iron, etc. But using both coal and coke comes at a heavy environmental cost.

The abandoned coal mining areas have not been reclaimed but are left with those gaping holes being filled with rain water during the monsoons. After a mine is abandoned, coal mine owners move to another place in the vicinity. It is shocking that they manage to get environmental clearance without a glitch. When the new mine is drilled and miners go down about two hundred feet into the ground they begin to dig horizontally and often hit an abandoned mine. That's when the new mine floods and people inside die before they can get out. This is a repeated saga in Meghalaya but it only became public in December 2018 when about 15 people were trapped inside and only one person was able to escape. The bodies of those trapped could never be retrieved. This in itself should have warranted strong action against the state but nothing happened. Thankfully, the no-sense Meghalaya High Court is today on the right track.

Letters to the Editor

Mushrooming coke plants in Meghalaya

News on dismantling of coke factories in the state by the District authorities as per orders of the Meghalaya High Court has dominated the front pages of Meghalaya's major print and electronic media during the last one week or so. But till date only 9 coke plants are reported in East Jaintia and West Khasi Hills. What about the rest 82 plants that need to be dismantled? What about the so-called legally set up plants since they also cause environment pollution much to the chagrin of the State Government? What is of serious concern to me and perhaps many others is the fact that there are more than 161 coke coal plants in East and West Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills Districts, which will be substituted by human-made robots. Robots were invented in the mid-1950s. It was a boom in those days. Things change, and so does their context. A century later, we are all struggling to get good jobs because of the apparent outcome. Who would have known that the invention of humans would be a subject of study for the people? It is unbecoming for educational institutions not to have a dedicated subject

The reservation saga: What will be the endgame?

By Bhogoram Mawroh

Recently, there was a news report that the Meghalaya Government has been dilly-dallying on the formation of the Expert Committee. The Chairperson of the Committee, Amarendra Lyngdoh, blamed the delay on the lack of suggestions from the political parties. VPP (Voice of Peoples' Party), the party that led the agitation for review of the current reservation policy, has termed the delay a "crisis" and demanded that the government should get down to business. Whatever the reasons for the delay, a final resolution is a must. Hence it is better that the Expert Committee is constituted. And now since the Committee has been formed the question that will arise one it sits and deliberates on the issue is what might be its recommendations. Will the old policy remain or will there be a revamp? If it's the latter, will it benefit and who will lose out in the process? And finally, what happens to the future of the political parties, especially those in the MDA-led government and the VPP, which has staked its political credibility on the issue? These are very important questions to deliberate on, as they have serious implications for not just Meghalaya but the whole country as well.

I am, however, not very confident since a judgement that supports reservation based on population in Meghalaya will have ramifications for the entire country. The Indra Sawhney judgement was made in the context of the Mandal Commission report, which identified OBC's (Other Backward Classes) as being eligible for reservation and found that they make up 52% of the Indian population. If OBC's got reservations based on population, the total reservation would be around 75%, leaving only 25% for open competition. That would have gone against the views of BR Ambedkar, who during the drafting of the Constitution had clarified that reservation "must be confined to a minority of seats". Based on this, the court therefore ruled that reservations have to be based on the criteria of minority, not population. If so, any deviation would mean a violation of the original design of the framers of the Constitution. Since reservation under Article 16 (4) is governed by the 1992 judgement, its law cannot be broken for the claims made by the ST and the OBC.

However, there is a way out for the VPP for the reservation legally and prove that the agitation was not driven for political gains. In such a scenario, the VPP, which has staked its political capital and reputation on the issue, will have to make some difficult choices. The first option they have is to not contest the recommendation legally. The party will express displeasure but not push for a legal challenge. However, this will raise the question of why the entire issue was raised in the first place. Did the party not know of the legal difficulties before it filed people up against the current policy? How can the entire state be put under anxiety without the party spearheading the agitation deliberating the issue that it is not the party's responsibility? The other suspicion that would arise is that VPP knew that the issue did not have legal merit but still wanted to put pressure on the government so that when the new policy fails the legal challenge, they can blame the government, claiming that the agitation was not failed by the people. The way they will most likely game electoral gains. Now, other parties have already made the allegation that the whole reservation issue was to failed the people. They will most likely game electoral gains. Now, other parties have already made the allegation that the whole reservation issue was to failed the people. They will most likely game electoral gains.

At least for The United States of America, a developed country does its progressive development at all hamper the state? Will it at all affect human labour? Yes, it did in the past, but at present it might not be affected as much as in the developing countries.

Talking about developing countries, lets magnify our own nation (Chat GPT was introduced 1st November, and it was unfortunately become a tool of intelligence for many, including universities, colleges, and even schools, whether for teachers or students. Will the easily accessible Chat GPT be utilised wisely? It is available through various applications, platforms, or websites that integrate and deploy the model for conversational purposes. The educated class uses Chat GPT for a quick search; its entire function is to gather the already available resources on the topic. I gather the information, provides it to us from all sources, and shares it within a defined manner.

In earlier days, we took pains to go to the library to get our assignments done. In the 2000s, we relied on encyclopedias for a minute search; in the late 2000s,

we relied on the Internet (Google); and at present, we rely on Chat GPT. What does the impact of this mean that one is prone to not education? Are we becoming over-reliant on AI to the extent that we avoid making efforts ourselves? Chat GPT is undoubtedly useful for quick research, providing researchers with impromptu ideas on various subjects. What is the most spellbinding factor here is that students often rely heavily on Chat GPT for their assignments and presentations and nothing of their own research and creative works. If Artificial Intelligence dominates the young population of the country, what will happen to us in the long run? When will our education go? Who will take the call? Who will be blamed? Should the Government of India intervene? Should they ban entirely in the country? Or should they regulate? Artificial Intelligence is not and never will be good for a country like ours, especially when more than 50% of the population is below the age of 25 and more than 65% below the age of 35. A developing country like ours, being the 5th largest economy in the world, will have the scope of reaching its zenith with the means and intelligence of the people and not with the aid of Artificial Intelligence. I have, firsthand, seen students using it and copied it exactly

Two outcomes are possible in this case. The first outcome is that the challenge fails, the present policy is held to be legally tenable (based on extraordinary situations), and the status quo is maintained. The fact that the issue has been discussed a lot in the public forum will raise the question again as to whether VPP raised the issue either not being aware of the legal difficulties (being irresponsible) or for electoral gains and in the process creating a schism among the indigenous communities of the State (playing the politics of divide and rule). The other, more worrying outcome could be that the reservation is reduced to 50% and the Khasi-Jaintia community loses their 40% guaranteed reservation. What will remain of the VPP, which has created so much agitation in the State but ended up losing the benefits that both the Khasi-Jaintia and the Garo are currently enjoying? What will these Khasi-Jaintia youths do who might have got the job under the current 40% reservation policy but will not lose out under the court-mandated new 50% reservation policy? What happens to their families, who knew they could have had a better life if the old policy had remained?

The last outcome, in case VPP decides to challenge the recommendation of the status quo, is that they win the case and the Khasi-Jaintia gets an extra 6%-7% based on their population. This would impact on the government of the party, and they will have a very good chance of winning, if not all, at least 30-31 seats in the next Assembly elections. On their own, they can form the government and have free rein to do whatever they want. So for the VPP, the whole reservation saga carries great risk, but it also carries great reward.

Since the Expert Committee has been constituted, the result of the discussion should be out before the elections next year, maybe next year. It will give the public a good opportunity to find out whether this whole agitation around reservations was a genuine attempt at correcting a historical wrong or an attempt to divide the community for political gains. We will find out sooner than later.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organization or institution)

There is a surplus of Artificial Intelligence over the internet that is accessible and that works for different assigned tasks; most of them require a fee to subscribe, and others, like Chat GPT, are available for free. Most of us subscribed to Chat GPT to understand the language of Artificial Intelligence and to learn its pros and cons, but to entirely rely on it is nothing but a waste of one's own intelligence.

I end my observation and open the door for a debate. If one relies solely on Chat GPT, are they aware that they are overshooting their intelligence? Can students of the contemporary world focus their efforts on research and development rather than on AI? Who will make the young citizens understand that AI is not the solution in itself, but rather a tool that should be approached critically? For the rest, you can make your own judgment on whether to frequently use it or to use it more as a backup, or to never use it at all.

Yours etc, Emidao Shylla, Shillong 2

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

Now or Never: Need for Railways in Meghalaya for Economic Progress

By Patrick Kurhah

Benjamin Lyngdoh's article, 'Meghalaya's politics of peering pressure groups' (ST July 13, 2023), laudably emphasises on why it is now pertinent for Meghalaya to drive its economy and get past pressure groups which have become insensitive to the suffering of the masses and are only raising politically motivated issues to stay in the limelight.

Taking the economic spirit of his article forward, it is perhaps the most crucial juncture at which Meghalaya is standing, now that it has to take a call on introducing railways. With the Centre having allocated funds for the same and the NFR waiting to get a green signal from the state for implementation, the MDA 2022 government must do all that is welcome in this potential game-changer which could show the course for our future generation and take care of most major woes that the state is currently facing.

For this article, let us take three areas: Unemployment, inflation and ease-of-doing-business concerns.

Unemployment is a significant issue in Meghalaya, with many young people struggling to find stable and well-paying jobs. Data from think tanks suggest that unemployment rate in Meghalaya is relatively low compared to other states of the country. But that assumption is essentially based on the Labour Participation Rate (LPR), which is defined by the working population in the 16-64 age group engaged in seeking employment in Meghalaya. It is a mere people are seeking employment as per the LPR.

In this scenario, one does not need a reminder that Indian Railways is one of the largest employment providers in India. As per official data of the Indian Railways, more than 12 lakh people have received direct employment till 2022.

The introduction of railways would create a plethora of employment opportunities for our youth, both directly and indirectly. Direct employment would come from the construction, operation and maintenance of the railway system, while indirect employment could arise from ancillary industries such as warehousing, last-mile logistics, hospitality, retail, and tourism that would fare well due to improved connectivity. This basically means railways will also be a supplement to the already-flourishing sectors in Meghalaya.

Inflation is another pressing concern for the state. It is largely acknowledged that the cost of doing business and the cost of living is quite high in Meghalaya. Even other goods and services aside, the everyday vegetable markets are an apt testimony to the kind of unaffordability that is slowly creeping into our state, impacting marginalised classes directly and disproportionately. This is coupled with the fact that our local produce, accounting for packaging and transportation costs, are unable to compete with the products that come in from other states due to which local farmers are ultimately not able to sell the desired amounts and command the right price.

It is also due to the fact that produce from other states become competitive in pricing due to the low transportation costs brought about by majorly by railways. Can to Mandiphar, the only existing and functional railway station in Meghalaya, where farmers of the region regularly take the trains to go and sell all of their produce across the border in Assam and satisfactorily command prices. Tractors must probably do a case study on Mandiphar to understand the impact railways have had on the farmers of the region to understand the benefits the state could unlock.

Currently, the lack of a robust transportation network means that goods have to be transported by road, which is both time-consuming and expensive (not to mention the benefits some members of the state are receiving due to this for

which they are complicit in the opposition of railways, but in a topic another day). Railways, with their ability to transport large volumes of goods quickly and efficiently, could significantly reduce these costs, tackling inflation. Lastly, the lack of an efficient transportation mode poses significant barriers to doing business in Meghalaya. It hampers the state's ability to attract investment and encourages the growth of local businesses in the outside world. One can consider the warehousing model that Assam is currently following, which is getting a good chunk of revenue for the state. Major companies are currently willing to invest in our neighbouring state due to the possibility of setting up warehouses along the railway lines, despite issues with heavy last-mile logistics costs. This in turn means easy and quick availability of goods for the state and further growth of the state of an eventual logistics hub for the entire northeastern region.

In rural areas, even major industrial estates have huge investments from some of the biggest companies in India, in their proximity to the railways. In Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, which have major rail belts, effective railway connectivity, and likewise industrial investments, have opened up formal employment opportunities for tribal youth, in turn uplifting the overall socio-economic state of their communities. In short, effective transportation is a major contributor for bringing in investments, which facilitates employment and economic growth. No country or state in India can ignore the existence has ever flourished by keeping their economy closed.

Guys active on social media are less manly: Here's why?

For better or worse, much of life is categorized along gendered lines: Clothing stores have sections for men and women, certain foods are considered more manly or more feminine, and even drinks can take on a gendered sheen ("mammoth," anyone?).

Our newly published research finds that even social media is a canvas for rigid gender stereotyping. Specifically, we show that men who post often on social media are seen as feminine, a phenomenon we refer to as the "frequent-posting femininity stereotype." We observed this bias in four experiments featuring over 1,300 respondents from the U.S. and U.K.

To post is to be seen as unmanly. As consumer behaviour researchers, we have long been interested in the contradictions, peculiarities and restrictions associated with masculinity.

These dynamics have far-reaching implications in the world of marketing. It is widely known, for example, that Coke Zero was created as an alternative to Diet Coke, a product that men notoriously shied away from for its perceived ties to women who want to lose weight. There's even a tendency for people to think it is unmanly to sleep more, because needing rest is connected to being weak and vulnerable.

We thought about how some of these notions might come into play on social media. Polling data suggests that men and women use social media platforms in very different ways: For example, men tend to be on fewer platforms overall and don't post as often as women on apps like Instagram.

We wondered if gender biases had anything to do with why Arc men judged harshly when they share on social media?

To test this question, we ran a series of experiments in which respondents were asked to evaluate a "normal, average, ordinary" man who either frequently or rarely posts on social media. To provide a more concrete picture, we described the man as someone who posts online for fun and has a moderate number of followers.

Respondents consistently rated the man as more feminine when he was described as a frequent social media poster. This was true regardless of assumptions made about the man's age, education, wealth, and preferred social media platform. We also controlled for the gender, age, political beliefs, and social media use of the people who participated in the study.

Notably, we used an identical scenario to describe a woman's posting behaviour — and post frequency had no effect on how feminine people thought she was.

An aversion to appearing needy. What, then, explains this somewhat unusual effect?

We discovered that anyone who frequently posts, regardless of their gender, comes across as a person who seeks attention and validation. But this projected sense of neediness only translates



to perceived femininity in men.

This makes sense. After all, research has shown that rejecting femininity is crucial to conventional notions of manhood, while avoiding masculinity is not necessarily crucial to conventional womanhood. Indeed, ads, TV shows, movies and music continue to reinforce ideas that men be resolutely stoic and self-sufficient. Our results indicate that by posting frequently online, men come across as the opposite.

Not only that, but the "frequent-posting femininity stereotype" effect turned out to be even more stubborn than we expected.

Two of our experiments attempted, but ultimately failed, to curb this bias.

First, we examined whether men were judged differently when sharing content about others as opposed to themselves — the idea being that this form of posting behaviour would come across as considerate and not as validation-seeking. Second, we examined whether male influencers — who post largely for professional reasons — faced the same stereotype.

In both cases — and to our surprise — frequent posting caused participants to see these social media users as more feminine.

Broadening the definition of manhood. There's a lot we don't know about this unique prejudice.

For example, it's unclear to what degree the frequent-posting femininity stereotype affects how men are judged in different cultures. While men around the world are often considered less masculine when they appear needy, our research only included participants from the U.K. and U.S.

Just as critical: How can the connection between frequent posting and femininity be broken altogether? Our research suggests that this link is durable and reflects persistent gender dynamics.

Still, it's worth exploring how platforms can curb this prejudice through their design. For example, BeReal is an app that prompts users to quickly share an unedited photo snapshot of what they're doing at a random time throughout the day. Functions like these seem to emphasize authenticity, routine, and community. Is this the recipe that's needed to change the association between posting and validation-seeking?

Notably, men are experiencing historic rates of social isolation and facing dire mental health consequences. This health crisis is likely exacerbated by pervasive biases that make men feel like they can't talk about their problems or ask for help. The frequent-posting femininity stereotype reveals another instance in which men are judged for attempting to express themselves and build social connections.

As New York Times correspondent Claire Cain Miller wrote in 2018, there are "many ways to be a girl but one way to be a boy," both in Western cultures and around the world. What will it take for that rigid definition of manhood to be broadened?

(The Conversation)

Engineering gut bacteria and microbes can improve health

The human body is a complex organism, made up of trillions of cells. But not all of them are human — about half of them are fungi, microbes, and bacteria. Scientists are starting to understand how and why these communities — referred to as microbiomes — are crucial to the functioning of various body systems.

In this episode of *The Conversation Weekly*, we speak to three experts who study the gut microbiome: a gastroenterologist, a neuroscientist, and a biological engineer.

Their research considers how these microbiomes are important, what the relationship is between microbiomes and wellbeing, and how synthetically engineered microorganisms promise new forms of therapies.



Partners in health

Chris Damman is a gastroenterologist and clinical associate professor at the University of Washington, Wash. Damman investigates how microbiomes in the gut — the digestive system from start to finish — communicate with other body systems. He looks at the gut-brain axis, specifically.

Damman points out the importance of the gut microbiome, which "plays an incredibly important role in digesting our food. We have powerful enzymes that our pancreas and our liver and our stomach, our salivary glands make," he explains.

"But the enzymes that are our bodies can produce only go so much. So the last part of the small intestine, um, and the large intestine, the colon... it's here that the microbiome is like our partners in health, converting fibre into things like butyrate and other short chain fatty acids."

Studying the composition and balance of the

gut microbiome is starting to reveal connections between it and various neurological conditions. Andrea Merchak, an incoming postdoctoral scholar at the University of Florida, studies the gut biome as it affects and is affected by various conditions.

"Somebody with multiple sclerosis is going to have a different microbiome from when they're perfectly healthy through diagnosis and then through late stages of disease, that microbiome is going to change."

Merchak points out that because of the progression of the condition, multiple sclerosis allows scientists to investigate the gut-brain axis.

"It happens over a really long period of time, which means that we have a really long time to intervene, and a really long time to try and stop what's going on," Merchak says.

"When a person's first diagnosed, they're not necessarily at the point of severe disability yet... We can see it early and we can try and stop it."

Engineering the biome

As scientists learn more about the gut biome and its relationship to disease, they're also starting to figure out ways to impact the gut biome's composition to produce different, and more healthful, outcomes.

Tae Seok Moon, a biological engineer at Washington University at St. Louis, Mo., looks at how synthetic biology can be employed within the gut. He is developing sensors that can help adjust the composition of the gut biome and various microbe communities within it.

"What I want to do is, there are some enzymes that break down or synthesize serotonin," he says. "In response to the serotonin level, bacteria would have the ability to control the concentration of serotonin by producing an enzyme that breakdowns serotonin if the serotonin level is too high."

Scientists are looking at how manipulating the gut biome can help address various conditions, but Merchak points out that it's not as straightforward as it sounds.

"We know that if you change what you eat, it changes the composition of your gut microbiome. And so ultimately, if we find beneficial bacteria that we think is going to be promising for a wide swath of people, generally, that's going to come with a dietary change in order to maintain those populations." (The Conversation)

Get rid of your diet soft drinks

Does artificial sweetener aspartame really cause cancer?

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which is the specialised cancer agency of the World Health Organization, has declared aspartame may be a possible carcinogenic hazard to humans.

Another branch of the WHO, the Joint WHO and Food and Agriculture Organization's Expert Committee on Food Additives has assessed the risk and developed recommendations on how much aspartame is safe to consume. They have recommended the acceptable daily intake be 0 to 40mg per kilo of body weight, as we currently have in Australia.

A hazard is different to a risk. The hazard rating means it's an agent that is capable of causing cancer; a risk measures the likelihood it could cause cancer.

So what does this hazard assessment mean for you?

Firstly, what is aspartame?

Aspartame is an artificial sweetener that is 200 times sweeter than sugar, but without any kilojoules.

It's used in a variety of products including carbonated drinks such as Coke Zero, Diet Coke, Pepsi Max and some home brand offerings. You can identify aspartame in drinks and foods by looking for additive number 951.

Food products such as yogurt and confectionery may also contain aspartame, but it's not stable at warm temperatures and thus not used in baked goods.

Commercial names of aspartame include Equal, Nutrasweet, Candarel and Sugar Twin. In Australia the acceptable daily intake is 40mg per kilo of body weight per day, which is about 60 sachets.

In America the acceptable daily intake has been set at 75 sachets.

What evidence have they used to come to this conclusion?

IARC looked closely at the evidence base from around the world using data from observational studies, experimental studies and animal studies.

They found there was some limited evidence in human studies linking aspartame and cancer (specifically liver cancer) and limited evidence from animal studies as well.

They also considered the biological mechanism studies which showed how cancer may develop from the consumption of aspartame.

Usually these are lab-based studies which show exactly how exposure to the agent may lead to a cancer. In this case they found there was limited evidence for how aspartame might cause cancer.

There were only three human studies that looked at cancer and aspartame intake. These large observational studies used the intake of soft drinks as an indicator of aspartame intake.

All three found a positive association between artificially sweetened beverages and liver cancer in either all of the population they were studying or sub-groups within them. But these studies could not rule out other factors that may have been responsible for the findings.

A study conducted in Europe followed 475,000 people for 11 years and found that each additional serve of diet soft drink consumed per week was linked to a 6% increased risk of liver cancer. However, the scientists did conclude that due to the rarity of liver cancer they still had small numbers of people in the study.

In a study from the US, increased risk of liver cancer was seen in people with diabetes who drank more than two or more cans of a diet soda a week.

The third study, also from the US, found an increase in liver cancer risk in men who never smoked and drank two or more artificially sweetened drinks a day.

From this they have decided to declare aspartame as a Group 2b "possible carcinogen". But they have also said more and better research is needed to further understand the relationship between aspartame and cancer.

IARC has four categories (groupings) available for potential substances (or as they are referred to by IARC, "agents") that may cause cancer. (The Conversation)



Political representation doesn't mean racial justice



There's no question that British politics is becoming more diverse. From only four minority ethnic MPs elected in 1987, now 67 MPs are from a minority ethnic background.

The Scottish first minister, Humza Yousaf, recently became the first minority ethnic leader of a devolved government and the first Muslim to lead a major UK party. Yousaf follows a number of historic firsts: a Muslim mayor of London (Sadique Khan), the first British Asian UK prime minister (Rishi Sunak), and the first female minority ethnic home secretary (Priti Patel) succeeded by another minority ethnic woman. (Sueella Braverman).

People often assume that if a person in power is an ethnic minority, they will advocate more strongly for minority ethnic communities. But, as our research shows, ethnic diversity in government is not a guarantee of racial justice.

Some minority ethnic politicians align themselves with a "model minority" archetype, attributing their success to quintessentially British, conservative values of hard work and entrepreneurship. This was an oft-repeated message in the 2022 Conservative leadership

campaign, the most racially diverse in history.

Minority ethnic politicians praise the government's news of UK politics as a symbol of diversity and social progressiveness. This, ironically, allows these government ministers to justify policies that are cruel to immigrants, and ignore legitimate concerns of minority ethnic citizens.

Badenoch has rebuffed calls for more teaching of black history in schools. A 2020 report from the race equality think tank the Runnymede Trust said that more diversity in what children are taught is key to addressing the racism that is "deeply embedded" in Britain's schools.

Speaking about perpetrators of child sexual exploitation, Braverman claimed grooming gangs are "almost all British Pakistani men". This was among the Hindu and Sikh refugees who are being recruited and evidence to the contrary. She was flanked by Sunak suggesting that "political correctness" and "cultural sensitivities" were getting in the way of stamping out grooming gangs out.

As home secretary, Priti Patel criticised Black Lives Matter protesters in 2020, and described England's footballers taking the knee as a widely supported symbol of anti-racist activism - as "gesture politics".

Patel has implied that as a victim of racism herself, she and the government - understand racial inequality. Her sidelining of others' very real experiences of racism is seemingly permissible, given Patel's minority ethnic identity.

Anti-immigration sentiment There are also examples of minority ethnic ministers pushing policies that actively stigmatise and target vulnerable minority groups.

The illegal migration bill is the latest example of this. As post-racial gatekeepers, politicians like Braverman give legitimacy to hard-right views on race and immigration. At the

same time, they prop up the line that immigration is no longer about race.

At the Conservative Conference in 2022, Braverman said, "It's not racist for anyone, ethnic minority or otherwise, to want to control our borders." And yet she has likened refugee

immigrants to an "invasion" and said that immigration threatens the UK's "national character".

Notably, the government's immigration policies of recent years have been articulated and championed by politicians who are themselves the children or grandchildren of immigrants. Sunak's grandparents were among the Hindu and Sikh refugees who fled Punjab following the partition of India. Patel admitted that her own parents would not have been allowed into the UK under her immigration laws.

The illegal migration bill comes just a year after Patel led the passage of the Nationality and Borders Act. Both policies are designed to keep out outsiders, many of whom are black or brown. It is contradictory that the ministers responsible for these policies are descendants

of immigrants themselves.

Immigration is still about race Despite comments like Braverman's, evidence shows that immigration is still very much linked to race and racism.

Many minority ethnic people - even those who are British-born or naturalised citizens - feel they are still targets of the immigration debate. Ethnic minorities are the worst affected by stringent immigration policies and stigmatised by anti-

immigration language.

Perceptions of migrants in relation to worth and value continue to be influenced by class and race. The current system, which depends on a hierarchy of immigrants by "skill", means mostly white, university-educated and English-speaking mi-

grants are consistently viewed more favourably than black, Asian and Muslim migrants.

And public opinion is far warmer towards Ukrainian refugees compared with those also fleeing war in Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, and Somalia.

Minority ethnic voters also perceived racial undertones in the anti-immigrant language used by the Leave campaign during Brexit. But while most voted Remain, some minority ethnic Brexit voters supported Leave in opposition to immigration from eastern Europe.

As with minority ethnic politicians calling for harsh border policies, immigrant status or family history is no guarantee of liberal attitudes to immigration or asylum.

Of course, this analysis does not apply to every minority ethnic politician. It is heartening to

see other Conservatives speaking out about the inflammatory anti-migrant climate. Mohammed Amin, a former chair of the Conservative Muslim Forum, described Braverman's rhetoric as "disgusting".

But it is important to remember that ethnic diversity is not racial justice, nor can it protect the government from challenges to its harmful policies. As Baroness Sayeeda Warsi noted: "Braverman's own ethnic origin has shielded her from criticism for too long."

(The Conversation)



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi Sunday, JULY 16, 2023

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon in Saturn on your return chart and you will have financial gains. You will enjoy your love life and your bonding with your spouse is going to be wonderful! You become more successful in your career. You manage to keep your expenses under control. You will remain devoted to your family. You will receive a good news from someone. Due to changes in the planetary positions, there will be no radical changes in your life. It is a favorable time for getting new job/business offer. You will also solve your family matters/suitor. You will make good progress in your job/career. You will also get relief from tension. Your health will improve. You will receive money that you have given to some persons. You are engaged will also get finalized.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be a great week for you. You will be having financial gains. You will also take up new tasks and face challenges with confidence. You will also get the expected help and assistance from friends and colleagues. You will face some challenges to begin with but eventually victory will be yours. You will also spend a lot of your time with your family members. You will also take out some time for fun, entertainment and relaxation. You will also have plans to buy and sell property. You will complete your work with great dedication and energy. Your business plans will also be successful. You will take some work to complete with a planned approach.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You will be having new plans. You will also make lot of money. Your social drink will increase. You will also make some wise decisions in business/wealth. You will take on. You will think of well get done. Plenary situation is in your favor. You will discharge all your responsibilities well and you financial affairs will be strong. Your family problems will get resolved in your office, the atmosphere will remain congenial. Do not take any decision by being emotional. Your love life is going to be amazing and you will have amazing bonding with your mate. Your superior will appreciate you for some great achievement. You will meet ahead with a positive attitude.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) You will work hard and willing to take challenges. You will also carry your duties nicely. As a result, you will be busy in your work. You will look forward with a lot of self confidence. You will not bow before anyone and will also pay attention to the requests. Your life will also turn smoothly on the track. Love/sex will have an amazing time. Creative thoughts will fill up your mind. And these in people, habit and film industry will get lot of name and fame. People close to you will give lot of respect. You will give advice and suggestions to the people close to you. You will also take part in some wedding or event. You will also spend some time with your children.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) The beginning of the week is turning out to be good. You will get lot of chances to earn money. You will take interest in your work and will be dedicated a lot. You can start a new project too. You will also undertake some travel related plans. You will get success in business. Work related things will be beneficial and you will come in contact with a lot of people. This time is very good for contacts and meetings. You will get a chance to come closer to someone special. You will be dominant in the high tide of romance and your life will be filled with color. Your opponent's will try to cheat you and it shows you down size. You need to be careful in financial dealings. It is a very good time for students.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) The whole week will be filled with lot of happiness for you. These days are totally in your favor. You will have financial gains. Your work will also get appreciated and you will work with lot of dedication. You will also find peace in your personal life. You will also have time for pleasure and entertainment as you loved ones. This time will be good for you. You will receive happiness all around. Your communication skills will be second to none. You will be successful in obtaining a diploma by your skill of conversation. Details will do well in exams. You will also discharge your additional responsibility. Days of tension and worries are over.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) You will receive everybody. You will have a very important task to complete in your job. It is a great about time. Even your boss will give you a raise or you and expect a lot from you. Students will study to be a member. However, all good results. You will be worth of a family member. However, all

misunderstandings and disputes will be soon removed. You may receive some surprising news about you or your relative. You will also take some wise decisions in business which might give you good gain later on. Your love life is going to be amazing. And your relationship with your spouse will be better. Money inflow will remain uninterrupted during this phase.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) You will show yourself into work and will not rest till you get the desired results. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will also make some use of money and will be very available time. The time will be extremely good and happy. You will also get success in some new or competitive exams. Your right advice will change the life of the person. You will get a proposal for your work. You will also get rid of diseases. It will be knowledge enhancing days. A long standing enemy will come to an end. Family happiness will increase. Your influence and inspiration in the energy phase will remain. You will also meet lot of new people.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) You will be full of self confidence. And will take some strong decisions in your business with lot of shrewd and powerful impact upon your rivals. Your profits will increase. And you will use your talent and skills in your best advantage. Your hopes and expectations will be met. You will also have financial gains. You will come closer to your partner and it is misunderstanding of the past will get removed. You will receive money that is given to someone. You will have much mental peace. Your long standing secret will come to an end. You will take some vital decisions which may prove to be fruitful for your family later on.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) Your own people will support you a lot and prove to be your biggest strength. It is an appropriate time to do some productive work. Let us cut off any bad connection of men/relations with keeping meekly and you will have gains. You need to keep your anger in check. You will get money and will have financial gains. You will have profits in your business. It is a time to add a new chapter in your love story. You will think about the possibility of getting married to person you love. Your government related works will be accomplished smoothly. You will have to work hard, but you will also get the results in the same proportion. The problems that exists were facing for a long time will get sorted out.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) Your finances will be high. You will get promotion in your job and your prestige will also. Your colleagues will also learn to you and cooperate with you. Your life will surely bring lot of financial gain. All work related to money and property will be resolved. You will also invest in it and they will prove to be beneficial. But you will make lot of money in multiple ways. Amidst these expectations by you will also spend some quality time with your family. It will help you to relax, feel happy and cheerful. An important family matter will also come into discussion. You will seek a consolate.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) The worth of your partner will bring music to your ears. You will have an amazing time with your love mate. You will also plan to get married. People will appreciate your skills. You will do introspection. You will also get some important information and news. You will have a major expansion in your business. Matters of dispute will become more complicated, though you will be the winner. Some government related work that had been in the back will be resolved to the benefit of some official. You will see a major improvement in your health. Your influence in the society will be high. You may attend some important meetings.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) It is time to make best use of a very good time. Students will get lot of success in their examinations. Those who are planning to get married will be able to do so. The placement of Saturn and Jupiter will give the door of profits for you. Your relations with seniors will become cordial and from time to time you will get good benefits. Do not take any financial decision in a haste. You might remember an old acquaintance and will be in a good mood. It will make you your attachment to a bit. You will also witness a sudden jump in your luck. New job/business offers will keep coming. Your colleague will help you in your work. You will also bring about a change in your daily routine and habits.

A capsule wardrobe can reduce consumption of fast fashion

Sustainable fashion choices are witnessing an increase in preference. This includes the much-respected capsule wardrobe. Be it Marie Kondo's wardrobe-focused tidying technique or Matilda Kahl's choice to wear one outfit to work for three years, the trend of dressing up consciously and having a capsule wardrobe is gaining traction. Before we get into how to build a capsule wardrobe, let's know what it entails.

A capsule wardrobe is an edit of clothing that has a long shelf life, is thoughtfully curated, and is interchangeable to make multiple outfits! A capsule wardrobe, in essence, helps you in creating an array of looks with a selected number of pieces.

The term capsule wardrobe was coined in the 1970s by Susie Faux, the owner of a London boutique called Wardrobe. Faux believed that a capsule wardrobe comprises a few essential pieces. These can be supplemented with seasonal additions.

Capsule wardrobes in this day and age are having a revival, largely due to an increase in public awareness. The consumer today is much more aware of the harmful effects of fast fashion on our planet and all living species.

A key tip to build a capsule wardrobe and reduce fast fashion consumption, Sarabhi Chopra, founder of Sarabhi Chopra Label says, "Clothes are often our armor that we do every day, or they are a means to celebrate festivities. The thought of having fewer pieces in your wardrobe can often be overwhelming. Therefore, start with an analysis of your lifestyle. To create a capsule wardrobe, you need to know what your personal style is and what pieces will be most useful for the kind of lifestyle you lead. Try asking yourselves questions like, 'Do I need work-specific clothes?' Do I need more travel clothes? Do I need more formal wear?' Consider all your needs so that you are better able to stick to the capsule wardrobe without any impulse purchases."

"The second step is to declutter your wardrobe. Most of us have a habit of hoarding clothes. Therefore, take out everything you have in your closet and analyse every piece in accordance with your style and lifestyle. Remove the pieces that you haven't worn for a long time or the ones that don't suit you or aren't your size. Donate, sell, or recycle these items. Then sort the rest into categories like bottoms, denim, tees, blouses etc."

"The final step is to curate timeless pieces that are interchangeable. Have 25-30 items for every season. The basis of a functional capsule wardrobe is versatility. It includes interchangeable garments that can create multiple looks for our everyday lives. Once you have sorted your pieces and feel that some basics are missing, invest in those items. Ensure that what you do is sustain-

able and long-lasting. Have basic tops, versatile jackets, etc. Neutral colours can be a great bet, as they are great for creating cohesive looks for any season and occasion," adds Sarabhi.

While building a capsule wardrobe, it is imperative to have quality pieces that are both functional and versatile. Do not invest in pieces that will lose their charm after a few wears. The only way to combat fast fashion is to invest in clothing that is useful, practical and suits your lifestyle. A versatile piece of clothing can easily pair with other pieces, be styled in different ways, and be worn in different contexts. Think about the item's weight, fabric quality, silhouette length, and, most importantly, how easy it is to maintain and wash. For an occasional treat, if you feel that for

particular occasion, you cannot use any of the garments in your capsule wardrobe, then renting something boring can be a great idea!

Although remember that a capsule wardrobe should be built slowly over time. Fast fashion fuels impulse purchases and rapid discards with its low prices and changing trends. This waste finds its way to landfills, where it results in low wages for the workforce and a heavy toll on the environment due to unethical and unsustainable manufacturing practices. It is estimated that the garment industry contributes to almost 10 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

Therefore, purchasing clothes just for the sake of trends or impulse comes at a price for the environment. (TANSIlife)



"Any truth is better than indefinite doubt."
— Arthur Conan Doyle

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 18, 2023

Going beyond one-day observations

AFTER meticulous research by Dr David Reid Syiem, formerly professor of history, North Eastern Hill University and later Vice-Chancellor, Rajiv Gandhi University and also former Chairperson, Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) the exact date of the death of Tiroi Singh was established to be July 17, 1835. These conclusions were arrived at after careful study of the British records in the UK and other libraries in Kolkata and Delhi. In her book, "Placing the Frontier in British North-East India: Law, Custom And Knowledge," Rejuj Ray writes that although the British reinstated surrendered Syiems to their positions through signing of agreements, severe restrictions were placed on their authority. The restored Syiems were liable for treason if they showed any form of opposition to the British government and heavy fines were imposed as an additional punitive measure. It was for the same reason that Tiroi Singh was confined to a jail in Dacca following a failed negotiation for reinstatement to his position as Chief of Nongkhlaw.

Ray raises several troubling questions on Tiroi Singh Syiem's incarceration in Dacca jail when he was identified as a sovereign by the same colonial state. She asks if Tiroi Singh would have been allowed to retain his position if he had signed an agreement acceptable to the British? Was he imprisoned for instigating rebellion and causing the deaths of British subjects including Europeans? Or was he punished for not agreeing to the terms of subjection? Ray says there are no available or clear answers to these questions. Interestingly the British did not hesitate to sign a treaty with Tiroi Singh's 9-year-old nephew, Rujum Singh on March 29, 1834 whereby Nongkhlaw was classified as a dependent territory and brought under the jurisdiction of the colonial political agent.

It is noteworthy that Tiroi Singh Syiem at a time when little was known of the outside world was able to stand his ground and to refuse to sign a treaty of subjugation to the British when many other Syiems had capitulated. It would have been a great boon to the present generation if some accounts of Tiroi Singh's childhood and youth were to have been pieced together. After Tiroi Singh the Khasi society has not produced a valiant chieftain except for Wickliffe Syiem the Deputy Chieflain (Syiem Khynnah) of Hima Nongstong and a structural engineer by training. He stood against the signing of the Instrument of Accession to the Indian nation because he argued that the 22 Syiems of the Khasi states had never been under British rule. But Wickliffe was helpless since he was not the syiem. His uncle was, and Tiroi Singh's son left Nongstong and went to East Pakistan vowing never to return to a country that according to him slipped from enslavement from one power to another. The tenacity of purpose of both Tiroi Singh and Wickliffe Syiem ought to be the guiding light for the youth of this generation that actually lacks role models. It is important that more details about the life and time of Tiroi Singh and Wickliffe Syiem be taught in schools, colleges and universities.

A Contrarian Perspective

By Paranjit Bakshi

Years ago, a cousin shared an apt analogy when he likened India to an overcrowded bus. He said that as long as the bus is stationary every-body jostles to get a better seat or even a little space. Arguments and even fights begin. Tempers flare, and people even reach for each other's throats. However, once the bus begins to move people learn to adjust. It needs to be acknowledged that a lack of resources is often the prime cause of unrest, whether it be within a family or in a nation. Many disputes get resolved once the financial situation, or what we call the economy of a country, improves. The pie gets larger, and more people partake of it.

This can be validated with a real-life example. In 2014, some of us from Shillong undertook a road trip from Delhi to Leh, passing through Srinagar among other places. Upon entering Srinagar, we happened to overtake a car with a JK number plate. This enraged the driver possibly because our vehicle bore a Delhi number. This vehicle overtook us and came to stop in the middle of the road. Four burly men got out and began marching threateningly towards us. Luckily for us, I was not driving at the time and my co-driver, a lady was at the wheel. When they saw her, a shen far woght with very alien features they were at a loss. After shouting a bit, they retreated and we could proceed. At that time there were hardly any tourists today in spite of all the doomday predictions about the abrogation of Article 370, lakhs of tourists have a safe sojourn in Kashmir. If we went, shopkeepers and restaurant owners cribbed about how terrorism had destroyed their businesses. Today they are reaping a windfall. One sees pictures of the renovated Polo View Market open at night and the infamous Lal Chowk is no longer a no-go zone, it was then. The moving economy has had a sobering effect.

Similar apprehensions were expressed when the current dispensation at the Centre decided to encourage digital transactions. I remember P Chidambaram, reviving about the impossibility of such a task. Verbatim, this is what he said in Parliament, "Go to a village fair buy potatoes and tomatoes and pay seven rupees and fifty paise by credit card. What will the poor lady do? Does she have a POS machine there? Is it connected to a electricity source? Is there Wi-Fi there? Is the internet working there? What kind of a false picture you are presenting?" This gentleman an MBA from the prestigious Harvard Business School and an ex-Union Finance Minister must now be regretting those words. India's foreign exchange payment system has reached almost every nook and corner of the country so much so that both my children never carry cash. Introduced at the behest of the BJP government in 2016, it has surpassed the transactions made on debit and credit cards. As per data of January 2023 nearly 260 million Indians (including vegetable and other small vendors) use UPI to pay or receive money and in January 2023 it recorded 8 billion transactions worth almost Rs. 200 billion. The beauty of this system is that it has not replaced cash, the amount ranging from a few to a lakh rupees per transaction. Indians living in ten countries now have access to this system.

There are many indicators to prove that the Indian bus is indeed moving and gathering speed in spite of the headwind caused by the Russian Ukraine war while the economies of many neighbouring and European countries are crashing our economy has shown remarkable resilience. This is because of the Modi government's bold policies, including the one on import and refining Russian crude not just for domestic use but also for export to US and Europe. This has not only prevented a burgeoning oil import bill but even brought in foreign revenue. Our forex reserves now stand at a whopping \$595 billion. At the time when Modi became the PM India was the tenth largest economy, and is now poised to become the third largest. The Indian economy is not just growing bigger but is also the fastest growing large economy.

In countless ways our lives have become better over the last decade. Gone are the days when we had to scurry to get a cooking gas refill. India today has surplus electricity power (though this may not be obvious in Meghalaya) and we are net electricity exporters. There has been a massive infrastructure push across the country with highways being built faster at the speed of 37km/day thus offering us better connectivity. On a visit to DebrajDun recently, a large gap of mere

five years, I was surprised at the speed at which road connectivity has improved there. It is the case with air and rail travel. Throughout the country Vande Bharat trains are being started. 74 airports have been made operational eight of them in the North East which had not nine. And to top it all there has not been any major scam in any of the Central projects. Morgan Stanley's latest report has been unabashed in its praise of the Modi-led government's achievements in the last nine years and has predicted that India will emerge as a key driver for Asia and drive a fifth of world growth in the next decade.

It is not just the rich or the middle class which has got a leg up with the focus on development India's poor have also benefited. They have got access to mobile phones (PM Awas Yojana), have been able to build toilets (Swachh Bharat Mission) and even tap water connections (Jal Jeevan Mission).

There has been a concerted effort to end militancy. In Meghalaya itself talks are underway with UNLÉ. The dialogue with NIP (NIA) is continuing, news of the Boko militancy has moved from the newspapers to textbooks. The Maoists movement in Chhattisgarh has simmered down, as has militancy in Assam and in Kashmir. Even Manipur which unfortunately is again in turmoil today saw some years of peace.

On the foreign policy front neither China (with an economy less strong than before and with much loss of goodwill) nor Pakistan (now seeking IMF life support) has been allowed to gain any moral or territorial advantage. Our relationships with our neighbours, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal are on a firmer footing and Western nations, including the USA, the UK and Germany, in spite of our neutral stand on Ukraine, are seeking closer and more mutually rewarding ties.

Yet, in spite of the facts and figures, a different story, Narendra Modi is a man who many just love to hate. To quote William Shakespeare perhaps he too is, "more sinned against than sinning." Though cleared of all charges connected to the 2002 riots by no less than a Supreme Court majority probe (during the UPA regime) he is referred

The sordid story of NPAs in India

By Jagdish Rattanani

It is not uncommon to hear in banking circles that non-performing assets, or NPAs, are a part of the business of banking. Some loans will go bad, and that is just inherent in the very nature of the business of giving out loans. This is a fair view, except that theory does not always translate to practice in the manner intended, at least not in the Indian banking sector. This is a sector with a unique efficiency in chasing the small borrowers and letting free the big ones. A true coming to life of that famous quote: "If you owe the bank \$100, that's your problem. If you owe the bank \$100 million, that's the bank's problem."

Has this ground reality changed in recent times? It

The willingness to act against at least the willful defaulters, and to name and shame them, just isn't there. Instead, the regulator has allowed banks to "undertake compromise settlements or technical write-offs in respect of accounts categorised as willful defaulters or fraud without prejudice to the criminal proceeding underway against such debtors."

would appear so, in the light of a set of news reports in the last few weeks that tell us that the NPAs in the Indian banking sector have fallen dramatically, down to a 10-year low, quoting the RBI's Financial Stability Report that was released June 28, 2023. The report says Gross NPAs were 2.9% in FY 2023, down from a high of 11.5% in 2018. The period also saw gross advances grow, from Rs. 83.6 lakh crore in 2018 to Rs. 133 lakh crore in 2023, so that falling percentages of Gross NPAs on an increased base of advances may not tell the full story. Yet, the drop in the Gross NPA percentage number is a unambiguous sign. Citing the data, the RBI report notes: "The Indian financial system, led by a sound banking system, remains stable and supportive of the productive needs of the economy. Aided by robust earnings, adequate capital and liquidity buffers and improving asset quality, Indian banks are well positioned to sustain the upturn in the credit cycle that has been underway since early 2022."

A different picture might emerge if the issue is studied from the numbers of new NPAs that are even now being created in the system. If the old NPA number fell because of huge write-offs and write-offs, and new NPAs continue to be added in the system, then that poses a different set of questions on the what, how and why of the management of NPAs and the protection of what essentially are public funds. All the funds that the banks have belong after all to the people of India, ordinary citizens who provide the capital from their savings to be lent out to businesses, which must invest them in power economic growth.

So, what has caused the fall in Gross NPAs percentages? Robust recoveries would be good. Write-offs would be bad. Strict follow-ups and penal or criminal actions where warranted would signal a resolve to come to grips with the problem of rising NPAs, which can cause genuine business failures but are often tangled with loose governance and the unique Indian idea of "willful defaulters" - those who can pay back but refuse to do so and continue to roam free.

Consider that Gross NPAs were 5.8% in 2021-22, which translated to a total NPA figure of Rs. 7.44 lakh crore. This number was down from Rs. 8.35 lakh crore at the beginning of the year. The single largest contributor to the lowering of the number was write-offs, which were reported at Rs. 1.79 lakh crore. More significantly, Rs. 2.83 lakh

may not be getting better from a systemic view either. We are nowhere closer to better assessment, monitoring, supervision, controls and risk management. The fact that the banking sector must work with it if it is to be called sound. The looseness of the numbers suggests and the lack of alarm at the state of affairs at the time NPAs have been normalised and that the system appears to have imbibed the message that this is the way it works in India. This encourages a loose system to get looser, not tighter and more efficient. Signals from the authorities can make a big difference. The willingness to act against at least the willful defaulters, and to name and shame them, just isn't there. Instead, the regulator has allowed banks to "undertake compromise settlements or technical write-offs in respect of accounts categorised as willful defaulters or fraud without prejudice to the criminal proceeding underway against such debtors." The very idea of a "settlement" where the defaulter is categorised as a fraudster or a willful defaulter sends a signal that we are open to a deal, and you can be back for more loans after a short cooling period.

All of this may be regular banking parlance but none of this, when the political debate is in the people of India. Added to the political-business nexus that plays a powerful influence on public policy, the image it creates if of India's financial confidence rotting and going to seed. This weakens the fabric of the nation, co-opts only those who can play the game by handing the rules and is a breaker on growth that is good, sustainable and open to all players.

In a nation where small subsidies to deserving citizens are being called to question, where the political debate is deliberately created around stopping these inputs and deriding them as the "revdi" culture, as if the people of India are beggars looking for small favours, the management of NPAs comes across as a sorry exercise. This is the money of the people of India, and if banks can't monitor the genuineness of projects and the flow of funds, then the lender and the borrower must both be held to account. Anything short of this is tantamount to robbing the poor to pay the rich, which is how the grossness of Gross NPAs comes across.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal, which were reported at Rs. 1.79 lakh crore. More significantly, Rs. 2.83 lakh

Letters to the Editor

The last days of U Tiroi Singh Syiem

Editor, U Tiroi Singh, Syiem of Nongkhlaw fought the Anglo-Khasi War from April 1829 to March 1834. For many years we had observed March 29 as the martyrdom day of U Systeem Tiroi Singh. This historical error in the date of death was corrected by Professor David Reid Syiemleib, former Vice-chancellor, of RG University, and ex-Chairman, of UPSC. Professor Syiemleib, searching through the Bengal Judicial Consultations came across a letter written across a letter written by Mr SC Scott, officiating Magistrate of the Foujdarj Adalati, Dacca addressed to the Officiating Commissioner of Circuit, Dacca informing him of the demise of the ex-Rajah Terath Singh. Mr. Scott further writes that the event took place "yesterday at 1.00 p.m." Mr. Scott's letter was dated July 18, 1835 which makes July 17, the martyrdom day of U Systeem Tiroi Singh. Today, as we commemorate the 188th Death Anniversary of our hero U Tiroi Singh, let us salute Professor David R Syiemleib for his significant research contributions.

the context of the last days of U Tiroi Singh. How did his last moments come? He was hanged to death by the British? After U Tiroi Singh surrendered in January 1933, he was sent to Guwahati for trial in the Court. Following the trial, he was lodged in Dacca jail - in common jail. The British considered it highly objectionable to confine a state prisoner in a common jail and hence procured a safe custody for him. A house was rented for him at a place known as Giridilal of old Dacca city. There are authentic historical facts also credited to the untiring and relentless efforts of Professor Syiemleib.

Professor Syiemleib mentioned in his Layers of History-Essay on Khasi-Jaintia that, "Official records are silent about the life of U Tiroi Singh from the summer of 1833 to the record of his death. He was first imprisoned in the common jail; later he was placed under house arrest and by the year of his death was given the liberty to move around Dacca. What eventually caused the death of the man is not certain though tradition says it was the outcome of a stomach ailment."

Professor Syiemleib further writes, "For too long have the Khasis believed and made others believe, that U Tiroi Singh died in jail. Though it is historically correct to say that he remained a prisoner from the time of his

sumner in January 1833 to his death in July 1835, the truth of his death is that Tiroi Singh did not die in prison, at least not in a prison cell. He was hanged to death? Here is another theme that has not been researched by you. Yours etc, Dr Omarlin Kyndiah Via email

Indian politics as a tool for development

Editor, India, being the world's largest democracy, holds immense potential to shape its destiny through political programs. Political stability and effective governance are pivotal for a nation's development. By fostering an environment of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, Indian politics can drive socio-economic progress. Policy formulation and implementation should focus on tackling key challenges such as poverty, education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

Furthermore, political leaders should promote a culture of innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development, by encouraging investment, fostering a favourable business climate, and supporting small and medium enterprises. Indian politics can unleash the nation's economic potential. Equally important is the need to prioritize social welfare programs, empowering marginalized communities, and ensuring equal opportunities for all. By championing social justice, promoting gender equality, and protecting human rights, Indian politics can pave the way for an inclusive and progressive society.

Doctors losing their reputation

Editor, Apropos of the article by Sali Gwalal titled "Why people fear doctors these days" (ST July 10, 2023) I wish to highlight that the writer has highlighted. Since the public never raise their voices, the medical professionals and private hospitals have crossed the boundaries of ethics. From exorbitant fees to prescribing medicines to recommending a series of unwanted tests on the pretext of diagnosis, the motive of doctors (and private nursing homes) is to loot as much money as possible from hapless patients.

Ever had a simple fever that otherwise gets cured naturally after a few days, doctors prescribe several tests and several medicines. I wish doctors were more sympathetic towards the weaker section of the people. Can we find doctors who would ever advise patients not to take medicines, which even medical science has proved. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity. Why don't these so-called doctors console the sick people this way also? As Robert Lyngdoh points out, the motive of most of the doctors is only to make money by hook or crook. I think it is for this reasons people not only fear doctors but they look down upon them. Is minor medicines like fever and dysentery which will get cured naturally after a few days? Fasting cures many kinds of illnesses, which even medical science has proven. Self-healing without medicines increases one's immune power. Cure through natural process enhances one's body's immunity

"Ego is the immediate dictate of human consciousness."

— Max Planck

The Shillong Times

VOL. LXV No. 27 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 19, 2023

The unmaking of 'India'

The battle lines are drawn for the high-stakes 2024 Parliament Polls. The grouping of 26 opposition parties met in Bengaluru and the 38-member NDA held discussions in the national capital on the same day, but both stopped short of raising a war cry. Clearly both are biding their time. Yet, some aspects stand out. The opposition grouping has shed its UPA baggage and re-christened itself as Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). The leaders failed to catch the fancy of the nation and its 1.35 billion people. Brevity is the soul of wit. This lack of imagination showed up also in the way the conclave zeroed in on the present issues. Mallikarjun Kharge, who set the tone for the discussions, said the Congress does not seek power or PM post but wants to "save" the nation, protect democracy, secularism and the Constitution and ensure Social Justice. These are clichés that, due to overuse, lost their meaning, except that the cause of upholding secularism has a significance in the fight against the BJP and PM Modi. The rest do not strike a chord with the common man.

More importantly, how advisable was it for the Congress to declare that it can give the PM post on a platter to its allies if the alliance wins the polls – more so as it being a behemoth, the main opposition formation. Question is, will the people be comfortable with handing over the reins of rational governance to one among the greedy regional satraps. It is precisely here that the BJP is now seeking to discredit the Opposition – by putting up flex boards near the conclave venue in Bengaluru, saying Nitish Kumar is their "PM nominee." Many would laugh at this. Rather, the Congress party should show the nerve to stand in the front. This should be reassuring to the voters, given the past experience of ramshackle coalitions of regionalists forming governments at the Centre and falling by the wayside in a jiffy.

By avoiding the crafting of a minimum programme or a joint manifesto for INDIA, it is safe to assume that the Opposition is planning a repeat of the successful game the Congress played at the final hour in Karnataka – promising the moon to the people in the form of pension to housewives and free travel to women on state-run buses. It must however be noted that the Opposition is far from united. The ruling parties of Odisha, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh kept away from the Opposition conclave. This is where the BJP is sensing an opportunity – that in case it falls short of a majority, help is at hand for the NDA

Letters to the Editor

Single mothers & abandoned mothers: Statistics higher than official figures

almost outdated institutions and authorities, especially in relation to this subject of marriage and children and the increasing number of orphanages. The impact on these abandoned women with children is especially in the case of families with many children as witnessed in the rural areas, coupled with poverty for all to see and read in the media which reports of them from time to time. These media reports about Meghalaya having the highest cases of teenage pregnancies, high child marriages and a high rate of trafficking which our young boys and girls are vulnerable to, is a cause for concern.

The Matishphrang had been instrumental in campaigning for the Meghalaya Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act 2012 but which is yet to be implemented, as one of the solutions to this problem. But despite the negative media reports of the problems arising from such abandoned marriages, this is still not a priority for many of those who are in power whether it's in the political or religious institutions. It is difficult to get statistics of abandoned mothers with children in our society because of unregistered marriages and our society's acceptance of multi-faithed children in a family because they still belong to the same clan/cur as that of the mother's. In such a situation the correct statistics of single and abandoned mothers will be much higher than the official figures as stated by the MSWC. As one of the solutions to this rampant abandonment of

women with children in our society, the Matishphrang had petitioned the government to make the Registration of Marriage certificate mandatory for all official purposes as stated in the principal Act of 2012 and define Official Purposes as those purposes as required for producing the Scheduled Caste certificate. In conclusion, this is basically a women's problem and it is for the women of our state to take the lead to solve them if they are really concerned about the problems faced by their fellow women and not confining this concern to a 'one day talk show' because if this problem is not dealt with from the initial stage we're afraid that this vicious cycle of exploitation will carry forward from mothers to their children and their grandchildren after that.

Michael N. Syiem, Via email

Time for a Wine & Mead Board for Meghalaya

By KN Kumar

The picturesque landscapes of North-Eastern India hide a treasure of immense potential - apiculture, or beekeeping. This age-old practice not only promises economic growth but also serves as a sustainable and eco-friendly means of livelihood. Through this article I want to place before you the untapped opportunities of apiculture in the North-Eastern region, examining its global significance, the challenges faced, and the transformative impact it can have on our farmers.

Beekeeping has experienced a global resurgence, owing to the increasing demand for natural honey, beeswax, and other bee-related products. Data indicate that the global trade in apiculture products surpasses \$10 billion annually. This thriving market presents a remarkable opportunity for Meghalaya to tap into its potential and become a significant global player. India's apiculture industry has witnessed consistent growth in recent years, emerging as one of the top five honey-producing nations worldwide. With an annual production exceeding 100,000 metric tons, India has established itself as a key player in the global honey market. Additionally, the domestic consumption of honey has witnessed a significant surge as health-conscious consumers seek healthier alternatives.

The North eastern region's unique floral diversity, consisting of approximately 107 bee flora species, yields a wide range of sought-after honey varieties. The region's geographical advantage and favourable climatic conditions enable year-round honey production, providing the industry with a distinct advantage. The apiculture industry in Meghalaya, is however, primarily supported by small and marginal farmers operating with one or two beehives. These resilient farmers find hope in beekeeping as a supplementary source of income. Currently, there are approximately 40,000 beekeepers in the North-East, collectively producing around 500 tonnes of honey annually. Too small a quantity to count!

Within the world of honey bees, an intriguing diversity exists. Alongside the common honey bee species, the North-Eastern region is

home to a unique variety - the stingless honey bee. The honey produced by the stingless honey bee is the most valuable of all the honeys. Honey bees are not mere honey producers; they are vital pollinators crucial for the reproduction of plants. 95% of earth's crops rely on cross-pollination so beekeeping plays a pivotal role in ensuring agricultural productivity. Their diligent foraging and efficient pollination ensure the health and productivity of agricultural crops, playing a pivotal role in global food security.

While the apiculture industry in the North-Eastern region holds immense potential, it also faces several challenges that must be addressed to ensure sustainable growth. One pressing issue is the lack of specific and specialised treatment for apiculture within government schemes. Despite its promising prospects, beekeeping has not received the attention and support it deserves. To build a sustainable future for apiculture, it is essential to advocate for dedicated support, tailored schemes, and capacity-building initiatives targeting the beekeepers. This includes providing access to modern beekeeping techniques, training programmes, and financial assistance to enable beekeepers to scale up their operations effectively. Most important of all the problems is that Honey has fallen between the departmental cracks. No one owned up Honey. For a while the subject was with the industries department while the National Bee Board is under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare.

A critical concern relating to honey, however, is the standards and transparency of Indian honey manufacturers. Allegations of adulteration and compromised quality tarnish our reputation as a nation. Strengthening the regulatory framework governing the honey industry is crucial to address these concerns effectively. Leveraging advancement in technology can significantly benefit the apiculture industry. Implementing sophisticated testing methods, such as Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR)

technology ensures the authenticity and quality of honey products, assuring consumers and strengthening the industry's reputation. I propose that Meghalaya should seize the opportunity and create a 'Meghalaya Wine & Mead Board'. Mead, also known as 'honey wine,' is an alcoholic beverage made by fermenting honey with water. Globally, mead has gained popularity as a craft beverage, offering a unique flavour profile. The mead industry is still emerging in India. As the craft beverage market continues to expand, a new market with its unique taste and potential therapeutic properties. Meaderies experiment with different honey varieties and flavours, appealing to consumers seeking artisanal options. Mead also presents opportunities for honey producers and beekeepers, creating a new market. I argue that the proposed Wine & Mead Board should be firmly within the fold of the Directorate of Wine & Grape Development. Both Wine and Mead are integrally connected to fruit and honey production. Beekeeping extends far beyond the production of honey. Bees offer a treasure trove of miscellaneous products that have diverse applications in various industries, such as cosmetics, health and wellness, and crafts. Beeswax, a natural substance secreted by honey bees, has long been cherished for its diverse uses. Its malleability, moisturizing properties, make it a valuable ingredient in cosmetics, where it finds application in lip balms, lotions, and natural skincare products. Beeswax is also favoured in candle-making due to its long-burning burn. Propolis, a resinous substance collected by bees, is known for its antimicrobial and antioxidant properties. Bees use propolis to protect their hives from pathogens. This natural product has found applications in various industries, including medicinal and oral care products. Its potential health benefits,

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Escaping the I.D, IT and Police...

Second to my love of writing is that of public speaking, and I was quite happy when the Madras Rotary, which is supposedly the oldest club in India, offered to fly me down to Chennai to address them. "What would you like to speak about?" they asked politely, and I promptly said, "Escaping the I.D, IT and police!"

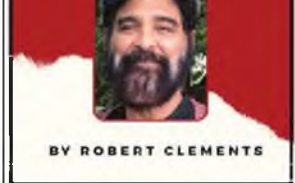
I knew that there would be some scratching of heads about such a strange subject but I also knew it would be a topic that would get everybody interested. Yes, how in the present circumstances do you get the Enforcement Directorate, the Income Tax and the midnight knock by policemen on your door, off your back?

"We hope here's the solution involves," cautioned the secretary over the phone. "None it all!" I said, and I sure got them more flummoxed.

Needless to say, the auditorium at the 5-Star hotel was full! All eager to know what the "escape formula" was all about.

"A man driving a car," I started, "stopped at a signal and waited impatiently as the woman in the car in front didn't start immediately when the signal turned green. He started screaming and beating his fist on the steering wheel. A policeman tapped on his windshield and he was silent!"

An article caught my attention in the Economic Times, and the caption of that article was "Data in 2025 - Huge, but not fully seen." Within the next few years," the article said, "worldwide, data on people is going to swell to about



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

163 zettabytes. That is the amount of data they have on you and me. What also caught my attention was that it was not only accurate. That's a startling amount of information about you and me that is in danger. Even now, when you think of the amount of information that is out there, it's too difficult to even imagine it. It is also a bit scary to think that there is so much of you that are that are not really to myself. That's not his car, he must have stolen it!"

"His behaviour did not reflect the thief in his car?" I told the audience.

I continued, as the crowd of top industrialists and businessmen wondered what I was getting at. "While reading Krishnaji Singh's 'Collected Short Stories,' one story that I'm pondering was, 'The Bottom Pincher'.

The writer beautifully describes a scene at a worship place where he sees "a thin tall gentleman, in his sixties, wearing a light blue suit, sola hat and thick post-cataract glasses. The gentleman walks through the stream of seagars near the temple and drops a coin in the hand of every beggar." The gentleman then proceeds to walk in the direction of Krishnaji Singh's office and Singh fascinated by the man's charitable acts follows him and is shocked to see what the gentleman does next: He continues to dip in his right pocket and drops a coin into every outstretched hand but as he passes a group of five women banding over some article at a stall, his left hand purposely brushes one of them and pinches another!

And so, it went on. Right hand to give alms to the needy, left hand touching and pinching unguarded, unwary women! What a character!

Yes indeed, what a character! But that again: Do you see some resemblance of yourselves in the gentleman mentioned or the man in

controversy over formalin laden fish being imported from southern states like Andhra Pradesh. Food adulteration and addition of harmful preservatives and pesticides has taken epidemic proportions in modern times. In fact, four major diseases due to adulteration is going to be the number one killer in the near future if some urgent remedial steps are not taken by the government. One out of two people is suffering from some chronic ailments like diabetes, blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, psychosomatic disorders etc. Chances of getting Cancer is almost 50% in the overall population. Along with spiralling cost of healthcare, modern medicine is able to do nothing except providing symptomatic relief. All modern illnesses have their roots in heavy pesticide laden and denatured food, grown in artificial conditions along with sedentary lifestyle. Meat, fish, fruits and vegetables, etc. are all laden with carcinogenic additives and preservatives. The present situation is not controlled then premature deaths will be a norm in society. One has to remember the Hippocratic dictum 'Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food' to thrive in this world.

For the problems of immigrants' influx into Manipur the State and the Central government must take immediate steps to control with firm mechanisms. The Union Govt. and the State Govt. and its competent authorities, armed forces of both centre and state must deal with this issue without any delay and must take strong action against those law breakers at the earliest to provide justice to the people immediately.

The situation in Manipur has turned horrific and every individual must stop playing the blame game and victim roles in various social networks circulated by several individuals/groups against each other, as this would only bring sadness and violence and is not good for anyone. We all must look forward to bringing Peace, Love & Harmony instead of this gun and violence and separation culture. Further, government must take concrete steps to overcome our emotions and let us stop these inhumane acts of violence; we must give a chance for PEACE.

Yours etc., Chongtham Thangbam (Meitei) President, Manipur Students' Union, Shillong

Sadiq Hussain Laskar, Guwahati

Food safety

Editor, This refers to the recent

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

Only when we stop giving alms with one hand and pinch bottoms with the other will agencies like the I.D, IT and police find nothing that they can implicate you and me with!

It was a somber order that left the hall that day... The Author conducts an Online Writers Course. For more details send a thumbs-up to him on WhatsApp 0902572483. bobshunter@gmail.com

"You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream." —Les Brown

The Shillong Times

Vol No 155 No 100 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 20, 2023

Scathing NITI Aayog Report Card

THE latest NITI Aayog report card on multi-dimensional poverty index puts Meghalaya just above Bihar amongst the states with the highest in poverty ranking. This may come as a shock for the urban elite who have lost touch with ground realities in their state. But for large sections of the population in Meghalaya poverty is a stark reality. Only those sitting in ivory towers making policies that don't resonate with the people who most need to be lifted out of the black hole of poverty find it hard to accept these harsh realities. It is also a NITI Aayog report that over 37% of Meghalayans live below the poverty line. Meghalaya has been unsuccessful in poverty alleviation because it has not yet come up with an economic roadmap that its people can be part of. Add to that its population explosion. There are never enough resources to meet the needs of a growing population where the family size is still 7-10 in the villages. Poverty is replicated in every household where a teenage girl becomes pregnant and delivers a child and then continues to do so year after year without a gap. In most cases the husband is engaged in daily labour where he is unpaid if he falls sick and is unable to work. But statistics have also revealed that at least 41% of households in Meghalaya are led by single women parents. The main reason is the tenuous nature of co-habitation or living together which carries no stigma. But living together with no formal ties also means that the couple are at liberty to break up the relationship at any given time. The marital union enjoys upon the mother to look after her children hence the father has no responsibility and hardly ever maintains his children after abandoning them. Family planning has completely failed and any talk of contraception is met with resistance. Women have become reproductive machines. Safe sex is a taboo subject. No wonder Meghalaya has the highest total fertility ratio (TFR) in the country.

In the current situation inflation is rising at an alarming pace. Malnutrition and under-nutrition is rampant since nutritious food is out of reach of most families. Healthcare is beyond the reach of most families because government hospitals are poorly equipped and usually have no medicines hence people don't frequent them. Primary Health Centres and Community Health Centres in most villages are functioning in the breach hence institutional deliveries are few and far between. Most villages are still not motorable and it does not seem that they will be any time soon since the priorities are skewed. Unemployment is a huge challenge because employment generation has not been able to match the young population entering the job market. The best brains from the state are all working outside. Ironically, the number of High Net-Worth Individuals (HNIs) is on the rise and they belong to the class of politicians and business persons. Obviously much of the funds for human development flow into private coffers. This is not a state secret. So who will save Meghalaya from this free fall?

Letters to the Editor

Heartbreaking reality of being second-poorest State in India

Editor, It was John F Kennedy who said, "Economic growth without social progress lets the great majority of the people remain in poverty, while a privileged few reap the benefits of rising abundance." A country's growth is determined by many factors, one of which includes the growth and development of the state within it. I picked up the newspaper in the morning on July 19, 2023, as I usually would on any given day. To my utter dismay, the headline of the report, "Niti Aayog names Meghalaya poorest state after Bihar," caught my eye and brought with it an air of sadness and questions of uncertainty. In a state that prides itself on progress and prosperity, it is truly heart-wrenching to witness such news coming to the fore. The state's title as the second-poorest pains a grim picture of its economic and social realities. For many, poverty would simply mean a "monetary condition" but poverty in itself encompasses a broader and wider range of other things, which include inadequate access to equitable educa-

Implementation of NEP 2020 in the HEIs of Meghalaya

By B Papang

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 holds immense potential for the state of Meghalaya, providing a comprehensive framework for reforming the education system and fostering holistic development. Here are some areas where the NEP 2020 can have a significant impact in Meghalaya:

1. **Multidisciplinary Education:** The NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of multidisciplinary education, allowing students to explore subjects beyond their chosen discipline. This approach can be particularly beneficial in Meghalaya, as it encourages students to pursue diverse interests and acquire a broad-based education. It will enable students to develop a versatile skill set, critical thinking abilities, and a competence in understanding different subjects.

At present, the Government has sanctioned only People's College for the Arts Stream and some People's colleges have only Arts Stream. It is also seen that the dropout rate of the students in the rural areas is a problem. One of the major reasons is that there is an absence of multi-stream colleges with affordable fees in some of the districts. The People's College has benefited the youths of some districts but not to a large extent because it could not provide options for the students who wish to study streams other than Arts Streams. With the demand in implementation of NEP 2020 and the UGC notification there is a need to have at least one Multi-Stream College in every district with plenty of options for the students to study. The Government can think of introducing new streams in these People's College where the students can opt for different subjects from other stream disciplines. This is one way the Government can also implement NEP 2020.

Having at least one Multi-Stream College in all the districts will provide an opportunity to the students who wish to pursue their higher studies and it will reduce the number of students migrating to Shillong and other cities in our country.

2. **Vocational Education and Skill Development:** The NEP 2020 emphasizes the integration of vocational education and skill development into mainstream education. In Meghalaya, where there is a rich cultural heritage and diverse economic sectors, this focus on vocational education can play a vital role in nurturing skilled professionals who can contribute to the state's economic growth. The policy encourages the

establishment of vocational training centers, apprenticeship program, and industry collaborations providing students with practical skills and enhancing employability. As we can see that many youths remain unemployed even after completing their graduation. Through its Meghalaya State Project on ITIs in the State, the Government, Colleges, People's Colleges and other Colleges in the State can sign an MOU with the other vocational training centers and also have a linkage with the ITIs and Meghalaya State Skill Project.

If the Government is really serious about employment and entrepreneurship, having at least one ITI or Vocational Skill Training centre in every district of the state is a must. This will create jobs and also encourage an entrepreneurship among the youths in all the districts of the state. The link between the College and the training centers will also ensure the youths would be encouraged to pursue vocational courses and training for Skilled Courses for the students. Moreover it will also encourage the youths towards entrepreneurship.

3. **Language and Cultural Preservation:** Meghalaya is known for its linguistic and cultural diversity. The NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of preserving and promoting regional languages and cultures. The HEIs through their various Departments such as Department of Sociology, Khasi, History can also introduce in some classes the local dialect of the district. It will encourage the inclusion of local languages in the curriculum, ensuring that students have the opportunity to learn and appreciate their native languages. Organizing of dramas and various sensitization programmes is necessary to educate the younger generation about the culture and traditions of our State. It will have an impact on society and teach the students about respecting the various traditions and cultures that we have in the districts, state in particular and nation as a whole.

The Government through its District Libraries can also have museums in every district. It will have various schools and college students visit the Library and Museum and learn about conserve their cultures and traditions. This will teach the younger generation about preserving the rich linguistic heritage of Meghalaya strengthening cultural identity among the younger generation.

4. **Technology Integration:** The NEP 2020 emphasizes the integration of technology in education, promoting digital literacy and online learning. In Meghalaya, where geographical challenges can hinder access to quality education, technology integration can bridge the gap and provide students with access to educational resources. The policy's focus on digital infrastructure development and teacher training in technology will enhance the quality and reach of education in the state. For this along with the ITIs and Training Centers, the Government can also equip themselves with the latest IT programmes or courses required in today's IT world after which the students can enroll for various opportunities. In these centers, the Government can also have testing centers where various examinations can also be conducted such as JEE, NEET, CAT (various entrance exams for MBA), CLAT (for Law), CUET and other competitive exams. Employment as well such as (IBPS, SSC, RBI etc). This will not only provide the youths with equal opportunities but will make the youths aware about these various avenues and also encourage them to pursue these examinations. As having centers far from their home district discourages them to try and attempt these examinations.

5. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** The NEP 2020 highlights the significance of continuous professional development for teachers. In Meghalaya, investing in teacher training programs aligned with the NEP 2020 can enhance the quality of instruction and empower teachers with innovative teaching methodologies and pedagogical techniques. It will encourage the development of the evolving needs of students and ensure a high standard of education in the state. The Government through their People's colleges can also have various training programmes being made to the President of India, Home Minister, Prime Minister Modi. The appeal have fallen on deaf ears.

Recently many Christians in India and abroad were moved to tears on seeing visuals of one of the BJP administration's Vice President of North India, bordered of national right-wingers entered into the under-constructed church and desecrated one holy spot by branding on a Hindu insignia. To add insult to injury, the statues of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and virgin Mary were forcibly taken away and dumped on the street! Coincidentally, nearer home, it is no exaggerating to witness that around 300 churches were burnt down allegedly by the Hindu Mitees leaving hundreds of Kukis to abandon their hearths and homes in the states of Mizoram, Meghalaya and other states. The atrocities on Kukis, who are mostly Christians, have been deeply witnessed by the Vice President of the BJP, Mizoram unit which made him to unhesitatingly resign from the Party. I don't think any BJP member from Meghalaya who is a Christian and holds a high profile party status will dare to implement the example set by the Mizoram BJP unit.

Unusually, and as an anti-climax, the Northern States

programmes for the teachers. Few months back it seen that the Government has successfully applied and received the permission to start the B.Ed Course at Kiang Nangbah Government College. The same can be set up in every district of the State, in the Government College, the B.Ed Courses can also be setup in the People's College. Since the seats are limited, this initiative will not only help the untrained teachers to get trained but it will also provide scope for the future generation teachers.

6. **Inclusive Education:** The NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusive education, ensuring equal access and opportunities for students with disabilities and those from marginalized communities. In Meghalaya, where there are diverse ethnic groups and remote areas, the policy's provisions for inclusive education can help address educational disparities and promote social equity. It encourages the establishment of special education centers and the adoption of inclusive teaching practices.

For the State of Meghalaya, it is necessary to think about having at least one special education center in the entire district. It is great to have new districts in the state but it is also important for the Government to make sure that all the important resources are provided to all the people of all the districts and the state. The Government must also make sure that it provides equality in access of various resources (Health Care, Road Infra, Electricity and other basic resources) equal opportunities, equal rights and equality in providing education to the needy especially to the people who need special education.

To fully leverage the benefits of the NEP 2020, it is crucial for the state government and educational institutions in Meghalaya to align their policies, curricula, and infrastructure with the principles and goals outlined in the Policy. By embracing the NEP 2020 and implementing its provisions effectively, Meghalaya can lay the foundation for a modern, inclusive, and quality education system that nurtures the potential of its students and prepares them for the challenges of the future.

(This article is just a suggestion as per research conducted by questioning the youths, parents and residents of various districts of our state. It is as per the need of NEP 2020. It is important to know the various requirements of NEP 2020 at the Higher Education level before we move towards its implementation.)

of India have been battered by unprecedented record rainfall from July 10. This unparalleled natural fury has made one of the senior citizens of these regions to go on record saying that he has never seen in his life-long career such fire of nature! It was seen that small temples adjacent to rivers were literally swept away. Panchwakari temple was submerged on account of flooding of the River Beas at Mandi, Himachal Pradesh. An ancient Shiva temple was separated from Himachal's mandi as the bridge linking the temple with the city was washed away. Sadly, some pilgrims died during the trek, and the Yamra was forced to halt in Himachal Pradesh, Unamkhal and Jammu and Kashmir. Also! The incalculable toll on human and infrastructure beggars all descriptions.

The unprecedented natural fury which has engulfed the northern parts of India has prompted me to ask my Hindu friends, with a secular bent of mind, the nuances behind the coincidental destruction of Churches vis-a-vis the flooding of Temples in India. They simply quipped, "Poetic justice! But I, for one, am reminded of the ironic words of a legendary footballer, who said 37 years ago, 'The hand of God!'".

Yours etc, Jerome K Dierghob, Shillong-2

India, Bangladesh to use national currencies for bilateral trade. Modi govt optimistic on use of India rupee in more countries

By Ashis Biswas

In South Asia, the recent agreement between India and Bangladesh, to use their respective national currencies for bilateral trade will help boost Bangladesh's forex savings by at least \$2 billion US annually.

While this is one of several factors behind the decision, other bigger economic interests are also involved. The foundation of the regional economy will be strengthened, feel observers, quite apart from immediate relief foreseen for the Bangladeshi economy. It was Sri Lankan president Ranil Wickremesinghe who had some time ago announced plans within the S.A.Sia region to switch to the Indian rupee avoiding the US dollar, in bilateral trade. Discussions between India and Bangladesh had been going on for some time. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine and its massive negative impact on developing economies worldwide was a major factor behind the current new thinking among many countries, forcing them to address a rapidly deteriorating financial situation urgently.

The months ahead should see the growing acceptability use of the Indian rupee as an international currency suitable for conducting bilateral trade. Around 18 countries have so far expressed their willingness to use the Indian rupee. Among these are Russia, the UK, Fiji,

"Prospects for the rupee firming up as an international currency further brightened after the recent agreement between India and the UAE, allowing bilateral trade by using the dirham and the rupee. Carrying out financial transactions and the dispatch of remittances etc using the digital modes of communication will become a great deal easier for the 3 million strong Indian community living in the Emirates."

Singapore, Malaysia, Mauritius and Israel. Reserve Bank authorities have agreed in principle to assist banks in these countries as well as India to work out the modalities of carrying forward.

Prospects for the rupee firming up as an international currency further brightened after the recent agreement between India and the UAE, allowing bilateral trade by using the dirham and the rupee. Carrying out financial transactions and the dispatch of remittances etc using the digital modes of communication will become a great deal easier for the 3 million strong Indian community living in the Emirates. The recent authorities in both countries are taking necessary steps like the mutual opening of Nostro accounts to implement the provisions agreed on so far.

While earlier India nor Bangladesh making much fanfare about the matter, the choice for the rupee comes as yet another step taken by several countries to reduce their dependence on the US dollar as the dominant, almost unavoidable currency for the conduct of international trade. At present, around 80% of the world trade and business is conducted in US dollar transaction.

However, from within the non-Western developing world, where most of the world population and economies are growing, the Chinese yuan is slowly emerging as an effective alternative to the US dollar. The decision taken by China and Russia to avoid the US dollar and other major western currencies like the Euro in their massive trade business transactions has certainly had some impact in the world economy. A de-dollarising trend has taken firm root affecting

around 15% of the aggregate world trade business transactions. It has become stronger especially in the wake of unprecedented economic sanctions (numbering over 7000) slapped on Russia following the outbreak of the Ukraine war.

Most countries have been shocked over the sudden freezing of Russian forex reserves of over \$300 billion held in US banks by Washington and by Moscow's apparent inability to do very much against the combined economic might of the US-led Western Block, even by way of legal remedies!

The American decision has caused concern among most countries holding positive forex reserves in US-owned banks, that they might well also fall victim to such string-a-ram economic sanctions in some regions. That could spell an immediate end to their existence as sovereign, independent nations threatening their very survival.

One major reason Russia was not hurt much by western sanctions was its enormous land mass, its huge natural resources and high levels of education and economic advancement. Frustrated Western financial writers who had predicted

a total Russian collapse within a week after the first tranches of sanctions were announced, later admitted - without benefit of apology - that they had "underestimated" the strength of Russia's economy.

Various alternate strategies are currently being tried out among nations to bypass future US sanctions, following the formation of unannounced creation of nations countries currently facing such sanctions - including Iran, Turkey, Venezuela and Pakistan. The process gained momentum after the American sanctions were announced against Russia. The recent strengthening of the US-dollar in recent months again has emerged as a major burden for the bulk of developing nations, whose national currencies have progressively declined in exchange value vis-a-vis the dollar - like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan. Already these countries were struggling to maintain their rapidly reducing forex reserves.

The weakening of their national currencies against the dollar came as a double whammy for their economies, fueling domestic inflation, worsening budget deficits and affecting fiscal capacities generally.

However, while India has cautiously welcomed the world population and economies are growing, the Chinese yuan is slowly emerging as an effective alternative to the US dollar. The decision taken by China and Russia to avoid the US dollar and other major western currencies like the Euro in their massive trade business transactions has certainly had some impact in the world economy. A de-dollarising trend has taken firm root affecting

"Conscience is the window of our spirit, evil is the curtain." — Douglas Horton

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 55, No. 117 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 21, 2023

Rules for bureaucracy

THE Indian bureaucracy, fashioned on the lines of the well-oiled British government systems, has its inherent strengths. The 'best brains' are believed to be recruited and inducted into the apex of the administrative system. First home minister Vallabhbhai Patel rightly called IAS the 'steel frame' of the government - which, of course, is beset over by the political class. Though these officers owe their allegiance to the central government, they are split into various state cadres. Periodic changes have been introduced in their service rules - and the latest such is bound to raise a row. It would, from now on, be solely for the central government to decide on punitive steps - like withholding or withdrawal of the retirement benefits - vis-a-vis IAS, IPS and Indian Forest Service officials, though they all serve for and report to state governments. The previous practice of taking such decisions on the basis of confidential reports (CR) given by the respective state government has been done away with. This would mean that the central government would exercise more control over these officers while the states' powers are reduced. This cannot be music to the leaders who run states. Their frequent complaints have been that the Centre usurped the rights granted to them by the Constitution under the federal system.

When the Constitution was framed and India turned itself into a republic in 1950, this nation was still in its formative years. It won Independence in 1947, when several princely states wielded powers over the people. While the princely states were merged and states formed on linguistic lines, the framers of the Constitution laid stress on the federal structure of the nation. The powers of the central government have been limited in several respects. Other than for defence, national finances, aviation, railways etc, states have the freedom to govern their respective territories. The basic concept was that 'without states, there is no Centre'. However, some 60 years later, it is time to have a re-look at the power-sharing arrangement between the states and Centre. Some regional satraps in Tamil Nadu have barred central investigation agencies like CBI and ED from operations in their states without state permission. This could derail investigations by these agencies, be it in respect of economic offences or even in matters of terror-linked anti-national activities. Also, as in West Bengal, officers of the IAS-IPS cadre were browbeaten by state governments vis-a-vis their day-to-day functioning. These officers are predictably caught between the devil and the deep sea. It is time the Centre keeps national interests in mind and suitably modify their service rules. The scenario as it existed in 1950 and today are vastly different.

Letters to the Editor

Let truth prevail

Editor, I wish to provide some perspectives from the Kuki community apropos of the letter to the editor "Peace in Manipur" by Chongbam Thangbam Meitei (ST July 19, 2023). The writer began by pointing out that Kukis attacked Meitei villages and in retaliation the Meitei attacked Kuki villages, which is a totally false narrative spread across the Meitei community. On May 3, 2023, Tribal Solidarity March was conducted under the aegis of All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) in all areas of hill districts in Manipur. The Aglo-Kuki War Centenary Gate was burnt down by some Meitei miscreants on this same day, which generated friction between the two groups. The incident happened while the Kuki people were travelling home from the rally. Video proof of the incident was widely shared on social media. This is exactly how the violence in Manipur increased. Manipur has experienced unprecedented levels of violence, and propagating false narratives is not encouraged.

Furthermore, Mr Meitei also stated that, "this conflict is not between the Hindu-Meitei and Kuki (Christian) nor it is between tribal and non-tribal but between those who are in support of and against illegal immigrants, poppy cultivators and are therefore asking for separate administration." It should be noted that the Meitei radicals targeted the Kuki people specifically, despite the fact

Manipur pummels the depths of depravity

By Patricia Mukhim

Today it is imperative that we turn our eyes to a neighbouring state where a section of the population is facing an unrelenting ethnic cleansing. It took a video that recorded the depravity and misogyny of groups in Manipur for Prime Minister Modi to break his silence. Meanwhile the Supreme Court has also taken cognizance of the despicable video and sought answers from the state government of Manipur. But was this too little too late. When Colin Gonsalves was pleading on behalf of the Kuki-Zo people before the apex court and sought direction from the court for providing more security for the hill tribes, the reply he got was that the constitutional step into the realm of the executive and that was the brief of the state government to provide security to its citizens. Colin Gonsalves, a human rights lawyer, was well briefed of the situation in Manipur.

Again it took a video of the two Kuki-Zo women being paraded naked and their private parts touched by humans turned monsters for the supreme court to get tough on the state of Manipur. It is a chilling account of what has been allowed to happen in Manipur under the watch of governments both at the Centre and State that are seemingly unmoved by this saga of brutality against hapless women. A statement by the Manipur Police says FIRs have been filed against unknown armed miscreants who committed the heinous crime. Are the armed miscreants unknown when their faces and their inhuman deeds were clearly visible? Is this what policing has come to? It's almost as if the perpetrators of the crime want to deliver a death blow to the hopes of the Kuki-Zo community of ever returning to their indigenous habitat.

Finally, one of the perpetrators was arrested but could he have orchestrated such a heinous act alone? What about the entire cohort of debauched minds that were part of this atrocity? They too need to be rounded up and it must be the responsibility of

all right thinking citizens of this country to follow this case to its logical end and to ensure that the perpetrators don't get out of jail once the situation calms down. It is unprecedented that the European parliament should pass a resolution against the atrocities inflicted on the Kuki-Zo community since May 3 last when violence first erupted at Charachanput. And what did our foreign office mandarins do? They told the European parliament to mind its own business. A violence that can last this long with gun battles happening on a daily basis can only be a result of two things - either the law has failed miserably or the violence has been allowed to happen with the intent of driving out the last of the tribals from the hills of Manipur. And what better justification than to label all the Kuki-Zo people with one broad sweep of 'illegal migrants'.

Swamp government for the Government of Manipur which is now seen as the eternally vigilant levianthan guarding the frontiers of Bharat on behalf of the 1.4 billion population - a majority of which does not even know what Manipur is and where it is located on the map. In this sordid saga of revenge and retaliation that has reached a despicable low, there is only so much that can be done to shake the souls of fellow Indians out of the complacency that distance lends and ask them if they too can feel the searing pain of this scourge that is visiting their sisters in a part of their own country. What is happening in Manipur is so wrong substantively and morally that it is challenging the very existence of the nation running the country - Prime Minister Modi. Why is he unmoved by all these brutally inhuman acts perpetrated by criminals, bigots in a state presided over by a venomously partisan Chief Minister? Manipur is in a

state of precipitous decline yet the Centre continues to look the other way. It has now made even the neighbouring states wonder if this model of vote bank politics where the policy is viciously polarized will be allowed to play out in the neighbouring states as well. The security forces in Manipur are virtually fighting a losing battle because they cannot break through the human shields that prevent them from enforcing the law and arresting law breakers. The situation is such that the law-breaking brigade in the Imphal valley has attained the status of defenders of their community pride against the much maligned 'illegal migrants' from Myanmar; the poppy growers; the drug lords who don't belong to Manipur. What a convenient narrative to camouflage the greed for land in the hills which they have been eyeing for decades but which their non-tribal brethren have become a hindrance since under Article 371-C non-tribals cannot buy land in the designated tribal habitat.

In an evolving geo-system land reforms are a vital part of the process of governance and the key element of governance is to establish a rule of law where justice prevails. If land is a hugely contested issue in Manipur and land is also linked to the survival of the group then settling that matter should have been the brief of governments past and present. Was it necessary to allow the unleashing of such hatred and outrage on the streets for 77 days? In fact, every single day the people of Manipur (and this needs emphasis - it is the Kuki-Zo people) have been waking up to a scene that is chilling in its cruelty and a rolling trauma wondering what the new level of debauchery they must witness. Just think how it feels to live in such a traumatic environment. Watching the scene playing out in Manipur every single day informs us that

Chief Minister Biren Singh is directed by a blinding egotism of pitting his own people - the Meiteis who he feels have a right to the entire physical landscape called Manipur - against those he has repeatedly termed as miscreants and interlopers from Myanmar. Today what is in full display in Manipur is the Lynch mentality where the extraordinary cruelties of ordinary people have become a common sight. Manipur has been blacked out by the internet shutdown which again is part of the nefarious ruling elite who had access to it all the while. It's the hoi-polloi that had to suffer the ignominy of not even being able to tell the stories of the unspeakable atrocities that have visited them over these 77 days in what can best be described as a civil war. The barbaric acts of parading women naked and then raping them and of killing the young village volunteer and hanging his head on a pole are tales of cruelties that one had heard of in a best forgotten past that to witness such cruelties and perhaps many more that yet to unfold on account of the internet embargo in the 21st century tells us that humans can regress into the depths of barbarism even today. It only takes a provocative narrative to be created around an issue for the worst human emotions to come spilling out. Indeed, what we have seen in Manipur is the weaponization of words which feed into the cycle of unending violence.

The fact that the violence has sustained for over two months and is soon reaching the third month in another 13 days means that the aggressors have been well prepared. It takes preparation and training to keep the fire alive for so long. Extremist outfits in the valley were seen to have been in a state of preparedness. Hence the violence in Manipur is neither sudden nor a concocted plot. It is a well-laid plan's success with precision. No wonder the Modi government is an apathetic onlooker.

These delays in recruitment delay an cancellation may also be repeated in the future and can negatively impact the candidates making them uncertain since all the candidates are on the status of the recruitment process. This results in loss of opportunity, diminished morale especially for candidates who have invested their efforts, time and resources for preparation of exams only to be notified that the recruitment has been cancelled which leads to frustration, disillusionment and skill obsolescence as it does not provide an opportunity to apply their skills effectively. And if a post is advertised to fill a vacancy, it won't hamper the efficiency or add to the pressure of the existing employees if its delayed cancellation.

Hence these delays and cancellations are unfair and unjustified, particularly given the time and effort some of the youths have invested in preparation of the applications right to the preparation for exams. This has deprived many of their rights and opportunities and also undermined the confidence that people have in the Institute to provide a fair and transparent recruitment process. This has left some to question the integrity and professionalism of the NEIGHIRHMS Administration to handle the recruitment process.

These delays in recruitment delay an cancellation may also be repeated in the future and can negatively impact the candidates making them uncertain since all the candidates are on the status of the recruitment process. This results in loss of opportunity, diminished morale especially for candidates who have invested their efforts, time and resources for preparation of exams only to be notified that the recruitment has been cancelled which leads to frustration, disillusionment and skill obsolescence as it does not provide an opportunity to apply their skills effectively. And if a post is advertised to fill a vacancy, it won't hamper the efficiency or add to the pressure of the existing employees if its delayed cancellation.

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

G-20 Meeting Consensus eludes

By Dr D.K. Giri

Not unexpectedly, consensus eluded the meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) of the G-20 countries in Gandhinagar on 18 and 19 July. The divergence between Russia-China bloc and the US-led alliance on Russia-Ukraine war persists. The meeting ended without issuing a joint statement. Many observers would have perhaps anticipated a consensus statement under the current chairmanship of India known for her inherent strength of accommodation and balance. However, that was not to be. New Delhi's posture of 'neutrality' on the Ukraine war should have helped develop a consensus. On the contrary, no G-20 meeting in India has so far ended with a consensus document.

Indeed, India released a document which is called the Chair Summary that records the discussions and disagreements taking place in the meeting. According to the Chair Summary, China and Russia objected to the mention of Ukraine war, in particular the phrases like "immense human suffering" and "exacerbating exist-

Global South. New Delhi is certainly utilising the opportunity as the Chair of G-20 to move towards accomplishing such aspiration. During the G-20 process, India has been trying to mobilise support for reforms of multilateral banks, other financial institutions to facilitate the development in low-income and vulnerable countries.

After the third meeting of G-20 meeting in Hampi in Karnataka, India's G-20 Sherpa, Anitabh Kant, said that India's focus was on development issues. He underlined, "there will be a contentious issue (read Ukraine war) and that will be the issue of geo-politics which we are not discussing at this stage at all. Our priority is developmental issues, inclusive and sustainable growth and progress, more finance from multilateral institutions, sustainable development goals (SDGs), technological transformation and gender equality." He was emphatic that India will not be discussing the Ukraine war. He said, "It is not a creation of developing and emerging countries, it is not a priority for us. ... Our priority is our war. That is not our priority at all. That may

"The meeting ended without issuing a joint statement. Many observers would have perhaps anticipated a consensus statement under the current chairmanship of India known for her inherent strength of accommodation and balance."

ing fragilities in the global economy. Several members condemned the war and the tragic consequences it has been causing in terms of shortages of supplying of food, fuel and fertilizers which came largely from Ukraine and Russia. They specifically referred to Russia's refusal to extend a deal to allow Ukrainian grain export through the Black Sea. Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman briefing the press after the meeting said of the majority view that, "food passing through the Black Sea should not have been stopped or suspended."

Although India has so far remained neutral on the Ukraine war, it has expressed deep concerns about the gravity of the conflict in terms of its impact on developing countries. New Delhi had set its focus as the current chair of the Group on the need to help countries grappling with food shortages and debt crisis following the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian war.

Majority of the low-income countries is in debt distress. Before the meeting, on 16 July, the US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, had said, "A key priority this week is to redouble our support to Ukraine as it continues to defend itself against Russia's illegal and unprovoked attack ... ending this war is imperative and the single best thing we can do for the global economy." The IMF Chief, Kristalina Georgieva, almost endorsed the perspective of the Treasury Secretary when she said, "The world today is more shock-prone and fragile, with climate change, pandemic and Russian invasion of Ukraine all causing widespread turmoil."

The Outcome Document comprising 26 paragraphs and two annexes, released by the Chair indicated the majority opinion on the war. It stated that the war was causing economic growth, increasing inflation, disrupting supply chains, heightening energy and food insecurity and elevating financial stability risks. There were also different views on war situation and sanctions.

While recognising that the G-20 is not the forum to resolve security issues, it acknowledged that security issues can have significant consequences for the world economy. Let us note that India is aspiring to be the voice of the

be a priority for somebody else."

To be sure, avoiding a reference to the war while discussing its consequences is not a prudent methodology for an authentic discussion. The critical link of the war with economy cannot be lost on the managers of G-20 in Delhi. It is true that lack of consensus on the Russia's invasion of Ukraine has hampered the momentum after the G-20 meetings so far. In the G-20 Declaration in Bali last year, similar divergences among the members in the end of the war, but they agreed on the use of threat of nuclear weapons and sought "peaceful resolution of conflicts".

The Summit in India should do better in closing the gap on the war. The best would be to nudge Ukraine and Russia and their respective allies - formal and informal - to end the war. India should diplomatically pull all stops in accomplishing this objective.

To be fair and objective in our assessment of India's efforts on building consensus, Prime Minister Modi is trying his best. While video-addressing the Foreign Ministers' conference, he said, "We all have our positions and perspectives on how the current geo-political tensions resolved. We should not allow issues that we cannot resolve together to come in the way of those we can." He lamented that the two principal goals of the post-World War II international political order, preventing conflict and fostering economic growth were elusive.

All in all, it would have been a great diplomatic feat for India to have been able to build consensus on the causes and consequences of the Ukraine war. Indian officials maintained that Russia-Ukraine war is beyond the remit of the G-20, "it may be technically correct, but not in the real world of distress and disruption of the world economy due to the war in Ukraine, let alone the pathetic loss of men and material in the war. Like Modi said to Putin that, "It is no time for war". In the run-up to the summit in September, India should continue to harp on ending the war and Russia and Ukraine coming on to resolve security issues, it acknowledged that security issues can have significant consequences for the world economy.

Let us note that India is aspiring to be the voice of the

Unfair recruitment process

As we know, unemployment has become a very disconcerting cause for the youths of Meghalaya. With the growing population there is a huge demand for job creation. Failure on this front has led to society going haywire (increase in crime rate, poverty etc.) as can be seen in everyday reports covered by your esteemed daily. The government cannot neglect this issue but look into it with urgency and take necessary steps to ensure that posts are being created/filled and recruitment is done on a timely manner.

We have seen repeatedly, the recruitment of various post in government sectors is delayed for 2 to 3 years which results in a negative impact on the department, the existing employees and on the candidates who have eagerly applied and patiently waiting. This is enough to make them lose interest on what they have prepared and force ahead with their career plans. But let's not only talk about these delay but let's look at an Institute of Excellence that was set up as a super-specialty hospital but when it comes to recruitment it seems to be lacking. Yes, NEIGHIRHMS, al-

though roomier as one of the best hospital in our state but the growing number of patients is creating a problem to work load that falls on existing doctors, nurses, allied healthcare staff and employees engaged with the Institute. The second appointment of Nursing Officer is a positive step by the Institute but recently we have seen a number of posts advertised, eligible list notified, exams date scheduled only to be renounced that the examination has been cancelled due to administrative reasons. Is cancelling exams due to administrative constraints a valid reason? Does they think that this affects the eligible candidates? Is there something behind those walls of the administration? This is in fact the failure of the Administration.

Some of the notified order/cancellation which came in the Institute was: N. O. NEIGHIR - E. 111/12/2015-Pt dated 17 March 2023; stated that the post of Store Keeper vide Adv. No. NEIGHIR-E.111/15/2014-Pt IV dated 15.11.2012 stands cancelled.

N. E. I. G. R. - E. 111/12/2015-Pt dated 17 March 2023; stated that the post of Store Keeper vide Adv. No. NEIGHIR-E.111/15/2014-Pt IV dated 15.11.2012 stands cancelled.

N. E. I. G. R. - E. 111/12/2015-Pt dated 17 March 2023; stated that the post of Technical Assistant Advt. No. NEIGHIR-E.111/15/2014-Pt IV dated 15.11.2012 stands cancelled.

N. O. NEIGHIR - E. 111/12/2015-Pt dated 17 March 2023; stated that the post of Store Keeper vide Adv. No. NEIGHIR-E.111/15/2014-Pt IV dated 15.11.2012 stands cancelled.

stands cancelled. Not only are they cancelled but the delay and the timeframe to even notify the post has been more than a year from the date of advertisement which violates the DoPT order O.M. No. Misc-14017/15/2015-Estt. (RR) dated 11.01.2016.

NEIGHIRHMS recruitment? Are they going to advertise these vacant posts and candidates eagerly applying only to be notified after a few years or months that the recruitment has been cancelled? Will such instances be repeated with other recruitments like the post of Assistant Accounts Officer, Health Educator, Medical Social Worker, Health Inspector, Radiographer, Library Assistant and Driver Gr. III vide Adv. No. NEIGHIR-E.111/2014-Pt. V on September 28, 2022, but new notification released till date. Will the applicants suffer the same fate as others who have applied for previous vacancies but now stands cancelled.

These delays may be due to inadequate or outdated procedures, technology used for recruitment which is supposed to be designed to handle large volumes of applicants or a cause of bureaucratic red tape or administrative delays or funds constraints. Such problems are often associated with reputed Institutes like NEIGHIRHMS. But no matter what the reason is, it cannot justify cancelling the recruitment and the time invested once for self-gain that could be involved in the delays and cancellations.

Let us note that India is aspiring to be the voice of the

Let us note that India is aspiring to be the voice of the

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

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 145 No. 348 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 22, 2023

NCW fails Manipur Women

MORE and more skeletons are tumbling out of the Manipur cupboard and they are all very troubling. It is now learnt that the National Commission for Women (NCW), Chief Rekha Sharma received a complaint letter from the women who were paraded naked, groped and later raped and that she had written to the Government of Manipur as far back as May 23, 2019 and June 19 but received no responses from them.

This one step back will save the innocent lives and property of the state and individuals and help focus more on development and the resolution of important political issues. Students can go back to schools, farmers can plough their fields, and daily wagers and small vendors can start their daily earnings. Killings and counter-killings, burning, determining who is in the right and who is in the wrong, land rights, political rights, and cultural rights dominate public discourse in the aftermath of any conflict. However, before a conflict or in normal times, one examines all these factors, except for a small number of conflict resolution scholars. When a situation arises, politicians seek political advantage, social organizations experiment, and businesspeople take advantage of abrupt price increases, economic blockades, etc. After a certain point, everyone must abandon the plans they had at the time for the conflict, alter their mindset, and resolve to live together once more.

Interestingly the Member in Charge of the North East Cell in the NCW is from Meghalaya. From her social media accounts it appears that she has used her time in the NCW very well by visiting several states across the country such as Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat etc. She recently visited Nagaland but Manipur did not beckon her. Anyone in her place who understands the brief of her appointment would have insisted to the NCW that an official visit be made to Manipur more so when letters of complaints had arrived at the desk of the Chairperson. But that was of no concern because the Chairperson had probably made the brief of the Commission clear to other members which is to keep their hands off the BJP-ruled states.

In this gross abdication of duty the entire Commission stands indicted and women activists ought to make an issue of this injustice where the NCW Chief has made light of the quasi-judicial powers and the right to investigate and summon witnesses that the Commission has vested on her. Clearly the highest body created to protect women's rights has failed them.

Let the Manipur Violence be the last one: We love Manipur

By Pramod Boro

Scends of gunshots are not a rhythm of the flute but a signal of gloomy days ahead... One step back by Meites and another step back by Kukis may change the entire uncertainty in the conflict-ridden state of Manipur and people can live without fear and enjoy their normal life and once again move ahead with the development agenda in the state. Peace in Manipur is entirely dependent on the Meites and Kukis. If they move their towards each other in a spirit of brotherhood and move their hands away from the trigger of the guns, peace will become an inevitable reality. And the State and its leaders can get rid of sleepless nights just to listen about a day when there would not be a single gunshot fired and not a single death in Manipur.

It is not in a government policy to ensure that the next generation is never again victimised by these senseless and senseless killings. As soon as normalcy is restored, social organisations and many stakeholders need to do the people who read about these incidents. In the political and policy-making ecosystem, there are contented leaders and civil servants who are well versed in history and deliver engaging lectures and pass the most difficult civil service examinations. But they do not feel the need to focus on such issues once they are in the job. Political leaders and bureaucrats who are content with their routine duties do not entertain any long-term discussion on conflict resolution even after incidents from some of their peers. If the Constitution contained such a provision, resolution officers and leaders may have been required to take these incidents seriously as part of their duties.

During many periods of conflict, the discussions in the Indian Parliament on such a provision have been overshadowed by the tug-of-war between the ruling and opposition parties and other partisan considerations. In normal circumstances, however, it may be an item on the Parliamentary Business agenda to develop a policy to address the recurrence of these types of incidents in various parts of the country at different times.

We have learned from recent events in Manipur that there can be conflict between communities that have lived together for centuries. Therefore, we cannot foresee where and when conflict and violence will occur between communities. Similarly, the Flood Control Department officials believe there will be no floods in the country this year, so they do not manage the embankments and river dykes in a timely manner. However, when the flood comes and destroys houses and thousands of acres of farming land, turning the rich into poor overnight, we realise that the floods would not have caused any damage if the embankment had been timely and properly constructed. This is precisely what occurs during times

of community violence and conflict. It is because we lack both long-term flood mitigation and conflict resolution policies. Our great Guru of non-violence MK Gandhi said the immediate result of violence is destruction. But still, we do that. Why? If it is for our survival why do we kill others? If we fight for our rights why should it be at the cost of another's rights? If it is for our security why do we make others insecure by killing and burning them?

In any conflict situation, one side engages in violence while the other side discusses security measures; one side murders innocents while the other discusses peace. But history shows that when there is violence and murder, neither security nor tranquility can exist. The same individuals who protest and complain about insecurity, if those who provoke violence were to sense for peace, lives would not be lost.

In my opinion, the present situation can be resolved if the Meites take one step back and the Kukis take another stride back. This is feasible since Meites love Meites and Kukis love Kukis. And both communities cherish humankind. If both communities declare the cessation of violence and control their anger, there will be no other, which we cannot do during violence using sophisticated weapons, we do not need to spend money, arms, or to spend acres of rupees on security arrangements that could be used for other development and welfare programmes.

The enemy of human society is violence, which is not unlike the failure of a government but also of all institutions, organisations, and intellectuals. People who belong to a community, physically, mentally, psychologically, philosophically, and emotionally constitute a community. If we do not have a common bond, we are not a community. We are not a community if we do not have a common bond, we are not a community. We are not a community if we do not have a common bond, we are not a community. We are not a community if we do not have a common bond, we are not a community.

in the state, they have fought numerous cases at various national and international levels. Despite this, the status of human rights in their own state is gravely threatened, and the state's hard-won calm has been suffocated by its own citizens during the ongoing conflict.

Among the north-eastern states, Manipur holds a unique position in sports, art and culture, craftsmanship, and entrepreneurship. Positive news emanating from Manipur has inspired and made us feel proud as citizens of diverse states. We heaved a sigh of relief when all types of conflicts between state and non-state forces ceased for several years. However, recent acts of violence stand out all and once again disrupted the normalcy, peace, and happiness of the state that has been lauded in recent years for its many positive developments.

Considering all these developments, a large number of precious lives, including one's beloved siblings, sons, and parents, were lost before their eyes. Our hearts are shattered by the uprooting of the beautiful families in which our mothers and sisters resided. The loss of the safest place on earth for humans, providing us with affection, courage, morals, and motivation to live, has been reduced to ashes. Nobody has time to consider the mother, sibling, and children because that compels us to consider such circumstances. We are accustomed to considering for the means and not the end. If one group considers safety, the other considers conflict. This raises the question of who will win in the end. Do we truly cherish our children? If we truly care for our offspring, are hatred, vengeance, and conflict gifts for their future?

Considering all these incidents that have persisted for centuries, I believe there should be a long-term strategy to transform our generation from being threatened by violence and insecurity to growing up in an environment of safety, tranquility and hope. Only our new generation pledged to change in any form of violence, conflict, or hostility and pledge for a peaceful existence can hope for a better future and appropriate development. This will not occur naturally. It takes a lot of ground work, mutual respect and cooperation.

I feel that we should have a curriculum that teaches children about peace and co-existence from an early age, so that they can experience the fruits of peace throughout their lives. Simple logic is comparable to when a doctor completes his training and begins meeting patients; when an engineer completes his training and begins designing infrastructure, and when a lad completes his military training and is prepared for battle. Similarly, a person who receives spiritual training becomes a spiritual leader during his lifetime. If our children are taught the meaning of peace and happiness, they will think twice before engaging in any form of violence or negative behaviour towards others.

The writer is Chief, Bakuland Territorial Council and former President, All India Students Union.

believe will world cause. In my view, these views are perfectly understandable. It is not necessary that all people must strive for economic progress alone. However, what is amusing is the fact that these same parties have also been complaining about unemployment and poverty in Meghalaya. They keep blaming the government for unemployment and poverty.

All 3 issues fundamentally relate to preserving the demographic composition of our state, and all 3 have received vehement public support from various intellectuals, ministers and the most powerful entities in Meghalaya, the present government, the IAP and MRSA are both designed to make it difficult for any other Indian to visit the state. The IAP and MRSA are both designed to make it difficult for any other Indian to visit the state. The IAP and MRSA are both designed to make it difficult for any other Indian to visit the state.

repeatedly mentioned that they are in absolute support of these two measures and the opposition to railways takes the form of a protest. The opposition to railways takes the form of a protest. The opposition to railways takes the form of a protest. The opposition to railways takes the form of a protest.

believe will world cause. In my view, these views are perfectly understandable. It is not necessary that all people must strive for economic progress alone. However, what is amusing is the fact that these same parties have also been complaining about unemployment and poverty in Meghalaya.

believe will world cause. In my view, these views are perfectly understandable. It is not necessary that all people must strive for economic progress alone. However, what is amusing is the fact that these same parties have also been complaining about unemployment and poverty in Meghalaya.

believe will world cause. In my view, these views are perfectly understandable. It is not necessary that all people must strive for economic progress alone. However, what is amusing is the fact that these same parties have also been complaining about unemployment and poverty in Meghalaya.

Need for a unified tribal party

By Barnes Mawrie

I have on earlier occasions suggested that North-east India needs a tribal political party one that will put tribal interests at the forefront. We had the erstwhile APHC which brought together prominent tribal leaders of the region. It was basically a unified political party intended mainly for attaining separate autonomous states from Assam. That was the reason why, this party disappeared soon after the creation of hill states. Today however, with the tragic incidents in Manipur where tribals are being targeted by the allegedly state sponsored non-tribal groups, the need for tribal leaders of the region to join hands in a single political party, has become an urgent and necessary step.

We tribal people of Northeast India are but a small minority in India and since political representation in our country is based on population, our impact in policy making at the center is insignificant when we stand divided among ourselves. But imagine if all tribal leaders from Northeast India come together under one banner, under one political party and with a common ideology, what a force we could become at the center. If such a tribal political party could send 11 MPs (Meghalaya 2, Nagaland 1, Mizoram 1, Arunachal Pradesh 2, Tripura 2, Manipur 2, Sikkim 1) and at least 4 to 5 MPs from the 14 total MPs of Assam, what a bargaining power we would have in the Lok Sabha as well as in the Rajya Sabha.

The present development in BJP ruled tribal-dominated states to decelerate the ST status of tribal Christians and deprive them of all minority privileges, is one manifestation of such a divide and rule strategy. This is a clear warning to tribal leaders of tribal Christians and deprive them of all minority privileges, is one manifestation of such a divide and rule strategy. This is a clear warning to tribal leaders of tribal Christians and deprive them of all minority privileges, is one manifestation of such a divide and rule strategy.

First of all, we tribal people of Northeast India are but a small minority in India and since political representation in our country is based on population, our impact in policy making at the center is insignificant when we stand divided among ourselves. But imagine if all tribal leaders from Northeast India come together under one banner, under one political party and with a common ideology, what a force we could become at the center. If such a tribal political party could send 11 MPs (Meghalaya 2, Nagaland 1, Mizoram 1, Arunachal Pradesh 2, Tripura 2, Manipur 2, Sikkim 1) and at least 4 to 5 MPs from the 14 total MPs of Assam, what a bargaining power we would have in the Lok Sabha as well as in the Rajya Sabha. With 15 or 16 MPs in the Lok Sabha and with 11 to 12 MPs in the Rajya Sabha, what a powerful party we could have from Northeast India that no government at the center would dare to bypass such a political force.

Secondly, the presence of such a powerful tribal political party would ensure that tribal voice and demands be taken. The NCP which at one time projected itself as a tribal party, has lost the confidence of most tribal leaders. Its alignment with the BJP has further tarnished its image and now it is being perceived as a corrupt party which has very little interest in tribal development. There are a few credible reasons why such a party is urgently needed in our region.

Secondly, the presence of such a powerful tribal political party would ensure that tribal voice and demands be taken. The NCP which at one time projected itself as a tribal party, has lost the confidence of most tribal leaders. Its alignment with the BJP has further tarnished its image and now it is being perceived as a corrupt party which has very little interest in tribal development. There are a few credible reasons why such a party is urgently needed in our region.

Secondly, the presence of such a powerful tribal political party would ensure that tribal voice and demands be taken. The NCP which at one time projected itself as a tribal party, has lost the confidence of most tribal leaders. Its alignment with the BJP has further tarnished its image and now it is being perceived as a corrupt party which has very little interest in tribal development. There are a few credible reasons why such a party is urgently needed in our region.

Letters to the Editor

Need a critical study on reasons for poverty

Editor, Aropsos of the editorial, "Seaching NITI Aayog Report Card," and the new item "Citizens blame government as state fails poverty" (ST July 20, 2023), the editorial has brought out the bare facts on the causes of poverty in Meghalaya while the news item referred to above was amusing. Why is it amusing? Because few citizens have regarded the causes of poverty without facts and figures. Let's get to the brass tacks and see what the data shows on poverty in Meghalaya since 2004-05 to 2015-16. The population below poverty line in Meghalaya in 2004-05 in absolute terms was 3.10 Lakhs and in 2009-10 it was 4.9 lakhs.

In 2011-12 the population below poverty line registered 3.6 lakhs and in 2015-16 it registered 10.76 lakhs. Hence the poverty ratio has gone up by 199 percentage points over 2011-12 and 162 percentage points over 2004-05. These calculations are based on the HPL computed according to Tendulkar Method on Mixed Reference Period as reported in the RBI's Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy. Now if we take the Head Count Ratio (HCR) as reflected in India - National Multidimensional Poverty Index - A Progress Review 2023 of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), the HCR clearly suggests that multidimensionally poor population in HCR in absolute terms has some down marginally from 10.76 lakhs in 2019-21. The son of the past

has become the burden on the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance 2.0. If we look at the district-wise HCR on dimensionally poor people in the State as reflected in the Progress Review 2023 of NITI Aayog, the poverty ratio or HCR has increased in the West Khasi Hills by 28.99 percent in 2019-21 over 2015-16 and 0.71 percent in East Khasi Hills. HCR of dimensionally poor population over the same period has decreased in East Jaintia Hills by 2.28%, Ri Bhoj by 14.64%, East Garo Hills by 14.06% and West Garo Hills by 19.29%.

Meghalaya as a whole between these two periods registered a decrease of 4.75%. In rural Meghalaya the HCR has decreased by 0.66% and in the case of urban areas has decreased by 0.27%. However, I would request the Government of Meghalaya and especially the Hon'ble Chief Minister to get the editorial, "Seaching NITI Aayog Report Card" critically examined by the powers that be and draw up an Action Plan on how to empower the dimensionally poor to overcome poverty and better their standard of living.

Yours etc, V K Lyngdoh Shillong

You can't have the cake and eat it too!

Editor, There has been a recent surge in discontents regarding three controversial projects: railways, HLP and the MRSA. At the same time, observing these discussions, I could not help but be entertained by the childish and immature comments certain individuals and groups have been expressing.

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

Hip-hop and health: Why so many rap artists die young

By AD Carlson

The song *Be Healthy* from the 2000 album by hip-hop duo Dead prez, *Let's Get Free*, is a rare rap anthem dedicated to diet, exercise and temperance:

"They say you are what you eat, so I strive to eat healthy / My goal in life is not to be rich or wealthy / 'Cause true wealth came from good health and wise ways / We got to start taking better care of ourselves"

In what's widely recognized as hip-hop's 50th anniversary, an unfortunate reality is that several of its pioneering artists aren't here to celebrate. The number of rappers who never live to see much more than 50 years themselves is astounding.

Rappers and rap fans can't help but take notice that their peers and favorite rappers are dying young. Trigo the Dove of De La Soul, 53, passed away in February 2023 after a battle with congestive heart failure. Gangsta Boo, hailed as the "Queen of Memphis" and known for her work with Three 6 Mafia, died at the age of 43 from an overdose in January 2023. Takeoff, a member of the Atlanta trio Migos, was killed in November 2022. He was 28 years old.

Rapper Jim Jones has claimed that rap is the most dangerous profession due to rappers being violently killed so frequently. Similarly, rapper Fat Joe believes rappers are an endangered species. In the 2022 *Rolling Stone* *500 Greatest Artists of All Time*, Lupe Fiasco put it more succinctly: *Rappers die too much.*

As a rapper, a fan of hip-hop's art and artists, and a professor of hip-hop, I agree with Fat Fiasco: Rappers die too much. Whether it's from gun violence, heart disease, cancer, self-harm or drugs, the number of rappers whose lives have ended prematurely is alarming.

The (un)exceptional spectacle of American gun violence

Stories of rappers who die violently are well known. News media are quick to report on violence in hip-hop to support their view that the music and the people who make it are exceptionally violent. Violence, death and conflict attract attention. Pair any of those with racial stereotyping and scapegoating and it's easy to see why the murders of hip-hop stars such as Nipsey Hussle, the Notorious B.I.G., Tupac Shakur and countless other artists garner so much attention.

Though they were all taken by the very American plague of gun violence, news and historical accounts often amplify the spectacle of violent Black death, even when they claim to honor those who are killed.

I've written extensively about the trend of scapegoating rappers. It is also the topic addressed in the book *From My Forthcoming Mixtape/essay, I: LLHCIT*.

He died by the gun but they blamed the music.

"They said, 'What he said was evidence.' And used it... / No compassion for the life torn apart when the bullets hit him. / 'Cause he talked about the block in his art, so he's not a victim.' / Camera-man said, 'They don't value life too much.' / He



reported here before. Even twice some months. / Somewhere in his mid-twenties was his deadline (dying). / 'Another N— Killed Here' was the headline (crying)."

An awful byproduct of this culture of consuming carnage is that the kinds of violent gun tragedies people are experiencing all across the U.S. are being spotlighted in hip-hop and used as excuses to criminalize and pathologize certain people and the music they enjoy, the art they create, the neighborhoods they live in or the places they grow up.

Another heartbreaking consequence is that some rappers only gain wide popularity and realize financial success after they've died. Deceased rappers are an unfortunately abundant commodity. Juice WRLD and Pop Smoke are prime examples:

strokes and renal disease are among the top 10 causes of death among Black men and Hispanic men, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It makes sense that these causes also prominently figure in the deaths of hip-hop artists.

Gone before retirement

Rapper and producer J-Dilla (32), rappers Big Moe (33), Black the Ripper (32) from the U.K., Lord Infamous (40), KMG the Illustrator (43) from Above the Law, DMX (50), Big T (52), Twccedy Bird Loc (52), Black Rob (52) and Big Pun (28) all died from heart attacks. Heavy D (44) experienced a pulmonary embolism that led to his death. Prince Markie Dee (52) of the Fat Boys passed away from congestive heart failure. Craig Mack (47) died from heart failure. And Brax (21) died from cardiac arrhythmia.

Phife Dawg (45) of A Tribe Called Quest, Tim Dog (46) and Biz Markie (57) all passed away from complications related to diabetes.

Guru (48) of Gang Starr, Bushwick Bill (52) of the Geto Boys, Hurricane G (52) and Kangel Kid (55) died from cancer. DJ K Slay passed away at 55 from what was described as COVID-19 complications.

Eazy-F died of AIDS at 30. Nate Dogg's death at 41 was attributed to a stroke.

Pimp C's death at 33 was attributed to sleep apnea and an overdose of cough syrup. Lexii Alljaji (21), Chynna (25), and Shock G (57) all reportedly died of accidental drug overdose.

Ms. Melodic passed away in her sleep at the age of 43. Big Pokey collapsed onstage and passed away at 48. Ecstasy of Whodini died at 56.

A renewed focus on health

Unfortunately, this list of tragic lives halted from ages 21 to 57 is not a comprehensive account of all the rappers who have passed away well before the age of retirement.

The occasion of celebrating 50 years of hip-hop provides a moment to reflect and honor some of the artists who contributed to the culture and are not here to celebrate this golden anniversary. It's also, perhaps, an opportunity to consider some of the outcomes of systemic barriers to health and wellness, such as access to affordable health care, varied dietary options and mental wellness resources.

Given the number of rappers and other prominent hip-hop artists who have died young, ultimately it may come down to seriously taking heed to dead prez's instructions from "Be Healthy": "We got to start taking better care of ourselves." (*The Conversation*)

[The author is Associate Professor of Hip-Hop, University of Virginia]

They both sold four to five times as much music after their deaths than when they were alive.

Along with being alarmed by these tragedies, it's important to examine the conditions that affect mortality and attempt to get to the actual causes rather than scapegoating a musical form.

Deadly diseases

While violence grabs headlines, guns are not the only cause for concern. Diseases — many of them preventable — are also a factor. Heart disease, lung disease, cancer, diabetes,

600 years of Indian history at the Met

Opened at The Metropolitan Museum of Art on July 21, the exhibition *Free and Fertile: Early Buddhist Art in India, 300 BCE-400 CE* illuminates how the religious landscape of ancient India was transformed by the Buddhist presence. Featuring more than 125 objects, including major loans from India, the exhibition consists of stone sculptures associated with the adornment of the stupa — the monumental dome structures that house the Buddha relics — as well as metalwork, ivory, ceramics, paintings, and jewelry. It presents a series of evocative and interlocking themes to reveal both the pre-Buddhist origins of figurative sculpture in India and the early narrative tradition that was central to this formative moment in early Indian art.

The exhibition is particularly noteworthy for the series of spectacular sculptural masterpieces from southern India that will be exhibited to the public for the first time, including newly discovered works of art from ancient monastic sites in the Deccan.

Max Hollein, Marina Kellen French Director of The Met, said: "Buddhism inspired an extraordinarily innovative and beautiful flowering of art in ancient India. It is a tremendous honor to present this stunning exhibition and to introduce new discoveries from this pivotal moment in the history of art to our global audience. We express a special thanks to the government of India and the six state governments in India, who have all been generous lenders to this pioneering exhibition, along with institutions in Europe and the U.S."

Govind Mohan, Secretary,

Ministry of Culture, remarked: "It gives me immense pleasure to learn that this international exhibition is being organized by The Met, in joint collaboration with a consortium of Indian museums to enhance cultural exchange between India and the U.S. The exhibition will most definitely reinvigorate interest in India's cultural heritage through its artefact wealth and will lead to deeper understanding of cultural diversities of two nations and appreciation among the people. I wish the exhibition a grand success."

Randhir Jaiswal, Consul General of India, New York, commented: "We are truly delighted to partner with The Met in bringing this important Buddhist art exhibition to the US. This exhibition will allow the Museum's audiences to delve deep into India's ancient past and understand how Buddhist thought and culture shaped our imagination and progress. That this exhibition is being held at a time when India celebrates 75 years of its independence, 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', makes the event truly memorable, and I wish it every success."

John Guy, Florence and Herbert Irving Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art at The Met, said: "This exhibition presents the story of the origins of Buddhist art through the lens of newly discovered masterpieces from early India. It showcases the beginnings of Buddhist art in southern India and presents it in a wider landscape of early Buddhist devotional practice, centered on honoring the Buddha and his relics. Buddhist monasteries were places for meditation but were also, on occasions, places for noisy festivals, the air heavy with the fragrance of

fresh flowers and perfumes. The lived traditions of early Buddhism are foregrounded here, along with the role of beautiful stories that found expression in the art adorning the stupa. This is an exhibition that celebrates the senses, just as Buddhist worship does."

Much of the earliest Indian art was produced in the service of Buddhism, a religion that emerged in northern India in the 4th century BCE as a result of the teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni. This thematically organized exhibition explores the pre-Buddhist nature cults of India that influenced early Buddhist art, the role of stupas and relic worship, the role of patrons, and the influence of India's global position, including its international trade with the Roman world. The resulting art was cosmopolitan and new, and devoted above all to the celebration of the Buddha and his message.

Highlights include sublimely beautiful renderings of stupas, sections of ceremonial gateways, and processional railings protected by awesome rearing cobras (nagas). Housed within are the precious relics marking the Buddha's presence, honored through these sculptural adornments — masterpieces of early Buddhist art.

The magnificent exhibition, which traces the history of Buddhist art, was made possible by Reliance Industries Limited and founder and chairperson Reliance Foundation, Nita Ambani. Ambani has been a lifelong and ardent supporter of the museum. In 2019, she was designated an Honorary Trustee of The Met, making her the first Indian individual to serve on the board of trustees. (*IANS/Hf*)

Here's 6 ways to deal with your child's junk food consumption

When you have a child, each tiny milestone of theirs brings you happiness and joy. Be it the first time they grab your finger or the first few steps they take, each development makes your heart leap with joy. But, with each new step, parents are also constantly worried about their health and well-being. Parenting is often challenging and takes ample hard work and responsibilities, especially for the new parents as the formative years of children hold the utmost importance to shape their lives. One of the biggest worries of a parent is to make their kids eat nutritious and healthy meals that help them to grow.

However, kids often get fussy and demand junk food with unhealthy fats and added sugars. They also increase children's chances of developing childhood obesity which causes multiple risk factors for many health complications in later life.

Dr. Pallavi Rao Charurvedi, a parenting coach, educator, and founder of Get Set Parent shares few ideas to raise your kids in a junk food-free environment:

Be an example for kids to follow: Children often imitate their parents and look up to them for everything. Hence, it is very important to make sure you are setting a good example by choosing nutritious, home-cooked meals over fast food. Show them that healthy eating can be delicious and can make all the difference.

Converse and educate: Teach your kids about the importance of a balanced diet and explain the negative effects of excessive fast-food consumption. Help them understand the nutritional value of whole foods and the consequences of consuming a lot of processed foods.

Involve them in meal planning and preparation: Get your children actively involved in meal planning and preparation, ask for their suggestions, and try to implement them. Let them pick out fruits and vegetables at the grocery store and help in the kitchen. This will give them a sense of ownership and make them more likely to enjoy healthier meals.

Limit fast food as a treat: Instead of completely saying no to fast food, consider it as an



occasional treat rather than a regular meal option. Set clear rules about how often it can be consumed, such as once a week or for special occasions.

Make healthy snacks accessible: Keep a variety of healthy snacks readily available for your child to choose from. Stock the pantry with options like fresh fruits, cut vegetables, whole grain crackers, and yogurt. Limit the availability of processed snacks and sugary treats.

Choose healthier alternatives: When eating out, choose restaurants offering healthier options or a wider range of choices. Look for places that have salads, grilled options, and fresh ingredients. Encourage your kids to make healthier choices by explaining the benefits of those options.

Remember that changes in eating habits may not happen overnight. Be patient, consistent, and supportive as you work towards improving your child's eating habits and patterns for a better and healthier tomorrow. (*IANS/Hf*)

Plate and present food, the expert way

By N. Lohangbeni Humsire

When it comes to culinary artistry, the way a dish is presented can be just as significant as how it tastes. They say we eat with our eyes first.

The artistic procedures of food plating and presentation turn a basic meal into an aesthetically pleasing and mouth-watering masterpiece.

Mastering the art of food plating can take your culinary creations to new heights, whether you're a home cook seeking to impress your guests or an aspiring chef looking to hone your talents.

Food is not only the important stargazing factor but its plating plays an important role too. The way food is presented on a plate can enhance its visual appeal, stimulate the appetite, and even elevate the perceived taste.

Chefs and culinary professionals understand the importance of thoughtful plating techniques to create visually stunning dishes that captivate diners.

Celebrity chef and founder of Palate Culinary Academy, Rakhee Vaswani, author and consultant celebrity chef Ananya Banerjee give six food plating and presentation suggestions that will help you take your culinary creations to the next level.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PLATE: In food plating and presentation, choosing the appropriate dish is crucial to improving the whole eating experience. Your culinary masterpiece is shown on the dish as a canvas. The dish's visual appeal might be enhanced or diminished depending on its colour, shape, and size. To attain a proper balance, various dishes call for different plate styles. How the components of the meal are organized and divided depends on the size and shape of the plate. The star components of your

cuisine might be better emphasized with the right platter. A textured or patterned plate can offer visual interest without detracting from the major pieces, as opposed to a plain white plate, which allows brilliant colours and detailed details to stand out.

BALANCE AND COMPOSITION: Balance and composition are fundamental elements in food plating and presentation, contributing to the overall visual appeal and aesthetic harmony of a dish. It produces a visually appealing appearance that grabs guests' attention right away. You can ensure that the varied flavours and textures are evenly distributed around the plate by attaining balance and composition.

Effective harmony and composition highlight the dish's star ingredients or focal points. You may direct the diner's attention and highlight the star elements by placing the important items in strategic locations, which will result in a visually compelling presentation.

The placement of the components on the plate should convey a sense of movement and flow, leading the eye from one piece to the next. As diners explore the many flavours and textures on the plate, this visual journey makes the dining experience more engaging and interesting.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL: Attention to detail is of utmost importance in food plating and presentation as it elevates the overall dining experience and showcases your professionalism and commitment to excellence. Every component on the plate is expertly arranged when even the slightest details are paid attention to, which improves the dish's aesthetic attractiveness. It indicates your commitment to making an enticing presentation that is aesthetically stunning.

Your culinary product exudes quality and precision when you pay attention to the little things. You show your dedication to delivering a superior dining experience by meticulously arranging each ingredient, garnish, and sauce. Your culinary identity and

brand are cultivated by paying attention to detail consistently throughout all of your plating endeavours. It creates a distinctive look and guarantees that each dish you serve adheres to a strict aesthetic and quality standard.

UTENSIL PLACEMENT: Utensil placement is an often overlooked yet essential aspect of food plating and presentation. Utensils that are arranged properly add to the plate's overall visual harmony. The diner's comfort and practicality should come first when placing the utensils. The diner will be able to easily switch between different components of the dish if the utensils are placed in a convenient location and within easy reach.

Keep in mind that utensil placement may change depending on the cuisine served, the setting, and individual preferences. In order to achieve a polished and aesthetically acceptable presentation, it is important to establish a balance between aesthetics, practicality,

and cultural factors.

LAYERS & HEIGHTS: Using layers and heights in food plating and presentation is a powerful technique that adds dimension, visual interest, and sophistication to a dish. The use of layers and heights enables cooks to express their artistic flair and originality. It gives you the chance to try out various plating methods, set-ups, and presentations, turning the dish into a gourmet masterpiece.

In order to generate visual contrast on the plate, several pieces are layered with contrasting colours, textures, and shapes. Contrasting layers give the meal interest and excitement while also adding to its visual appeal.

USE EDIBLE GARNISHES: Using edible garnishes in food plating and presentation adds a touch of artistry and enhances the overall dining experience. Edible garnishes offer the chance to enhance a dish's bright colours, textures, and visual appeal. They can improve the



plate's presentation, making it appear more alluring and delicious. In addition to adding to the aesthetic appeal of a dish, garnishes can also improve its overall flavour profile.

A burst of freshness and aromatic notes can be added with fresh herbs, microgreens, or edible flowers. The possibility to add contrast and balance to the dish is provided by garnishes. By introducing various colours, shapes, and textures, they can provide a contrast to the primary elements.

For instance, delicate, vibrant green herbs can be used to contrast with hearty, earthy proteins, or red chilli flakes can be used to provide a splash of colour to a creamy white sauce.

The significance of meal presentation and plating cannot be emphasized. Food has the ability to stimulate our senses and produce life-changing experiences in addition to merely sustaining our bodies. A basic meal may be turned into a piece of art that satisfies the senses and provides amazing culinary experiences by paying attention to every detail, from the arrangement of components to the choice of colours and textures. (IASNStje)



Six enchanting picture books to spark your child's imagination

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani Sunday, JULY 23, 2023

Birthday Forecasts! Moon semi exalta Venus on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results. You would be energetic and raring to go. You will have self belief in your abilities to achieve your dreams. You will be entrusted with major responsibilities at your workplace and you will not skip your job duties. Your name and fame will increase. Financially there would be no major worries. You will explore new areas of business. And your business will flourish through partnership or collaboration. There would be lot of business related jobs that you might undertake. And will be meeting of people. They will prove highly beneficial. These who are highly confident in themselves and get favourable responses. Relations will more will remain perfect.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be a wonderful week. You will have fun with your friends and you will enjoy every moment. You will have fun. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) This is favouring you. You will get lot of knowledge and will become more skillful. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) It is a monthly satisfying week for you. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is going to be a happy period. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It is going to be a highly auspicious week for you. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 23) This week your income will increase. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 23) You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 23) This is a week when you will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) This is a good week. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) Your time will be spent in good work. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do. You will be able to do anything you want to do.

Young children are often very creative and hence constantly seeking new ways to engage their boundless imagination. Picture books play a vital role in this process, taking them on a journey that is both visually and emotionally captivating – transporting them to extraordinary places, igniting unforgettable memories, and imparting valuable lessons with engaging artwork that complements a child's active curiosity and imagination. Encouraging the ever-curious child to explore the world of words and pictures, these books can be essential tools in encouraging your young ones to express themselves freely and creatively, be it through sketches, stories, or both!

Here is a curated collection of six engaging picture books for young readers.

Iku's First Day of School
Illustrator: Sujata Gauthi
An engaging wordless picture book that beautifully captures countless stories surrounding a momentous event in every young child's life: their first day of school. With delightful and immersive illustrations, this enchanting book vividly portrays the experience of stepping into the unknown on that memorable day. Being wordless, it is accessible to several kinds of readers, particularly younger ones, who can experience the essence of school life through these moving illustrations.

This is Where We Live
Illustrator: Manjari Chakaravarti
A visually captivating story that takes readers on a journey of a day from sunny to stormy, and then rainy – unfolding over pages of compelling and bold sketches that will surely grip the young reader's imagination and heart. Instantly relatable, the book evokes memories of any child's days in the sun, storm, and rain – encouraging them to connect with their experiences through art. Buzzed with beauty and creativity, this picture book might even compel young readers to embrace their inner artist, pick up a pencil and create their own sketches as they explore the wonders of the natural world with this book.

Zakir and His Tabla Dha Dhin Na
Author: Sandhya Rao, Illustrator: Priya Kuriyan
A window into the musical heritage of India, this story traces the childhood journey of Ustad Zakir Hussain as he learns to play the tabla from his strict and famous father, Allarakh. Coming alive with animated illustrations that are vivid and deeply emotive, this book tugs at the strings of a child's imagination – transporting them into a world thumping with energy as young Zakir's hair and hair fly in a mesmerizing rhythm while he strikes the tabla.

Our World! Hamari Duniya
Illustrator: Sujata Gauthi
A moving portrayal of valuable virtues like solidarity, love, and compassion, this bilingual picture book serves as a gentle guide for young readers, teaching them about the profound interconnectedness of all life. Using captivating imagery and powerful metaphors, this book presents a nuanced understanding of the world as a web of life where everyone needs to support each other – sparking their imagination around abstract philosophical concepts like the significance of harmony and unity in the world.

Animal Alphabet
Author: Manjula Padmanabhan, Illustrator: Manjula Padmanabhan
A thoroughly delightful introduction to the English alphabet, there is more than meets the eye with this enjoyable picture book that brings alive on paper the many lesser-known animals of India in their natural habitats. Placing content in context, the book effortlessly opens up children's minds to the rich lives of diverse fauna that is thriving across our country through its memorable rhymes, vivid illustrations, and appealing color palette.

Tiger, Tiger, where are you?
Author: Mujahid Khan, Illustrator: Manjari Chakaravarti
A captivating hunt for a tiger lost in the woods, let your child's imagination run wild (quite literally!) as they imagine the great outdoors with a lost tiger roaming the jungle. The watercolor illustration is gentle, soft, and warm – taking young readers on a picturesque visual journey through the woods. A gripping mystery riddled with clues, this book engages the young reader's curiosity on where the tiger could be while also giving them a glimpse of pragmatic life skills on how to track wild fauna. (IASNStje)



"It takes half your life before you discover life is a do-it-yourself project."

—Napoleon Hill

The Shillong Times

Vol No LXX No. 31 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 24, 2023

Modi vs Kejriwal

A fresh round of fight between the Centre led by the BJP and the Delhi government headed by AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal is currently on. The Centre is bent on passing a legislation that would effectively snatch the Delhi government's control over the state's bureaucracy. This fits into a pattern wherein the Modi government had tried its best to throttle the AAP-led administration through multiple ways over the past several years. The Centre had armed the Delhi government with more powers and Chief Minister Kejriwal, after some protests, had to fall in line. The present attempt at usurping more powers from the state government would effectively make the Delhi government a laughing stock. Without sufficient powers in its command, the state government will find the going hard in respect of several of its initiatives on development and people's welfare.

Delhi, declared as a state 1992, had in the past been a Union Territory, fully under the control of the Centre. Statehood meant Delhi got an elected government, a set of ministers and a legislature to fashion its laws or pass budgets. From that time itself, the Delhi government did not have any authority on the police force, as the central government retained its control by citing the argument that "the national capital is a sensitive region." Things went on smoothly until the UPA governments ran the central government and the Congress under Sheila Dikshit ran the state government. Thereafter, a scenario of the BJP-led NDA ruling the Centre and the AAP ruled Delhi came into being — which also turned out to be an era of frequent confrontations between the Delhi government and the Centre. Clearly, the Modi government could not tolerate the popularity of the AAP at the nation's apex, right under its nose; and Kejriwal and his AAP went on repeatedly winning the elections and humbling the BJP. With the AAP winning one more state — Punjab — the dirty tricks department of the BJP went into an overdrive against Kejriwal. Two AAP ministers are currently in jail, linked to cases of corruption and under other provisions. Cases are before the court. If these are genuine cases, Kejriwal and his party should pay a heavy price as they had won polls on the plank of fighting corruption.

The central government must avoid acting in a partisan manner against the opposition-led governments. Since 2014, it has attempted to outwit the BJP in Karnataka in the recent polls and a similar scenario is likely in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in the assembly polls by this year-end.

Letters to the Editor

Whither Polygyny

The news item, "Polygyny rate highest in Meghalaya: Report," which was featured in the 21st July edition of The Shillong Times made me contemplate and analyze the myth behind this alarming information. Yes, we understand that the report was prepared by the reputed and deemed to be University. In ornamental Institute of Population Studies (IPS), Mumbai which is an Autonomous Organization under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. However, after carefully going through the report, one finds a few statements that are misleading and also the usage of a technical concept like Polygyny to brand the State of Meghalaya must be based on more robust research.

The first line of the report states - "Contrary to popular belief, Christians as a religious group are more polygamous than Muslims or Hindus and married Meghalas has an extreme rate of polygamy, more than any other part of the country" which is an overstated statement. Meghalaya is comprised of no only Christian population whereas

the data has shown a comparison of only 3 religious communities. Whether other indigenous faith of these communities were also taken into consideration in the study? Religion cannot be the only yardstick on the basis of which such conclusions can be drawn. Whether the study was carried out with proper scaling techniques and what were the parameters used while conducting the research that has resulted in such statistics and data?

Secondly, it has been mentioned that the report was based on "statements of married women who stated that their husbands had other wives besides themselves." Can statistical data be based on such subjective analysis of a few married women and conclusions drawn? The third point which is quite perplexing is the usage of the term Polygyny. While the definition of Polygyny is correctly given in the report, however in the last few lines it says - "The study indicates that polygynous marriages are more prevalent among women." It is not women who are polygynous but the men of this society. Hence I think there's a slight confusion with the usage of very term Polygyny which is both misleading and confusing. Polyandry is the term used for a woman who

Meghalaya Poorest State: Difference in Perception

By IIII Mohrmen

The Shillong Times carried a news item on the NITI Aayog report which showed that Meghalaya is ranked as the second poorest state in the country. This however does not surprise many as people who are acquainted with the development activities in the state are also aware of the ground realities. The sad fact is that the general public continues to be poor while the ruling class and their supporters are getting richer every day. While the people of the state are poor, the only people who get rich are the politicians and the high-level class which continue to patronise them. While the politicians and the bureaucrats continue to live in oblivion and a denial mode on this fact the poor in the state continue to get poorer.

The richest farmers in the country

In one of the panel discussions during the G20 meeting at Shillong, a retired bureaucrat proudly claimed that the farmers in Meghalaya are the richest in the country. I wondered how our farmers can be richer than the farmers in Punjab or elsewhere in the country. Now the NITI Aayog report came like a bolt from the blue, and it has shocked me more. The question is, if our farmers are the richest in the country, then how come our state ranks second as the poorest state in the country? If the farmers as officials in the state always constitute about 20% of the population of the state, then the majority of the people in the state are rich. And if we go by this logic then, if seventy percent of the population are already very rich hence the state should be the richest in the country.

The growing population of unemployed youth

On the sidelines of the G20 we also had a meeting with another senior bureaucrat in the state who explained to us the unemployment scenario in the state. The officer I think was referring to the job re-orientation issue in the state when he said that the state each year produces 30,000 to 40,000 young people who are looking for jobs. It is true that if one only looks at the SSLC result each year not less than thirty thousand students pass the examination and if we add an estimated number of school dropouts to that then certainly the number of youth entering the job market in the state will increase by not less than 30,000 every year.

The officer explained that the state can only generate less than 1500 government jobs through Meghalaya Public Service Commission, the

contractual jobs, government posts, guaranteed a steady income to the person and even if the government has done away with providing pensions to its employees, government employees are provided pensions through their contributions. Government jobs also provide other allowances, health benefits, and incentives that employees in the other sectors are denied. Government employees are also enjoying and do not have to work as hard as employees in different sectors. Even if the person is not interested in a job and does have the passion to do the work, the goal of every educated youth in the state is to get a government job.

Not only does a government job offer job security, but one cannot deny the fact a government job is also not as demanding as a contractual one or working in a private enterprise. At the Hotels, there are government posts

"The sad fact is that the general public continues to be poor while the ruling class and their supporters are getting richer every day. While the people of the state are poor, the only people who get rich are the politicians and the high-level class which continue to patronise them. While the politicians and the bureaucrats continue to live in oblivion and a denial mode on this fact the poor in the state continue to get poorer."

perks the same benefits or provide for all its employees. This may sound good and hard to digest even for the bureaucrats but, the question is whether there is an alternative to this? **The man's boy's image** In another government meeting a certain high-ranking officer who had also worked with the group his perception about the men or particularly the young boys of the region. The group discussed the young people of the region reluctant to work outside the region. He shared stories of how young men who did well outside the state had to return to their native place because they want to be close to their mothers or the mothers want their sons to live near them.

It is right in his assumption that in general men in the society are quite lethargic and not as hardworking as the women folk. His argument is

based on the fact that in every meeting organized, women will always outnumber men. I suggested that even attending church, the women's pews are always full and the men's pews are always half empty. But the reluctance of young people to work outside the state may also have a connection with the initial general attitude to be poor while the ruling class and their supporters are getting richer every day.

The difference in perception of growth Perhaps it is the difference in our perception of the world. The modern scientific way of calculating the growth of the state is based on economics and numbers, whereas like many indigenous people, the most important thing for a tribal is the wellbeing of the family and the community. The modern way of calculating growth always led to over-exploitation of resources. The goal of which is to extract more to get richer and richer the man and asked him what his profession is to which the man not surprisingly said that he is a fisherman. The banker then asked him why he was not out fishing in the sea to which the man said "Well, I had fished in the morning and caught enough fish for my family's consumption and little to sell in the market to buy for my family's need". The banker then asked him "Why don't you fish more so that you can buy yourself a boat?" The man asked the banker "What for?" The banker said "So that you can go fishing as much as you want". The fisherman again asked the banker "What for?" The banker said "that you buy yourself many boats and then a ship and go fishing in the deep water." "What for?" Asked the fisherman again? "So that you can be rich like me and sometimes take a holiday and enjoy your life." The fisherman then asked the banker, "What the heck do you think I am doing now."

The banker's perception of happiness is that one has to get rich to become happy and be waited till he got rich to enjoy his life, while the fisherman enjoyed his life all along in the human pursuit for wealth nature and the earth in general are exploited and ultimately destroyed.

It is beyond imagination that in our country, which fought against colonial power and despite extreme poverty and illiteracy developed as a democratic country that such a situation would ever crop up. But signs of such events were becoming apparent in the last few years. A systematic propaganda against the minorities has been unleashed and hatred being spread. Violence in Gujarat in 2002 in which 2500 Muslims were said to have been killed and several women raped was a part of this sinister game plan. Worst was when such killings were going on a section of the people including the women rejoiced. Mr Narendra Modi who was then Chief Minister at that time

Hatred breeds socio cultural and mental aberrations all along Civil society and political parties have to be vigilant after Manipur

By Dr Arun Mitra

The video showing two women being paraded naked and molested by an unruly mob of men in Manipur has shocked the whole country. It has brought shame to us worldwide. This has also exposed hollowness in our society which takes pride in worshipping women as Devis. This has also brought to the fore socio-cultural degeneration that has occurred and has highlighted male chauvinist attitudes to use women as a tool. Above all it has exposed the insensitivity among the political and bureaucratic structure in power. This is the first ever incident of this level in independent India.

Dubious silence of the Prime Minister for the last 79 days since the violence erupted added to the suffocating atmosphere in the state. This led to hatred against each other. Hatred towards others does not happen automatically but it is engineered and hatched in a planned manner.

There are always prob-

"Such pernicious propaganda in the last few years has led to communal division in the society. So much the people are engrossed by the propaganda that they lose human feelings and feel no pain when the people whom they hate are subjected to violence, even killings. The victim and the family face humiliation, extreme mental stress and develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. They lose interest in any thing in life; develop suicidal tendencies and revengeful attitude. They get angry for no reason even on their nears and dears on trivial issues. Those who have been subjected to physical violence keep on lingering for want of healthcare. When the state is insensitive or perpetrator, things are worse."

lems in society. Question is how we project them or how we try to deal with them and solve them. It is easy to blame the vulnerable sections of the society for various issues. Systematic propaganda is unleashed against the other community. This is spread in a systematic manner and a mind-set is created among the people against each other.

We have seen this during the partition of India when nearly 25 lakh Hindus Muslims and Sikhs were killed by, *grab, abduct, rape* etc. 18 crore people were forced to migrate from their place to the other areas. But that was the time we were ruled by the colonial masters who would not hesitate to resort to any dirtiest means to continue their power and hold. But we are an independent nation now.

It was beyond imagination that in our country, which fought against colonial power and despite extreme poverty and illiteracy developed as a democratic country that such a situation would ever crop up. But signs of such events were becoming apparent in the last few years. A systematic propaganda against the minorities has been unleashed and hatred being spread. Violence in Gujarat in 2002 in which 2500 Muslims were said to have been killed and several women raped was a part of this sinister game plan. Worst was when such killings were going on a section of the people including the women rejoiced. Mr Narendra Modi who was then Chief Minister at that time

an anarchic situation in any society. Such situations destroy harmony in the society built through several decades of hard work. It takes decades to rebuild a harmonious relationship. It is the task of sane elements in the society to come forward to spread the message of love, brotherhood, sisterhood, respect to each other. Similar things were reported in Rwanda where over 8 lakh people were killed in just 100 days in 1994 after a hate campaign among Hutu and Tutsi tribes. Let us not let this happen in our country lest it starts falling apart. It is important that the constitutional bodies, bureaucracy, police and judiciary and others become proactive to save the constitution. Civil society and social reformers have hard task ahead to take up the cause to save the life of India for which thousands of our freedom fighters laid down their lives and laid foundation of a secular, democratic, socialist republic (IPN Service)

Men and cultural attire

Editor,

Apropos of the recent commemoration of U Tiroi Sing's death anniversary it was a sombre yet memorable moment for our generation to remember the sacrifice of our freedom fighters. However, what was observed was the cultural imbalance in that the men present were all dressed up in suits with a jaipong or a traditional Khasi turban on their heads. What is intriguing is the hypocrisy of men dressed up in western attire while in every other event, women are expected to come in their traditional wear which exposes the hypocrisy of our society where the rules are different for both genders. The uniformity of dress code would have been better if both adhered to their respective traditional attire. When will we ever have a balanced approach as far as our cultural attire is concerned. Or will it ever happen?

Yours etc.,
Monalisa Wankar
Via email

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

Manipur violence a disgrace

Editor,
The time has come when

Yours etc.,
Dr Omairin Kyndiah
Via email

"Violence, even well intentioned, always rebounds upon oneself" — Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 15, No. 242 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2023

Politics of Internet Shutdown INTERNET shutdown is a new technique adopted by state governments when there is breakdown of law and order and violence erupts in any part of the country. The latest is Manipur where the internet has been shut down for months in what can be termed a gross violation of the citizen's rights such as right to receive information, to online work, banking transactions and keeping in touch with family and employers. Women face more problems when the internet is banned because their bodies are targeted as locations for violence and if that happens they have no way of quickly informing anyone. What about pregnant women in labour and needing urgent help? The alibi trotted out by governments is that internet shutdown is imperative to quell rumours that could escalate the violence. While this can happen for a day or two, shutting the internet for months exposes government's inability to tackle violence largely due to intelligence failure. Each time there is a conflict the police behave as if they are seeing the situation for the first time and there is no established procedure.

The media are the first to suffer the consequences of internet shutdown as news from the conflict zone does not filter out. In conflict situations the perpetrators of violence can carry on their ugly acts of rape and sexual molestation undeterred. What is worse about Manipur is that there was a selective shutdown because the CM's office and the departments adjacent to the VIP areas were connected. This again is injustice because citizens cannot access rights that their so-called rulers have access to. In India we are quickly forgetting that the elected are not rulers. They are public servants. This matter needs serious attention.

Shutting down internet each time there is a collapse of the governance system is aimed at providing a cover-up for those that have botched up the system. Had internet not been barred those videos from the hills of Manipur would have surfaced over two months ago and the horror could have been addressed speedily. Other offences too could have been nipped in the bud. The media would have had free access to record and inform people across the country on how the events are shaping up. Extremist groups in the Imphal Valley who were actually allowed to loot thousands of guns and the modus operandi thereof would also have been recorded by media persons. Even the burning and looting of homes of non-Meiteis would have been reported timely.

Letters to the Editor

Manipur outrage

Editor, Recent events in Manipur have been horrifying enough to keep us sleepless at night. It is hard to stomach further news of deprivations and brutalities, like rapes, beatings, and torture. The most recent case of the Kukis women being publicly humiliated and then gang-raped, leaves one speechless with horror. To call this violence identity politics is to sanitize it, missing the harsh reality that is, in fact, a barbaric breach of human rights.

For New Delhi to hit back at the EU, for its parliamentary resolution against violence in Manipur, proves how unethical and outdated BJP style anti-westernism and anti-colonialism have become. Given Manipur's devastating breaches of human rights, anybody in the world has the right to protest these violations. This includes Britain, India's former colonizer. The west too has its barbarism against women - but for the most part, it is not identity based. Besides, the west has, in its own history, fought hard for democracy and basic human rights. So it has every right to protest this outrage in Manipur. Quia as India has the right to protect western

of George Floyd. Indian women and men (especially non-ideological Hindus) should hold a day of silence and mourning in solidarity with these poor sufferers in Manipur. Even if some of the Kuki people are refugees from Myanmar - so what? The refugee deserves our compassion and refuge - not abuse, torture, rape, or violence. How will these women recover from their trauma? Will they ever be able to return to normal life? I hope their families and communities support them in their hour of need. Like Nero fiddling while Rome burnt, Mr. Modi kept silent all these weeks. Is this because the Meiti people are Hindus while the Kukis are Christians? Finally he has spoken. But to many of us, it seems like it is too little, too late. Yours etc., Deepa Majumdar, Via email

NEHU's notification on implementation of NEP2020 in UG, wrong

Editor, The notification issued by Debassis Chowdhury, Officer on Special Duty (OSD), College Develop-

Indigenous peoples' rights vs. Jaidybriew politics

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

The recent video of two Kuki-Zomi women being paraded naked and raped by a Meitei mob has finally become a name that the death of more than 140 people, which included a brutal beheading, again, a Kuki-Zomi youth by Meitei miscreants could not achieve. It got the Prime Minister of the country, Narendra Modi, to finally speak out. Of course, even when speaking about the incident, Modi mentioned Rajasthan and Chattisgarh in an attempt to deflect the blame from his own party, which rules in Manipur. This was reminiscent of the way right-wing groups in the USA tried to play down the 'Black Lives Matter' movement by punting forward the counter narrative of 'All Lives Matter'. This was an attempt to deny the historical injustice that black people faced and are still facing in the USA.

While it is indeed true that people of all races and creeds have suffered all manner of from injustices, it is also equally true that there are certain groups that have historically been targeted and deprived of their rights and liberties. One of such groups are the indigenous peoples, who are among the most marginalised in the world. Though they constitute just 6.2% of the world's population, they represent 18.7 percent of people living in extreme poverty (defined as people living below US\$1.90 a day) and are more than twice as likely to be in extreme poverty compared to their non-indigenous counterparts. This appalling state of affairs is exacerbated by the fact that oppression and discrimination still continue to this day, and it does not appear that they will go away anytime soon. India is no exception.

Just before the Manipur video surfaced, there was another video making the rounds: the video of an upper-caste man urinating on a tribal person in Madhya Pradesh. The accused was promptly arrested, but the fact that such an incident takes place brings to light the patronising attitude that many upper caste Hindus harbour when dealing with lower castes and tribals on the mainland. This is despite the fact that there are constitutional provisions that have been in place to protect the rights of tribals in the country, viz. Articles 15(1), 19, 46, 315 (II), B, Educational, Economic, and Public Employment-related Safeguards), 330, 332, 334, 243B, 243T (I), C, Political Safeguards), and 338A (I), D, Agency for Monitor-

ing Safeguards). A lot of it has to do with the fact that tribals in the country are not being recognised by their true term, indigenous peoples, but instead are being termed scheduled tribes (ST). This is because the official position of the Indian state is that, since independence, all Indians are considered indigenous. This claim of course, is not true, with historical and genetic evidence irrefutably demonstrating that the present-day nation-state of India has many groups that are descendants of populations that inhabited the sub-continent at the time of conquest, colonisation, or the establishment of the present-day state boundary, i.e., indigenous; one of those groups being the present-day tribes, with the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo being two of them. So by just delimiting the tribes as ST, the true identity of the indigenous peoples has been taken away from them. Also, the criteria employed for identifying ST groups in the country, viz. i) indications of primitive traits, ii) distinctive culture, iii) geographical isolation, iv) shyness of contact with the community at large, and v) backwardness, betray a highly patronising and paternalistic outlook towards such groups. It is not a wonder that discrimination against them has continued to this date, making indigenous peoples one of the most marginalised groups in the country.

Oppression and discrimination against indigenous peoples have not gone unopposed, especially in the North East, with multiple insurgencies, mounted by different indigenous peoples groups in the region, beginning with the Naga, to protect their land and identity. The present conflict in Manipur is also tied to the question of land and identity. At the same time, it exposes the distortion that can take place when the fight for the rights of indigenous peoples becomes defunct and resemble the antics and ideas they profess to fight against: racial injustice, bigotry and communal discrimination. The latter is what is taking place in Manipur right now. It is no longer if ever it was for any moment, about the rights of indigenous peoples, but pure and simple, a fight of racial superiority of the majority (Meitei) against a minority (Kuki-Zomi). In Meghalaya, we have our own variant of that, which is called the Jaidybriew politics. The rationale behind the Jaidybriew politics is very simple: there is a need to protect the rights of the non-Khasi-Jaintia, and the ones threatening those rights are the non-Khasi-Jaintia. The outcome of such a rationale became apparent immediately after Meghalaya attained statehood in 1972, with the state witnessing many riots (1979, 1982, 1992, and 1997) targeting the non-indigenous population (known as non-tribals) of the state, Bengali and Nepali. This consequently resulted in thousands of non-tribals leaving the state, with the Census reports recording a constant decline of the non-tribal population in the State from 19.22% (1971) to 13.85% (2011). Although exact population figures are not available because the 2021 census was not conducted due to COVID-19, it would be a surprise if the trend does not continue. But apart from the major riots, the non-indigenous population of the state has been targeted in other ways as well, like restricting their employment opportunities, both in the formal (government) and non-formal (taxi drivers, small businesses, etc.) sectors. I personally know two people: one was my senior and the other was my brother, both of whom were forced to resign from their jobs after they got the appointment because they were non-indigenous despite having been born and brought up in the State. There has also been that non-indigenous traders are allegedly paying extortion money to groups for doing business in the city. And now there is a new target: the Garo, a fellow indigenous peoples group from the same State, who has been accused of depriving the Khasi-Jaintia of their rightful share of an extra 6-7% of the government jobs. And it is the last one specifically that highlights the limitations of the Jaidybriew politics. Because as it is everywhere, they will always lack what the struggle for indigenous people's rights is built upon: solidarity.

The fight about indigenous people's rights is not against a certain community, indigenous or non-indigenous, but against ideas that treat one group as inferior to another. Those were used as a rationale for justifying colonialism and the wholesale dispossession and decimation of indigenous peoples throughout the world. It was called the 'White Man's Burden'. The Indian caste system, which dehumanises people belonging to lower castes and tribals, is another example of that. Because it is a fight against ideas, it does not view the non-indigenous as the enemy, as, in fact, a lot of the people who support and fight for the rights of non-indigenous people are non-indigenous. A very good example in the Indian case is the Constitution, which does have very strong provisions for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. The Sixth Schedule and Articles 371A and 371G for Nagaland and Mizoram, respectively, are good examples of that. The North East, along with the Constitutional provisions for the STs in the country. These provisions would not have been possible without the support of non-indigenous peoples who debated these issues in the Constituent Assembly led by BR Ambedkar. As such, the struggle for indigenous people's rights is built upon solidarity between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples to build a society that is not plagued by racial discrimination, bigotry, and communal discrimination, something that the Jaidybriew politics will always fall short of. The most critical question is, however, how to differentiate between the struggle for indigenous people's rights and Jaidybriew politics, as both can look very similar. The one rule of thumb that I follow and that others might also consider is that whenever there is an issue about a threat to land or identity, look at the enemy who is being projected as the source of the threat: is the enemy an entire community or a system or institution made up of ideas that are inimical to indigenous peoples' rights? For example, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2021, and the proposed Uniform Civil Code are threats to indigenous people's rights, not the non-indigenous people, many of whom are the architects of these legislations. Hence, solidarity is the answer, not hatred, which is on full display right now in Manipur. We instead fall prey to the Jaidybriew politics, we will be playing into the hands of our true enemies, who will indeed take away our rights, the choice is therefore critical, and hopefully we make the right one. (The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way the views of the organization or institution)

Who will smoke the pipe of peace?

By Barnes Mawrie

The violence in Manipur state is going on unabated and crimes are being reported daily. It is very heart-rending to listen to the pathetic stories of individuals and families who are victims of this ethnic clash. Even the women are not spared and we have witnessed such appalling and inhuman crimes against them. It is sad to say that this ethnic conflict has touched the deep ethos of both communities. It will remain in the historical consciousness of generations to come. As a tribal myself, I

"It will remain in the historical consciousness of generations to come. As a tribal myself, I empathize with my fellow tribal victims and as a fellow Northeasterner I feel ashamed that such inhuman crimes are being perpetrated in our beloved region."

emphatiz with my fellow tribal victims and as a fellow Northeasterner I feel ashamed that such inhuman crimes are being perpetrated in our beloved region.

The honourous crimes committed are not easy to be forgiven or forgotten. I am afraid that the seed of enmity sown in the past cannot be allowed to fester. There has been an attempt to allow this enmity to go on indefinitely. Too many innocent lives have been lost; too many people have suffered and too many people have been destroyed. Above all, peace and harmony have been sacrificed for nothing absolutely. Soul searching for both communities is very much needed here. They should ask themselves - what have we gained from all this violence? Once again, I would reiterate that coming to the table of reconciliation is an urgent need and this responsibility lies with the true leaders of both communities. We members of other tribal communities of this region, only hope and pray that good sense prevails and soon we would see both the Meiteis and the Kukis shaking hands with each other and living one again like brothers and sisters. A word of caution to all our tribal brothers and sisters of North India - beware of hostile elements, both within and without who are trying to sow the seed of hatred and division among our people. Let us nip them in the bud lest we suffer the same fate as Manipur does today. Let me end with the quote of Nelson Mandela who says "in the end reconciliation is a spiritual process which each of us has a just a legal framework. It has to happen in hearts and minds of people."

Neglected roads: Call for a complete repair

Editor, I am writing to draw attention to a concerning issue that is impacting the safety and well-being of citizens. The hazardous state of the roads from Umam towards Nungskor which is 2 km long is causing many problems to commuters. While some roads have undergone partial repair during the G20 meet, a distressing number remain neglected and in dire need of attention. I urge the relevant authorities to address this situation promptly and carry out complete repairs to ensure the safety and convenience of all citizens.

Over the past few months, we have observed road repair projects initiated. While we appreciate the efforts in addressing the deteriorating roads, it is disheartening to see that only certain sections have been repaired while others have been left unattended. As a result, the condition of the unrepared portions has worsened, creating hazardous conditions for motorists and pedestrians alike. The road that leads to

several State and Central offices has been in a state of incomplete disrepair for far too long. This dire situation has not only caused extensive damage to vehicles but has also led to accidents and injuries, posing a significant risk to public safety. Employees who use this road to reach their workplaces face daily challenges, putting a strain on their physical and mental well-being. Commuting on this damaged road results in increased travel time, stress, and fatigue, making it difficult for them to focus on their professional duties once they finally arrive at their offices.

Moreover, the neglect of these roads sends a discouraging message to residents and investors, as it reflects the infrastructure reflects the commitment of the government to the well-being of its citizens. By leaving these roads partially repaired and neglected, the government is not only compromising the safety and convenience of its citizens, but also the reputation of our city.

Yours etc., R. Sarki Shillong

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

"Our constituents deserve better than narrow-minded political games." — Stephen Fincher

The Shillong Times
Vol No LXV No 244 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 26, 2023

Court on trial

NO system is perfect, and the scope for improvement is all too evident across the board. For, imperfection is in the law of nature. This is so with our governing systems - and prominently with the judicial system. The last hope for justice in all societies lies with the judiciary. Curiously, today, there too are the rotten apples and system flaws. A new research done jointly by academicians from within and abroad about the way the Indian Judicial System works has zeroed in on the well-known possibility for "manipulations" within the system; namely the "master of roster" powers that is at the command of the chief justices. The researchers, who came up with a book titled Court on Trial, note that this power could be misused by CJIs to "strategically influence the outcome of important cases." CJIs are seen to have a greater say than the other judges in deciding the course of justice in important matters, the book has noted.

As a matter of fact, if the CJI wields more powers than the other judges, this in itself cannot be faulted. He or she should have a greater say as is the case with any entity at the apex of which sits a 'chief' executive. Irrespective of whether the Constitution granted such a privilege to the CJI or not, the head of the judicial system should be carrying with him more authority than the other judges. It cannot also be faulted if the CJI exercises his powers in ways as to balance equations in sensitive cases, as in the Babri Masjid dispute, or other cases of prime importance. A CJI will be failing in his duty to the nation if he acts like a machine without a mind of his own or does not exercise his sense of judgment in the best interests of the society. Written rules should come only next.

However, the fact is that the Indian judiciary is plagued by more serious problems. Cases in our courts go on and on for decades, which is tantamount to an outright denial of justice. This is more a norm than an aberration. Cases are postponed for the uncounted time, with no questions asked. Courts or investigating agencies should not be taking their sweet time to dispense with justice. Manipulations are suspected at high levels where cases are assigned to 'select' judges. The book notes that the CJIs sit themselves on larger numbers of benches than are justifiable. Worse, the long-awaited judicial reforms, to set many wrongs right, are not being attempted at all. Questionable mechanisms are adopted vis-à-vis the process of selection of judges. Reforms are imperative and the only way forward.

Letters to the Editor

Poorly Organized Inter-School Taekwondo Tournament

I write to express deep concern regarding the recent inter-school Taekwondo tournament for children aged 8 to 19 years, organized by Army Public School Umroi in collaboration with the Meghalaya Taekwondo Association. As a concerned parent, I feel it is imperative to highlight the serious issues that marred this supposedly celebratory event, which was meant to be an opportunity for young athletes to showcase their talents and skills.

To begin with, the tournament's organization fell much to be desired. It was distressing to witness an event meant for over 400 participants unfold with such lack of preparation and oversight. The most glaring concern was the sub-standard food provided during the event, which can be best described as third-class. It is disheartening to see young participants, some as young as 8 years old, subjected to such conditions, risking their health and well-being due to inadequate nutrition.

Furthermore, the decision to host the entire tournament in just two days seemed impractical and ill-conceived. With such a large number of participants, it was evident from the outset that time would be a constraint. Regrettably, this lack of proper scheduling and planning led to the event culminating at an unworkable 5:30 a.m. in the morning. Such an extended duration was not only physically and mentally taxing for the young athletes but it also put their safety at risk, particularly considering their age group.

As a result of the disorganized schedule and inadequate food provisions, it is deeply concerning that many of the participating children fell sick during the tournament. Moreover, the scarcity of time meant that some registered participants were unable to compete at all, depriving them of the chance to showcase their talent and hard work. This is deeply unfair to those young athletes who had trained and prepared for the event, only to have their dreams dashed due to poor planning and mismanagement.

In light of these issues, it is crucial for the organizing committee of the Army Public School Umroi and the Meghalaya Taekwondo Association to take immediate action. It is imperative that they conduct a thorough re-

view of their organizational practices and implement necessary reforms to ensure the well-being of the young athletes and the success of future tournaments.

I urge the concerned authorities to address these problems transparently and responsibly, taking into account the safety and welfare of the children. We must strive to create an environment that fosters healthy competition, provides adequate support to young athletes, and upholds the spirit of sportsmanship and fair play.

It is my sincere hope that this letter draws attention to the pressing issues facing the inter-school Taekwondo tournament and initiates positive changes for future events. Our children deserve better, and we, as a community, must stand together to ensure that they are given the opportunities they need to thrive.

Yours etc.,
GEMMUNIA
A Parent
Via email

It's the 23rd of July 2023. The sky was clear and the weather was perfect for an outing. So with my family we decided to drive up to Sohra to visit some of the picturesque waterfalls.

The peak and dilapidated condition of this road made the ride bumpy but somehow we made it to our destination. To our utter surprise, a police constable stationed at the entry point to the fall, stopped us from proceeding further and politely told us that the District Administration has prohibited the entry of persons (including domestic and foreign tourists) into the area. The reason being that, two Dohar Shingns among the "Dainkhen" and "Wei Sawdong" area are engaged in a long-drawn-out legal dispute over these places. Our hearts sank. Having travelled so far and enduring the bumpy ride, we were not permitted to see the waterfalls. Can you imagine the disappointment of tourists having travelled all the way from different parts of the country and the world, to visit Meghalaya and to see these famed waterfalls being denied entry? What a shame!

Is this how we promote tourism? Sadly, we had no other option but to drive back. On the way we stopped at the "Misty Hills" restaurant for lunch. The place was jammed packed with tourists and it took as long as 45 minutes before we could find a table.

What I noticed at the parking lot of the restaurant were tourist taxis, SUVs, LRVs and tourist buses all bearing Assam Vehicle Registration plates. There were very few Meghalaya tourist taxis. I drove over, it was time to drive back home. The large number of tourists visiting Sohra on any given day has to be witnessed first-hand to really appreciate the growth of tourism in our State. But once again, all along the road I noticed that nearly all the vehicles bore the Assam State Registration numbers. With my daughter driving at small pace following the long line of vehicles I sat back relaxed and started to think. What if we were to have our own Rail Head in the outskirts of Shillong City?

Presently, domestic and international tourists with plans to visit the Khasi and Jaintia Hills first take the Guwahati airport or disembark at the Guwahati railway station. From Guwahati they hire Assam tourist taxis to travel to Shillong and to visit the various tourist spots in and around the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. If Shillong were to have its own railhead in the outskirts of the city, I am sure our local city cab and tourist taxis will through the railway station to ferry passengers from there to their hotels, homestays, to Lantlum, Dawki, Sohra, Kheleish, Tyrosh, Thadlakson, Nongkham, Lum Shillong, Matilang Park and to many more tourist spots. Like cabbies lining up at the Railway station to ferry passengers, I can also picture trucks, rickshaws and taxis loading up goods from the railway godowns and transporting them to the different places in the Khasi, Jaintia and Ri Bhoi Districts. Today Guo Hills already has a railhead at Mendaphar. What if we as citizen accept the offer of the Government of India to bring the railways to East Khasi Hills District? What if food grains, essential commodities, construction materials, fertilizers, cattle and poultry feed etc are brought into the State by rail? Will the farmers, traders and consumers not benefit from the cheaper cost of goods? Presently cabbies are complaining that Assam transporters are hogging all the benefit from our tourist industry. Consumers complain to the high cost of living which can be attributed to the exceedingly high road transportation cost. Considering all these factors, will it then not be beneficial to all if we were to have our own railhead. I am sure many of us, as a citizen, would support this very well. I am simply appealing to everyone to think rationally. But what about Influx and Inner Line Permit (ILP)? Being an avid angler, since most of our rivers are devoid of large game fish, twice in a year, my friends and I would travel to Arunachal Pradesh and spend a couple of days fishing the rivers in Arunachal which are still pristine and unpolluted. But to enter Arunachal one needs to have an Inner Line Permit. So

you log on to the Arunachal Pradesh government website, choose ILP application and fill up the ILP form, pay for the permit fees online click the send button and then wait for a few days to get the ILP. On one occasion it took us nearly a week to get the permit, reason being that for 2 days in between the date we applied for the ILP, the offices in Arunachal were closed because of the official holidays. Armed with ILP, if we were to head for Pasighat, we would set off early in the morning since it takes 14 to 15 hours to reach Pasighat. On many occasions by the time we reach the Assam - Arunachal border it's late evening and there is hardly any checking at the gates. But if you were to travel to Pasighat with the ILP, the scenario is different. At the Bhalakpung border gate, the checking is very thorough. It would take around 10 minutes for each vehicle to be checked. Only after having checked the validity of our ILP are we allowed to cross over into Arunachal. Point to be noted here is that at some gates the authorities are slack and at another the time taken for scrutiny is pretty time consuming. So, if entry to Meghalaya is to be controlled by the ILP, the question is: Will it impede the smooth flow of traffic at the entry points to the State? Will it be a deterrent to the growth of tourism? Will it help prevent influx of illegal immigrants into our State?

A Police officer once commented that the real threat to the N.E. States is, "the over-populated plains of Bangladesh and the under-populated hills of the North East." As stakeholders of our State we must be very vigilant and pay heed to the distressing jobs being done from the southern borders of our State. Migrants coming to our State in search of work have increased by existing Law (ILP).

Now, what about the Meghalaya Resident Safety and Security Act (MRSSA), the Land Transfer Act, the KIADP (Khasi and Jaintia Development and Planning) Act? Are these acts not enough to safeguard the tribals' land, their identity, tradition and prevent demographic imbalance in the State? Perhaps not 70 percent.

Mohsen brilliantly drew attention to the state of a banker's perception of happiness and that of a fisherman's and rightly concluded that, "the human pursuit for wealth, nature and the earth in general are exploited and ultimately destroyed." This is a universal problem with economic development today where ecology is not factored in when measuring Gross Domestic Product. The architects of the GDP (John Maynard Keynes (U.K.) and Simon Kuznets (U.S.)) did caution against using GDP as a measure of the welfare of a nation. In 1962 Kuznets lamented that, "the welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income as defined by the GDP." He went on to say that growth should specify of what and for what. "Some 57 years after Simon Kuznets' lament, Redefining Progress (R.P.I.) was introduced by the challenge Kuznets posed. This economic research think tank developed the Genuine Progress Indicator, by Clifford Cobb, and co-authored by Ted Halstead and Jonathan Rowe, the 1994 U.S. GPI results created a minor tremor in the U.S. economic machine. Genuine progress was considerably different than years of torrid economic growth. For the first time, a holistic measure of the welfare of a nation had been constructed - revealing the true state of the nation's

Railway, ILP and Influx

By PD Nongrum

we should honestly and carefully analyze these prevailing safeguards which are already in place and demand that the authorities implement them strictly and effectively. Presently as Rangbakh Shong Jaiv Shiyap Lumphyon, I mean say that the Executive Committee of the Dohar Shingns has always been very strict with the scrutiny of person-persons who wish to reside in our locality. It is only after such scrutiny that the Dohar Shingns registers them as tenants. If the MRSSA is implemented and all the Shingns play their roles, sincerely and honestly, as guardians of the community, the Act can be an effective tool in preventing influx of illegal immigrants. The Land Transfer Act has and will continue to be the strongest tool to prevent alienation of our land. Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can also play the role of sentinels of the hills and remain ever vigilant. Violators of the Act should be brought to the notice of the Administration Swift and stern action needs to be taken by the government against violators.

As to the Implementation of the Benami transaction and Trading License Acts, greed has got the better of us. We only have ourselves to blame for what we are now seeing around the markets and shopping places in Shillong City. Somehow in the rural markets things are much better. In summing up, the questions we need to ask ourselves are: What if we are open to the idea of bringing the railways to Khasi, Ri Bhoi and Jaintia hills? What are the benefits we can reap from having the railhead close to the district headquarters? What about existing laws? Are they adequate to protect our land, our livelihoods, our traditions, our customs? Let us all sit back and think rationally: carefully about any project before objecting to its implementation. It is our responsibility to endeavour to create opportunities for the present and future generations and at the same time it is our duty to preserve and protect the Land and Identity of Ujjanjwreep Hymnaw's.

(The writer is former police officer and presently the Rangbakh Shong Jaiv Shiyap Lumphyon)

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Politics Godmen!
It was with a lot of hope, some trepidation and a lot of expectations that I looked at the ads concerning and saw one from a godman school which said they could make a godman out of anybody. "Become one," said the wife. "Anyway you do have a beard, just grow your hair a little longer and combine with your acrobatic ways!" "I don't have any such ways!" I said still looking out of the window.

"There, you were looking at her, weren't you?" "Who?" I asked, puzzled. "Our pretty neighbour! See you already have one of your qualities, which is why we've offered you the principal's job!" "Thank you!" I gushed as I looked about at the board members. "I looked like they were about to weep. "You all look like there's been a flood or landslide that's wiped out all your godmen properties!" "Yes," said the chairman. "We are nearly wiped out, and we need you to revive the issue right away!" "Shoot!" I said, for want of a better word. "How do you like the campus?" asked the chairman. "It's huge and expansive!" I said.

"Our pretty neighbour! See you already have one of your qualities, which is why we've offered you the principal's job!"

"Thank you!" I gushed as I looked about at the board members. "I looked like they were about to weep. "You all look like there's been a flood or landslide that's wiped out all your godmen properties!"

"Yes," said the chairman. "We are nearly wiped out, and we need you to revive the issue right away!" "Shoot!" I said, for want of a better word. "How do you like the campus?" asked the chairman. "It's huge and expansive!" I said.

"Our pretty neighbour! See you already have one of your qualities, which is why we've offered you the principal's job!"

"Thank you!" I gushed as I looked about at the board members. "I looked like they were about to weep. "You all look like there's been a flood or landslide that's wiped out all your godmen properties!"

"Yes," said the chairman. "We are nearly wiped out, and we need you to revive the issue right away!" "Shoot!" I said, for want of a better word. "How do you like the campus?" asked the chairman. "It's huge and expansive!" I said.

"Our pretty neighbour! See you already have one of your qualities, which is why we've offered you the principal's job!"

"Thank you!" I gushed as I looked about at the board members. "I looked like they were about to weep. "You all look like there's been a flood or landslide that's wiped out all your godmen properties!"

"Yes," said the chairman. "We are nearly wiped out, and we need you to revive the issue right away!" "Shoot!" I said, for want of a better word. "How do you like the campus?" asked the chairman. "It's huge and expansive!" I said.

"Our pretty neighbour! See you already have one of your qualities, which is why we've offered you the principal's job!"

"Thank you!" I gushed as I looked about at the board members. "I looked like they were about to weep. "You all look like there's been a flood or landslide that's wiped out all your godmen properties!"

"Yes," said the chairman. "We are nearly wiped out, and we need you to revive the issue right away!" "Shoot!" I said, for want of a better word. "How do you like the campus?" asked the chairman. "It's huge and expansive!" I said.

"Our pretty neighbour! See you already have one of your qualities, which is why we've offered you the principal's job!"



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

the most essential characteristics!" said the wife with a sneer. "I finally picked up the paper and ang the number. "Did your wife ask you to call this number?" asked the wife, to the other end. "Yes!" I said surprised. "How did you know?"

"The wife is the first to see such qualities in her husband," said the voice at the other end patiently. "And were you looking out of the window?"

"Yes!" I said nearly jumping out of my chair, very happy about the godman school. "Yes, but I was only looking at some trees and bushes!" "Excellent!" said the voice from the godman school. "You already know how to bluff!"

"I have a beard!" I said eagerly. "And I can grow my hair long!" "These are not important," said the voice. "You can be fixed with a good wig and a clipped-on beard. What do we intend to do? Whether you should go in for the beginner's course or the higher one. From these few questions you have answered I feel you can go straightway to the higher study course!"

"That's very good of you," I said. "Are there any other qualities of mine you would like to know about?" "Are you a ladies man?" asked the voice. "Does the opposite sex like being around you?"

I looked at my wife, who was hovering around me, trying to key into the conversation. She put her ear close to the mouthpiece to listen even more keenly. "Yes!" I whispered loudly. "They love being all around and near me!"

There was some whispering at the other end. "Garnji, we will come to your house in a few minutes, you are the godman we have been looking for. You have all the qualities needed." I said a new voice. "You mean I can go to an even higher course?" I asked excitedly. "We will enroll you immediately as our principal," said the voice. "With you in charge, we will build our godman school into a premier institution in the country. We will pick you up in half an hour, meanwhile continue looking out of the window!"

It was a few hours after reaching the Godman School, that I was summoned hastily for a meeting. "What's the hurry?" I asked the committee member who had come to my lavish quarters. "I am just getting used to the place."

"You cannot serve this immediate problem, you might have to return home by the next train!" said the committee member woefully. "What? What?" I exclaimed. "And what may I ask is the problem? I know everything about looking out of the window, and pretending to be the best in the world, staring at my pretty neighbour. I know all about..."

"Enough!" said the chairman of the godman committee as I entered the boardroom. "We know all

"I took many godmen tricks and tantrics to fund such a school. I continued the chairman seriously. "But now we have competition which will wipe us out!"

"From other godmen?" I asked. "Don't worry, with my super abilities, I will see all other godmen institutions are off the radar, even before they get on the drawing board!" I looked around hoping my stimulating words would inspire a standing ovation, but found the members weeping even more bitterly.

"The competition is not from other godmen," went a committee member even as he howled with sorrow. "It is from a most unexpected source. It's from politicians!"

Immediately, all the godmen committee members in the village court, in a godman school, said the chairman and the waiting started again. "The speeches and tantrics we gave to our disciples are now being said, broadcasted and repeated at every political meeting! Every politician has asked them talking about gods and goddesses, even instructing their people through religious discourses!"

"They have infringed on our territory!" shrieked a godwoman who I had not seen till then, since they all had long hair. "All my disciples are now going for political meetings, they say, they are getting the fill of godly discourses!"

"And those lectures and messages are working," went another committee member unenthusiastically, as he switched on the TV monitor and showed me pictures of churches, mosques and even temples razed or burnt. They are able to do practically what we never achieved!"

"This is your first task!" shrieked the godwoman as a moneyed TV evangelist godman held her shoulders. "Yes, your first task as principal of our godman school," shrieked all the other committee members of the godman school. "To free politics off religion and bring it back to us!"

My wife was at the gate when I rushed home. "What happened here?" she asked. "You've left the job, I see?" "They gave me an impossible task!" I said looking cross-faced. "I think you should stick to looking out of the window!" she said as she waved to my pretty neighbour who was waiting at the gate. "I realize I'd lost my own turf while away, and I cried bitterly with the godmen who'd also lost their turf."

"The Author conducts an Online Writers Course. For more details send a thumbprint to the godman committee as I entered the boardroom." We know all

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

"Shame may restrain what law does not prohibit."

— Lucius Annaeus Seneca

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LV No. 245 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2023

Intelligence Failure in Tura

WHAT happened in Tura on Tuesday July 25 was clearly an intelligence failure on the part of the Police Department which should have foreseen that such a scenario is likely to happen in a highly surcharged situation. The group ACHIK had been on hunger strike for their demand for a winter capital in Tura besides other demands. The hunger strike had reached its 14th day on July 25. That it took the Chief Minister a fortnight to respond to the demands and to engage with the agitating groups shows a lack of sensitivity. After all, ACHIK carries the aspirations and hopes of the Garo people for a better tomorrow. The demand for a winter capital is dictated by the fact that it was a long-standing promise to the Garo people by Meghalaya's first chief minister, Captain Williamson A Sangma. That this demand was not fulfilled in 50 years shows remiss on the part of successive state governments and not just the MDA-02 government. Conrad Sangma is bearing the brunt of accumulated ire which perhaps is fuelled by the contentious Roster System via the State Reservation Policy. Be that as it may, the police and district administration should have anticipated the storming of the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Tura.

Intelligence gathering is an integral part of policing. How could the district police not foresee the storming of the Secretariat? Was there not enough police force to guard the precincts? The Police Chief had made a statement to the media that the sudden attack by a huge mob was a conspiracy to harm the Chief Minister. He even stated that police had enough evidence that money and other enticements were distributed on July 23. When did the DGP get that information? Did he get it before July 25? If not, then of what use is the information at this point? Good policing revolves around good and timely intelligence gathering. Why was the July 25 gatecrash not anticipated and the motives of the criminal elements nipped in the bud?

Information gathering and analysing such information is what helps police make informed decisions in strategic operations especially when that concerns VIP security. Information not only helps to curb crime but is imperative for internal security. Meghalaya has passed through periods of insurgency and the presence of arms and ammunition with former militants who might have surrendered cannot be ruled out. Also, the regrouping of former militants as evidenced in Manipur does not take much of a trigger. Policing involves eternal vigilance and the July 25 incident needs to be analysed and the gaps in policing have to be addressed. Police also need to be reminded lest they forget that they are paid from the public exchequer to secure the lives and property of all citizens and not just that of VIPs and the elite of society.

Letters to the Editor

On Railway, ILP and Influx

Editor, PD Nongrum in his July 26 ST article 'Railway, ILP and Influx' has thoughtfully given a picture of what railways could mean for Meghalaya and why perhaps the protectionist measures that are being asked for, namely ILP, are already in force — or waiting to be so — in some form or the other.

Why, I would also like to thank him is because, perhaps for the first time, a Rangbah Shong has publicly echoed his views positively with regards to this matter. All this while, what we have been fed by pressure groups, in the guise of NGOs, is that traditional institutions are in union for the vehement opposition of railways in the state. I always viewed this claim with cynicism and believed that good, experienced and learned people of the state can never be opposed to the fulfilment of the people's need without some reasoning or deliberation at least.

PD Nongrum for me is one such voice who has given thought to the matter from not just a personal point-of-view but also from a holistic perspective. Our state needs more such people to come forward. They are the truly democratic voices, that future is to be decided by people whom we have given power to decide for us, and not by people who feel

entitled enough to stretch this power via means of goddamnism and roidwasm.

When Meghalaya was declared the second poorest state in India by NITI Aayog recently, a lot of people did come out against the successive governments of the state. Without absolving them of their accountability, what are we as people doing to ensure we push for development? Is pressing an EVM button once in five years the only democratic duty that we have? Have we ever voted our support in favour of something that is supposed to bring development to our state? Social media murmurs and passive support do not help a cause.

Yours etc., Parnek Kurbah, Via email

Preserving India's Pluralism: Relevance of a Uniform Civil Code

Editor, I am writing to share my perspective regarding the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India. While I understand the concerns about preserving the diversity of our nation, I believe that a well-implemented UCC can play a vital role in upholding the principles of justice.

Inhuman and barbaric stories continue to emerge from strife-torn Manipur. The parading of two women in public before the gang rape of one of them, the burning alive of the wife of a freedom fighter inside her house and the beheading of a man are a few unimagineable incidents that Manipur tells. These add to the mob's burning of a child, his mother and an attendant inside an ambulance. More and more, inhuman incidents are expected to flow into the media space in the days and months to come. The prestige of Manipur is tarnished forever. The reputation of the multi-ethnic state is totally altered.

The four men who have been belatedly arrested (and those who may be apprehended later) following the national and international outrage may be villains but the unpopular chief minister is the first to be called out. Definitely he knew the details of the ghastly act much earlier but he refused to move a finger. He did not direct the police to act as per the law. The topmost government executives in Delhi too were aware of the rape of the wife of a Kargil veteran. The prime minister, Narendra Modi conveniently spoke only after the video of humiliation of the three women had been viewed by millions. The PM does not mind using the armed forces and freedom fighters for political mileage but doesn't care when spouses of war heroes face the humiliating ordeal and when they are charged to death.

Following the indignum viral video of stripped Kuki victims, women calmly touched the house of the accused. It is clear now that the state is totally lawless. The masked women 'punished' the rapists but ironically they prevented security forces from carrying out their duties. They even forced the Army to release 12 nabbed militants of the banned Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), including the mass militant 'charalad' ambassador in 2015 in which 18 soldiers died and 15 others wounded. The Assam Rifles had to release a video entitled, "Being humane is not weakness."

The violence in the north-eastern state is 'identified' as an ethnic clash between the Meiteis and the Kukis. A religious angle too is highly suspected. The Mizoram Iharaitia Janata Party (BJP) vice-president, R. Vanramchhuanga knew it well and hence resigned from the party accusing the central

equality, and unity in our pluralistic society. India is a land of diverse cultures, languages, religions, and traditions. This rich tapestry of diversity is something we cherish and take pride in. It has indeed been the foundation of our strength as a nation for the past 75 years. Our ability to coexist harmoniously despite our differences is a testament to the resilience of our democracy and the spirit of tolerance that thrives among our people.

However, as we celebrate our diversity, we must also recognize that it presents certain challenges, particularly when it comes to matters of personal laws. The existence of multiple and varied personal laws based on religion or community can sometimes lead to disparities and inequalities, especially concerning issues related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and succession. A well-thought-out and carefully drafted Uniform Civil Code can address these disparities while respecting the diverse identities of our citizens.

The UCC aims to provide a common legal framework that upholds the principles of equality, justice, and individual rights for all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations. Contrary to the notion that the UCC seeks to erase cultural and religious identities, it actually seeks to create a common ground where fundamental rights and freedoms are equally protected. It is not an imposition of one set of beliefs upon another, but rather a harmonization of laws to ensure fairness and consistency for everyone. Of course, the implementation of the UCC requires a sensitive and inclusive approach. It is essential to engage in open and constructive dialogues with all stakeholders, taking into account the diverse perspectives and concerns of different communities. The focus should be on creating a code that preserves the essence of our pluralism while upholding the principles of equality and justice.

While some may argue that certain sections of society might be exempted from the UCC, the objective should be to minimize such exemptions and work towards a code that encompasses as many aspects as possible, treating all citizens equally under the law. A well-crafted Uniform Civil Code is not an attack on our diversity but rather a step towards strengthening the foundations of our nation. By ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all, it can foster a more inclusive and cohesive society.

The Manipur in us

By Albert Thyrning

Integrated Krima (ACHIK) demanding the retrospective implementation of the roster system from 1972 and establishment of a winter capital at Tura. These demands have widened the gaps between Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. Khasi Hills groups have opposed the ACHIK's demands. But the Garo Hills pressure groups have the right to protest just as their eastern counterparts have. Even the political party VPP went on a fast. The government obliged VPP's request in quick time. Why should the ACHIK's not be heard? The demand for the revision of the reservation policy is seen to be benefiting the Khasi-Jaintia community at the cost of the Garo community. The rhetoric by VPP and pressure groups are in this direction. The ACHIK actions are viewed exactly the opposite. Prejudice and ill feelings are bound to surface. Extreme ethnic sentiments may develop if we are not careful. If we think that the demands are justified only democratic means should be employed without any hatred for the other. No vilifying and degrading language should be used. Unfortunately in Manipur-Kukis and other tribal groups are conceding to be called 'tribals'. Under no circumstance should Meghalaya turn into Manipur.

The "Manipur" sentiment prevails in religions here in Meghalaya too. It is an unstated fact now that in Shillong diocese only a Khasi bishop is acceptable. In Nagaland diocese only a priest from the region can be the head. In Jowai diocese only a Par is welcome. Additionally only from a group of priests can bishops be selected. The extreme concept has perhaps spread to all the dioceses in the North East. Is this the real face of the church? Is this the spirit of the church? The universality and oneness of the church is only in documents. It must be pointed out that by and large the lay faithful are not touched by the narrow outlook.

This tendency has crept in and will have a detrimental effect. The "Manipur" mindset of a few has played havoc in the former princely state. We too may not be innocent of it.

Religious groups too are not free from the counter-voice attitude. A particular tribal group may claim that a particular region is exclusively meant for them. This tendency has crept in and will have a detrimental effect. The "Manipur" mindset of a few has played havoc in the former princely state. We too may not be innocent of it.

These days we are witnessing the indefinite fast of Achi. Conscious Holistically

and state governments of tacit support in the burning down of churches in the chaotic state. The genesis of the Manipur mayhem is attributed to the judgement of the Manipur High Court directing the state government to take steps towards recognition of the Meiteis as a tribal group and the false narrative of the presence of a large number of illegal immigrants from Myanmar among the Kukis. Credible estimates reveal the number to be a minuscule number of 2000. The real cause could be the exclusive mind-set of a section of people. It could be this jingoism that led to the cleansing of a tribe. It could

be this chauvinism that says that Manipur, and especially the Imphal valley should be essentially meant for the majority community, that barred and is still barring Manipur. There is nothing wrong in loving one's own people and being proud of one's own race, culture and history but ethnic chauvinism is dangerous. It could be this extremism that killed 150 people, burned down thousands of homes and destroyed 250,300 hatched, looted properties and drove away a whole community from the valley. It could be a fundamental patriotism that is a driving force for the arson and riots for nearly three months.

The Arambai Tenggal and Meitei Leupun were created to protect the culture and identity of the Meitei. They have every right to do so not at the cost of others. Allegations are rife that these groups have turned militant. They are engaged in training. They stand accused of carrying out much of the pre-planned violence.

There are also allegations that the Arambai Tenggal and Meitei Leupun are creations of the The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS is supposed to be a Hindu social and cultural organisation, an umbrella body consisting of organisations called the Sangh Parivar. So far so good but this proponent is a right-wing Hindu nationalist organisation that propagates the establishment of a Hindu Rashtra or a Hindu nation. The vision of this organisation, which draws fascist movements, is that this nation is primarily and essentially meant for Hindus. Others may exist but with merely subservient roles. It is the RSS which has been insisting that all Indians are Hindus. The ideology of this Sangh which played no role in the Indian independence movement is divisive and exclusive. Its affiliates too spread hate and spew violence.

The RSS played a key role in the demolition of Babri Masjid. Top functionaries of the RSS, VVIP and the Bajrang Dal are accused of carrying out the 2002 Gujarat carnage with the knowledge and sanction of the state authorities. In other riots as well the radical groups are accused of being involved. It will be surprising if Manipur violence is proven to be linked to the RSS. It will not be a shock if sections in Manipur were influenced by the organisation that was armed after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and the demolition of Babri Masjid, to carry out the Manipur violence.

There could be 'Manipur' in us too. It started earlier here for one's tribe, race, culture, history and identity is appreciated but the misplaced form is dangerous. Tamilians may say, "Tamil Nadu is only for Tamils", "Maharashtra is meant for Maharashtrians", "Gujarat is only for Gujaratis", "Bengal is only for Bengalis", "Assam is only for Assamese", etc. etc.

We could also be saying "Khasi Hills is only for the Khasis", "Garo Hills is for the Garos", "Nagaland for the Nagas", "Mizoram for the Mizos" and so on. This extremism could lead to hatred and intolerance. That is unacceptable. It is in this context that the 'para Khasi' (among Khasis) slogan of Ardent Basaiawmtoi is frightening.

These days we are witnessing the indefinite fast of Achi. Conscious Holistically

Chief Minister. Probably the trustee of Sun Tzu is outdated in the morale of the force. When was the last time the State Security Commission was formed? In the past few weeks, Meghalaya has been in the news for reasons best known to politicians. A state once known as the Mecca of Education has fallen from grace. No wonder the frustration of the unemployed youth and drop-outs has accumulated. While private institutions flourish, government-run schools are the phantoms in nature. Many have gained patronage for paying to do. Meghalaya was never a poor state but a reflection of a bad mindset from the executive class ruling at the back of a lethargic bureaucracy. I struck up a conversation with a Keralite poet who suggested that 60 representatives should develop their constituencies instead of being Shillong centric.

In the book Reinventing Government by David Osborne, the writer states that the entrepreneurial spirit and fair competition are two urgently needed mindsets for government service in the state if we want a 10 billion dollar economy or else doom awaits us.

Yours etc., Pinky Loh, Shillong

Fallout at Tura

Editor, On September 12, 2012, the world woke up to an attack on a US compound and a CIA annex at Benghazi. The scenes at Tura is a reminder of what underestimating the pulse of the commentators could lead to. State intelligence agencies failed to foil the so-called pre-planned attack on the

Police East Khasi Hills had issued a directive in consonance with the Supreme Court of India ruling with regards to restricting limited window glasses and misuse of siren. But due to reasons best known to the police and the Home Department the order of the apex court has not been followed in letter and spirit. No leave aside even penalizing the misuse of red beacons and sirens by so-called "Not So Important People", for their political patronage. Most importantly the complex disregard even by bureaucrats who whir around in SUVs with black tinted windows and sirens which is prohibited by the law is abominable. Any misuse invites penalizing of a fonder and the police should be strict in their duty to confront even those in power, because they should remember their oath to the Constitution and not invite contempt of Court.

Yours etc., Dominic S. Wankhar, Via email

Police should act according to law

Editor, The office of the Super-

intending to be the laboratory for the RSS and BJP to experiment with the Bhagat and others. The RSS also nurses the view that Manama is going to the main pillar of the opposition in 2024. The RSS and BJP must try to confine their BJP leadership and especially Modi, are desperately searching for a new kamraj and new ideas. Modi's job against the opposition name is not simply an off-the-cuff remark; instead, it's a well-designed attack on INDIAs. Having exhausted their gimmicks, they are now latching on to a new phrase and place to catch the BJP imagination of the Modi-led Hindus. The RSS and BJP leadership would like to go to the polls with the new slogan of "Aaya Bharat".

It ought not to be forgotten that Modi has been repeatedly emphasising on 2014, the year he came to occupy the chair of prime minister, as the year India became 'truly independent'. He had rechristened India as 'New India' and it did not strike him then that the word 'India' was colonial gift to perpetuate their in-absentia rule. As he now proclaims, 'Testing the waters, Modi, instead of uttering this disrespectful phrase in full public domain, chose to express his views at the parliamentary party meeting of the BJP. It was a shrewd move to gauge the reaction of his party members. He had also told his MPs that the name of the new Opposition alliance was to 'mislead the people'. He said, 'Eau India Company, Indian National Congress, Indian Mujahideen and the Popular Front of India also added in their name.' Modi also said, 'Opposition was frustrated because their leaders have realised that they would remain in the Opposition even after next year's general election'.

The threat perception of losing the 2024 election is

Modi deriding 'India' betrays design to humiliate the opposition RSS worried that PM's arrogance may alienate nationalist citizens

By Arun Srivastava

Prime Minister Narendra Modi deriding and insulting the united opposition from INDIA, and drawing parallels with the likes of the erstwhile British East India Company, the outlawed outfit Indian Mujahideen and the Popular Front of India, has certainly not come as a shock. Expecting PM Modi to speak respectfully of the political opposition is tantamount to living in a fool's paradise. By lampooning INDIA, the acronym of Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, and deriding it as the most directionless yet uncaring country had ever seen, he was simply accomplishing the RSS's mission of demoralising the rising oppositional momentum.

Being the topmost executive of India, one could expect that he was not making a casual remark. He was speaking in language of the Hindu supremacist rightist sect currently at the helm of the country, the RSS. Modi and his BJP colleagues have been rhetorically hiding behind their so-called 'Indian nationalism' for winning over people and elections. Recall how the brutal killings of 40 CRPF soldiers were exploited by Modi on the plea of upholding the supercharged spirit of ultranationalism to win the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Undeniably, the opposition alliance has completely unseated Modi and his RSS mentor, Mohan Bhagwat. Earlier, it was much easier for them to attack Congress and speak ill of the Nehru-Gandhi family, since they were not isolated from the mainstream opposition. But after the massive success of Bharat Jodo Yatra of Rahul Gandhi, which brilliantly countered Modi's narrative of politics of hate and divisiveness, followed by the launch of the joint opposition platform, IN-INDIA, Modi and Bhagwat are genuinely worried. The only option left to them is to let their political hate come out of the woodwork with open bearing about the bush. Modi musing courage to deride India is part of the said design.

This derision of INDIA by Modi has failed to move Bhagwat and others. The RSS also nurses the view that Manama is going to the main pillar of the opposition in 2024. The RSS and BJP must try to confine their BJP leadership and especially Modi, are desperately searching for a new kamraj and new ideas. Modi's job against the opposition name is not simply an off-the-cuff remark; instead, it's a well-designed attack on INDIAs. Having exhausted their gimmicks, they are now latching on to a new phrase and place to catch the BJP imagination of the Modi-led Hindus. The RSS and BJP leadership would like to go to the polls with the new slogan of "Aaya Bharat".

It ought not to be forgotten that Modi has been repeatedly emphasising on 2014, the year he came to occupy the chair of prime minister, as the year India became 'truly independent'. He had rechristened India as 'New India' and it did not strike him then that the word 'India' was colonial gift to perpetuate their in-absentia rule. As he now proclaims, 'Testing the waters, Modi, instead of uttering this disrespectful phrase in full public domain, chose to express his views at the parliamentary party meeting of the BJP. It was a shrewd move to gauge the reaction of his party members. He had also told his MPs that the name of the new Opposition alliance was to 'mislead the people'. He said, 'Eau India Company, Indian National Congress, Indian Mujahideen and the Popular Front of India also added in their name.'

Modi also said, 'Opposition was frustrated because their leaders have realised that they would remain in the Opposition even after next year's general election'.

The threat perception of losing the 2024 election is

so acute that RSS is taking up the cudgels to lead the electioneering. As the first step, the RSS top brass will hold organisational meetings in Kolkata on August 18 and 19. It will be attended by party members and some senior BJP leaders. The RSS leadership has already made public its reservation to Modi's leadership. Even a section of the top RSS leaders favour projecting a new face as the new prime minister.

These leaders are quite optimistic of a new leader retrieving the grounds which the BJP lost in recent months. They nurse the view that by and large the people, especially the middle class, will not be so easily misled but it is the arrogant attitude and behaviour of Modi that has alienated them. These leaders are also confident that Modi and Amit Shah utterly lack political acumen. They depend on use of administration to achieve their ends. The RSS has proved to be counter-productive for the RSS and BJP.

RSS will use Bengal as its launching pad since according to the RSS leaders, TMC leader Manu Satish has proved to be an impeccable and tough leader. The RSS leaders will also be proved to be counter-productive for the RSS and BJP.

For obvious reasons, the RSS will begin its campaign after a high-level meeting in Bengal. The RSS will prepare the party in Bengal for the next year's big poll battle. Though the turnouts are abysmally supported by INDIAs, the BJP is making an attempt in Bengal. The RSS leadership does not subscribe to it. The party's local leaders will be present in the 2021 Assembly polls to around 24 per cent in the 2021 panchayat polls. A local level election was held in Delhi where the RSS joint general secretary Arun Kumar and senior leader Pradip Kumar were elected to the panchayat poll results in Bengal and pulled up the state leaders for poor performance of the party in the election.

Bengal is going to be the laboratory for the RSS and BJP to experiment with the Bhagat and others. The RSS also nurses the view that Manama is going to the main pillar of the opposition in 2024. The RSS and BJP must try to confine their BJP leadership and especially Modi, are desperately searching for a new kamraj and new ideas. Modi's job against the opposition name is not simply an off-the-cuff remark; instead, it's a well-designed attack on INDIAs. Having exhausted their gimmicks, they are now latching on to a new phrase and place to catch the BJP imagination of the Modi-led Hindus. The RSS and BJP leadership would like to go to the polls with the new slogan of "Aaya Bharat".

It ought not to be forgotten that Modi has been repeatedly emphasising on 2014, the year he came to occupy the chair of prime minister, as the year India became 'truly independent'. He had rechristened India as 'New India' and it did not strike him then that the word 'India' was colonial gift to perpetuate their in-absentia rule. As he now proclaims, 'Testing the waters, Modi, instead of uttering this disrespectful phrase in full public domain, chose to express his views at the parliamentary party meeting of the BJP. It was a shrewd move to gauge the reaction of his party members. He had also told his MPs that the name of the new Opposition alliance was to 'mislead the people'. He said, 'Eau India Company, Indian National Congress, Indian Mujahideen and the Popular Front of India also added in their name.'

Modi also said, 'Opposition was frustrated because their leaders have realised that they would remain in the Opposition even after next year's general election'.

The threat perception of losing the 2024 election is

"The scars of others should teach us caution."

— St. Jerome

The Shillong Times

Vol. No. 47, No. 346 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 28, 2023

Restore peace in Manipur

IT'S in the fitness of things that Speaker Om Birla has facilitated a detailed discussion on the Manipur conflict in Parliament through a no-confidence motion tabled by the Opposition. Full national focus is already on the disturbed situations in Manipur, where those of the prominent Kuki tribe and Meiteis fought against each other and a series of violent and highly condemnable incidents in recent weeks have hurt the nation's conscience. The seriousness of the situation there can be gauged also by the fact that over 70,000 people have been displaced and given refuge in about 350 relief camps. Over 4000 weapons have been looted by mobs from the security forces, of which only one-fifth have been recovered. The blame naturally falls on the BJP-led state government headed by N Biren Singh, on multiple fronts. The Kukis, the original natives of the hills, feel their existence is under threat. Their sensitivities need to be addressed first and foremost, while Meiteis also should have the right conditions to live peacefully in the same soil. Incidents like the naked panding of women only added salt to injury in the present situation. What's important is that the guilty from both sides are identified and punished. At the same time, considering the seriousness of the situation, the Opposition is well-advised to avoid creating conditions that could worsen the present situation.

By no stretch of imagination will the no-confidence motion bring down the NDA government. Nor is this intended by the Opposition. The principal idea of this step is to highlight the situation and propose meaningful suggestions to the government on how to move forward in the attempts at restoration of peace in Manipur, part of India's North-East and bordering Myanmar. The chances of external forces coming in and adding fuel to the fire are not ruled out; rather, that was what the Union Home Ministry has expressed a serious concern about. Unfortunately, this upheaval comes at a time when the North-East sector was integrating better with the mainland and developmental activities for the region were being taken forward by the central government with a sense of seriousness. This was evident also from the way the rail network was extended to this sector and national highway development progressed impressively in recent years. New institutions of higher education have come up in the region, giving the youth a chance to empower themselves in modern ways. The momentum can be sustained only if peace is given the first priority both by the government and the people. Sensitivities of the local populations must be borne in mind when governments shape policies.

The Gendered Price of Ethnic Violence

By Saikpa Bhattacharjee

One is aware that this is not the time to merely write an academic or popular article on ethnically motivated sexual violence but to register the sharp cries of ethnic-sexual crimes of any kind experienced by any community. The video of the incident of the two Kuki women being subjected to orable violence, indignity and humiliation in B Phainom village in Kangpokpi district on May 4, 2023 has become a landmark case for the Supreme Court as "deeply disturbing" and Chief Justice DY Chandrachud has mentioned that the court would take up the case on 28 July. For all sensible people and particularly for a woman, how does one absorb the shock of such a visual display of a fellow woman being robbed of her modesty, her helpless disposition of her birth right in her own dignity and her bodily integrity on the face of a besetted mob whose only aim was to justify its hyper masculinity by making a public display of its power?

Ironically by groping and objectifying the genitals of the women, what they had actually intended to display as male valour, enacted on the ethnic gendered other as a symbol of political victory, came across as barbaric and insane. Months have passed since the incident has occurred and it is now going to be a week since the video of the two Kuki women paraded naked has gone viral but so many questions pertaining to investigation and justice remain unanswered, particularly from the gender perspective. Therefore, it is also the time to again reflect as to why women's bodies have always become the crucial site on which histories and victories of nations and communities have been inscribed.

Meanwhile cases of ethnic-centric violence, rape and molestation elsewhere in Manipur are being reported in the media and several videos of such atrocities on Meitei women are also being circulated. While the whole world has united in shame and shock over the barbaric act and the conspiracy of silence of government, institutions and political stakeholders, protectors of both the ethnic groups, staging protest in Manipur, the national capital or elsewhere are caught in the battle of optics. The question is can or should a set of videos contest the truth claims of another set of videos in the case of organized and politically motivated cases such as gender violence? Or can two wings make a right?

Ethnically motivated sexual violence, particularly on women is a universal phenomenon of patriarchal societies and is a repetitive act, almost a stereotype in all conflict situations and the present incident in Manipur is no exception. Such acts of crime constitute a nexus in circulating the patriarchal ideology of subjugation of women. Rita Menon, a co-founder of Kali for Women, India's first and oldest feminist press, in an account for the experiences of women from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, during the Partition of the subcontinent, has asked "Do women have a country?" She says that there will be no archive for the destitute, widowed, abandoned, abducted, raped, maltreated women of Partition in any of the two countries because violated women are often erased from history and yet they are the ones who have experienced the event most acutely and intimately through their bodies used as "weapon of war".

In this context one recalls the sixtieth annual session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on the 15th of March 2016, where Caroline Dinanage, Minister for Women, Equalities and Family Justice of the United Kingdom had stated "Women are at the eye of the storm of conflict and repression, their bodies the focus of social and cultural battles and the object of aggression and contempt". One cannot get over what happened to pregnant Kausar Bano during Godhra riots - her womb slit apart, the foetus torn out, her body cut into pieces and burnt alive. How can one reconcile with what happened to Thangjam Manorama on July 11, 2004 Rajawar Sanak Rajan also shows the complicity that the nation-state has with female violence and so ethnical identity claims and movements in postcolonial countries have to be seen as a complex intersection of class, caste and gender in its various constructions of otherness.

For average viewers/readers, heated discussions in popular TV channels and newspapers after such incidents of gruesome brutality, provide for temporary cathartic release of their anger and as days pass by this anger evaporates till another such incident is reported.

Our response to such unforgivable acts of gendered violence never acquires a constructive shape in the form of an 'agency' (Agency describes our capacity to resist, defy, recreate and act against the grain) primarily because we neither analyze deeply the etiology of a single incident such as the one of the two Kuki women on the May 4, nor do we succeed in finding a common link between the contextual realities involved in every such incident of inflicting violence on women's bodies, for making a political statement. Experts and analysts often throw light on social, political and legal implications of robbing a woman of her modesty; in this case not only stripping but making a public display of how a helpless woman's dignity can be

crushed and gangraped. One cannot understand such a situation without addressing foundational questions such as why does the perpetration of ethnic and sexual violence consider such an act as the ultimate offence he can commit against the victim (woman)? One cannot get over what happened to pregnant Kausar Bano during Godhra riots - her womb slit apart, the foetus torn out, her body cut into pieces and burnt alive. How can one reconcile with what happened to Thangjam Manorama on July 11, 2004 Rajawar Sanak Rajan also shows the complicity that the nation-state has with female violence and so ethnical identity claims and movements in postcolonial countries have to be seen as a complex intersection of class, caste and gender in its various constructions of otherness.

For average viewers/readers, heated discussions in popular TV channels and newspapers after such incidents of gruesome brutality, provide for temporary cathartic release of their anger and as days pass by this anger evaporates till another such incident is reported.

Our response to such unforgivable acts of gendered violence never acquires a constructive shape in the form of an 'agency' (Agency describes our capacity to resist, defy, recreate and act against the grain) primarily because we neither analyze deeply the etiology of a single incident such as the one of the two Kuki women on the May 4, nor do we succeed in finding a common link between the contextual realities involved in every such incident of inflicting violence on women's bodies, for making a political statement. Experts and analysts often throw light on social, political and legal implications of robbing a woman of her modesty; in this case not only stripping but making a public display of how a helpless woman's dignity can be

crushed and gangraped. One cannot understand such a situation without addressing foundational questions such as why does the perpetration of ethnic and sexual violence consider such an act as the ultimate offence he can commit against the victim (woman)? One cannot get over what happened to pregnant Kausar Bano during Godhra riots - her womb slit apart, the foetus torn out, her body cut into pieces and burnt alive. How can one reconcile with what happened to Thangjam Manorama on July 11, 2004 Rajawar Sanak Rajan also shows the complicity that the nation-state has with female violence and so ethnical identity claims and movements in postcolonial countries have to be seen as a complex intersection of class, caste and gender in its various constructions of otherness.

For average viewers/readers, heated discussions in popular TV channels and newspapers after such incidents of gruesome brutality, provide for temporary cathartic release of their anger and as days pass by this anger evaporates till another such incident is reported.

Our response to such unforgivable acts of gendered violence never acquires a constructive shape in the form of an 'agency' (Agency describes our capacity to resist, defy, recreate and act against the grain) primarily because we neither analyze deeply the etiology of a single incident such as the one of the two Kuki women on the May 4, nor do we succeed in finding a common link between the contextual realities involved in every such incident of inflicting violence on women's bodies, for making a political statement. Experts and analysts often throw light on social, political and legal implications of robbing a woman of her modesty; in this case not only stripping but making a public display of how a helpless woman's dignity can be

crushed and gangraped. One cannot understand such a situation without addressing foundational questions such as why does the perpetration of ethnic and sexual violence consider such an act as the ultimate offence he can commit against the victim (woman)? One cannot get over what happened to pregnant Kausar Bano during Godhra riots - her womb slit apart, the foetus torn out, her body cut into pieces and burnt alive. How can one reconcile with what happened to Thangjam Manorama on July 11, 2004 Rajawar Sanak Rajan also shows the complicity that the nation-state has with female violence and so ethnical identity claims and movements in postcolonial countries have to be seen as a complex intersection of class, caste and gender in its various constructions of otherness.

For average viewers/readers, heated discussions in popular TV channels and newspapers after such incidents of gruesome brutality, provide for temporary cathartic release of their anger and as days pass by this anger evaporates till another such incident is reported.

Our response to such unforgivable acts of gendered violence never acquires a constructive shape in the form of an 'agency' (Agency describes our capacity to resist, defy, recreate and act against the grain) primarily because we neither analyze deeply the etiology of a single incident such as the one of the two Kuki women on the May 4, nor do we succeed in finding a common link between the contextual realities involved in every such incident of inflicting violence on women's bodies, for making a political statement. Experts and analysts often throw light on social, political and legal implications of robbing a woman of her modesty; in this case not only stripping but making a public display of how a helpless woman's dignity can be

crushed and gangraped. One cannot understand such a situation without addressing foundational questions such as why does the perpetration of ethnic and sexual violence consider such an act as the ultimate offence he can commit against the victim (woman)? One cannot get over what happened to pregnant Kausar Bano during Godhra riots - her womb slit apart, the foetus torn out, her body cut into pieces and burnt alive. How can one reconcile with what happened to Thangjam Manorama on July 11, 2004 Rajawar Sanak Rajan also shows the complicity that the nation-state has with female violence and so ethnical identity claims and movements in postcolonial countries have to be seen as a complex intersection of class, caste and gender in its various constructions of otherness.

sure. The gendered nature of these acts against women distinguishes them from the violence men suffer in conflict situations. In a context of a volatile ethnic-centric contestation, sexual violence becomes the signature of ultimate violence that can be committed against the community to which the women belong.

The need of the hour is reconciliation, dialogue and reflection on the claims and counter-claims of the valley and the hills and not retaliation. The crucial point here is who will facilitate dialogue and negotiation? Whether gendered justice? Whether reformers, civic bodies? Most importantly, where is the state? The incident happened on the 4th of May 2023. The media reported a 'Zero FIR' was filed by the Saikpa police, in Kangpokpi district, on May 18 and it was forwarded to the Nongpok Sekmai police station. After this for several months the incident is suppressed until the video goes viral and then some other videos also started reporting incidents of sexual violence in the state.

What's most frustrating is the role of the National Commission for Women which held on to its justification that it was impossible to send a team for investigation in the disturbed state of Manipur. It is in such situations that one is haunted by the strategic absence of sexual violence in the state. In the case of Northeast India it has mostly been women's groups as non-political actors who have acted as mediators between groups in conflicts, and insurgents, as protesters and as vigilantes, engaged in collective constituting 'multitudes', enacting their roles in the public space. Non-state actors like women's groups in the state, socio-political activists and the media have in the past integrated institutional bankruptcy and non-deliverance of justice.

One of the ways of overcoming the present crisis and impasse is the coming together of women's groups who can enlarge the civic space for dialogue and negotiation between the oppositional groups in Manipur in the total absence of a statist initiative to address the conflictual issues. Social change that would 'prevent renewed hostilities' can also be affected through the articulation of alternative narratives of physical and spiritual change in human beings in a conflict situation as against the male-centred universalist narratives of revenge and retaliation.

The author can be contacted at saikpa_b@yaho.com

National Education Policy 2020: Some challenges

By Kamakhya Bhattacharjee

After nearly two years, there are now some discussions and gossip, even during our morning walks, particularly after a few write-ups in newspapers on this very important topic of NEP(2020). The process of discussions is continuing. Some vital points have also been raised in respect of the government's plan to implement NEP (2020) and its struggle for finance, management and execution.

In a similar NEP conceive the government of Assam has called for transforming Assam into an 'educational hub' of Eastern India. The Government has already declared some seven colleges in seven districts of Assam to be promoted to the status of Universities. We feel that this declaration is again a very short-sighted decision without much discussion with the stakeholders. All these are however welcome moves.

At present we think the most vital issue is how to upgrade our educational institutions. Let us start with one or two things at the very beginning, and perhaps one or two institutions in every community. Development Blocks in Meghalaya to start with. Of course we do not forget before our 2023 Assembly Elections many of our aspiring candidates had promised that better educational policies will come, once their political party is elected to form the government. Whatever be the reasons, once we start something we may find ourselves unable to stop.

In this connection opinions of the respective institutions, both private as well as government schools or colleges are very important. With the present infrastructure available how will these institutions upgrade their respective institutions, keeping in mind that the resources are very limited. The Department of Education may invite their written opinions through newspapers so that the educators and heads of the institutions as well as general citizens may understand the urgency of our needs of strengthening our institutions and give their valuable opinions. It may become easier for our government to make the necessary resources of course, we feel that the general public have to share some burden of re-structuring since it is an important investment for our future.

There are some vital issues or challenges we are facing now. They are maintaining uniformity in the academic calendar, syllabus, grading patterns, curriculum updation, and many more. These will come up one after another. All these aspects need to be discussed in detail. About a year ago Shillong based Martin Lu-

ther Christian University (MLCU) had organized a seminar and invited some prominent educationists to provide their valuable opinions. Professor Sonali Nag of Education and Psychology, Oxford University had suggested the importance of home learning environments to complement school learning, learning book reviews as learning tools, and some other measures.

Among other challenges, providing students scope for playing, drilling for physical exercises, and fun among themselves, and a well-balanced School Library; subject-wise Laboratories within school campuses in seven districts of Assam to be promoted to the status of Universities. We feel that this declaration is again a very short-sighted decision without much discussion with the stakeholders. All these are however welcome moves.

At present we think the most vital issue is how to upgrade our educational institutions. Let us start with one or two things at the very beginning, and perhaps one or two institutions in every community. Development Blocks in Meghalaya to start with. Of course we do not forget before our 2023 Assembly Elections many of our aspiring candidates had promised that better educational policies will come, once their political party is elected to form the government. Whatever be the reasons, once we start something we may find ourselves unable to stop.

In this connection opinions of the respective institutions, both private as well as government schools or colleges are very important. With the present infrastructure available how will these institutions upgrade their respective institutions, keeping in mind that the resources are very limited. The Department of Education may invite their written opinions through newspapers so that the educators and heads of the institutions as well as general citizens may understand the urgency of our needs of strengthening our institutions and give their valuable opinions. It may become easier for our government to make the necessary resources of course, we feel that the general public have to share some burden of re-structuring since it is an important investment for our future.

There are some vital issues or challenges we are facing now. They are maintaining uniformity in the academic calendar, syllabus, grading patterns, curriculum updation, and many more. These will come up one after another. All these aspects need to be discussed in detail. About a year ago Shillong based Martin Lu-

ther Christian University (MLCU) had organized a seminar and invited some prominent educationists to provide their valuable opinions. Professor Sonali Nag of Education and Psychology, Oxford University had suggested the importance of home learning environments to complement school learning, learning book reviews as learning tools, and some other measures.

Among other challenges, providing students scope for playing, drilling for physical exercises, and fun among themselves, and a well-balanced School Library; subject-wise Laboratories within school campuses in seven districts of Assam to be promoted to the status of Universities. We feel that this declaration is again a very short-sighted decision without much discussion with the stakeholders. All these are however welcome moves.

At present we think the most vital issue is how to upgrade our educational institutions. Let us start with one or two things at the very beginning, and perhaps one or two institutions in every community. Development Blocks in Meghalaya to start with. Of course we do not forget before our 2023 Assembly Elections many of our aspiring candidates had promised that better educational policies will come, once their political party is elected to form the government. Whatever be the reasons, once we start something we may find ourselves unable to stop.

Letters to the Editor

NEP-2020: Where ends justify the means

I would like to draw your attention to the news item "NEP plan of NEHU finds few takers" in your esteemed paper dated July 23, 2023 when the Meghalaya College Teachers' Association (MCTA) claimed that during the 110th Academic Council meeting no resolution was adopted to implement the NEP 2020 from the academic session 2023-24, hence, the notification issued by the College Development Council (CDC) Officer on Special Duty, dated July 12, 2023, which stated that "in pursuance of the decision taken at the 110th meeting of its Academic Council that was duly endorsed by the 187th meeting of the Executive Council, the University would implement the Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) envisaged in the NEP 2020 with effect from the ensuing 2023-24 Academic Session at its af-

iliated colleges" tantamount to misrepresentation of facts. To date, the office of the CDC has maintained an astute silence on the allegation of the Association. However, on July 26, 2023, in a news item "NEHU academic council cannot implement NEP" in your paper, Prof. Ghanshyam Bez claimed that the Executive Council has delegated its power to the V.C. to decide on NEP implementation, implying that the approval of the same by the Academic Council is not required. As a sample, I am just forwarding the following two URLs: <https://nep.mca.gov.in/2022-23-session/article/wb/85823725.cms>, which will make it amply clear that, both in the case of Gauhati University (a State University) and Delhi University (a Central University), the implementation of NEP 2020 was made only after the decision to implement the same was passed by the Academic Council, which was subsequently

approved by the Executive Council. So, to assume that the decision of the Academic Council is irrelevant in the implementation of NEP 2020 is unacceptable, unless material evidence can be provided to prove otherwise. Moreover, the learned professor's implication that the Academic Council has no part to play in the implementation of NEP 2020 highlights the lack of coordination between the NEHU administrative set-up, as the CDC notification and the claims of Prof. Ghanshyam Bez, a member of the NEP 2020 implementation Committee of NEHU, contradict each other. Lastly, all stakeholders who have received the said notification may have been forced to act upon it should get clarification from the concerned authority of the university as to the authenticity of the matters stated in the notification because, as of now, it seems that authority that the end justifies the means. Yours etc., SK Peadrib, Shillong

Chaos at Inter-School Tae-kwondo Championship

I wish to share my profound disappointment and concern regarding the recently conducted 1st Meghalaya Inter-School Tae-kwondo Championship, organized by Army Public School, Unnai Military Station on 22nd and 23rd July 2023. The event, which held great promise for countless children and their parents, turned into a disheartening ordeal for the participants. Many of these young tae-kwondo enthusiasts had trained diligently and prepared wholeheartedly to showcase their skills. However, due to the disorganized nature of the championship, it failed to live up to its potential. One of the most glaring issues was the lack of proper timing and scheduling. Expecting young children to endure long hours from 9 am until 10 pm took a toll on their physical and mental

well-being. Additionally, the failure to allocate separate time slots for the weigh-ins of participants who had submitted their application forms in advance added to the chaos, leading to an unpleasant and uncomfortable experience for everyone involved. The inadequacy of infrastructure was also evident, with only two arenas available for a staggering 400 participants. This forced participants with varying skill levels to compete together, resulting in unfair matches and some children being deprived of the opportunity to showcase their talents altogether. This, in turn, led to a wave of disappointment and frustration among the eager young athletes. I urge the organizers to take immediate action to rectify the organizational flaws and ensure a fair, safe, and enjoyable experience for all participants in future events. My young athlete's dreams should not be compromised due to organisational negligence. I sincerely hope that my concerns will reach the appropriate authorities and prompt and necessary steps

taken to ensure that events like these are better organized in the future, allowing our children to shine in the spirit of sportsmanship. Yours etc., F. Marbaniang, A concerned & disheartened parent, Via email

Unprecedented traffic chaos

I am writing to express my deep concern about the increasingly severe traffic congestion on the route from Mawching to the Civil Society area. As a daily commuter on this route, I have personally experienced the frustrating and time-consuming ordeal of being stuck in traffic for more than two hours every day. The situation has reached a tipping point where traffic jams have become a regular occurrence, leading to significant delays and disruptions in the daily lives of countless individuals who depend on this route for their commutes. The issue not only affects the working population but also impacts

students, businesses, and essential services, causing an adverse ripple effect on the entire community. The reasons behind this chronic congestion demand urgent attention from the concerned authorities. Some possible factors contributing to the problem could be inadequate road infrastructure, an increase in the number of vehicles, ineffective traffic management, and ongoing construction activities. Identifying the root causes is vital to formulating effective solutions. I urge the relevant authorities to take immediate action to alleviate the traffic congestion on this crucial route. Some potential measures to consider include: Implementing better traffic management strategies, such as traffic signal synchronization and lane management. Investing in road infrastructure improvements to accommodate the increasing traffic flow. Encouraging the use of public transportation by

improving the frequency and efficiency of buses or other public transit options. Promoting carpooling and ride-sharing initiatives to reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicles on the road. By addressing this issue promptly, we can improve the overall quality of life for everyone who relies on this route for their daily commute. Additionally, it will lead to environmental benefits, as reduced traffic congestion translates to lower emissions and a cleaner atmosphere. I call upon the concerned authorities to take swift action and prioritize the resolution of this pressing matter. Let us work together to ensure a smoother traffic flow, shorter commute times, and a more efficient transportation system for the benefit of the entire community. Yours etc., Saikpa Bhattacharjee, Shillong

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

"There are some ideas so wrong that only a very intelligent person could believe in them."

— George Orwell

The Shillong Times

Vol. 56, Iss. 56, 2023 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 29, 2023

Getting away with skullduggery

THE Meghalaya High Court is presently the only institution providing light at the end of the dark tunnel that is the State of Meghalaya. The judicious and deft handling of the illegal coal mining and transportation saga that has been carrying on in the state for the last 9 years since the NGT ban on coal mining in April 2014 gives hope that those with a propensity to treat the law as dispensable rubbish will ultimately be hauled up and face the consequences of their actions. While police officials at the districts must be held accountable for closing their eyes to the daylight crime, this entire gamut of illegal mining, transportation and re-transportation in the form of coal brought from outside the state is a well-oiled machinery involving many other departments such as Mining and Geology, Transport, Police and the district administrations as well. The verbal orders for this coal business which funds the state elections in the same way that drug money funds elections in Manipur all come from the top rungs of the government. Hence if punishment for these gross illegalities is to be meted out then the lower rung officials alone cannot be held guilty. A police official in Ri Bhoi District who decided to carry out his duties and check the illegal transportation of coal paid with his life. The case is still hanging fire after several years. Justice takes so long to be served. Meanwhile, the other police officials reason that they don't want to put their lives on the line but rather earn from the transactions instead.

The wealth ranking and affluent lifestyles of some of the local police officers is indication enough that not all their acquisitions are from their salaries alone. This is almost taken as a fact of life and par for the course. Corruption runs deep in Meghalaya. It begins at the lowest rungs of the administration. There are allegations galore that officials in the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills who man the land registration desk take their pick as to whose property they will immediately register and whose will be held up. This transactional malpractice is known to all but with so few whistleblowers, crime is normalised.

In Assam, the media regularly reports of officials taking bribes and being caught red handed and jailed — be they in the police or administration. Can this ever happen in Meghalaya when corruption begins at the very top? Besides, elections in India today are impossible without freebies and cash distribution. The Election Commission of India despite its best efforts is unable to check this. Hopefully this time around those guilty of the illegal coal business transactions will be hauled up. Justice must be served so that people don't lose faith in the judicial system.

Letters to the Editor

Police Tech Menace: Open letter

Does the Meghalaya Police's quest for crime solving infringe on the common man's civil liberties? That's the question I'm asking today as modern technology continues to make it easier for law enforcement agencies to illegally monitor us innocent citizens.

In a recent incident, cyber sleuths from the SP's Office, Laitumkhrah PS and Nongthymmai Police Beat House were left red-faced and embarrassed after they were exposed by a hacker for stealing personal photos from the Twitter account of a man from Cambodia (possibly of Khmer descent) and using them to create fake Telegram accounts (@cardpoly and @idk) applying on to track 'suspects' as part of their CCNS program.

Even though the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and the Information Technology Act, 2000 has under certain circumstances, permitted the government to

The Indubitable Social Backwardness of the Scheduled Tribes

By Kitor H. Blah

It would not be wrong to say that the subject of Reservation has been "adequately represented" in the public discourse in the state in recent times. It is also true that this is not a new discourse. Thirty years ago even twenty years ago, this has been the subject of articles and public debates in our newspapers. And perhaps, it would also not be untrue to say that the present participants are at the tail end of the discourse. I use the words tail end, because the Government has taken steps towards implementing the demand for reviewing the State Reservation Policy. Hence I congratulate the nascent political party that has made use of legitimate democratic means to put pressure on the Government to give this issue a serious look. I also congratulate the Government for respecting the will of the people and accepting the proposal put forth by that party. In anticipation of the recommendations of the yet to be formed Expert Committee, the present discourse is of utmost importance because the long pending demand is about to come to fruition, but the nature of that fruit is of critical importance. Will it reflect the long public discourse, by bringing us here, or will it take on an unfamiliar form?

The consistent demand from organisations has been to review the policy in order that the quantum of quota is determined according to the proportion of the population of the Scheduled Tribes in the State. Their demand is based on the principle that the existing quota has caused a disadvantage to the Khasis, in public recruitment and academic courses, owing to their larger population. This has been the historical demand and aspiration from many sections of the Khasi community, and the recent discourse has hinged on this aspect of proportional reservation with various case laws and judgments being brought to the fore.

But at this present juncture, between the decades-long historical discourse and the anticipated Expert Committee, what is critical is the amplification of messages that would look to reshape the dialogue at this juncture and steer the discourse away from the historical demand that have actually brought us to this point. These novel voices can be grouped together as one, because they have the same underlying principle. This writer intends to show that their principle is wrong, and not according to the principle of the constitutional provision for Reservation, which is Article 164. This is necessary in order to empower the public to give a principled measure of the anticipated recommendations of the Expert Committee.

These novel voices have taken the form of new and unfamiliar demands that look to reshape the very principles of the demand to review the Reservation Policy and steer it away from the historical aspirations that have led us to this juncture. First, questions

have emerged from some writers as to who deserves Reservation more. The point of their question is that if we measure the economic and educational status of the Khasis and the Gans, we would find that the Gans community is "more backward" and hence, if the policy is to be reviewed at all, it must be to give more Reservation to the Gans. Second, since there are districts in Jaintia Hills that have lower literacy rate than some districts in Garo Hills, there has risen a demand to determine the Reservation quota according to the relative educational and economic status of districts. Third, there has arisen a demand from an organisation called Anti-Corruption League, to give 4% reservation to Muslims in the state. Fourth, there is a demand to exclude a section of the tribal communities in the state from Reservation, owing to their high economic status, by defining them as "creamy layer". Fifth, is the demand to give special Reservation to a section of the tribal communities in the state, owing to their low economic status, by defining them as "economically weaker section". Sixth, is the demand from some tribal communities in the state, namely, the Ijapung, Rabha, Khasi, Bodo, Kachan, Minj Tai, under the new organisation "Meghalaya Indigenous Minority Tribes", to give 15% Reservation for these communities. All these novel voices are one, and all these unfamiliar demands have a core and the same underlying principle, and that is to question the "backwardness" of that tribal community or those tribal districts that have a relatively higher economic and educational status, and to therefore question their privilege to enjoy equal Reservation.

This writer intends to establish the indubitable social backwardness of the Scheduled Tribes, and the indubitable constitutional privilege of every Scheduled Tribe to enjoy equal Reservation as other Scheduled Tribes, which of course can only be achieved by determining the Reservation quota in terms of their population, which is the basic principle of the State Reservation Policy. The Constitutional provision for Reservation, Article 164 is in fact in social backwardness. The historical and social backwardness of castes in India that beckoned Reservation is due to the social stratification that is present in the Caste System, which has resulted in generational economic and educational backwardness. What the Scheduled Tribes historically could not afford, due to the discriminatory Caste System, was social mobility. The opportunity to improve their social status. Thus, in the Indian context, and in the context of Reservation, economic and educational backwardness cannot be divorced from social backwardness. In the

case of the Scheduled Tribes, there are no criteria that define a Scheduled Tribe, and the Government has not laid down any such criteria when it listed the Scheduled Tribes. But there has historically been certain inherent features that characterised Scheduled Tribes, such as the hill areas and/or forests that they inhabited that was isolated from the mainland, the social life that they lived that was secluded from other communities, and the distinct customs that they practiced that made them peculiar and excluded from the main body of people. In other words, the social backwardness of the Scheduled Tribes was rooted in their geographical and social isolation. While the criteria that define Scheduled Tribes, they are what has historically characterised them.

The history of the Scheduled Tribes in North East India is that the areas they inhabited were defined as "backward areas" by the British in the Government of India Act, 1919. They were later redefined as "excluded areas" and "partially excluded areas" in the Government of India Act, 1935 for the purpose of administrative convenience. The Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, Gans and Mikir Hills fell under the "partially excluded areas". In both Acts, special provisions were made for the administration of the "backward areas" and "partially excluded areas" such that (i) the provisions of the 1919 Act would not apply to the "backward areas" without exceptions and modifications, and (ii) the Indian Legislature shall not apply to these areas, or shall apply subject to exceptions made by the Governor-General (i) in the case of the Provincial Legislature, and (ii) in the case of the Central Legislature. The Act shall apply to the "excluded and partially excluded areas" unless the Governor-General in the exercise of his powers notified by him (i) the Governor may make regulations for the peace and good government of the "excluded and partially excluded areas" and such regulations may repeal or amend any Act of the Provincial Legislature and any existing Indian Law. Moreover, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills existed beyond the boundaries of a British District, and the British never imposed taxation on these hills, although no criteria has ever been laid down by the British or by the Government of India to define Scheduled Tribes. Despite this, the historical characteristics, geographical isolation and peculiar social life of the Scheduled Tribes, and their social backwardness self-evident, and without question.

The Supreme Court in the landmark case of Indra Sawhney vs Union of India, 1992, in para 88A, point

No education, no health and doomed to poverty

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The book Poor Economics (Penguin publication) by Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo (winners of 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics) is extremely insightful and backed by extensive data on how to understand poverty and the possible ways to mitigate it. Its narration on poverty and poorness is primarily based on 18 developing countries, data sets mainly from Africa and Asia with India included. The writings, analyses, findings and arguments of the book resonate closely with Meghalaya. This is because much of the narrations about schools, higher education, skills, being productive as a human, health impacts on account of poor nutrition, being stunted, diarrhoea, malaria, etc makes it easily relatable with the current scenario of Meghalaya. In the overall opinion of criticism, this writer, Poor Economics is best suited as a knowledge base for understanding Meghalaya's poorness and thereby may give a sense of direction in its development policy and planning.

Education is a necessity to break the chains of poorness and move out of the poverty trap. It is observed globally that if one is poorly educated then the chance of declining into poverty is more. It is important to draw the distinction between literacy and education as the latter's connotation implies the ability and capability to engage in gainful employment. For example, a literate person may or may not be able to land employment but an educated person on some train (say graphics, special effects, food production, etc) will be able to sustain and come up in life. This exemplifies the value of education — it is not just a degree, rather, an enabler for livelihood. Meghalaya's education scenario needs to gradually shift focus towards making students capable of trying out new things. Simply making graduates of a kilogram of potatoes cost Rs. 100 — that would be the cost for 250 grams has less value. It has to shift towards skills that can be made from a kilogram of potatoes and when sold how much would be the revenue and if it be profitable? Poor education results in incapable citizens and this ultimately reflects on the status of Meghalaya in the national picture. The NEP, 2020 aims to address some of these nagging developmental bottlenecks but the policy is a non-starter. The state government has been showing inability to implement the policy. One of the reasons for this is the lack of a special fund specifically meant for the implementation of NEP. Time to act on it!

It is useless for a person to be educated but not be healthy and vice versa. This is because he/she will be less valuable to society. This is precisely the reason why human resource development focuses upon both education and health equally. Banerjee and Duflo make a case for poor health due to lack of food and the necessary calories per head due to getting the body and being productive. Living below the poverty line directly implies that the people eat less and poorer quality food which in turn adversely impacts their health. This in turn makes one unable to have the requisite energy to work and earn a living for self and the household. This makes the family incapable of moving out of poorness. This phenomenon is described as a food-poverty trap. Further, eating less would mean that the children and family would be more vulnerable to ailments, thereby making the whole community get stuck in a cycle. The demands of education require for the body and mind to be adequately nourished and healthy. In the absence of health, a student subjected to be capable and climb up the

ladder? For example, people living below the poverty line have the same aspirations for their children as any middle-income family would. When poor health weakens have on learning capability, all dreams are shattered and then comes the claim that the rural students cannot compete with the urbanites. In general, this is still true (even if the recent class X and XII results have shown some exceptions).

The Meghalaya numbers on education and health leave a lot to be desired. According to CEIC data the gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education (higher education at colleges, universities, etc) in 2020 was 25.8% (a decline from 26% in 2019). The average from 2010 to 2020 stood at 20.4%. India's gross enrolment ratio for higher education in 2020 was already around 27%. These figures only show the lack of penetration of education in Meghalaya. There are many factors for this. At the forefront are poorness and the unfavourable impact of covid-19 pandemic. The figures also tell us that with a sizable chunk of the population outside the ambit of education, the future does not look good. It is also to be noted that the majority of these are children from poor families. This means that they will continue to be victims of the vicious cycle of poorness and most likely even their children. Further, the 2021 National Health Systems Resource Centre Report on Meghalaya shows that 45% of children below the age of 5 years suffer from anaemia. Around 36% of the children in the state are stunted and figure is whopping 59% for the Khasi hills. The proportion of communicable and nutritional diseases contributes to 36% of total disease burden. Further, lower respiratory tract infection, malaria, diarrhoea, etc are the leading causes of deaths. These numbers are a blot on the prospect of human resource development in Meghalaya.

The Meghalaya numbers are significant as Banerjee and Duflo make a compelling argument with regards to education and health. Their basic premise is that education is a must to break the chains of poorness and health is critical to grow into productive and resourceful adults. In the absence of schooling and skilling an entire future would be wasted and lost. If children are more prone to stay diarrhoea, malaria and anaemia when not addressed appropriately, it is something like this that is what is going on (proper interventions in education and health), we may only need one push, one generation that gets to grow up and work in a healthy environment, to set the trap loose. So, are we interested in investing in a generation? (The author teaches at NEHU. Email: benjamin@nehu.ac.in)

conduct surveillance such as interception of calls and data, however, planting of bugs in innocent civilians' phones disguised as mobile applications and games like Dailyhunt, NewsPop, Snapchat and Solitaire to spy on their activities is highly unethical and a criminal act punishable by law. Has the Meghalaya Police forgotten that stealing personal photos of innocent people's data are swept up in the process? As a Meghalaya citizen, I am concerned about my own privacy. I now demand an answer. I want a clearer understanding of where that data goes, how long it's stored and who has access to it. And if the law stands for the general public, why shouldn't it apply to law enforcement agencies?

Yours, etc,
Name withheld on request
Via email

UCC a double-edged sword

Editor,
The editorial "UCC — Bringing the battle" (ST June 29, 2023) made interesting reading. The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India proposes to

replace the personal laws based on the scriptures and customs of each significant religious community in our lives have become less private; hence it becomes more important than ever to secure our privacy. Speaking of privacy, do citizens of Meghalaya know that the Meghalaya Police also use tower dumps to zero in on suspects, but a lot of innocent people's data are swept up in the process? As a Meghalaya citizen, I am concerned about my own privacy. I now demand an answer. I want a clearer understanding of where that data goes, how long it's stored and who has access to it. And if the law stands for the general public, why shouldn't it apply to law enforcement agencies?

Yours, etc,
Name withheld on request
Via email

There are many adversities and jankisms who have their own traditions and customs. Some of them have expressed concern that their pooja pahars (form of prayer) will be affected. Some of these communities also follow their own norms for marriage and divorce, which they feel will be subsumed in the larger law. Last week, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council unanimously passed a resolution to oppose the implementation of UCC in areas within its jurisdiction. In a similar fashion, the Bodoland People's Front in Bodoland threatened to protest against the proposed law. India is home to an amazing 700 plus tribes with a population of 104 million as per Census 2011 and its tribal population is the largest in the world. Despite this, the modernisation, habitat loss and dwindling livelihoods, many tribal communities continue to practice their traditions and to conserve the ancient wisdom handed down by their ancestors. The BJP is aware of the political implications of UCC as its vote share in tribal-dominated areas and is wooing tribal communities in Madhya

Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and in the Northeast. States such as Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have set up committees to examine UCC. Knowing the sensitivity of the issue, the Sangh Parivar has pushed for building a narrative, encouraging debate and discussion and creating consensus rather than just bringing legislation.

"Council unions" passed a bill to implement UCC was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by a BJP lawmaker. Several states have been asked to or have been their draft bills and suggestions solicited from people shows that the government believes in taking an amicable route that will benefit all sections of society. However, the utterances of the Prime Minister in Bhupul area an indication of an election plank for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls that election will be fought on the basis of "majority and UCC". If UCC is implemented the concept of Hindu Undivided Family will have to be given a go-by. Will the Hindus accept it?

Yours, etc,
V K Lyngdoh,
Via email

ONE FOR THE BOOK CLUB

A book brings up strong emotions and gives you a break from dumb scrolling and screen times. Here are some enriching reads for the weeks ahead.

Only Love Can Hurt Like This

Neither of them expected to fall in love. But sometimes life has other plans. When Wren realises her fiancé is in love with someone else, she thinks her heart will never recover. On the other side of the world, Anders lost his wife four years ago and is still struggling to move on. Wren hopes that spending the summer with her dad and step-family on their farm in Indiana will help her to heal. There, amid the cornfields and fireflies, she and Anders cross paths and their worlds are turned upside-down again. But Wren does not know that Anders is harbouring a secret, and if he acts on any feelings, he has far more to lose than serious fall-out for everyone. Walking away would hurt Wren more than she can imagine. But, knowing the truth, how can she possibly stay?

The Devil's Flute Murders

An ingenious and highly atmospheric classic whodunit from Japan's master of crime. Amid the rubble of post-war Tokyo, inside the grand Tsubaki house, a once-noble family is in mourning. The old viscount Tsubaki, a brooding, troubled composer, has been found dead. When the family gather for a divination to conjure the spirit of their departed patriarch, death visits the house once more, and the brilliant Kosuke Kindaichi is called in to investigate. But before he can get to the truth Kindaichi must uncover the Tsubakis' most disturbing secrets, while the gruesome murders continue...

Other Peoples' Husbands

Sometimes friendship crosses a line... A group of close friends, their bonds forged at the nursery gates two decades ago, have celebrated, commiserated and grown together; they thought they all knew each other so well. Until the affair. Now a crack appears in everything.

Could one betrayal really destroy it all?

Much Ado About Nada

Once they were sweethearts, now they're strangers. Worse than strangers - practically enemies.

But will a chance encounter offer Nada and Baz a second chance at love? Nada Syed is stuck. At twenty-eight, she's living with her parents and mourning the failure of her start-up baby, which failed because of a double-crossing business partner.

Nada's best friend Haleema is determined to pry her from her shell - and what better place than at the giant annual Muslim conference? And did Haleema mention that Baz will be there? What Haleema doesn't know is that Nada and Baz have a secret history. And in their chance encounter at the conference, that history comes hurtling at Nada, bringing a moment of reckoning. Will Nada find a way to let go of the past but hold

onto her dreams?

The House of Doors

It is 1921 and at Cassowary House in the Straits Settlements of Penang, Robert Hamlyn is a well-to-do lawyer and his steely wife Lesley a society hostess. Their lives are invigorated when Willie, an old friend of Robert's, comes to stay.

Willie Somerset Maugham is one of the greatest writers of his day. But he is beleaguered by an unhappy marriage, ill-health and business interests that have gone badly awry. He is also struggling to write. The more Lesley's friendship with Willie grows, the more clearly she sees him as he is - a man who has no choice but to mask his true self.

As Willie prepares to leave and face his demons, Lesley confides secrets of her own, including how she came to know the charismatic Dr Sun Yat Sen, a revolutionary fighting to overthrow the imperial dynasty of China. And more scandalous still, she reveals her connection to the case of an Englishwoman charged with murder in the Kuala Lumpur courts - a tragedy drawn from fact and worthy of fiction.



Prize-shortlisted Tan Twan Eng, *The House of Doors* is a masterful novel of public morality and private truth a century ago. Based on real events it is a drama of love and betrayal under the shadow of Empire.

Hello Beautiful

From the New York Times bestselling author of *Dear Edward* comes a beautifully tender, heart-breaking, and moving story of four sisters over three decades.

Meet the Padvano girls. Best friends and sisters, they are thought of as inseparable by everyone in their close-knit Chicago neighbourhood. Julia, the eldest, is the "rocket" of the family - she always has a destination in mind and clear plans for how to get there. Sylvie, the dreamer, is happiest with her nose in a book and imagines a life for herself other than the expected path of wife and mother.

Cecelia and Emmeline, the twins, are the artist and the caregiver. From childhood, the four

sisters complete each other, expecting that their family will always be intact.

When Julia falls in love with William Walters, a history student and college sports star, she's delighted by the way her plans for adulthood are coming together. A husband, a house, a family. But when darkness from William's past begins to block the light of his future, it is Sylvie, not Julia, who steps in to help. Suddenly, things shift. Dynamics and relationships, priorities and secrets - everything that was once a given no longer is.

Rich and vivid, heart-breaking and heart-mending, *Hello Beautiful* captures the joy, tragedy, trust, and betrayal of asking what does it mean to be a family? And once shattered, can it be pieced back together?

The Mivus

The follow-up to No. 1 Sunday Times bestseller *The Mister*, a passionate and thrilling love story from E. J. James, author of the phenomenal bestselling *Fifty Shades* Trilogies.

Alessia regards her husband through heavy-lidded eyes. She has to fight for him. Her mother's words ring through her head. And when she will be using every



available weapon she has. She loves him. She knows it. And she wants him to want her.

What happens once the glass slipper fits...?

Maxim Trevelyan, reluctant Earl of Trevelthick, has pursued the woman he loves to the wilds of Albania. Having fought for and won her, he now has to wed her, at the sharp end of a shotgun.

But can a reformed rake like Maxim ever make a good husband - or will his own notorious reputation and the scandalous secrets of his aristocratic family destroy his new-found happiness?

Alessia Demachi has defied and outwitted kidnappers and traffickers, and won the heart of the man she loves, but can she make this marriage work? Confronted by Maxim's lurid past, his forbidding family, and the looks and whispers of London's elite, will she ever be seen as Maxim's mistress - or will she always be his former cleaner?

From the majestic mountains of Albania,

through the rural idyll of the English countryside, to the shady glamour of contemporary London, *The Mivus* is a spellbinding journey of love, longing, acceptance and redemption.

Summer Reading

Sam set out to spend the summer resurrecting her career as a chef but instead, has to chaperone her half-brother to a robotics competition at the local library.

And naturally, because the universe hates her, the library's interim director, Ben, turns out to be the flor Reader Guy whose book she accidentally destroyed on the ferry to the island. Sam doesn't do reading. Ben doesn't do romantic relationships. But when Ben inspires Sam to create the cookbook she's always dreamed about, they discover there might be more than just a creative spark between them.

Will this summer be a recipe for disaster... Or love?

Beach Rivals

One bookshop in paradise. Two bitter rivals. A whole summer to get through...

Clare thought that by now she would have her life figured out. Instead, she's living with her parents, working a job she hates and has absolutely no idea what she wants to do with the rest of her life.

When she sees a viral job advert for a three-month bookseller position on a Bali beach, she jumps at the chance. But it's not until she arrives in Bali that Clare realises she won't be working in the bookshop alone.

Instead she's sharing the bookshop - and a flat - with a handsome but infuriating American man. Jack is Clare's opposite in almost every way, and it's not long before they're driving each other crazy. But fighting with Jack is also the most fun Clare's had in years, and it's only a matter of time before their relationship turns less than professional... *Beach Rivals* is an escapist, slow-burn enemies-to-lovers rom com - the ideal summer read!

Office Secrets by Harish Bhatt

The corporate masks we wear hide many a secret. The most potent are not the secret financial numbers or confidential strategy documents hidden away in locked drawers or in safes but the simple ones - good filter coffee, generosity and thirty minutes of me-time.

This book offers a selection of fascinating and useful secrets that can help you be far more successful at your workplace. As a bonus, they can make you happier as well. You will find within a range of subjects - whether the best methods of fighting exhaustion, organizing your work desk, the power of listening, why kindness is so important, workplace lessons from Hercule Poirot and what you can learn from the cookies that your colleagues eat.

Harish Bhatt wields his pen with his signature insight to delight, inspire, provoke and change the way you see offices forever. (*HANSlife*)

Pistachios recipes for the win

Every delicacy have its own taste and its adored by a large number of people. Here are some recipes curated by American Pistachios to give a different taste to your buds of Pistachios.

PISTACHIO, ASPARAGUS AND BLUE CHEESE RISOTTO (By Chef Ashish Bhasin)

Ingredients:
280 g Risotto rice (Short grain like Arborio)
60 ml Extra virgin olive oil
40 g Onion
50 ml White wine
16 g Lemon zest
250 g Asparagus



60 g Parmesan
40 g Unsalted butter
800 ml Vegetable stock
100 g California Pistachios
60 g Blue Cheese
5 g Miso green for garnish
20 g Salt
10 g Black pepper

Instructions:
Heat olive oil in a pan and add finely chopped onions, saute till translucent.
Now add risotto rice, saute for a minute.
Deglaze with white wine, until wine evaporates; add little stock and continue cooking on slow flame gradually.
Keep repeating till risotto is about to be cooked.
Blanch asparagus separately and mix with the risotto.
Finish risotto with unsalted butter, pistachios,

blue cheese and grated parmesan. Stir it vigorously (preferably with a fiber spatula) until it gets a creamy texture.

For garnishing, sprinkle pistachio shavings/flakes, crumble blue cheese and a bit of micro-green.

Adjust the seasoning. Finish with parsley and drizzle balsamic reduction on top.

MALAI PRAWNS (By Chef Anand Panwar)

Ingredients:
100 g White Onion
50 g California Pistachios
10 g Ginger Garlic
100 g Prawns

Curry Leaves, Green Chilli & Salt to taste
100 ml Coconut Milk
20 ml Coconut Oil

Instructions:
Heat coconut oil in a pan.
Add mustard seeds & curry leaves.
Add white onion, pistachios, garlic, ginger, green chilli together and cook for a few minutes.
Add salt, turmeric powder, coconut milk and make a gravy.
Put cleaned prawns in the gravy and cook for 2 to 4 minutes.
Garnish with curry leaves and chopped pistachio.

PISTACHIO PANER (By Chef Anand Panwar)

Ingredients:
100 g White Onion
50 g California Pistachios
10 g Ginger Garlic Paste
100 g Paner
Curry Leaves, Salt, Green Chilli as per taste
100 ml Coconut Milk
20 ml Coconut Oil

Instructions:
Heat coconut oil in a pan.
Add mustard seeds & curry leaves.
Add white onion, pistachios, garlic, ginger, green chilli together and cook for a few minutes.
Add turmeric powder, coconut milk to make a gravy.
Put some paner in the gravy and cook for 2 to 4 minutes.
Garnish with curry leaves and chopped pistachios.
Serve hot. (*HANSlife*)

Indians second most confident travellers in the Asia-Pacific

Despite complex global challenges, including inflation, geopolitical instability, climate change and supply chain disruptions, this year's research uncovers a striking paradox: a remarkable 86 per cent of Indian travellers are brimming with optimism about their future travel plans, while 61 per cent have no intention of postponing their travel plans in the next 12 months.

Even more striking, over half (59 per cent) of these travellers intend to maintain, if not increase, the number of trips they take and 68 per cent intend to increase their travel expenditure budget for the year ahead, finds travel site Booking.com's, 2023 edition APAC Travel Confidence Index (TCI).

The study provides perceptions into the attitudes of APAC travellers and the significant influence that economic and global concerns have on their travel choices. India is the nation with the second most confident passengers out of the 11 APAC nations surveyed, just behind Hong Kong. After Singapore and Taiwan, China comes in third.

Travel Behaviours

Indians stand out for their unusual travel behaviours, especially in how they approach itineraries and how much attention they place on cuisine. More than half (57 per cent) prefer to follow a set schedule and reserve their lodging, activities and meals in advance. This suggests a desire for a planned

Top Places and Activities of Interest while Travelling

Indian travellers exhibit a strong preference for nature and scenic areas (67 per cent), suggesting a desire to immerse oneself in the



beauty of natural settings. Beaches (63 per cent) and food and dining (57 per cent), which also maintain a strong attraction, are next in line. Shopping (52 per cent), local culture and lifestyle (55 per cent) and tourist attractions and landmarks (56 per cent), among other things, are of interest. Compared to Indians, APAC tourists prefer to seek out food, then nature, tourist destinations, and beaches. (*HANSlife*)

"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

— Milan Kundera

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LXV No. 347 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 31, 2023

BJP's Wanton ways

THE BJP, as the strongest political establishment ruling the Centre and several states, is far from being a cohesive political entity. Consider the manner in which it is appointing leaders at its head. It requires an enormous amount of guts for a political establishment to field leaders without the necessary clout even at its apex...

Anil Antony was heading the social media wing of the Congress. The main engagement of which was to trash the BJP and PM Modi. Out of the blue, six months ago, he made an abrupt about-turn allegedly on encouragement from his father and found virtue in Modi thereby criticising a BBC documentary that showed the PM and India in a "poor light"...

Clearly, the BJP has either failed to groom good leaders from the minority communities ever since its formation over four decades ago or is acting in haste. This is not specific to minority leaders. The party has all along been "experimenting" with green-horns, many of them having failed to do any good to the party and having eventually been dumped. As a result, the party -- a behemoth at that -- remains organisationally weak. That weakness was well displayed in Karnataka, where it was sent packing in the last assembly polls. In the other South Indian states too the same wanton "musical chairs" approach it adopted for leadership positions failed to take the party forward...

Letters to the Editor

Safeguarding our mother tongues

Editor, First and foremost, let me confess that while I may not be an expert on culture nor linguistics, I take immense pride in speaking my mother tongue. It connects me to my roots and identity. I am fortunate to be fluent in four languages -- War (War-Jaintia) which is my mother tongue, Khasi, from my father's side in Shillong and Jaintia, which I learned while growing up in Jowai before settling in Shillong and English, taught in school, has been a tremendous blessing, aiding communication with people from diverse backgrounds...

However, I am concerned about the dominance of English over our mother tongues and the potential threat it poses to our true identity. I have observed that many young individuals from the current generation (especially Generation Alpha) communicate fluently in English but appear unfamiliar with their mother tongue. I do not have the data and I am not yet a parent, so I can't say for sure whether this is due to early exposure in pre-school or the content they watch on screens. Through observation, I have witnessed some of my young nieces, nephews and other young individuals at family parties primarily conversing only in English. While I am impressed with their English fluency, it also made me think that, what if we are the last generation of Khasi people, especially

those living in urban areas, who can speak our mother tongue fluently?

Fortunately, some of my friends and colleagues have shared that they make a conscious effort to encourage their children to speak their mother tongue at home and that is a positive step. I believe many other parents are doing the same, as preserving our mother tongue is crucial. If our language dies, our culture may suffer the same fate. Therefore, we must emphasize the significance of our mother tongues within families, schools and communities. Encouraging young individuals to speak their native language not only fosters a strong cultural identity but also improves their cognitive and linguistic abilities. Parents, educators and society as a whole should support language programs and resources that promote the learning and preservation of our mother tongues. Right from pre-schools, we can integrate local languages into the curriculum to ensure they are given the same importance as English. This will help young individuals understand and appreciate their cultural heritage while becoming proficient in both their mother tongue and English.

Media and technology can play a vital role in preserving languages. Content creators should be supported and encouraged to produce content in local languages, allowing children to consume educational and entertaining content in their native tongue. This will help in keeping the language alive and relevant in the digital age.

Let this brief article be a friendly reminder that we must recognize the value of our mother tongues and work collectively to preserve them. Embracing and promoting our native languages will not only safeguard our cultural identity but also enrich our lives. Let us cherish the gift of language and pass it on to future generations as a treasure of our heritage. Yours etc., By Zaman F. Tongper Faculty, Department of Tourism and Travel Management, Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong. Via email

NEP: Meghalaya's preparedness & the future of students

By H H Mohrmen

So much has been written about the National Education Policy 2020 even in this newspaper, but the pertinent question is whether enough has been written on this very important issue. It is written somewhere that if enemies want to destroy the nation, it only needs to see that its education system is second-rated and that will do the job. The future of every country depends on the kind of young people produced. What kind of future the country will have will largely depend on the kind of education that is provided to them. Education is something that neither the government nor the agencies providing it can compromise on. It is therefore important to note that the kind of education we have is crucial to prepare our youngsters for the kind of future they will live in.

In recent weeks the debate was more on what the policy says about the undergraduate level of education according to the NEP 2020. There is so much to discuss about the NEP 2020, but in this column, we are restricting ourselves to the two important aspects of the policy and that is the under-graduate stage of education and the earliest stage of education as per the policy document.

The UG level and the University and Government preparedness

The under-graduate stage of education is right now, the very crucial issue that the people of this state need to discuss. Despite several write-ups the opposing parties do not seem to be able to come to an understanding. Whereas the need of the hour is for the parties concerned which include the University, the colleges, the teachers, and the government to come to an understanding on this very important issue, some are not on our side, so the above stakeholders should come together to see how the state's education can emerge from the current situation for the sake of the future of the under-graduate students. The University, colleges, and the government cannot afford to prolong the debate before arriving at a consensus for the sake of the current degree students of the state. Whatever they do will also decide the future of the students who are going to join their degree-level studies from this year on.

ward. From what appears in the press, even at this level there is no consensus on the direction in which the North Eastern Hill University and the different colleges affiliated to it will move.

As parents and relatives of the students who are going to study in the colleges affiliated with NEHU, we have the right to ask questions as to the future of our wards depends on the kind of under-graduate courses that the University offers. We expect that all those concerned with providing under-graduate education in the state should put their heads together and come up with a solution for the future of the students.

Student-centred decision

The debate is divided on at least two sides. One side argues that the decision to

"Despite several write-ups the opposing parties do not seem to be able to come to an understanding. Whereas the need of the hour is for the parties concerned which include the University, the colleges, the teachers, and the government to come to an understanding on this very important issue."

implement the NEP was not properly made or due process was not followed. The other section thinks that we need to start somewhere and start now because we cannot afford to waste any more time. The argument on one side is that the colleges affiliated with NEHU are not prepared for the change. So the question is when will the colleges be prepared and whether we can afford to wait till all the colleges can make the necessary arrangements for the required changes. All those concerned should work together and the interests of the students need to be taken into consideration first. It is the students' right to get quality education as prescribed by NEP and offered by the other Universities in the country. Our wards deserve the same kind of education that is being offered in all the states in the country. It is the duty of the University, the government, the management of the colleges, and the teachers of the colleges to see that all the students are provided the best education as prescribed in the NEP 2020.

It is the duty of the University, the government, the management of the colleges, and the teachers of the colleges to see that all the students are provided the best education as prescribed in the NEP 2020.

As per the new policy, classes will now be held in the Anganwadi centers. The question is not only concerning the infrastructure alone but one can ask if

The time to change is now

We cannot continue to postpone the implementation of NEP 2020; we cannot put the future of our degree children in jeopardy. If we continue to delay the implementation of the Policy, it will be at the cost of our children's future as under-graduate students are very crucial for the future of students. I am not an expert on the subject, but we want our children to be at par with their counterparts across the country. We certainly don't want our children to be second-rate or left behind.

No doubt under-graduate studies deserve immediate attention from the authorities concerned, but the other issue in the NEP 2020 that needs to be debated is the first stage or the early part

Education is a basic human right

The state will certainly not be hundred percent prepared for implementation of the Policy and it is also known to all that there is no going back on the NEP. The onus is therefore on the state and those at the helm of power to provide education to the young people of the state and to ensure that our children are provided education that is at par (if not better) with the children and youths in the rest of the country. This is their basic human right and the government cannot deny them their right.

Education is a basic human right

The state will certainly not be hundred percent prepared for implementation of the Policy and it is also known to all that there is no going back on the NEP. The onus is therefore on the state and those at the helm of power to provide education to the young people of the state and to ensure that our children are provided education that is at par (if not better) with the children and youths in the rest of the country. This is their basic human right and the government cannot deny them their right.

At times, an ambulance would have to wait to allow those in government vehicles to pass through. What is this if not the arrogance of power? If we turn towards crime, children and women are the worst hit and the most vulnerable. Nowadays, perpetrators of rape are usually men known to the victims. The lack of conviction and punishment, if at all, does not deter others from committing the same crime. This arrogance and show of power and control and of trampling the weak is frightening.

Arrogance of power everywhere

Corruption has sown its seed so deep that its presence is felt across every sphere of society. Merit takes a back seat because what counts is how much money one can offer those in power. What we see is what we learn. Hence our children learn from what they see and hear their elders discussing. Right now we are not seeing any good examples before us. Shouldn't we be at home, at school, at work, in the government do something? Yours etc., Janifer Dikar, Via email

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

the Anganwadis are trained to be pre-school teachers. Pre-school education uses different pedagogy to impart education to the kids. So are Anganwadis trained to provide the much-needed early childhood education to the kids in this village? And which department will have the responsibility to provide training for the Anganwadi workers?

Then there is the more serious administrative question. The Anganwadis are under the Department of Social Welfare. Does the department have the expertise to run and manage pre-school education? Isn't it more convenient to let the education department which has the necessary wherewithal to run and manage training to the Anganwadis to run the centers?

The NEP also prescribes that three years of preschool or Anganwadi education would then be followed by two years of Primary schooling which is class I and class 2. Of course, the emphasis is on play-based or activity-based learning strategies and language development, yet this is a crucial stage of child education and it needs to be taken seriously.

Lower Primary Education

The next stage is the preparatory stage and this will include children in the age of 8 to 11 years old. In this stage the classes are from 3 to 5th grade. Early education which includes Lower Primary School education is another part of the NEP 2020 that the government needs to take a serious look at. These two aspects of the NEP 2020 are the areas which the government needs to give immediate attention to.

Education is a basic human right

The state will certainly not be hundred percent prepared for implementation of the Policy and it is also known to all that there is no going back on the NEP. The onus is therefore on the state and those at the helm of power to provide education to the young people of the state and to ensure that our children are provided education that is at par (if not better) with the children and youths in the rest of the country. This is their basic human right and the government cannot deny them their right.

Education is a basic human right

At times, an ambulance would have to wait to allow those in government vehicles to pass through. What is this if not the arrogance of power? If we turn towards crime, children and women are the worst hit and the most vulnerable. Nowadays, perpetrators of rape are usually men known to the victims. The lack of conviction and punishment, if at all, does not deter others from committing the same crime. This arrogance and show of power and control and of trampling the weak is frightening.

Arrogance of power everywhere

Corruption has sown its seed so deep that its presence is felt across every sphere of society. Merit takes a back seat because what counts is how much money one can offer those in power. What we see is what we learn. Hence our children learn from what they see and hear their elders discussing. Right now we are not seeing any good examples before us. Shouldn't we be at home, at school, at work, in the government do something? Yours etc., Janifer Dikar, Via email

SC's grant of extension to ED Sanjay Mishra till Sep 15 bizarre How can learned justices be party to centre's sob story defying its own order?

By Shushil Khaty

Supreme Court Justice B R Gavai is busy, perhaps the busiest justice. Very recently he was asked to be recused from Rahul Gandhi's defamation conviction case citing longstanding family links with the Congress. Now, he has been part of the special bench that has given Director, Enforcement Directorate, Sanjay Kumar Mishra, further extension for the onerous task of saving India from international humiliation.

The Supreme Court ruled that Mishra would remain ED director till September 15. Earlier, the top court had asked Mishra to quit stalling and clear his desk by July



31, no more extensions! The volte-face came four days later. Sanjay Kumar Mishra can now continue as "ED Director". Did this Modi government feign that Sanjay Kumar Mishra was indispensable because FAF was India's head and there's no ED officer competent enough to stand in for the irreplaceable "Mr. Mishra"? Bunkum! People die. Lightning might strike. You could get hit

Sanjay Kumar Mishra's tenure saying it is in "public and national interest". This, after telling Mishra point blank to be out of the ED building by July 31. Four days short of the deadline, Mishra is all smiles and "Mr. Indispensable". The Modi Government announced the Supreme Court with an "urgent application" that said with FAF's onerous on the head, India cannot be left in the lurch. And

The Enforcement Directorate has the teeth of a K9. Bottom-line, the Modi government uses the ED for purely political purposes. Come to think of it, all the excuses, including the one about the country's international image, are straight out of "Believe it or Not", in simple King's English, this particular ED Director is intrinsic to "Modi's grand Third Term" plan. He cannot be kicked out.

crossing the road. But life goes on. Time never stops. God forbid, Sanjay Kumar Mishra could have gone with the wind and nobody would have missed him except family. Point is, the Supreme Court should not have fallen for the Modi government's sob story. The Modi government pulled a fast one. The Modi government would not have gone running to the apex court if Mishra was god forbid, no more. His replacement would have been named within 24 hours. It's all political. Sanjay Kumar Mishra's presence in the Enforcement Directorate is important for the Modi regime's 2024 plans.

Not because he's supposedly the only Indian alive who can take on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) like Selector General Tushar Mehta makes it out. He told as much to the SC though not in as many words. Appointing a new ED Director doesn't require shifting gallop. Like Justice Gavai observed, "Are you not going a picture here that your entire department is full of incompetent people except for this one person... Is it not demoralising for the SC to stop this person... This is not one person, the entire department will collapse." That is intelligent obser-