

“Resolve to be thyself: and know, that he who finds himself, loses his misery.”

--- Matthew Arnold

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 1, 2017

Fairy tale win for Aizawl FC

AIZAWL Football Club becomes the first team from the North East to clinch the I-League football championship title. The game known as the North East Derby saw Aizawl FC pitted against Shillong Lajong FC. Aizawl coach, the 40 year old Khalid Jamil a Kuwaiti national has played for the India national football team since 1997 and had earlier coached the Mumbai Football Club. Jamil was seen bending and kissing the JN Stadium ground immediately after the fairy tale finish on Sunday when Aizawl FC scored its critical goal against Lajong to position as itself as the unrivalled champion of the I-League Football 2017. Compared to most other football clubs Aizawl has the lowest investment of just Rs 1.5 crore which is only one-twentieth of what most clubs spend on their footballers. Incidentally, Mizoram also has the highest number of footballers playing for different football clubs of the country but it was only in the last two year that the Aizawl FC has come up. So much so that when Aizawl scored a 1-0 win against Mohun Bagan on April 22 this year, a leading English news daily captioned its story as, “Team from nowhere defeats Mohun Bagan.” Henceforth, the rest of the country would be better placed to know that Aizawl is the capital of the North Eastern State of Mizoram.

The Sunday win was the 11th out of 18 matches that Aizawl FC played. The Club had accumulated 36 points from 17 matches while its closest rival Mohun Bagan had 33 points from as many games. Aizawl could have won the title even if it lost the Sunday match but that would have depended on Mohun Bagan losing to Chennai City FC the same day which they did. Aizawl's Sunday win has firmly established it as one of India's leading I-league football club and the first from the North East. So while Shillong Lajong has been the first football club from the North East to join the prestigious I-League, Aizawl FC has beaten it to the glorious title of I-League champion. Perhaps this has much to do with the patronage that football receives from the State Government of Mizoram which has been actively promoting football as a game and not just football clubs. Other states have much to learn from the Aizawl win.

LOOKING BACK

April 11, 1989

Havildar killed in Bodo Ambush

A police havildar was killed and a sub inspector injured during the past 24 hours in different parts of the state even as the 36 hour Bodo task force called by the All Bodo Student's Union (ABSU) ended at five PM this evening. The bandh was called to protest against alleged police repression.

Official reports received here said that the dead body of Havildar Mangal Chandra Bodo of the 1st Assam Police

Task Force (APTF) was found lying near Fakiragram railway station this morning. The havildar was on duty last night at the Fakiragram government railway police outpost. The cause of death is not known, but the body bore marks of injury, the report said.

In Mangoldoi, district Sub-Inspector S. Sheikh of Paneri police station was injured in an ambush by Bodo extremists at Harisinga this morning.

MUA Govt's step-motherly treatment of Jaintia Hills

By H H Mohrmen

Elections to the State Assembly are just round the corner and the season for foundation stone laying ceremonies, inauguration ceremonies, tall promises and distribution of knick-knacks is here again. The tamasha will last until the Election Commission announces the elections to the august house, but the question for the MUA and its partners in the government is - what has the government achieved in the last five years? Can we see (if the government can provide us) the report card of this government's achievement(s) in the last five years? This question is especially pertinent from the point of view of Jaintia hills which has sent seven representatives to the Assembly and most of them have not even spoken a word in five years.

Of the seven legislators that the people of Jaintia hills have elected; only three occasionally took part in the debates in the house; two of them are cabinet ministers whose only contribution to the debate is to reply to the member's questions and nothing more than that. And the other member who intermittently took part in the debate was Hopefull Bamon. In all the sittings of House in the whole five years, you can count the number of times he spoke in the within the five fingers of your hand.

In circumstances like that what can we expect from our leaders? Hence it is safe to say that the two districts of Jaintia Hills were not only neglected by the present MUA government, but even the legislators that the people elected have failed them. Primarily, this is obvious from the fact that the state Government has done nothing to alleviate the plight of those affected by the mining ban in the coal mining areas. The Government not only failed to comply with the NGT directives to come up with regulatory mining mechanisms which will not have harmful consequences on the environment, but it has also done nothing to provide alternative livelihoods to the people who lost their livelihoods to the mining ban. And did any member from the district bring this matter to the notice of the house? The answer is an astounding 'No.' All the seven MLAs and even the

two who represent the two constituencies in East Jaintia hills have not said a word on this issue.

In fact East Jaintia hills district is at the receiving end of this Congress-led MUA government because the condition of the roads in the different parts of the district particularly those in the Indo-Bangladesh border and the Saipung area are pathetic to say the least. And still the minister in charge of border areas department has the gumption to state in the House that everything in the border is hunky-dory. The newly created District still lacks many basic necessities and it is a known fact that Saipung development block functions in name only.

East Jaintia hills now has two colleges, both privately run; one by the public and the other by church and there is no polytechnic or ITI to provide skills training to the youths in the entire district. The question is how can Government provide skills training to the youths when there is not a singles ITI or Polytechnic in East Jaintia hills?

Jowai, the capital of West Jaintia hills has not seen any development at all, and if there is any change that occurs, it is the construction of few approach roads if that can be called development. The town has functioned with a Municipal Board which is in a severe financial crunch because the MLA who has represented the town since 1983 has thrown his own baby out with the bath water.

Now with the NGT order hanging like a Damocles' sword on the head of the District Administration coupled with the MLA who has abandoned the Jowai Municipal Board, it is the people of Jowai town who will have to suffer. Also because we have an MLA who does not even care if the Municipality exists or not, one can't help but wonder if he even cares how people dispose their waste? Does it even cross the legislator's mind that too generates waste and contributes to the problem when he occasionally visits Jowai? Can we live in the present world and call ourselves educated when we do not even have proper waste disposal system?

In the more than three decades that Dr R C Laloo

had represented the prestigious Jowai constituency, no institute for professional studies has come up in the town or in the district either; even the only government college remains as it is since before he was first elected. In spite of Dr Laloo holding the education portfolios several times, the college still suffers from many inadequacies which compel the students to hit the streets on a regular basis to demand what is rightfully theirs.

Now Dr Laloo has made an announcement that the Government will very soon inaugurate the B.Ed College in Jowai, but what is new about this? For those who are not aware B.Ed College in Jowai has existed in the nineties and it functioned from the premises of the Kiang Nangbah Government College, but for reasons best known to the Government and Dr R C Laloo who represents the area then, the college was abruptly closed. Dr Laloo will now give the college its second lease of life and rather than taking credit for that, he should explain to the people of Jowai why the institute disappeared then?

About the river Myntdu, Dr Laloo had time and again claimed that he knows better about the river than anybody else because he had successfully guided a PhD scholar who studied the pollution levels of water in the river, but what has he done after that? What did he do with the information that was collected? Nothing! And the people of Jowai have to continue drinking the polluted water of Myntdu because the government had failed to complete the new Umngot water supply project which is supposed to supply cleaner water to Jowai. The completion of water supply projects at Mynso, Raliang, Rymbai and other places are still pending for more than a decade and a half now.

If the river Myntdu will ever have a fresh lease of life, the credit should go to the young man from Panaliar locality - Sajay Laloo who had filed a PIL with the National Green Tribunal against the rampant destruction of the river and not the MLA who turn a Nelson's eye to this very important subject of saving the lifeline of Jowai town. Recently, the DC Jowai in collaboration with the JMB convened a special public meeting of the residents of the town to apprise them

about the Court's order in this regard. By washing his hands over the JMB issue, Dr Laloo obviously does not care even if people continue to dispose their liquid waste into the water body of river Myntdu.

Health care facilities remain as they did in both the districts with no improvement at all in this very important sector. The CHC, the PHCs and Sub Centres do not have the required manpower or technology and even medicines are in short supply. The less we say about education the better, because the very reason that the teachers have to strike every now and then, proves that the government has failed in this sector too.

In higher education all the existing colleges like Jaintia Eastern College; Khliehriat, St Anthony's college extension in Myndihati in the East Jaintia hills and the Thomas Jones College in Jowai, the Presbyterian college Ummulong, to Shangpung College and Nongtalang College were established by communities and until now supported by them. So where is the Government when it comes to providing higher education in the Jaintia hills?

The State has a plan in the anvil to start a medical college and an engineering college in Shillong and Tura but nothing in Jowai and in spite of the community donating land for starting of NEHU campus at Wahiajer, neither the Government nor the University shows any interest to the effect.

The Government agency which has performed below par is the MeECL; the corporation has more power cuts than that it can supply in Jaintia hills, yet in spite of supplying only few hours a day, the energy bill remains the same. In both the East and West Jaintia hills there are reports of villages remaining without power supply for month together.

The Government has also failed the youths of the district as it has not been able to create any jobs at all for them and the young voters will certainly make this Government pay for its sins of omission and commission. This Government has failed its people particularly the youths and it has betrayed the people's mandate.

Yours etc.,
Sonaram M Sangma
Tura

Healthy Nation Low cost nutrition vital

By Dr Oishee Mukherjee

It is a well-known fact that malnutrition and under nutrition is a big problem in the country and this need to be tackled effectively. As per the Global Hunger Index, 15.2 per cent of the population that is, around 215 million Indians, have been found to be malnourished in the country though unofficial figures are more.

The National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) pegs the average Indian adult ideal protein-fat-carbohydrate (PFC) ratio at 20 per cent, 30 per cent and 60 per cent. According to a recent survey conducted in eight metros, the protein intake is low, whereas the fat intake is highest in the country's capital, Delhi that thrives on parantha, milk/butter and samosa and related oil rich diets. Not just Delhi but in most other places of north India, such food habits affect heart-related diseases and hypertension, apart from resulting in obesity.

Other cities such as Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore consume more carbohydrate through their diet of rice, idli and dosa makes them susceptible to diabetes. Insofar as Kolkata is concerned, the intake of fish, lentils and other types of high protein intake "put people at lower risk for conditions like diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, obesity etc."

The survey rightly pointed out that the lack of balanced diet has been leading to micronutrient deficiencies such as Vitamin D, iron and folic acid. These problems, as usual, mostly occur among the impoverished people who cannot afford a proper meal. It also reiterated the well-known contention that high consumption of fast food is another aspect of the problem, affecting mostly the rich and the middle income sections.

In fact, the continuous intake of junk food leads to hepatitis A, B, C and even cirrhosis of liver. According to unofficial figures, over 30 per cent of the city's male population has been suffering from non-alcoholic liver disease, while the figure may be half in the case of women. Controlled lifestyle and consumption of more vegetables while leaving out oil-based foods, chocolates, cold drinks etc, it must be remembered can do wonders.

The survey further revealed the question of burning of calories, which is indeed an important problem for people residing in big cities. It found Kolkata burns a minimum of 209 kcal a day followed by Bangalore 232 kcal, Delhi 229 kcal and Mumbai kcal. Recent studies have shown that people residing in cities do less physical work compared with those in rural areas and this is the reason for lesser burning of calories.

While the spectre of the problem has been partly covered by the survey, in big cities the situation is completely different from that in the rural areas. In villages, under nutrition and malnutrition has been plaguing a major section of the population, some of which can be tackled by undertaking a proper awareness campaign. It has been found that even the economically weaker sections can afford a balanced diet at low cost which would be reasonably healthy.

The campaign has to reach the lowest tiers of the village for which the National Institute of Nutrition has a vital role to play. There is indeed a need to involve the civil society in spreading this awareness and also to ensure that the food given by the

Government's in Central welfare schemes - such as Mid Day Meal Scheme - should have the proper balance, as recommended by NIN. It, however, remains to be said that strengthening this organisation and having more offices all over the country is essential at this juncture.

The whole issue of healthy food has to be considered seriously and both Central and State governments have to join hands in this regard. If targets are set for electrifying all villages or proving affordable housing to all, then there should also be an action plan to bring down under nutrition and malnutrition as this would have an effect on curbing the growing incidence of diseases, obviously affecting the economically weaker sections.

Indeed, eating healthy food is being emphasised repeatedly by doctors and nutritionists but much of such advice by and large goes unheeded. Though, however, it also needs to be pointed out that certain sections of the population are becoming increasingly conscious of the need to eat such food that could keep them healthy and disease-free.

As is generally known, vegetables and fruits are beneficial to the growth of the body. Even the opposite sex are motivated to eat fruits - at least those who can afford it - to keep the skin glowing and for normal hair growth. Steadily the awareness about the need for taking nutritious food is being realised by the people.

The question of nutritious food reaching the poor and economically weaker sections is the biggest challenge for the country as this section does not have the resources to get proper treatment due to inadequate protein diet. It is for this section of people that low-cost and easily available vegetables and pulses need to be made available to them for better nutrition.

One may mention here of an observation made by a renowned doctor, wherein he said that if only one takes adequate quantity of rice or wheat, pulses and vegetables, then no food drink such as Horlicks or Complan is necessary for children/individuals growth. The vigorous advertising campaigns of these products, entailing crores of rupees, even compels poor people when ill to buy these food drinks which are absolutely not necessary. Even doctors who are influenced by pharmaceutical companies prescribe these drinks.

The situation is best exclaimed by Father Augustine, Registrar of Xavier University, Bhubaneswar who, at a recent seminar, aptly stated that while the urban rich and middle class consume enough/more food - both nutritious and fast food -- and have to take recourse to various methods to digest it, including walking, exercising etc., the major section of our population are deprived of essential food for their survival and have to walk miles to procure this food.

There is serious concern about the need for proper and low-cost nutrition, which can be tackled if only the Panchayat and block officials are properly trained in this regard. The State governments have to play a crucial role, in association with institutions like NIN, for only then can poor and not-so-well educated people become conscious in the matter. The health of a nation is best judged by the health of its people. --- INFNA

TO THE EDITOR

Shillong parking lots!

Editor,

I would like to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to the MUDA, parking lot at Police Bazar. Is it really logical and sensible to divert the vehicles from the exit towards Jail Road? Let us take a conservative figure of say 300 vehicles daily coming out from the parking lot and each vehicle runs an extra 2 km and this practice has been going on for the last few years. Now, if this practice continues for another 10 years then how much fuel and money is being wasted! The nation and people of this country are paying the price. I personally feel that vehicles can be easily permitted to exit the parking lot and proceed directly towards Police Bazar and beyond as was done in the past. Yours etc.,
Anjan Kumar Das,
Shillong - 6

Delhi rejects the anarchist!

Editor,

This refers to your editorial "Delhi Municipal Polls" (ST- April 28). Kudos to BJP for riding on PM Modi's popularity to retain Delhi's three civic bodies for the third time in a row, dealing a body blow to the AAP, whose leaders blamed EVMs for its poor show in the municipal elections. The results show the clear need of development oriented politics. The AAP has only shown arrogance and a politics of confrontation since assuming power. People want a corruption-free and bribery-free Delhi. Prices have gone up, water and electricity are becoming costlier. People need a government that brings some relief to the poor people. Anti-corruption crusader Anna Hazare has rightly questioned Kejriwal's leadership, saying the party half lost credibility

among people in a short span of time. It is clear that India only gets what it deserves and what majority of population perceives. Congress has lost very heavily as every gain of AAP was at the expense of Congress. Indeed, the Congress will have to think of bringing in better and mature leaders. Delhi needs an administrator and not an anarchist. Don't we think every step taken by the PM and his schemes for poor, women, soldiers, farmers and workers, went in the BJP's favour?

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad- 15

Modi- the common man's PM!

Editor,

If there is one man next to Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who bashes self-ego and the ego of others in India it is undoubtedly Prime

Minister Narendra Modi. He deserves this title for the following reasons: When he first became PM of India in 2014 he took the broom himself and swept the streets of New Delhi adjacent to one Police Station and raked up the litter himself and thereby punctured his ego and self pride. Have other netas from various political parties done this? This is a coveted humble mindset! Other netas should learn from him Next Modi proceeded to demolish the 'gods' of this world - the Rs 500 and 1000 notes, to the utter chagrin of the chest thumping rich and powerful. Then he focused his attention on the red beacon (lall batti) and demolished the symbol of arrogance because the colour red attracts the anger of all bulls as experienced by the red motor bike riders. The Lal batti brigade must hate him for this! Modi has now turned towards air travel the monopoly of VIPs and their fiefdom. He has

demolished the racist and class divide by saying "I want to see the hawai chappal passengers not the suit boot people on this Hawaii Udaan of the Common people" Hence one hour's flight will cost only Rs.2500 which is within the reach of the common man!

The Prime Minister might now target lavish splurges on the big weddings which often is a cause of worry for the bride's parents if they come from a middle class background. Modi might in all probability even downsize the wedding parties, the invitees and the paraphernalia. Many middle class and senior citizens are also expecting the school admission fees in CBSE/ICSE affiliated schools, which so far is the domain of the powerful and affluent and is "not affordable" for the common person earning a salary of Rs 20,000-25,000 thousand rupees.

Admission fees must be reasonable between Rs 10,000- 15,000 annually.

While keeping the school out of bounds of the riff-raff is laudable and which is only possible by raising the fees sky high that is not the best method of elimination. I would humbly suggest Mr Prakash Javadekar the Hon'ble HRD Minister to take a fresh look into the fee structure in CBSE/ICSE schools? The more Modi demolishes the monolith of arrogance the dearer he becomes to the common people of India - the masses belonging to middle class and APL/BPL category. I am not allergic towards the rich and powerful people but against brazen display of an arrogant mindset. Some leaders take selfies with the .common men just for photo-ops!

Yours etc.,
Sonaram M Sangma
Tura

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

"The true meaning of religion is thus, not simply morality, but morality touched by emotion."

--- Matthew Arnold

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 2, 2017

Triple Talaq

THE Triple Talaq issue has been triggering a controversy for years. It is now under review by the Supreme Court. There is no doubt that it is a highly discriminatory and objectionable practice in Muslim society. The provision of instant divorce is a threat to marital relationship and the stability of family life. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is justified in urging Muslims to keep the debate out of politics. The main objection is that only husbands can do it and they control the pursed strings. It has also been said that the shariat does not provide for it. Modi rightly stressed that Indian muslims should show the path to modernity worldwide. Politicising the issue will be utterly wrong whether the BJP does it or the Opposition. A BJP minister in UP, Swami Prasad Mourya raised hackles stating that triple talaq is prompted by lust. Home breaking is not the preserve of muslims. The idea of the lustful muslim has been played up by the Sangh Parivar in the crusade against, 'love jihad'. Such motivated malignity of BJP ministers and RSS leaders is doubtless a hindrance to enlightened moves made by muslim reformers. The wife of India's Vice President, Hamid Ansari, Salma Ansari, recently condemned triple talaq.

Many muslim countries have abolished the objectionable practice. In India, the muslim Personal Law Board is responsible for its continuance. It violates the secular spirit of the Indian Constitution. The importance attached to the vote bank by all political parties has so far thwarted the introduction of a Unified Civil Code. The BJP's current obsession with curtailment of freedom of worship and the construction of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya has stiffened conservative fundamentalist muslim opinion. As Narendra Modi is the leader of the BJP, he appears to be in a cleft stick.

LOOKING BACK

April 11, 1989

Govt not aware of any violation of LPG supply system

Meghalaya Supply Minister Mr Upstar Kharbuli told the State Assembly on Wednesday that the Govt was "officially unaware" of any violation of the home delivery system of LPG by the dealers. Replying to a question by Mr H Suchiang (Cong-I), he said that the Supply department believed that "all is well" about LPG distribution since it had not received any complaint from the consumers with regard to over charging or any other irregular practices adopted by the dealers.

He said that in most cases the customers were themselves responsible for irregularities because they pressurized agencies as they were worried about "shortages of LPG." Mr Kharbuli said that under the existing regulations for supply of LPG even carrying of one's own gas cylinder from the godown was illegal. He assured that the state government would take appropriate step to check godown, showroom and roadside sale of cylinders.

2018 and what do we get?

By Toki Blah

The 2018 Meghalaya Assembly Elections are scheduled for sometimes next year but might come even earlier. The eager anticipation that usually precedes such political events is however missing. Nervousness has replaced enthusiasm. The whole state and the public at large is tetchy, anxious and fretful about the coming polls. Strangely the public worry is not so much over the change of government that the polls might bring. The concern of people is actually over the thought that even if a new government were to come to power in 2018, for the man in the street, there is hardly anything worth celebrating about. Nothing will change. There is nothing to anticipate. In a nutshell the general public has become indifferent and apathetic to elections! In the light of 45 years of mal-governance this is understandable. From the parliamentary democracy point of view however, this is a calamity of the worst kind. For an electorate to lose faith in the election of democratic leaders is an indication that parliamentary democracy has become redundant in Meghalaya. People no longer consider the adage Of, For and By the People as the panacea for democratic governance. Political credibility is at rock bottom. The way ahead is dark and foggy.

Meghalaya was conceived because of an assumption that our own elected tribal leaders would give the indigenous people a better deal than our erstwhile Assamese rulers. We went about it with the famous 'No Hill State No Rest' slogan which after 45 years, in the final analysis, was an emotional war cry that simply heightened our sense of tribal unity but bequeathed precious little else. Emotional politics caused us and our leaders to lose sight of the fact that power is a means and not an end in itself. Statehood found us totally devoid on what to do next; ignorant of our own borders; short of foresight; badly in need of visionary leadership. Sadly this continues till today. Our politicians love to talk development but few have the gumption for it. Totally dependent on central assistance for survival, our elected leaders viewed governance simply as another word for distributing money and that is how they continue to approach the electorate

correctly? Do you think, they would be able to commit everything to memory? Then where is the joy of learning? Furthermore, when one remains absent for a day or two which is very likely, children are made to stay back after school hours and pounded with those missing lessons. How does one expect a child with tears in her eyes to comprehend and learn when almost all students have left school to be with their loved ones? This creates a fear psychosis in the young innocent minds. Aren't these highly qualified teachers capable of imparting proper education with lesser homework, project work? Or are they employed just to finish their syllabus on time and take home a big fat salary. Please bring some changes and understand the individual needs of each child because all children are not born geniuses.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request.

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Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request.

Cyber crime on the rise

Editor,
This refers to your report, "State's cyber cell in sleep mode with untrained

and all elections. In the process Abraham Lincoln's famous Gettysburg address has been made to stand on its head. In Meghalaya democracy is now defined as "For the Power (to grab power) by hook or by crook). Of the Party (party is crucial for promoting personal interests) and Buy the People (people are cheap purchasable commodities. No need for vision, or planning. Give them money and be done with it)." That's Meghalaya's political ethics. We continue to survive by God's mercy and nothing else!

No wonder therefore that all of us are looking at the approaching 2018 Assembly elections with such trepidation. Change for the better is yet to make an appearance. People see no light at the end of the tunnel irrespective of who comes to power. No doubt Meghalaya is spoilt for choice as far as number of political parties and politicians are concerned. Choice however is severely limited as far as parties or individuals with political ethics are concerned. Everyone appears to be a chip of the same block irrespective of the party symbol. Indications are that the Congress will come out as the largest single party but Congress political ethos and their single minded dependence on money alone to bring them back to power is no assurance of better things to come. Their preference for winnable candidates will continue. (a favourite turn of phrase of the MPCC President and if you think the bloke is referring to ability or charisma, you better think again). The Congress will continue to view elections as a pure sell and buy economic exercise. Only money bags need apply for tickets. This totally debunks public service as the goal of politics and simply pushes corruption to the forefront of governance. The motto seems to be "Invest to win then grab power for self aggrandisement." It will simply be a replay of past non governance. Is public disillusionment therefore to be wondered at?

The Regional Parties are no better despite their 'holier than thou stance.' Fact of the matter is they are as clueless, as the next person, as to what to do if they ever came to power. The regional ideology no

longer sells and the fact that they are usually regarded as B teams of the National Party has hardly helped matters. As of today all regional parties seem to be driven by the individual personal agenda and ambitions of their top brass, the most inhibiting factor for the growth and development of the party. The old guard refuses to make way for young blood and fresh ideas. Stagnation is the result. Then the refusal of the regional parties to come together for a pre-poll alliance simply enforces the view that everyone thinks he/she is CM material and no one is prepared to sacrifice this potential (however bogus it maybe) through any premature tie-up. That everyone is a leader is the biggest tragedy of regionalism. In a hung Assembly situation, post poll bargaining is preferable to any pre poll agreement. The possibility of back door entry, to the CMs chair, then has more than distinct possibilities. Hope reigns supreme for CM-ship by default. It has happened before so why not again. Why not indeed!

There are two new entrants into the 2018 political arena. One is the BJP and the other the NPP. As far as the BJP is concerned, the goings-on within the state unit of this entity, if one is to believe the media and the press, hardly gives any assurance of its ability to provide the leadership nor the governance expected. The state unit walks in with the baggage of its parent body. The one food habit, one faith, one ideology, one language, one identity, one culture for all, is something that will require real skilful marketing. The party declaration to contest all 60 constituencies is to be admired but to accompany this with a threat to lodge FIRs against anyone who dares criticise the party, was simply astounding. For any party, on the eve of an election year, to threaten the electorate with such drastic retribution, is simply unheard of. Innovative perhaps; but unheard of all the same. One has heard of shock treatment but it's the first time it's ever being applied in electoral politics. Must be some new fanged strategy to win hearts and minds but it takes the cake, let me tell you. Important to remember that - impulsive outbursts can often

produce bovine like reactions where one can chew the cud of regret at one's own leisure.

Then there is the NPP, a party which has captured the interest of the Meghalaya electorate. In the Garo Hills, it is expected to give the Congress more than a run for its money (no pun intended). And here is where the catch lies. Eye brows are being raised as to where is the presence of the party in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills? Why this interest of keeping it strictly as a Garo party? Don't the other major Meghalayan tribes flicker on the NPP radar screen? Conrad and James, the two young dynamic Sangma brothers at the helm of NPP affairs are well known and respected with a huge non-Garo fan club outside Garo Hills. The refusal of the party to expand beyond Garo Hills makes no sense. It simply enforces public suspicions that politicians are there for their own selfish interests and nowhere for the good of the common man. The prospects of positive change in 2018 recede even further.

Time for us the people to force our politicians to flag people's concerns in their manifestoes. First is the lack of vision on education. Meghalaya needs an education policy where students and their welfare remain the focal point. All other aspects, teacher benefits; political vote banks, ministerial chairs etc., remain secondary to the focal point. Meghalaya also needs a transparent policy on how its scarce fiscal resources are to be managed. A non transparent; non accountable; non productive political extravagance like the MLA scheme is anti people. It should be immediately done away with. The scheme is a waste of public money; it serves no purpose except to encourage corruption. The funds squandered could have been better used to build our woefully deficient infrastructure. Meghalaya also needs a dynamic leadership that encourages and promotes leaders and leadership qualities. A leadership that simply fosters more followers is an inward looking selfish leadership, the last thing Meghalaya wants in 2018.

UDAN- ambition to the Aam Aadmi's flying dreams

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

The 1990s saw the opening up of the economy. India was liberalised and with it Indians began to dream of flying. With the opening up of the aviation sector new players entered the market and upper middle class Indians began to fulfil their dreams of travelling in an aircraft. While it did open up flying to some, yet the steep prices ensured that flying still remained a distant dream to many. This was broken for the first time when the first low cost no frills carrier Air Deccan was launched in early 2000s. Air Deccan revolutionised the market with low cost tickets and sought to cover their costs with innovative marketing. However sound financial principles evaded the carrier and finally it had to wind up its operations. Since then however flying

annually. 50% of the seats will be offered in subsidy through the scheme which will be served on a first come first serve basis.

The prime thrust of the scheme is to reach underserved and unserved airports of the country. The plan includes pulling out a number of airports back from wilderness and bringing them on track. In a way it is also a scheme of first of its kind when government activity is hoped to stimulate private entrepreneurship in the long run. The scheme comes at a crucial time when a number of regional airlines have closed down their operations in the past decade. There is a hope that UDAN will revive these airlines or create new ones in the process once the private sector recognises

The prices have been capped not only for flights but helicopters as well. Prices have been kept at a lower rate so that people are tempted to choose air travel over railway and roads. Seen in the context of a deliberate and multimodal transport policy that is being developed UDAN makes sense. The offshoots of benefits of UDAN may not limit itself to giving a chance for all to fly alone. If it is successful then it may also be able to bring relief to the creaking railway infrastructure which would in turn see development and upgradation.

costs have come down and more Indians are travelling via aircrafts than ever before. A large number of airports are becoming international airports while existing airports like Delhi airport have become bigger and better.

And yet the question of regional connectivity has continued to haunt lawmakers and aircraft official alike. The air travel pattern in India revolves around a few major sectors and this is where airlines focus on. Regional connectivity is almost non-existent and if it does exist is erratic and costly. All that is poised to change with the launch of UDAN with a maiden flight between Shimla and Delhi. With UDAN or 'Ude Deshka Aam Naagrik' (enabling the common man to fly), as the new programme is called, capping the airfare for a one-hour journey on a fixed wing aircraft at Rs2,500, another glass ceiling in air travel has just shattered. What takes roughly 10 hours of road travel can now be covered in an hour and is affordable too; this would contextualise connectivity in a different environment.

In the case of UDAN-1 (the second phase of auctions are expected to be rolled out soon), it brings the country's Tier-II and Tier-III towns on the country's air map. Of the 70 airports served in the first phase of UDAN, 31 are currently unserved. One can be sure that this would not have been possible without a host of concessions which would have been shared between the Union government, state government and the airports. However the scheme has been launched in such a manner that the private sector does see potential and newer market in it which is why it has set an active interest. The government estimates UDAN-1 to cost the exchequer Rs 200 crores

the market in regional travel. The UDAN scheme entails the provision of proportionate pricing for routes of different stage lengths/flight duration. The government aims to achieve the affordable pricing through a) a financial stimulus in the form of concessions from Central and State governments and airport operators and (2) a Viability-Gap Funding to the interested airlines to kick-off operations from such airports so that the passenger fares are kept affordable, according to a PIB release.

The 70 airports to be connected in under the UDAN scheme include 27 currently served airports, 12 currently under-served airports and 31 currently unserved airports. Also, 17 out of the 70 airports are in the North, 12 in East, 6 in North-East region, 11 in South and 24 in the West. Hence UDAN seeks to cover the length and the breadth of the country.

The prices have been capped not only for flights but helicopters as well. Prices have been kept at a lower rate so that people are tempted to choose air travel over railway and roads. Seen in the context of a deliberate and multimodal transport policy that is being developed UDAN makes sense. The offshoots of benefits of UDAN may not limit itself to giving a chance for all to fly alone. If it is successful then it may also be able to bring relief to the creaking railway infrastructure which would in turn see development and upgradation. Air travel if availed by a significant part of the population can play a role in reducing pollution as well. Thus seen in totality UDAN seeks to be a game-changer which could very well redefine the way Indians fly.

(Views expressed by the author are personal)

Where are the free medicines?

Editor,
Civil Hospital is a Government Hospital which provides free check-up, and free medicines to the poor people. Government set up this hospital in Shillong to serve the lower income groups from all over Meghalaya but especially the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. I am a patient who depends on this hospital and doctors advised me to come for check-up once a month. Every time I go to this hospital for check-up and after that the doctor writes the names of medicines in the card (paper) and tells me to get the medicines from the pharmacy but every time I show the card to the pharmacists I am given only one kind of medicine whereas the others such as Encorate 300 mg which cost Rs 74 per strip, has to be bought from outside the hospital. I am a poor person so how do I buy this medicine as I need about six strips a month which means an expenditure of Rs 440 per month.

I feel sad and angry with the Government which does not have the spirit of social service but whose ministers and health officials are engaged in looting the right of the poor people, in

connivance with drugs suppliers. Need we look further? Just see how wealthy the drug contractors are and how much of expired medicines are dumped in Meghalaya. Who is making all the money?

Yours etc.,
Nistarbok
Kharthangmaw
Krang

Burdened with homework!

Editor,
Apropos the news item 'On Pine Mount School,' (ST April 13, 2017), I would also like to highlight some facts which relate not only to the heavy school bags but also massive homework given by teachers of different subjects in a single day. As a mother of two school going children, I find it hard to deal with this. On reaching home from office, like every working woman I first have to ensure that the children finish their homework, study and go to bed early.

But the trend of multiple homework from various subjects, are taking their toll on these young minds. Aren't they burdened and confused? What do we expect of a young child, when every letter/word has to be spelled to pronounce

correctly? Do you think, they would be able to commit everything to memory? Then where is the joy of learning? Furthermore, when one remains absent for a day or two which is very likely, children are made to stay back after school hours and pounded with those missing lessons. How does one expect a child with tears in her eyes to comprehend and learn when almost all students have left school to be with their loved ones? This creates a fear psychosis in the young innocent minds. Aren't these highly qualified teachers capable of imparting proper education with lesser homework, project work? Or are they employed just to finish their syllabus on time and take home a big fat salary. Please bring some changes and understand the individual needs of each child because all children are not born geniuses.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request.

Cyber crime on the rise

Editor,
This refers to your report, "State's cyber cell in sleep mode with untrained

officers" (ST-May 1, 2017). It is observed that the internet world is ever-evolving and fraudsters continuously use newer ways to commit frauds. Earlier when internet banking was started, we thought that user name and password was enough security but then additional security measures were developed, but that too is now proving futile. The vulnerability of credit and debit cards and net banking has made it easy for criminals who are just a click away from easy money. Thus there is a need for widespread customer awareness about risks and threats of giving out confidential login information for internet banking. With the right permissions, hackers have succeeded in changing daily ATM cash limits and create fraudulent credit cards with new PINs for third parties to access accounts. It is rightly said that, "Prevention is better than cure," so it is always better to take certain precautions while operating the internet by way of following good practices in order to minimize the security risks of increasing Cyber crimes in banks.

No doubt, it is near impossible to eliminate

Cyber Crimes in total but it is quite possible to check them. Legislation cannot totally succeed in eliminating crime but we must be aware of our rights and duties i.e. to report the crime as a collective duty towards the society and making the application of laws more stringent to check cyber crime.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad - 15

Bees under threat

Editor
Bees and other insect pollinators constitute an important natural tool for efficiently transferring pollen grains from anther to stigma of flowers in case of a large number of important commercial crops and forest tree species around the globe. Unfortunately, the native bee populations across the globe are showing signs of alarming decline over the past two decades due to over application of pesticides in our agricultural fields, diseases, ecological stress, lack of quality bee habitats, foraging areas and nutritional deficiency to mention a few. It is important to look into bee conservation with utmost care and urgency as this

could have significant negative impacts for future global crop production, ornamental and horticultural species, forest trees and orchard species and apiculture. It is important to develop quality Bee habitats or Bee sanctuaries at appropriate places around crop production areas, hard to reach areas of farms, weedy unused patches, wetland areas, along irrigation canals, unused and undisturbed parts of farm areas, reclaimed areas, city and municipality parks and gardens, private and public lawns, kitchen gardens, boulevards, highways and rural secondary highway areas. Pollinator Mix or Bee Mix can be an important constituent for establishing such Bee sanctuaries using mix of annual/perennial wild flower/native flower and grass mix or pollinator friendly annual/perennial forage mix.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge, Canada

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

"The pursuit of perfection, then, is the pursuit of sweetness and light."

--- Matthew Arnold

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MAY 3, 2017

Season of inaugurations!

THE Chief Minister of Meghalaya and the sitting MLAs are on an inauguration spree. For the Chief Minister, if it's not a foundation stone for a building then it's a sub-division or some such thing. The question that needs to be asked is what are the time lines for the completion of those buildings? Let's take a look at the few pending projects. At the top of the list is the Crowborough Hotel Project first constructed by the Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation and later leased out to a private party. No questions are asked in the Assembly on this issue and therefore no answers are received. Hence the public is kept wondering when this 30-year project will be completed. Is it still good for occupation or is it now fit to be demolished? In fact a good, independent architect should be asked to evaluate the longevity of the building and to tell us exactly what the present status of the building is. We recall that the operators of local hotels who have the credibility, the finance and the know-how on hotel management had bid for this project but there was political pressure then to give it to a person with political clout but who knows zilch about the hotel business. Now, the second hotel - with a 5-star tag built on Government land by a private party on private-public partnership mode, in collaboration with noted hoteliers JW Marriot, has also run into financial mess.

The moral here is that Government should (a) stop doing business (b) private-public partnerships must be legally binding on both parties. The private party cannot make the Government liable for its inability to manage its finances. The other long-pending project is the State Assembly building, tender for the design of which were called only recently. The old Assembly building was gutted in January 2001. This is now the 17th year but not much headway has been made. Hence merely inaugurating something is not enough; completing it is more important. Let's not forget that several crores of public money has been spent on Crowborough and other half-finished projects. Meghalaya's cardinal sin is in the time and cost overruns involved in almost all projects. Who is to be held accountable for such delays if not the Government?

LOOKING BACK

April 11, 1989

Khongwir Deprecates land acquisition move

Leader of the Opposition in Meghalaya Mr S.D. Khongwir has deprecated the move by the State Govt to acquire land for some central Govt establishments saying that such "alienation of land" would "pose a threat to the peaceful existence of the tribal people themselves".

In a statement issued here on Wednesday, Mr Khongwir said "if the tribals have to part away with their lands bit by bit and acre by acre their very existence would eventually be in jeopardy."

He, therefore, called upon the state Govt to "restrain itself in matters of acquisition of lands and to always take the local people and leaders into confidence before embarking upon any proposal for acquisition."

The statement came in the wake of reported move to acquire land at Umpling-Nongrah in East Khasi Hills, Mukhla in Jaintia Hills (for BSF) and near Umroi in East Khasi Hills (for ICAR)

Meanwhile, a group of volunteers of Jaintia Youth Organisation held a day long hunger strike in front of the State Central Library on Tuesday as a mark of protest against the move for acquisition of land for BSF camp at Mukhla. Some KSU and HSYO volunteers also joined the hunger strike as a

mark of solidarity.

DIC Booklets on viable industries released

Two booklets pertaining to the techno-economic survey for identification of viable industries in Meghalaya and a practical approach to setting up of small scale village and cottage industries published by the District Industries Centre (DIC) were released by the Meghalaya Special Secretary, Industries, Mr Dilip Singh at the inaugural function of the 9th District Industries Exhibition in Shillong on Wednesday.

Mr. Dilip Singh, while emphasizing the vast potential of handicrafts in the state said that they are yet to be improved and modernized since this sector plays an important role in providing subsidiary income.

The Secretary Industries Mr Didar Singh, in his presidential address stressed the need for improvement in the quality of handicraft items which he said, could be achieved through proper guidance, training and other support.

Others who spoke on the occasion include the General Manager of DIC Mr. S.B. Gurung the Joint Director, Industries, Mr A.V. Rangad and the Manager, Circle, DIC, Mr Edward W. Shadap.

Naxals: Wake Up Call Will Modi walk his talk?

By Poonam I Kaushish

Sitting ducks is what would define how a 99-strong CRPF troops were easy prey for 300 Maoists in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district last week resulting in 25 jawans being massacred. This is the second deadly attack in less than two months which left 12 dead and the third in seven years! Underscoring, tall talk of containing internal terrorism is simply banal and a hog wash!

Yet, post assault, things ran par on course. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh called an emergency meeting of top security officials, asserting, "This cold blooded murder showed the Naxals' frustration over the success of our crackdown operations in the recent past." Sic. Tweeted Prime Minister Modi, "Cowardly and deplorable. The sacrifice of the martyrs will not go in vain, we have taken the attack as a challenge and will enforce the State's writ."

Really? Then why hasn't accountability been fixed? And heads not rolled? Will the State admit it has blood on its hands? Specially, after the DGP CRPF accused the Chhattisgarh Government for being slack in constructing the road leading to the Maoists' den. Shockingly, the road, where the attack took place has been in the making for years.

More scandalous is the fact that security personnel have been crying hoarse for new technology which shortens construction time of one km road to just two days. Alas, this proposal too has been gathering dust for three years with the State Administration. Alongside, policemen acknowledge they were soft targets due to the route's predictability for the road construction site.

Undeniably, the Naxalite menace continues to tear asunder with lethal precision the Indian State. Equally, it showcases the lack of political will, utter confusion and exposes the Central and State Government's soft underbelly in their anti-Naxal armour, slack coordination and no cohesion between the forces on the ground.

Moreover, the attack highlighted lack of unified strategy and actionable

intelligence which failed to realize that knee-jerk operations will not yield results, instead it would put security forces at risk. Alongside, the Centre's much-hyped policy on tackling Red terror is caught in a time warp. One-step-forward-two-steps-backwards! Asserted a senior police officer, "There is a lot of vacillation and ad hocism, whereby counter-Naxal strategy and attacks have been outsourced to the Central security forces." Consequently, with the Central forces playing the role of a supporter and not a lead force to the State, the fight against Maoists is manifest in massive confusion and operational weakness with both accusing each other of failure.

Questionably, how does the Centre intend to fight the war? Does it know the DNA of Naxalites? What fuels their movement? Is there an iron-tight anti-Naxal policy in place followed by a realistic and accurate assessment of the challenge? Are the Reds driven purely by the "robbing Peter to pay Paul" syndrome? Can an honorable cause and an eventual utopian outcome justify violent means? Is violence consistent with the norms of democracy?

Tragically, the Government is insensible of how it should tackle the growing menace. At last count Maoists had spread their poisonous tentacles in 20 States and 223 districts (7 States have already slipped beyond State control). Worse, they have assumed alarming proportions, ratcheting up the stakes at a potent level to destroy democracy and replace it with anarchy.

Undoubtedly, both the Centre and State need to get their act together, take the bull by the horns and realize that anti-Naxal operations are a chronic terrifying black hole. For starters, the Centre must rid itself of finding political and bureaucratic solutions instead of getting security and intelligence experts to strategize tactical requirements to contain this.

Intelligence sources assert the Maoist game plan is to occupy the

countryside, surround cities until they can force regime change. Simultaneously, they want to transmute the social structure through the barrel of the gun. Towards that end, they are getting moral & material support from Nepal, China, and Pakistan's ISI, Lashkar-e-Tayiba, HUL and other Islamic terror outfits. Their ambition: Have a 'red corridor' from Pashupati to Tirupati.

Sadly, for a year, the Government has talked ad nauseum about its 'anti-Naxal strategy' couched in jingoistic jargon of "challenge, clear, development," and using grand language like tackling terror "on the political, security and development fronts in a holistic manner". The state has failed to realize that impressive catchphrases don't add up to well-thought-out strategies. Instead they only allude to a mumble-jumble of intentions and wishful thinking at best and complete catatonia at worst.

Shamefully, New Delhi is fighting this violent movement with not even one tenth of the total security forces required to contain it. Worse, more than 30% of the Centre's outlay towards modernization of the police in the Red corridor hasn't been released. Of the amount released only some has been used.

Frankly, our war against Naxalism is slowly turning out to be a one-sided bloody affair, as Maoists dominate a battlefield of dispirited and ill-prepared security forces with no credible intelligence flow. The level of their sophistication in inflicting large-scale casualties on civilians and security personnel with minimum damage to themselves exposes their superiority.

In addition, the tribals' feel that if security forces could be killed where do they go? So willy-nilly they start obeying the so-called diktats of the Naxalites. This gives impetus to other groups to attack elsewhere. True, the Adivasis are a disadvantaged lot. Chhattisgarh's Bastar which lies in the heart of Maoist territory ranks as one of the poorest districts in the country sans basic amenities, roads, no medical facilities and means of

income almost non-existent. Development is only a word parroted by the polity at election time.

However, at the same time beyond the Adivasis' abject poverty is a skillfully orchestrated charade that serves the interests and ulterior motives of the Red brigade. Recall, prior to the State's anti-Naxal operations and Salwa Judam in 2005, the Reds were busy hampering development and creating a fear psychosis. Bluntly, the Maoists facade of social movement hides a sinister design: usurpation of political power.

What next? First, New Delhi must clearly define and acquire resources to contain if not annihilate the enemy. There should be planned deployment of time-bound resources imposed by the conflict. The Government needs to remember that if there is a disconnect between its objectives, tactics, resources and ground conditions, all stratagems and measures are rendered redundant.

Two, the State must lay calculated emphasis on intelligence-led targeted operations seeking out the leadership, rather than dissipating the forces on chasing cadres, seize and hold the initiative that it has long relinquished, instead of concentrating on territory, given that the Maoists follow the 'fish in water' policy: which renders the guerrilla soldiers indistinguishable from common citizens.

Three, there must be a clear determination to contain the Naxalites on their peripheries, to engineer their expulsion from areas in which their influence is nascent, and ensure that they are not able to expand into new areas. As also deal with distortions in the social system on a war footing to alleviate poverty, ensure speedy development and enforce law and order strictly.

Time to send a clear message that senseless violence wouldn't be tolerated. Remember, nations live or die by the way they respond to a challenge. Do our leaders have the stomach? The ball is in NaMo's court. Can he walk his talk? ---- INFA

happens in some places, to get his expert opinion. Who knows very soon some TV channels might send a free air ticket with security to Hafeez Mohd Saeed, co-founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba, or take him through the hotline, to lash out at India as to how the terrorists are heartlessly shot down by the Indian army! Have we not heard enough from the media that the "innocent" stone-pelters in Jammu and Kashmir have been harassed round-the-clock by Indian army?

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal
Shillong-2

Let's remember real heroes

Editor,
During the Champaran Satyagraha movement, 100 years ago, a cook, Batakh Mian Ansari had divulged the conspiracy by forbidding Mahatma Gandhi to drink poison-laced milk. He was made to pay the price for disobeying W. S. Erwin's order. He was tortured and was fired from his job. His home was razed to the ground and his land was confiscated. India should honour such great souls and help their heirs for silently contributing to India's freedom struggle at the cost of everything.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Of religion and politics

By Ananya Guha

A lot has been discussed of late on religion and politics in the columns of this newspaper. While some contend that politics is a backburner for religion others argue that the mix is inevitable in a country like India. Others would say that the cow issue has nothing to do with religion, politics or no politics. Why only protect one minority community ask some, what about others? Hindus have been tolerant for a long time exclaim others, enough is enough. Placating minorities for the inexorable vote bank is of course the common argument. Placating everyone for the vote bank including the majority is conveniently forgotten.

This is totally misconceived and misconstrued. It is simply because of the political base that rules the roost. So history is tied up into knots and views of social and historical thinkers radically debunked. So called secularists are a target, the vocabulary domain has of

personal level? Can you single them out? Or do you need to? But you need to single out the Muslims. You are obfuscating the Muslim factors with: immigrants, cow consumption, Jammu and Kashmir -deliberately to whip sentiments; to ignore diversity in the country and of course to show off strength.

What if Hindus eat beef at a personal level? Can you single them out? Or do you need to? But you need to single out the Muslims. You are obfuscating the Muslim factors with: immigrants, cow consumption, Jammu and Kashmir -deliberately to whip sentiments; to ignore diversity in the country and of course to show off strength.

The Hindu religion has been described as all embracing. Very true indeed! That is why the people of India have been able to absorb multiple religions and peoples. We should certainly be proud of this. But we should not forget in excitable moments of applying blinkers to history, that it is exactly this process of absorption that has awakened a diverse consciousness in the country, cow or no cow. Mohammed Aklaq's murder was very coordinated and planned. You can't eat beef. The cow is sacred. She is Mother. Of course, you are entitled to your apotheosis. But you are not entitled to comment on others' food habits and make perky comments on that. We are trying to be better Hindus in order to ingratiate the Gods that be.

That is why I suppose the majority is so supercilious and damn caring today. There is a resurgence of a purist Hindu traditions today. Why was this not there earlier?

The Hindu religion has been described as all embracing. Very true indeed! That is why the people of India have been able to absorb multiple religions and peoples. We should certainly be proud of this. But we should not forget in excitable moments of applying blinkers to history, that it is exactly this process of absorption that has awakened a diverse consciousness in the country, cow or no cow. Mohammed Aklaq's murder was very coordinated and planned. You can't eat beef. The cow is sacred. She is Mother. Of course, you are entitled to your apotheosis. But you are not entitled to comment on others' food habits and make perky comments on that. We are trying to be better Hindus in order to ingratiate the Gods that be.

If we are not careful as a nation, historical backlash could be an answer in the future. A historical backlash can take place either due to reactionary forces or due to a political and mass uprising. It would be inane and simply fatuous to tell the people of India that theirs is not a culturally diverse country. They know this at their level, whoever they prefer to vote for. Certainly we have an ancient collective wisdom in the country. We can glorify it. But we must also glorify the Sufis, the efflorescence of cultures which have led to the shaping of languages such as Urdu.

We must revitalize the Bauls; stand up against any form of caste tyranny and look towards an educated and healthy India, cow or no cow, milk or no milk. Simply baiting minority groups could be disastrous and catastrophic. Let us respect Indians for what they are worth, what they have contributed to the conglomerate of a nation and not point unhealthy fingers at dietary habits.

In this manner everything will fall into a pattern of unity, not disembodied reality, which in turn can only cause divisiveness and fragmentation.

"This strange disease of modern life, with its sick hurry, its divided aims."

--- Matthew Arnold

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2017

Atrocities again

A Pakistani Army Border Action Team (BAT) beheaded the Indian soldiers near the Line of Control (LOC). This has naturally further exacerbated relations between India and Pakistan. The atrocity occurred under heavy shelling by Pak troops and within 24 hours of Pakistani General Qamar Bajwa's visit to the LOC. The incident has belied hopes of a crackdown on anti-India terror. No doubt the Army is the controlling force in Pakistan. Unless the army is pro-peace, bilateral talks with the Pakistani civilian government will be abortive. The civilian government and the army in Pakistan are at odds with each other over some media leakage. That makes it unlikely that Islamabad and Rawalpindi will speak with the same voice in talks with India.

India needs to hammer out a multi-pronged strategy in the circumstances. The Indian Army should be allowed to retaliate against every hostile action by Pakistan. Measures should be taken to deter Pakistani BAT operations and cross-border terrorism. Attack on Indian Army Personnel in Jammu & Kashmir should be dealt with firmly. It is good that the Indian Army has now escalated firing on Pakistan army bunkers. Security of Indian military installations should be adequately tightened up. India has rightly talked of revenge against the recent barbaric act. Pakistan has naturally asked for proof of the mutilation. The Hizbul Mujahideen has blamed CRPF for the death of two bank guards. The atmosphere is tense. Nevertheless, India should press on with diplomatic endeavours to facilitate talks led by a full-time Defence Minister.

LOOKING BACK

April 11, 1989

IOC to set up LPG bottling plant in Silchar

The Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) is planning to install one more LPG bottling plant at Silchar to meet the increasing demand for cooking gas in the North Eastern sector.

The plant, to be commissioned in two years, will produce an additional 10,000 tonnes of bottled LPG per annum. Mr T.P. Raghavan, IOC's Executive Director for the eastern region told reporters here last night.

The present LPG bottling capacity in three plants, located at Duliayan, Noonmati and Bongaigaon, in the North East is 3,900 tonnes per month, according to Mr Raghavan.

Apart from the Silchar plant, IOC also started work on installing a semi-automatic carousel filling unit at the Bongaigaon plant which would increase its bottling capacity from the existing 1,150 metric tonnes to 1,800 tonnes.

Mr Raghavan said that production and supply of LPG from the Bongaigaon botting plant disrupted since July last year owing to political disturbances in the Kokrajhar District

NSF Memorandum to Election Commission

The Naga Students Federation has urged upon the Election Commission to delete the names of the outsiders who have been enrolled as voters after 1963 from the electoral rolls in a bid to protect the Naga identity of the political set up in the state.

Expressing grave concern over the alarming growth rate of the non-Naga population vis-à-vis the number of the voters in Nagaland, the NSF stated that the abnormal rise in population and voters were due to heavy influx of non-Nagas and also foreigners in the guise of visitors and tourists who

illegally continue their stay and ultimately manage to enroll themselves in the electoral rolls.

The NSF opined that this has caused a grave threat to the basic rights and interests of bonafide citizens residing in the state.

According to the NSF, the situation has greatly upset social, economic, moral, cultural and political life of the Nagas jeopardizing their very existence and identity. The NSF observed that in spite of the Inner Line Regulation operating in the state, there were non-Nagas engaged in various avocations every where in the state.

The NSF has also demanded introduction of photo identity cards for all bonafide voters in the state. (EPS)

Risk of long TV viewing

Television viewers should open windows after viewing to minimize the risk of breathing in poisonous fumes given off by TV sets, a West German scientist has warned. Tests in this northern port showed that after several hours of running television sets and other visual display screens emitted a fireproofing agent known as brominated dibenzofuran.

The gas is allied to the dioxin family of chemicals and suspected of causing cancer, city environment department specialist Fritz Vahrenholt said yesterday. He added there was no cause for panic. The amount of the gas measured in a room where a television had been switched on continually for three days equal to that found at a busy road intersection, said Vahrenholt. He advised people to open the windows after watching television for several hours, especially if they were using a newly bought set for the first time.

Withering voices of minorities in Parliament

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

In a democratic country like India, the phenomenal rise by a single political party having special attachment to a particular group and ideology will certainly dominate the entire process of making law making and governance. Coupled with the marginalization of other regional parties including national secular parties, there seems to be a disproportionate representation from among the minority groups in the temple of democracy as described by Mr. Modi, in the Indian Parliament after being unanimously elected leader of BJP Parliamentary Party.

Minorities here include all the marginalized groups, the rural folks, the illiterates, the children, etc. The situation is further endangered by the absence of quality representatives either in parliament or state legislatures who can vociferously stir the debate on any matters or motions brought before the House that might directly or indirectly affect the minority communities in the country. Whereas, in the present state of affairs where BJP is dominating the political arena, there is a general perception and fear from among the non-Hindu sections that BJP may impose Hindutva philosophy in the entire country. In this situation, the challenge to such proposition is very weak and the disadvantages and repercussions will be on those regions or states with lesser numbers of representatives in the parliament. But we should have faith in the constitution of the country and in the temple of democracy. And I strongly believe that the principle and spirit of debate within the House is still the essence for the passage of any law or directives.

But to conclude that BJP's success is solely because of its pro-Hindu strategy is completely wrong and inappropriate. The BJP leadership under Narendra Modi have done their homework very well and know their opponents and the people in general

like the back of their hands. Further they have good speakers and apologists who can disseminate their points clearly to the masses and against their opponent. The failure with other political parties is that they are too dependent on the legacy wave of their founders along with the confused leadership because of so many individuals within the party who are merely position and status-minded. They cannot speak the concept and language of the general public and they failed to delve on matters that dearly affected the common citizens who constitute a major chunk of the electoral mandate. For instance, there may be good parliamentarians who may get awards or recognitions, whereas some of them contributed nothing to the process of making law that will also safeguard the interests of the minority groups.

Minority voices should be echoed regularly in Parliament. Only then will something happen. But when an MP writes to the Prime Minister for any special consideration what does it mean? This reflects a situation that an elected member has exhausted all strategies and wisdom that should be followed to communicate inside the House in order to obtain satisfactory and result-oriented answers. But submitting petitions outside the House is like equating himself to an outsider and made him redundant inside the House as elected member. By common sense, the Prime Minister or Chief Minister is statutory responsible for the development of the entire country or state. Therefore, any action or inaction by this Constitutional head is to be held accountable in the House and subjected to questions and queries from any member. By writing letters to the Prime Minister like any common citizen, it only makes the PMO (Prime Minister Office) officials busy in filing letters and documents. On one hand it is another trick to fool the

electorate who are presumably ignorant. With due respect to our MP, Vincent Pala, a crore-pati who can even hire an Oxford or Cambridge University to draft a good letter with powerful contents to catch the Prime Minister unawares, he should have instead generated a more pro-active debate and display of concern inside the House. In this way he will do justice to the people and to the role that has been entrusted to him.

On the contrary, if there is anything that will make the Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi to consider some development for North Eastern States, it will be strictly on the basis of his Party's strategy and goal to capture the region. Nevertheless, Pala's letter will serve as an eye opener for the PM to prioritise development in BJP's ruled states only i.e. Assam and Manipur. The Parliament and other legislative bodies are established in a democracy in order to activate a deliberative process of making law and policies. Shillong has elected a representative belonging to a national party with the fervent hope that the representative will exert some influence through his Party and draw the attention of the Government towards the plight of the region and state which is lagging behind in many areas. But unfortunately, the Congress party too has fallen from the grace and is itself fighting for survival. Any attempt by a Congress member today to push any agenda will yield no substantial results and in this case an Independent member would be better off because his privileges of being Independent is still better recognized if one takes seriously the definition of the Prime Minister about Parliament or the House of representatives.

As it appears, the Congress leadership will not entertain suggestions, views and resolution for any particular section or community because their

primary focus as of now is not on development but on rejuvenating the Party. Therefore, when there is no one else to defend and fight for our state and region, we should blame ourselves because in the first place we have failed to differentiate who is a nation builder and who is not before voting for that person. A nation builder is a person who builds his house from scratch and not the one who purchases a readymade one. The plight of our state Meghalaya is uncertain; it will continue to be ignored and neglected. This is mainly because in the Parliament we do not have apologists and at the State level our political leaders are divided on many grounds and are individualistic in nature.

BJP has a long term mission to sustain and retain itself in the political dominion and to replace the Congress which has dominated for so many decades. To achieve that it is important for the Party to capture every single state to the extent that there is very little opposition against it. When that situation happens, perhaps democracy too will be interpreted strictly from their philosophy and political ideology. Therefore, there is a need to have representatives who are intellectually capable to tackle these strategic moves. The world is becoming more and more dependent on technology and no one can escape from its purview. Whereas in our situation, our elected representatives are making the people dependent on them rather than making the people self-reliant on matters that concern their lives and livelihoods. How far can the leaders help and protect their constituents materially or monetarily if not by the appropriate system of law and standardized policy or projects? The system of patronage democracy has got to end. Only then can Meghalaya move forward! But will that ever be allowed to happen?

TO THE EDITOR

Is this the beginning of religious oppression?

Editor,

The sacrilegious act of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in demolishing the cross in West Bandra, has come as a shock to the Christian citizens of this country. The cross that had been there for over half a century, a cherished religious symbol of both the Christians and non-Christians of the locality, was standing on private property and not even on a public space. The sacrilegious act of mowing it down with a JCB is the greatest insult to Christians in India. It is a contemplated vicious act of an authority that is highly polarized on religion. If the BMC had just respectfully displaced the cross to another location, that would not have hurt the sentiments of the people. But the fact that it had been unceremoniously demolished is an unpardonable crime. I do not think the Court (if it had acted with a true sense of justice) would have permitted such a sacrilege. This is a crime not only against a minority but against religion itself. When the cross which is the most important religious symbol of Christians is desecrated publicly, it affects the sentiments not only of the people of West Bandra, but of all Christians across the world. For this reason, whoever has been

responsible for such a crime should be brought to book immediately. As a member of the Catholic Church of North-east India, I, for my part, strongly condemn such an act of desecration and I hope that more similar voices will come forward to do the same.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie SDB
Via email

Of unnecessary traffic diversions

Editor,

I share the concern of Anjan Kumar Das, who pointed to the diversion of traffic exiting from MUDA Parking lot towards Jail Road before driving back to Police Bazar. I wish to draw the attention of the Traffic Police to another such diversion at Rhino junction. Vehicles approaching the junction from Kenches Trace and Last Bus Stop are made to take a complete circle from Anjalee Petrol Pump and proceed towards Civil Hospital. Now what makes this affair tedious is when there is a massive traffic jam right from Rhino junction all the way to Military Hospital and Mawlong Hat. Vehicles that are not bound for Military Hospital or Mawlong Hat are also unnecessarily stranded in that traffic jam. I wonder why these vehicles are not allowed to take a right turn from the Rhino junction itself.

While diversions could have multiple purposes, at least two of them are (a) to divert vehicles towards a particular destination and (b) to simply ease traffic congestion. While the first is defeated the second does

not seem to help much as many vehicles are converging at the same place and we are still stuck in traffic jams.

Today, traffic jams have become a way of life for Shillongites and I am also conscious of the fact that it is challenging for the Traffic personnel to manage traffic especially during school hours. Their efforts are commendable. However, it becomes an even greater challenge for us common people as we are not allowed to ignore the NO ENTRY/NO RIGHT TURN/NO PARKING signboards. But what is galling is that VIPs are exempted from all these rules. If only VIPs give up their unwritten rights over the road rules and instead, try and understand the plight of ordinary people then some constructive steps can be taken to manage traffic better. But will they ever?

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Generic medicines

Editor,

It is a welcome decision by the Modi government in bringing in a legal framework under which doctors will have to prescribe generic medicines, which are cheaper than equivalent branded drugs, to patients. PM Modi has rightly stated, "Doctors write prescriptions in such a way that poor people do not understand the handwriting, and they have to buy medicines from private stores at high prices." Promoting the generic drugs industry is good but there should be

strict quality control as it is a matter of people's lives. It is generally true that generic named products are less expensive than their brand equivalents. It is reported that 90% of the domestic Indian pharmaceutical market deals in branded products. If government implements a rule that doctors must prescribe only generic drugs, a patient will, in most cases, still end up buying a branded drug as generic medicines have low margins. It is rightly pointed out that since advertisement of prescription medicines are not allowed in India, companies or medical representatives push their products through doctors, chemists and distributors in lieu of freebies, junkets and incentives.

It must be amended in the new regulation that every physician should prescribe drugs with generic names legibly and preferably in capital letters and he/she shall ensure there is a rational prescription and use of drugs. The generic medicines if available across medical shops will be welcomed by one and all and in one way we can stop multinational companies from looting our money in the name of brands. We also need strict rules for doctors and hospitals charging high rates and doctors prescribing unnecessary tests, x-rays, MRI scans, etc., just so that the hospital can increase their revenues.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad -15

States Fiscal Deficit Vital to generate resources

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

India's fiscal deficit has been brought under control though the States shortfall will increase marginally to 3.3 per cent of GDP in 2017-18, according to India Ratings & Research estimates. India's combined debt of around 70 per cent of GDP is one of the highest among emerging markets, topped only by Brazil.

Consequently, the talk of an international conspiracy to keep India's credit rating low is not valid. The fact remains that for the country to credibly improve its ranking it must work on fiscal discipline of the Centre and States.

Meanwhile, the minutes of Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) reveal a major concern for the undoing of the Central Government's fiscal discipline by State Governments was loan waivers. Undeniably, State Governments finances have turned unfavourable in recent years and according to experts the over 3 per cent deficit is likely to stay wide in the current financial year. Pertinently the N. K. Singh panel on 'Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management' (FRBM) guidelines might help States to make suitable changes in their fiscal deficit targets, specified under the FRBM Act.

Besides, despite recruitment being severely curtailed in most States, the burden of increasing salaries, contractual retention charges have been growing. According to figures, this amounts to around 10 per cent of the SGDP. Moreover, as a share of the GDP, the Centre's pay cheque to States was 6.8 per cent in 2015-16 which was reduced to 6.6 per cent this fiscal.

And the Budget has further brought this down to 6.4 per cent in 2017-18. This clearly shows that the States are left to fend for themselves, either by fighting the odds to reduce deficits or having to borrow even more from the market.

Undoubtedly, the situation of the States is intriguing. Some of them, specially the bigger ones, are facing huge debts. These include Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. According to economists, these States are facing problems in spite of the Centre doing its job by raising the devolution as suggested by the Finance Commission. Others opine that while welfare expenditure needs to be curtailed, revenues need to be raised.

Additionally, as per RBI figures Maharashtra's debt burden is the highest at Rs 3.79 lakh crores followed by Uttar Pradesh at Rs 3.27 lakh crores and West Bengal at Rs 3.08 lakh crores. In the latter's case the ratio of taxes to the Gross State Domestic Product should have been around 7 per cent. But is actually a little above 5 per cent. Further, there has been a decline in State revenues as percentage of GSDP between 2011-12 and 2015-16. Between 2014-15 and 2015-16 revenues as percentage of GSDP declined in states like Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and the North Eastern States.

Hence, it goes without saying that the States are cash strapped with development activities not increasing at the desired pace. This does not augur well for the country as balanced development of the countryside and upgrading the living conditions of the poor and the economically weaker sections are an immediate necessity.

Alongside, in spite of all efforts at development, the poor and impoverished sections are at the receiving

end, specially vis-à-vis education, health and basic necessities of life. Even drinking water availability is not ensured topped by inadequate sanitation facilities.

Notably, the massive expenditure needed for improving social and physical infrastructure along-with effective implementation of plans and projects is a big challenge which needs to be seriously considered.

Certainly, it is difficult to foresee the problems the States would face in the coming years. In the meantime, even as States are vying with each other to attract investment and boost up industrialization, the fact remains that there is little scope of conditions improving in most States. Indeed, the introduction of GST and efforts at revenue generation is critical to reverse the present trend.

The Eastern and the North Eastern States are most vulnerable as their growth over the last 2-3 years leaves much to be desired. While the Eastern States have to find ways and means to increase their revenues --- which West Bengal has been successful to some extent --- more subsidies have to be given to the seven sisters in the North East. Alternatively if tourism is promoted in a big way in the latter region, their revenues might increase to some extent.

One needs to recall and underscore that the fall in States' own tax revenues and lower net transfers from the Government did the damage since 2015-16. For instance, lower oil prices reduced the ad valorem taxes on petrol and diesel, a huge income item for States, affecting revenue collections.

On the other hand, while higher devolution of divisible pool (hiked from 32 per cent to 42 per cent) led to higher revenue transfers from the Centre, grants were also cut through reduced outlay for eight Centrally-sponsored schemes, such as National e-Governance Plan, Backward Regions Grant Fund and Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA). Interestingly, on a net basis, as per a RBI report, State Governments received less net transfers to the extent of 0.3 per cent of their GDP in the financial year ended March 2016.

Nevertheless the situation is not as grim as it was during the crisis years. While the States went from a revenue surplus to a revenue deficit situation, revenue shortfall of the general Government fell to 2.8 per cent of GDP in 2015-16, thanks to better performance of the Central Government on the revenue front. For example, the UDAY scheme might not be negative. "This was an off-balance sheet item earlier, which is now in the books of the State Government. If the power sector picks up, it could be good for the State finances --- over the long term," asserted an economist from a renowned bank.

However, what is disconcerting is the fact that the deficit levels for the Government have risen, that too during times when the household savings into financial assets have been falling. Historically, the savings of the households have sponsored the borrowings of the Government.

Today, household savings have fallen to around 7.5 per cent of GDP (from earlier level of 11 per cent), thanks to higher inflation --- which in turn led to negative real interest rates (till recently). Now that inflation levels are much lower, leading to positive real interest rates, if households don't begin re-investing into financial assets like earlier, a glum fiscal situation may occur again. --- INFA

“Unquiet souls. In the dark fermentation of earth, in the never idle workshop of nature, in the eternal movement, yea shall find yourselves again.”

--- Matthew Arnold

The Shillong Times

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VIP culture is in the mindset

A few days ago when a senior Congressman was asked by a section of the media how he felt about the disbandment of the VVIP culture in the form of the red beacon atop Government VIP vehicles, he smugly stated that the diktat emerged out of envy. Perhaps the man has turned senile so his answer can be tossed aside as gibberish. The Congress Party has perfected the art of sycophancy and its political arrogance knows no bounds. When Prime Minister Modi said that the VIP culture has become a mindset problem he hit the nail on the head. Today people who are actually public servants (called ministers because they have to minister, not govern) are so far removed from the public because of the security paraphernalia, that they only know what their sycophants whisper to them. It is only now that elections are nearing that we see politicians rubbing shoulders with ordinary people and coming off their high horses. So yes, the red beacons may have gone but have the sirens been silenced? And what about those who fix designations on their vehicles so much so that even the number plate has become invisible?

Democracy and the VIP culture are incongruous! If power actually belongs to the people then why are people kept off from most important exercise of planning their own development? Does a bureaucrat know more about a particular village than the people who live there? Yet democracy in this country is such that people don't matter. Only their votes matter! Once the voting is over people are treated like menials who can be summoned at will. That such practices prevail even in hitherto egalitarian tribal societies is the failure of the people themselves to decipher the meaning of democracy. But people cannot be blamed entirely because they have been kept at subsistence level over decades and are now voiceless and powerless. The poorer they are the more voiceless they become. This powerlessness of the citizenry is what keeps the VIP culture alive and democracy gasping for breath!

LOOKING BACK April 11, 1989

Nagaland Govt denies hand in Massacre

Nagaland Government today denied the involvement of its police force in the recent firing incidents in the disputed areas of Assam Nagaland border, as alleged by the Assam Chief Minister.

The incidents claimed 25 lives leaving many more injured besides arson of 36 hours.

Director General of Police Nagaland Mr K K Zutski in a statement described the allegation of Assam Chief Minister Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta as "totally false".

Referring to the claim of Mr Mahanta about recovery of some badges of Nagaland armed police badges from the place, the DGP said that such could be procured from any market in Guwahati or Dimapur.

Nagaland Excise Minister Mr I. Vikhese Sema, after a visit to the affected border area, told reporters here today that law and order situation in the areas was "under control". He emphasized the need for maintaining peace in the border.

The Minister pointed out that the operational command of CRPF in the areas was under Inspector General of Assam Police and hence the involvement of Nagaland Police in the

unfortunate incident did not arise at all. (UNI)

Swer Defends Pollution Board Recruitment pattern

Meghalaya PHE Minister Mr S. P. Swer assured the Assembly on Thursday that the State Govt would follow the employment policy "as far as practicable". The Minister was replying to a call attention motion by Mr Hopingstone Lyngdoh (HSPDP) to a news item in "Ka Dongmusa" which alleged the State Pollution Control Board had flouted the state employment policy.

Mr. Lyngdoh questioned whether the employment policy of the state govt- 40% for Khasis 40% for Garos, 20% for others was followed by the Meghalaya Pollution Control Board.

In his brief reply, Mr Swer said because of financial constraints, the Board employed some retired personnel in technical, scientific, and accounts posts. Of these the period of some contracts were over, other were on deputation.

He said that consolidated salary had been offered for a number of posts, and since no tribals were available for them, non tribals were appointed.

The anxiety of the Congress is showing!

By Patricia Mukhim

The Congress Party in Meghalaya is paranoid. Hence every other day there are unnecessary assertions that the Party will return to power in 2018. As if anyone is interested in their forecast! If the Congress Party at the national level is in a shambles it is no better in the State where each party worker is trying to cover his/her own flank. And now in a desperate bid to appease the powerful coal mining lobby the Government has bent over backwards to outwit the National Green Tribunal (NGT) by bringing in the Meghalaya Minerals Development Corporation (MMDC) as the lifeline so that coal can again be extracted and exported. It will be back to 'business as usual' and the revenue generated from sale of coal will be pumped in to win the 2018 elections. Chief Minister Mukul Sangma is under pressure since money is the prime factor for winning elections in Meghalaya. All the humbug and the bleeding heart for the so called suffering poor who have been hit by the coal ban is a lot of hogwash. His Government has not come up with alternative livelihood strategies targeted at the small fries who earned their living not from coal digging, for that is done by people from outside Meghalaya, but by the ancillary businesses that coal mining and transportation provided them. The Chief Minister and his cabinet comprising of "Yes Mr Chief Minister," sort of allies, has made this desperate bid to win the hearts and minds of the people of Jaintia Hills. It's a convenient short cut and it might just pay off unless environmental activists like Sajay Laloo get their act together. In Meghalaya, for now, the battle is between survival of the environment which includes all of us or the victory of the few coal mine owners of which the Chief Minister's wife is one! And this dear readers is the irony! The head of the state who should be concerned with the health of the environment has a direct interest in coal mining! Is this not a conflict of interests?

We are told by reliable sources that some non-tribal businessmen from Meghalaya under the banner of a certain chamber of commerce had recently met Prime Minister Modi in Delhi to carp about the ban on coal mining and how it is affecting their businesses. Apparently the PM gave them a hearing but sent them back saying they should be doing more for the people of Meghalaya rather than just sucking the state's resources dry. I suppose that this mercenary group will now prefer to align with the Congress since the Congress Government is now facilitating the resumption of this extractive mining exercise. And for good measure, while there is a hue and cry over uranium mining none of the proactive NGOs have a problem with the devastating limestone and coal mining activity and the large scale pollution from the cement companies in Jaintia Hills. The other day someone posted a picture on Facebook which lamented at the smoke-stacked cement industry that has all but killed the environment around Lumshnong! But who cares?

Coming to other more important matters such as the scams galore that have plagued Meghalaya for years together in appointment of aspirants to the Meghalaya Civil Service and Meghalaya Police Service, one has to look at neighbouring Assam where the former Assam Public Service Commission Chairperson, Rakesh Paul is arrested in the, "cash for job," scam. Only a Government without a history of dodgy deals can afford to unearth these scams. Well, the BJP Government in Assam had promised to clean up the Augean stables before the elections and has done so in right earnest. Hence three Assam Civil Service officers working as Circle Officers (ADMs) have been arrested from Nalbari, Silpathar and Halem. The answer scripts of the three arrested individuals were found to be carbon copies of each other's. This therefore means that someone was paid to write the exams for all three. A senior journalist from Assam says that the three arrested are just the tip of the iceberg. There could be several such aspirants serving other departments over the years who paid Rakesh Paul, now languishing in jail. Will

Meghalaya ever see such people who have served in the MPSC and have yielded to political pressure or have accepted bribes to appoint non-deserving candidates being arrested? In the infamous Education Scam the Education Minister of the time, Ampareen Lyngdoh was given a list of names of aspirants to teaching jobs given by several MLAs and serving ministers as a 'sifarish.' If what happened in Assam is repeated here will those who have canvassed for their undeserving constituents also be given jail term? Not unless we have a new untested government, which is all the more reason why we should elect a new set of legislators and throw out the present lot!

Now there will be cynics and critics saying that I am campaigning for the BJP. Frankly speaking, I don't care which group or party/parties emerge provided they are not the tried and tested variety and provided they have in their manifesto the clear commitment to unearth all the scams that have deprived many young people over the years of the jobs they rightly deserved. I have come across many such MCS aspirants who failed to make their grades here but later ended up getting into the UPSC conducted allied services. I am sure if those who wrongfully occupy the seats of power in the Sub-divisions and Blocks of Meghalaya today are told to sit for another examination and are kept under tight scrutiny, they would not even score pass marks. And to think that these are the people who are entrusted with the governance of our State. The very thought is disgusting! But our politicians have handpicked the members of the MPSC and the DSCs. All of them are political hangers-on with a history!

This culture of political appointment to posts such as the State Information Commission, the State Women's Commission, the State Security Commission, State Social Welfare Advisory Board and the different Boards and Corporations actually sucks big time. It is political patronage at its worst and it certainly is not what democracy is meant to be! That even the educated amongst us choose to sit in

silence and wait for out a Government to be voted out before we even squeak just shows that perhaps we all have some vested interests in remaining silent. The poor and the meek of Meghalaya are voiceless. It's the pressure groups, the media and the Opposition parties that are supposed to articulate their deep-seated anxieties, their exacerbating poverty and their growing disenfranchisement from the system that is supposed to serve them. As a media person I say, 'mea-culpa.' We are so busy chasing politicians and reporting about their inauguration of this, that and the other that we fail to see the tears in the eyes of the poorest; we fail to give voice to the frustrations of the growing number of youth who are falling between the cracks every day and who we blame as 'drug users and peddlers.' Those who preach to us about why our youth are taking to drugs should first shine the mirror on themselves. Living in Meghalaya today is a frustrating experience for the ordinary citizen who does not move around with the siren and the red beacons.

A Government that has turned a five-year mandate into a joke by not enunciating a single policy paper on the critical areas of Health, Education, Power, Roads, Water Supply and Sanitation and does not know where it wants to take us in the next five years is definitely not a Government that deserves a second tenure unless we all want to self-destruct and become another Arunachal Pradesh or Nagaland where corruption has become second nature and everyone remains silent under the weight of their own guilt.

And by the way, the church types who are busy smelling problems that happen in Maharashtra and elsewhere but don't preach on Sundays about the massive corruption in their own backyards also have a lot to answer for. It's pitiable when the so-called spiritual leaders begin to enjoy the company of the high and mighty of this earth instead of challenging them. Truly we seem like a lost cause. Pardon my despondency!

TO THE EDITOR

End to VIP culture!

Editor, The 'Red Light' culture was very prevalent and dominated our social lives often making us feel like minions in front of a VIP or so-called "VVIPs." The decision by the BJP led government at the Centre to do away with VVIP culture has been hailed as a great change pan-India since that practice has evolved from the British era-slave mentality to an equal society where everyone is at par. The Congress could not do this because it was saddled with a Nehruvian-Mountbatten attitude of treating the electorate like subjects. This is an eye-opener that we are all equal in this democratic nation no matter how high or low we are.

Yours etc., Dominic S. Wankhar Shillong

Act of barbarism

Editor, Pakistan Army has once again proven to be criminal-minded and barbaric. They carried out unprovoked rocket and mortar firing on forward posts of LOC in

Krishna Ghati Sector. It is an unsoldierly act by the Pak army, where the bodies of two of our soldiers in the patrol were mutilated. Such inhuman attacks do not happen even during a war. It was a pre-planned operation of the Pakistan Army while Pakistan's Border Action Team (BAT) set up an ambush to target the patrol party of the Indian soldiers over 250 meters deep thick vegetation inside Indian territory. But BAT is Pakistan's Border Action Team which carries out cross border operations and raids across the Line of Control. They are experts in guerrilla tactics. Terrorists are included in BAT so that Pakistan can disown them when caught. Pakistan is a habitual offender and has been committing such heinous acts in Baluchistan too.

India and Pakistan have agreed to a ceasefire along the LoC but the latter has frequently violated the ceasefire. Pakistani troops routinely target Indian posts, often to give cover to militants trying to cross over. The situation along the LoC has always been tense. A number of civilian and military casualties have occurred on both sides in cross-border shelling and

firing incidents. A befitting retaliatory military action like surgical strike is not just the solution. Diplomatic options are still wide open. India granted MFN status to Pakistan since 1996. Uprising in Kashmir also made India feel international pressure. Islamabad has always been vocal for the human rights and the resolution of the Kashmiris. But in reality, Pakistan is practising cross-border terrorism. India must decide tactfully to put paid to Pakistan's game plan.

Yours etc. Kamal Baruah, Via email

Kashmir on the boil!

Editor, This refers to your editorial "Atrocities again" (ST- May 4, 2017). It is distressing that Kashmir is always on the boil. The issue of Kashmir is a chronic one, and has festered nearly three quarters of a century. Those familiar with Kashmir's history would be aware that violence in Jammu and Kashmir generally tends to come in "waves". One's imagination failed to understand that Kashmir has been boiling with discontent for years

and there has been no effort to assess the problem. Problems are due to the insincere and inept polity. Unrest in Kashmir reveals the failures of the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party. The killings reveal the fact that the real power in Kashmir lay not with the state's elected government, but with the security forces. Slogans are becoming the main instigators of violence even though sloganeering has been a part of long cherished history of the world. The security forces do not appear to be following standard operating procedures. Whenever there is a riot, there are plenty of ways in which the situation can be dealt with. The country needs a tough law to curb the misuse of information technology. India always thought that peace can be achieved by sincerely addressing grievances. India must take its cue from those instances and solve the Kashmiri challenge once and for all. Countries across the world must unite to fight terror so that the innocent people of Kashmir can live in peace and not in pieces.

Yours etc., Vinod C. Dixit Ahmedabad - 15

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Yours etc., Vinod C. Dixit Ahmedabad - 15

Gau Rakshak Dals Karnataka joins bandwagon

By Insaif

ROUND THE STATES

Holy cow, Karnataka has sprung a shocker! The Congress-led Siddaramiah government has defended its law shielding 'Gau Rakshaks' to prevent cow slaughter in the State. This comes in the form of the administration urging the Supreme Court to dismiss a PIL challenging the constitutional validity of the law. The southern State now joins five others --- Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand - which have framed laws to protect the Gau Rakshak Dals. The apex court had sought replies from all these States and the Centre on why such groups shouldn't be banned given that these allegedly are creating disharmony among communities and castes. While Karnataka was the only State which replied on Wednesday last, it sought to emphasise that its law seeks to protect only those cow vigilantes who are acting in "good faith" and doesn't offer any cover to those engaged in violent or criminal activities or working to create disharmony among communities. Further, the protection, it said applies only to the groups recognized by "competent authority" provided for under the law and not to just any group which can claim to be engaged in protection of cows. Wonder, whether this would be any consolation to the Congress, which has been flogging the Gau Rakshak issue accusing the BJP of encouraging and protecting the cow vigilante groups, specially in its ruled States. The fact that the law is very old wouldn't be any comfort as the timing of the admission has clearly gone awry. Will it take the winds out of the Congress sails?

Incogrigible Bihar! Bihar will be Bihar. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's talk of development appears to be hogwash if one goes by the State's admission before the Supreme Court. In its response to the apex court on filling up of the massive vacancies in the police force, the Home department stated that in its action plan it would take over two years to fill vacant stenographers' post. (July 2019)! Prompting an exasperated CJI to say: 'Is this some kind of joke? Are you making fun of us... Somebody will go to jail for this unless it is rectified forthwith...' Bihar has to fill 34,500 vacancies and as per the plans law and order doesn't seem to be Nitish's priority. In comparison, Jharkhand and West Bengal got away lightly. The former has 26,300 vacancies and assured the court it would cut down its constable strength gradually and increase the sub-inspector post. Bengal with 26,000 vacancies said 4,375 constable posts would be filled by July-end and thereafter it would recruit 8,000 constables every year till 2020. The other States facing shortage includes Gujarat with 28,500, Telangana 17,504 and Rajasthan 15,731. Their plans would be examined later. Guess, they would be cautious after Bihar's chastisement.

Telangana Alooof Telangana may well upset the combined Opposition's efforts to put up a united Presidential candidate. And, none other than the Congress, which is in the forefront to get that elusive unity, is only to blame. TRS Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao is peeved understandably with the Congress, which is in the forefront to get that elusive unity, is only to blame. TRS Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao is peeved understandably with the Congress, which is in the forefront to get that elusive unity, is only to blame. TRS Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao is peeved understandably with the Congress, which is in the forefront to get that elusive unity, is only to blame. TRS Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao is peeved understandably with the Congress, which is in the forefront to get that elusive unity, is only to blame.

which has strength of 22,048 votes in the presidential poll, has given signals that it may vote with the NDA, which is short of 18,000 votes. Though many say that the contest is a forgone conclusion for NDA victory, the fact is that a prospective partner has been rubbed the wrong way. Will there be more boo-boos? Reducing chances of the Opposition making it at least a close contest!

J&K Money Loot New Delhi will need to think out-of-the-box when it comes to Kashmir. Already shaken by the spike in stone-pelting and violent incidents and beheading of soldiers along the LoC, and postponement of the Anantnag byelection, it now has a new headache—of bank robberies. North Block which has been reviewing the critical situation in the Valley on Wednesday last with NSA advisor, IB Director and RAW chief, will need to aid the ruling BJP-PDP government with more security personnel to guard both the banks as well as to counter the terrorists. In the past 72 hours three banks have been looted in the Valley by militants—in Shopian, Kulgam and Pulwama districts. Five policemen and two guards have been killed. The incidents send obvious signals that the Hizbul and Lashkar terrorists are short of money for weapons and their underground workers. They want the people to keep their money at home instead of the banks, which they started doing after demonetisation. This would help the terrorists access their money when needed. It is no secret that in these districts the support to militants has increased. Will the Government be able to give them a run for their money, literally.

MP Takes Lead Madhya Pradesh becomes the first State to switch to the January-December financial year from this April-March cycle. On Tuesday last, the Shivraj Singh Chouhan Cabinet endorsed the move, which breaks a 150-year tradition the country started adopting the April-March financial year since 1867. The Budget session of the next financial year for the BJP-ruled State will now begin either in December or January 2018. All ministries and departments have thus been instructed to prepare a quarterly, half-yearly and annual road map of works to be done with fixed deadlines in view of the change. Chouhan obviously will please Prime Minister Modi, who made a strong pitch for the shifting the financial year recently at the NITI Aayog's governing council meet. However, while he would like this move to add to his State's first, and pip the Centre, which may gradually make the change next Union Budget, officials would be on tenterhooks to deliver. Hiccups aren't being ruled out.

UP Village Rings Out A village in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh should make women empowerment groups see red. Its panchayat has issued a bizarre diktat. Any woman found talking on a cell phone in public is to be fined Rs 2000. The justification given by the Muslim-dominated Mandora village elders is that this shall prevent girls from eloping! The thinking has been influenced by reports in the media where every week there is a report about girls eloping with young boys, which in some cases has led to bloodshed. So, it has been decided that the girls should use their mobiles only at home. Absurd as it sounds, the panchayat, defends its decision saying that unlike some other khap panhayats they have not banned mobile phones for women per se. Poor connection indeed. --INFA.

“The need of expansion is as genuine an instinct in man as the need in a plant for the light, or the need in man himself for going upright. The love of liberty is simply the instinct in man for expansion.”

--- Matthew Arnold

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 6, 2017

Presidential Election

PRESIDENT Pranab Mukherjee's term ends on July 25. The race for Raisina Hill is on. The NDA has a strong position and whatever shortfall there is may be filled up by the AIADMK. But if the Opposition can close its ranks, the NDA may be up against it. Congress President Sonia Gandhi is at the forefront of the Opposition to arrive at a consensus. She has approached leaders of SP, RJD, NC, NCP, CPM, CPI, JD(U), and JD(S). She will perhaps rope in TMC, BSP, DMK and RJD. But regional leaders may in the event plump for a non-Congress President. But they have till now no candidate they may support. Representatives of 9 political parties met in New Delhi to mark the 90th birth anniversary of socialist leader Madhu Limaye on May Day. There was a general feeling that the Presidential election would be a crucial event. The BJP riding to victory, it was felt, would be fatalistic.

As for the BJP, the long standing contender to be the First Citizen L.K. Advani now finds himself on a sticky wicket. The Supreme Court has revived charges against him for criminal involvement in the demolition of the Babri Mosque. His self defence before the Lieberman Commission did not put him in a favourable light. The BJP may instead put up Sumita Mahajan or Sushma Swaraj. But that will be putting the active Swaraj to pasture. Everyone is thinking that the BJP may spring a surprise by putting up an outsider. In any event Raisina Hill is not the seed of power

LOOKING BACK

April 11, 1989

NE passing through dangerous phase: CM

Meghalaya Chief Minister Mr P.A. Sangma has slated the North East was passing through a “very dangerous” phase and the happenings in any part of the region tended to affect the entire area. Inaugurating Rongali Bihu festival in Shillong at Stoney land on Friday, Mr Sangma called upon the people to commit themselves to solving the problems of the region.

Greeting the Assamese community of Meghalaya and Assam on the occasion, Mr Sangma hoped that the spirit of Bihu would prevail in the region and infuse all with a “new spirit of brotherhood, ad cooperation”. Later, the Chief Minister inaugurated a cultural programme in Laban organized by the Shillong Central Rongali Bihu Cultural Committee.

Pilot dies in MIG Crash

An MIG-21 aircraft on a routine sortie from the Pathankot airbase crashed this morning near Tada Ram Sahai village under Mukerian Police station in Hoshiarpur district.

Police sources told UNI that the pilot, flying Officer Aggarwal, died in the crash. They said the plane had caught fire before hurtling down spreading debris over a two square kilometer area.

A course of inquiry has been ordered, the source added (UNI)

Lapang Asserts

Govt will now bow before threat

Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister D D Lapang has made it clear that the State Govt. would not be cowed down by “ultimatums” and confrontations.

Mr “Lapang was reacting to “rumours” that the Jaintia Welfare Union (JWU) had delivered an ultimatum calling for the removal of the BSF Camp from Mukhla “within a week”.

Talking to Shillong Times on Thursday he denied having received any memorandum from the JWU regarding the BSF camps at Mukhla. A delegation of the JWU met Mr Lapang at the State Assembly on Tuesday afternoon after having launched a one day protest fast with the support of other groups the same morning.

Mr Lapang told this reporter that the JWU delegation had not brought along a memorandum, and submitted a petition only after he advised them to do so. The Deputy Chief Minister said there was no truth in the story that he had given the JWU or any one else any assurances in this regard. He said that while the Government would always take a positive and helpful attitude towards the problems of the people, “ultimatums” and confrontations were untenable.

He confirmed, however, that the JWU had not delivered an ultimatum. “They only gave me a petition”, he said.

NPC to boycott

Rajya Sabha by-poll

Nagaland People Council (NPC) the only opposition party with a strength of 24 in a sixty-member assembly has decided to boycott the ensuing by-election to Rajya Sabha seat from the state, according to the Party working president Mr Vamuzo.

He told UNI here today that the party had directed its legislature party to boycott the election slated for April 27 next in view of rigging “and unfair practices” committed by the ruling party during the recent assembly poll. The NCP general convention held at Dimapur last Wednesday inducted Mr Chuvfuo, Ex-MLA and Mr Pohawang Konyak as vice-president of the party Mr Vamuzo said.

Civil Services

Time for rededication

By S Saraswathi

performance from officials, promotion of spirit of ownership, and removal of restrictions of hierarchy in the interest of performance are recognized as necessary for reinventing the civil service.

Responsibilities of government officials have grown in terms of challenges they face in every aspect of life. Human progress has not simplified life, but on the contrary, introduced very many complexities.

Good governance is committed to enhancement of the quality of life – a goal that can be achieved only with integration of knowledge, abilities, and ethical make up of persons vested with the responsibility for governance. Therefore, constant trimming of the role and responsibility of the civil service stands on top of the agenda in establishing good governance.

Max Weber has pointed out that bureaucracies are central to emergence and growth of modern capitalism. He considered impersonality and impartiality as the special virtues of bureaucracy. But in course of time, these same virtues have led to certain serious deficiencies like “red tape”, lack of initiative and innovation, disinterestedness, and poor service delivery, and corruption.

Civil Service – the generic term used to designate servants of the State or the government employed as civilians – is a sub-division grouped with the “executive”. All employees of the government are not civil servants. There are only about 60,000 civil servants in the country constituting a rank-based system manning a vast bureaucracy. At the top is the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) followed by Central Services. There is also a police service (IPS). Senior civil servants may be called to account by Parliament.

The guiding principle of civil service remains unchanged as given by Queen Elizabeth I to her Secretary over 400 years ago that: “you will not be corrupted by any manner of gift, and that you will be faithful to the State and that

without respect of my private will, you will give me that counsel which you think best”.

A certain standard of ethics is required of civil servants in India. Principal among these are : to discharge official duty with responsibility, honesty, accountability, and without discrimination; ensure effective management, leadership development, and personal growth; avoid misuse of official position or information; and to serve as instruments of good governance and foster social-economic development.

The Indian civil service has been modelled on the British system and independent India accepted it as “the steel frame that holds this country together”. Recruited by a centralised authority, civil servants are posted in all parts of the country.

Several studies have pointed out the need to reform the civil service in India. We may brush aside the Carnegie study (2011) as over-emphasising corruption and politicization in the Indian civil service which plague bureaucracy all over the world. But, we cannot ignore the findings of the Second Administrative Commission of India (2005) on undue political interference, inadequate accountability mechanisms and capacity building. Rajiv Gandhi, referring to rampant corruption in administration through several levels is reported to have confessed that only 16 paise out of every rupee reached the actual beneficiaries who were poor.

Modi's assurance on the Civil Services Day that he would stand by them if they took decisions with honest intentions and in public interest is undoubtedly needed in the present age of widespread corruption in numerous forms. It was reiteration of his advice to Secretaries of central government departments soon after assuming office in 2014 to get in touch with him directly whenever required to resolve issues and expedite decision-making. He stressed the importance of collective action and team spirit. Simplifying and streamlining procedures

formed important part of his agenda for good governance.

Misuse of official machinery mostly results from political-administrative collaboration and occurs at every level of governance. The Supreme Court said in a case in 2013 that much of the deterioration of the standards of probity and accountability with the civil servants was due to political influence and directed Central and State governments to free the bureaucracy from political stranglehold by constituting civil services board. The Bench considered that recording of instructions and directions was necessary for fixing responsibility and ensuring accountability in the functioning of civil servants and upholding institutional integrity.

Today, the bureaucracy enjoys enormous powers as technological revolution demands and facilitates greater delegation and decentralisation. Public perception of civil servants, however, is not very favourable as expectations are rising and administrative performance does not keep pace. Public awareness has also risen and is able to sense the deficiencies in delivery of services. Emboldened by media support, people are ready to respond and react to decisions of governing authorities. The Right to Information, and easy access to government information are bound to keep the entire bureaucracy with the top civil servants on their toes.

At the same time, the positive role of civil servants in many States in carrying on administration when political bosses are fighting for power and positions cannot be belittled.

Wholesale reform of civil service is not easy. Nor is it necessary. Difficulties highlight a Catch 22 situation wherein the very things we want to change make change impossible, however, intense our efforts may be. All we need is a high ethical standard combined with pragmatic and human approach to public issues.

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

Aizawl should continue to grow !

Editor,
Aizawl FC are the newly crowned champions of India, but it seems it will count for nothing. What a shame as they could be relegated and play their trade in the second division of Indian Football next season if the projected new league is a reality. The projected new league which is a merger of I league and ISL means that only the existing ISL clubs and three I league clubs (Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Bengaluru) will be able to play in the top flight of Indian football. After achieving a Leicester City like dream this season, Aizawl FC will not be able to at least defend its title. What a nightmare and this is the last thing that Mizoram football needs. Football has huge potential in Mizoram and North East in general. The North East of India really is a hotbed of Indian football at the moment but clubs from this region will not be part of the proposed top league. This region also boasts of some of the best football fans in India. How silly it will be for Aizawl FC to represent India as champions and play in Asia in the Asian Champions league but back home in India they are not even playing in the main league. Aizawl FC is the first champions from North East India, but I am praying and hoping they will not be the last.

Yours etc
Manuel Carey Lymba
Shillong - 8

POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Rahil Nora Chopra

BJP PREPARING GROUND FOR GOING IT ALONE IN JAMMU & KASHMIR

The buzz is that the BJP will break its alliance with PDP in Jammu & Kashmir after the president and vice president election is over. According to sources, Amit Shah told Ram Madhav that they will fight the next assembly election on their own. He directed Ram Madhav to go and work on the ground so that BJP can form the government on their own with their sincere efforts in the state. Recently BJP chief Amit Shah visited Jammu & Kashmir and this indicates the purpose of the tour which is basically to strategize on ways to help the BJP win 2019 Lok Sabha elections, particularly finding the right formula to capture seats that the party lost in 2014. Two years after they came to power in Jammu & Kashmir, BJP and PDP are locked into a war of words both publicly and privately, each blaming the

PREPARES ROAD MAP FOR BJP TO CHALLENGE MAMATA

BJP President Amit Shah has asked the West Bengal state leadership to prepare a roadmap for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. West Bengal has 42 seats and if the party wins more than 20 seats in the state, it would be a big boost. Though BJP's vote share in the state decreased from 17.5 percent in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls to 10.2 percent in the assembly elections. It was the first time the party won three seats on its own in the state. Recently Amit Shah had his three days tour of West Bengal. He visited the ancestral house of Jan Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee in Kolkata's Bhawanipore area and did a meeting with booth-level party workers at Rajarhat and accused Mamata Banerjee of not doing enough for the people of West Bengal. He said, “we will form the next government in the state”. On

The Chief minister of J&K Mehbooba Mufti met Narendra Modi, and Rajnath singh and had asked them to initiate the dialogue process in J&K and to save the alliance. Mehbooba told Prime Minister Narendra Modi that talking to every one is the only solution in Kashmir as Atal Bihari Vajpayee started the dialogue process and had firm belief that exchange of words was the only solution. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi refused Mehbooba and had asked her to see first that stone pelting and terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir comes to an end.

other for massive mob violence, rising militancy and the embarrassingly low voter turnout in Srinagar Lok Sabha bypoll. The Chief minister of J&K Mehbooba Mufti met Narendra Modi, and Rajnath singh and had asked them to initiate the dialogue process in J&K and to save the alliance. Mehbooba told Prime Minister Narendra Modi that talking to every one is the only solution in Kashmir as Atal Bihari Vajpayee started the dialogue process and had firm belief that exchange of words was the only solution. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi refused Mehbooba and had asked her to see first that stone pelting and terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir comes to an end. Then only any exchange of words to restore peace between them would be possible.

MANY EXISTING AICC GENERAL SECRETARIES TO BE WEEDED OUT IN RESHUFFLE

In the wake of the Congress defeat in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and also its failure to form the government in Goa and Manipur and now after it lost badly in Delhi MCD election, overhauling of the party has become imminent. Vice President Rahul Gandhi has hinted that major reshuffle would take place in the organisation. The General Secretaries who are likely to be shown the door in AICC are Mukul Wasnik, CP Joshi, Digvijay Singh and Mohan Prakash.

SUSHIL SHINDE MAY BE THE NEW AICC GENERAL SECRETARY

According to Congress sources, Sushil Kumar Shinde, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Bhanwar Jitender Singh will become the new AICC General Secretaries. Ajay Maken resigned from PCC Chief post after losing in Delhi MCD Election but Rahul Gandhi had rejected his resignation and told Ajay Maken to continue as a PCC chief of Delhi.

AMIT SHAH

the other hand Mamata Banerjee is not taking the BJP lightly. The Chief Minister is asking people not to fall prey to “divisive politics.” Amit Shah has appointed Kailash Vijay Vargiya, Rahul Sinha to work on the ground so that party can do well in the panchayat elections in 2018 and increase the tally in Lok Sabha in 2019. According to sources, RSS workers are working hard in West Bengal for the last 6 months to win in the panchayat polls.

CONTROVERSY OVER EVM MACHINES USED IN STATE POLLS CONTINUES

Election Commission has put up an EVM machine with VVPATs. These were used in 40 Assembly constituencies in Goa where Congress emerged as a single largest party and in Punjab. VVPATs were used in 33 assembly constituencies where Congress emerged as a winner. Political parties accused BJP of managing the EVM, and also stated that it was operated at a distance of 150 feet with a remote. In Chandrapur Lok Sabha constituency, where Chandrapur Mahanagar Palika election was held on April 19 and the result was declared on April.21 senior Minister of Maharashtra, Sudhir Munguntiar's nominee candidate had won the seat.

According to the grapevine, a meeting was held late night at the residence of Hansraj Ahir (Minister of State for Home) who admitted off the record that EVM Machines are magical and were managed by Sudhir Munguntiar who paid the heavy price to manage the EVM. Political parties accused Sudhir Munguntiar of his financial controversies, including the ownership of 17 acre farm house. At present he is the minister of State & Planning in the state government of Maharashtra. (IPA)

TO THE EDITOR

The Mother Cow

Editor,
Apropos to letter by B.P Goenka (ST April 27, 2017), I must confess that it was quite an interesting letter especially when the Gau Rakshaks (cow vigilantes) is over active and are working day and night, taking the law into their own hands and bashing up and thrashing anyone and everyone who drives cows from one place to another or into the fields on mere suspicion of being cow slaughterers. We respect the religious beliefs of those who consider and treat the cow as mother (Gau Mata) and hence they do not eat beef because according to them beef is like the mother's flesh. We respect that too. It is perfect and there is nothing wrong at all with that. Nobody is interfering with their beliefs or consider those beliefs as a taboo. But to consider those who eat beef as uncivilized and cannibals and hence detest them is carrying it too far. Those who do so are more uncivilized and cannibalised than anybody else! In fact this is detestable !.

Moreover, I have my doubts that there are 900 million Hindus in India and they constitute 80 per cent of India's population, owing to the fact that the population of others too have increased, especially of the Muslims. In fact the Muslim population has increased by leaps and bounds in India and within a short time, they will be

the majority community if the trend of things are going the way they are, especially under the patronage of the so called secular political parties like the Congress and a host of others.

I do not want to comment on other areas of his letter but, finally, I, personally, do not think that all Hindus in India subscribe to what B.P Goenka thinks and also all his views expressed in the letter. Many Hindus are broad minded and highly civilized and do not detest other faiths and communities just because they eat beef. What does Goenka say to some Hindus who eat beef either in secret or in the open? Goenka should remember that most of the problems in India or elsewhere, come from this kind of intolerance towards other faiths and communities and for meddling with the food habits of others. Why should we dictate to others what they should or should not believe, what to eat, how to dress and how to behave? .

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Shillong-2

Let's stop being litterbugs!

Editor,
For the improvement of cleanliness standards under Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, the “Swachh Survekshan” has been initiated which can be called the most ‘healthy’ competition of all times. In

the “Swachh Survekshan 2017”, about 500 cities all over India were ranked. Quality Council of India (QCI) evaluated the cities on the basis of improvement from last year, cleanliness and other aspects of urban sanitation. Unfortunately, Shillong's rank this year has fallen down to the 276th position.

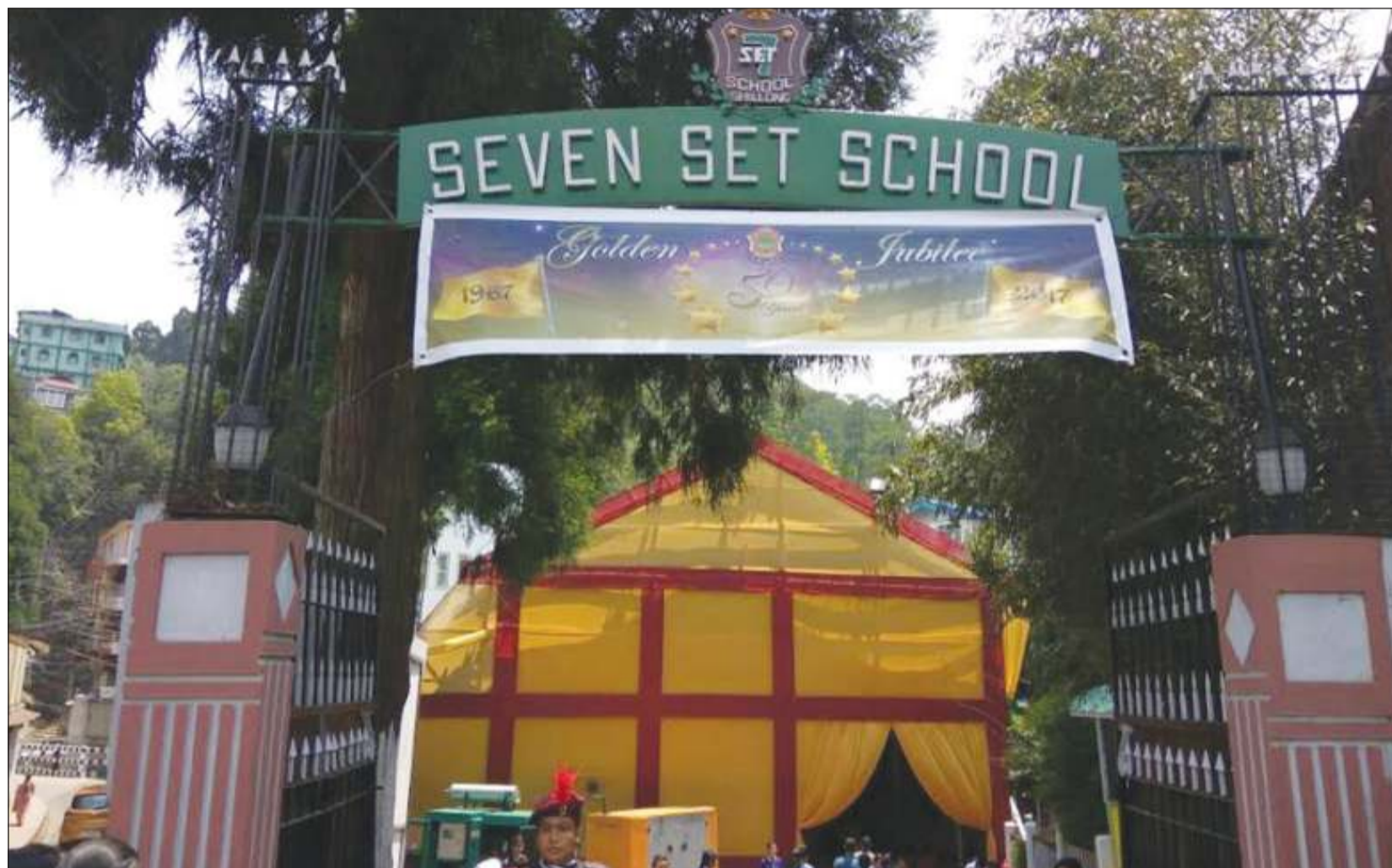
We are the best critics of our society. When we see unattended garbage or filthy roads, we most definitely don't fail in blaming the Municipal Corporation but the biggest problem is that we end up neglecting our social responsibility. We the people usually tend to shrug off such issues and therefore this has resulted in the deteriorating cleanliness quality of the city. We all know that we need to be more aware of the cleanliness in and around the city but very few among us take up the initiative to do something about it. We should all help in changing the present scenario and start from our own homes through the small steps like perhaps sorting out our garbage or minimizing plastic use. We should also understand the need of using of only what is needed to reduce the excess waste generated.

Through these small steps let us hope to make improvements. We need to take this as a collective responsibility, because that is what will ensure that our city becomes a cleaner one.

Yours etc.,
Manisha Pala,
Shillong.

Spreading light for decades

Two renowned schools in the city, Seven Set at Malki and Pine Mount at Barik, celebrate their golden jubilee and silver jubilee, respectively



By Sanchita Paul

It was established in 1967 to spread the light of education. Now, after five decades of service, Seven Set School at Malki can well be proud of its achievements.

The school celebrated its 50th anniversary recently.

The founder of the school, K.B Warjri, started it at Lumbalang with the help of Shiela Evelyn, who was an experienced teacher. There were only nine students in the beginning.

The name 'Seven Set' symbolised the

support and hard work of the seven members of Warjri's family whose blessings "helped the school grow".

The number 'seven' also symbolises a complete number reflecting the school's unity and integrity.

As the number of students increased, it became imperative for the school management to expand the campus. Hence the school was shifted to its present location in 1974. With the sheer hard work of the people associated with the school, classes were upgraded every two years and the first HSLC batch with seven candidates appeared in 1987, where all the students passed with flying colours.

From then on, the school saw a number of successes with Manish Gupta securing first position in the boards in 1992, following which there was a succession of rank holders. The higher secondary section was introduced in 1998 with Arts, Science and Commerce were introduced in 2006.

The higher secondary section too saw brilliant results. The school has been growing and producing brilliant and successful students since their small beginnings.

The events planned to commemorate the golden jubilee celebration is a year-long affair beginning this month and the

concluding ceremony will be held next May. Students, faculty members and the administration have all worked hard to make the celebrations a success.

Seven Set began its celebrations with the dedication prayer service on May 4. The inaugural function was held the following day. The occasion was graced by Roshan Warjri, Minister of Higher and Technical Education, who congratulated the school for their successful 50 years. The programme saw a showcasing of an array of performances by young talents displaying vibrant creativity.

An alumni meet was organised on May 6 giving an opportunity to all the students associated with the school a trip down the memory lane. The meet reunited many former students, now spread all over the country. Teachers too participated in the ceremony.

The school has organised a host of events to commemorate the celebrations by giving an opportunity to all the students to display their academic as well as co-curricular talents. Many inter-school competitions are to be held.

The school has various academic competitions such as Inter-School Seminar and Debate Competition. Besides academic competitions, various other unique competitions like Inter-School Mural Competition, Inter-School Choir Competition and Inter-School Vegetable Animation Competition, among other things, are being organised by the school. Various other competitions and events too are on the list.

The year-long festivities will conclude next year. The fifty years of the school has brought out well-placed former students who are not only successful in their respective fields but also are good human beings. The school has marked its 50 successful years with the hope that the future will be brighter.

(Above) The entrance of Seven Set School; (left) students perform on the 50th anniversary celebrations; (top right) Pine Mount HS School and students discuss lessons



A journey to remember

By Sanchita Paul

Pine Mount Higher Secondary School is all set to celebrate its silver jubilee with pomp and glory. The HS section was introduced on June 13, 1992, with only eight students in the Humanities section and 18 in the Science section.

Being one of the first ISC schools in the North East, the school has helped in introducing a new system of education. It has recently started the Commerce section in 2015 with the first and only student appearing the board examinations this year.

It was the hard work of its first Principal N.M.B Khonglam and Vice Principal A. Das that the school has reached its present glorious stage. The first batch of ISC appeared in 1994 and the performance was laudable. Slowly, the school created a brand name for itself. The classrooms for the higher secondary students were inaugurated in 1994 by S.C Marak, the then chief minister.

In the last 25 years, the school has seen various developments. Its principal Aiomksiar Diengdoh and Vice-Principal W. Dkhar hope to continue the legacy of this prestigious school.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary, students, faculty members and the administration have planned a series of events that started this month. The closing ceremony is in the last week of September. The celebration started with the inauguration on May 2, with Khonglam as the chief guest. The theme for the four-month celebrations is "Entering the world of uncertainty and facing fears and doubts" while the logo of the silver jubilee celebration symbolises "reaching high and aiming far into the unknown, experiencing breakthrough accomplishments beyond one's imagination" and reflects the students' aspirations while in

Pine Mount School.

The first programme organised by the school was the marathon on May 6, with the starting point from Pine Mount School towards the intersection near Pine Wood Hotel and back to school.

Various academic activities are also being organised. An Inter-School Quiz Competition was organised on May 5, where all Higher Secondary schools were invited to participate. Following the Quiz Competition on May 26, an Inter-School Debate Competition will be organised by the school for students from the Higher Secondary level.

The school is also organising a Science Exhibition for students of Classes 9, 10, 11 and 12 on August 18.

The school not only promotes academic learning but also promotes the students' talents in various co-curricular fields. A Singing Competition in July will see young talents participating.

An alumni meet in July will bring together old friends sharing fond memories.

The eventful year will see a colourful end with the concluding programme which will be held in the last week of September, where students will showcase their prowess on stage with multi-talented performances.



Opportunities aplenty for graduates

By Ranjan K Baruah

We have published about career options after Class X and XII.

In this edition, we are publishing some options after graduation. We are aware that selecting a good career has been a challenge for many but with proper planning and authentic information we can choose the best career option for us. It's important to choose our career from an early age and the best to choose the professional courses or regular education comes after we pass senior secondary examination. Students who are in graduation level or recent graduate may opt for higher studies or professional courses or may appear in various entrance examinations. Some of the entrance examinations and career options after graduation are as follows:

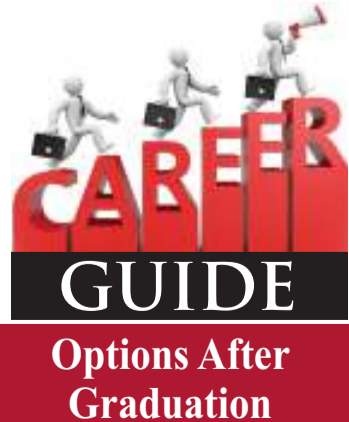
Defence Entrance: Students can appear Combined Defence Service Examination after passing graduation. Students from any stream can appear for the CDS examination. For Air Force or Navy students must have physics and maths in

passing examination. Students from Arts and Commerce can opt for Army only. This exam is conducted by Union Public Service Commission. Even doctors or engineers may also appear in CDS exam for joining in defence forces. Apart from CDS there are more ways to join defence forces after graduation. Female candidates may also join defence forces as officers after graduation.

Civil Service Examination - Union Public Service Commission conducts civil service examination for various posts depending upon vacancies. Through civil service examination aspirants may join IAS, IFS, IPS, IRS, etc. Apart from civil service UPSC conducts many other examinations for filling up vacancies in

various departments of the country. Meghalaya Public Service Commission conducts examination for civil servant in the state.

Para Military Forces: Para Military Forces (PMF) in India includes Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force, Sashatra Seema Bal, Assam rifles, Indo Tibetan Border Police, etc. The Paramilitary Forces of India are these agencies that help the law enforcement agencies and the Indian Armed Forces in their operations. It has over a million personnel active in its service. PMF is regarded as the world's second largest paramilitary organization (second only to the Chinese



People's Armed Forces) and its head officers and other senior officers being members of Indian Police Service (IPS). Officers entry in the PMF may be through UPSC or SSC.

Public Sector Units (PSUs)
PSU are a government owned corporations, state-owned companies, state en-

terprises, publicly-owned corporations or government business enterprises. Public Sector Enterprises (like NTPC, ONGC, IOCL, OIL, etc), an aspirant is required to have good technical knowledge, apt general apt and reasoning and a pleasing personality. PSUs recruit through individual entrance Examinations having technical and non technical questions.

Railway Service: There are different entries into railways. Those who want to make a career in Indian railways need to pass the Civil Services Examination, conducted by UPSC or an allied examination by the Railways Recruitment Boards (RRBs). These examinations are held from time to time to select a wide variety of personnel. There are gazetted post and non gazetted post. Mostly the top posts are selected through UPSC's Examination. The minimum eligibility required for the Group A services is graduation in any discipline or an equivalent qualification as per requirements. Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs) make appointments to various services posts. RRBs also recruit teachers, physical in-

structors, doctors in various departments, nurses and paramedical personnel through countrywide written tests.

We shall publish more options and opportunities after graduation in our next edition.

Updates

SBI Fellowships: State Bank of India (SBI) Youth for India is a 13-month long programme that enables young minds to work on rural development projects with experienced NGOs. Interested young people (21 years to 32 years) may apply for the fellowship before 31st May.

Italian Scholarships: Indian students may apply for Italian Government's Scholarship for courses of 3, 6 and 9 months. Priority fields are biology, architecture, physics, environmental engineering, and nanotechnologies. Aspirants may visit the MHRD website for further details. Last date is 10th May.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and he can be reached at 98640 55558 or bkrnanjan@gmail.com for any career related queries)

Maze of Dystopia

Having been an ardent reader in my growing up days, topics like feminism, corruption and climate change never failed to catch my attention. What is pretty strange is the fact that depression or mental illness were not things the teenager me was familiar with. Today I ask myself, 'Why?' Were people much happier back then, or was mental health just something that was buried under the carpet?

Honestly, till I had left home at the age of 18, I didn't know what it meant to be depressed. To the teenager me sadness was only momentary. I could not fathom why and how children of my age were depressed and committing suicide over board exams. But when I look at it now, this is a very serious issue. A simple google search on depression yields 6 million hits.

A couple of months back, I read about a conversation between my favorite author Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Brande. Ayn Rand refused to believe that depression can be caused by the body.

On being asked how could she be so sure, considering that she never studied the subject, Ayn Rand replied that she knows how to think. This throws light on another aspect of depression.

Many of us, often tend to deny the existence of depression. I have myself been sad, for months together, a number of times in the last four years of my college life. Yet, I wouldn't term it as being in a phase of depression. Infact, despite having read quite a lot on the subject, I still have no idea about what classifies as being in a state of depression and what does not.

Going by Rand's theory of individualism, I must say that her three axioms of existence, consciousness and identity hold good in this regard.

The axiom of existence is grasped in differentiating something from nothing, while the law of identity is grasped in differentiating one thing from another, i.e., one's first awareness of the law of non-contradiction, another crucial base for the rest of knowledge. So when you are sad you know it is not how things are supposed to be; that your current state is not the normal state (or the state of nothing).

With time your state of being perpetually sad becomes your normal state. Going further, con-



The axiom of existence is grasped in differentiating something from nothing, while the law of identity is grasped in differentiating one thing from another, i.e., one's first awareness of the law of non-contradiction, another crucial base for the rest of knowledge

sciousness is the faculty of perceiving that which exists. Your state of perpetual sadness is a reality. When you start perceiving it as it actually is, you embark on a journey of consciousness. Slowly and steadily you start accepting you start accepting the state of you being depressed.

Thus you see, your mind does not create depression, but rather, it finds a way of discovering the depressed state it is in. Maybe, in the recent days this discovery is more widespread and that is why we hear more of the word 'depression'.

The theme for World Health Day 2017, celebrated on the 7th of April, was 'Depression: Lets talk'. This act of mobilising action on depression initiated by the largest global organisation is, I believe, a welcome step for society at large.

Depression affects people of all ages, from all walks of life, in all countries; more so today when the

need for academic excellence and keeping oneself afloat in the rat race of scaling the corporate ladder are the need of the hour.

This May Day, on retrospection I see that depression impacts people's ability to carry out everyday tasks, with its direct consequence impacting the workplaces and the industries. In my most humble opinion, a better understanding of depression will help reduce the stigma associated with the illness and lead to more people seeking help.

For let us not forget that depression can be prevented and treated only by following WHO's concept of 'Let's Talk'. So friends, whenever you see a depressed soul around try talking it out with him or her; for no human soul deserves to live a dystopic existence.

(Contributed by Shatavisha Chakravorty)

'There's no political pressure on us'

At a time when the State is witnessing a rise in crime against women and children, the State Commission for Women has come pilloried for not acting tough, especially in the case of the high-profile rape and trafficking case involving a 14-year-old girl. However, its chairperson, Theilin Phanbuh, says the Commission cannot go beyond its boundary but it does follow up cases and pull up officials concerned to expedite cases. Talking to **The Shillong Times**, Phanbuh, who is serving her second term as the chairperson of the Commission, says how the Commission is working towards solving the problem of rising crime against women by addressing issues at the roots.



TALKING POINT

Why do you think the number of sexual harassment cases has seen a surge in the State?

It is true that ours is a matrilineal state but despite that the women here face the same problems as those in the mainland. Domestic violence, sexual assault, husband leaving wife... these are quite common in Meghalaya.

There are several factors behind the recent spurt in crime against women in the State. You see for a marriage to be a success you need trust, love and respect and without these, no family can have the bonding. However, these things are lacking among today's couples. A broken family affects a child too. Alcoholism, violence in family finally leads to disintegration. So the problem is deep-rooted and we at the Commission try to solve it by preventing a family to break.

What steps are being taken by the Commission in the wake of such incidents?

As I said the problem needs to be addressed at the roots. We get at least 2-3 cases of domestic violence every day. Also, single mothers come to us for help. For domestic violence, we refer the cases to the district protection officer. The Commission has no power to punish erring persons but we can definitely summon both parties and insist on amicable solution. We also spread awareness, especially among rural women who do not have any knowledge about their rights and legal proceedings that they can take in case of domestic violence or sexual harassment. We already held our programmes in five areas and the response was really good. I think our regular awareness programmes are bearing fruit as more cases of sexual harassment are reported nowadays. There are cases of witch-hunt too and we run awareness programmes on this too.

What happened to the medical board that

was proposed by the SCPCR? Is MSCW pursuing it with the government?

I think the medical board is already there. It has always been there. I cannot say since when it was in existence but I know it is there. (The medical board, as proposed by the SCPCR, is yet to be formed)

Both the government and police have been lax in ensuring safety of women and children. What do you have to say about that?

We have asked the government to constitute internal sexual harassment committees and expedite cases. As I said, we have the power to summon government officials too, including police. If we notice any laxity, we summon the official concerned and ask them to expedite cases.

In the high profile case of trafficking and rape of a 14-year-old, a minister's name has been directly linked. Why hasn't the women's commission commented on the need for the minister to step down for fair inquiry?

You have to know that the Commission has a boundary and we work within that. Moreover, we are mostly concerned about women's cases and cases involving minors are usually looked after by SCPCR.

You are holding the post for the second time. Are you not acting tough because there is political pressure?

Though we are a part of the government, we are an independent body and never feel any

pressure either from politicians or other quarters.

With so many juvenile delinquents involved in rape cases, don't you think it is high time to introduce sex education in schools?

Absolutely. Nowadays children know everything thanks to internet and other forms of media, so why not speak to them about sex openly. The more you will try to hide things from them the more they will learn the wrong things from other avenues. In this regard we had once spoken to BSNL if it could stop the porn sites but I guess that is not possible. So parents and school authorities should take the initiative to sensitise their children.

Does MSCW have enough staff to make visits to shelter houses regularly?

We have meager resources. We do face manpower crisis. But we are hoping that the Government will recruit in this financial year. However, we do get volunteers who visit shelters for rescued women.

Are quarterly reports sent to the National Women's Commission regularly?

No we send annual reports. However, we do carry out surveys and send reports regularly to the national body. At present, we are doing a study on single motherhood, which is a big problem in the State, and the report will be sent to Delhi soon.

What are the deficits/hurdles that MSCW face in its course of duty?

Fund is a perennial problem. Even to hold awareness programmes, we need money. So we are planning to increase our budget proposal this year. Also, I feel the Commission should have cells in different places as it is difficult for people living in remote areas to come to Shillong. Despite these problems, we try to reach out to people as much as we can.

How are you planning to better infrastructure?

We are planning to set up an internal legal cell soon. In many cases, poor women cannot afford to go to lawyers. In such cases our legal cell will help them.

Looking back, do you think you have done enough?

How much can a person do? Whatever we can we do and should be happy about it. It gives me immense joy when I can help an individual or solve the problem of a family at the verge of disintegration.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, May 7, 2017

Mars semi-square Uranus on your solar return chart indicates a mixed year. The year may begin with conflicting opinions with authority. Foreign transactions would bring profits. You may struggle to deal with spouse though, as there could be ego clashes in the initial parts of the year. Some health issues may trouble you. Situation could further worsen after the mid of the year, especially on the health front. Luck may not favor much either. Avoid making false commitments or promises and do not overwork during second half of the month.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This phase brings harmonious relations in friendship, love, family and children. Economy in the home and management of manpower and finances at work keep you ahead and in control of situations. You further your business by expanding in related fields of activity and with good chances of foreign collaborations. You would have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. Possessing good team spirit you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers which brings harmony and also a joyous atmosphere at the work place. You would be more aware about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

The planetary configuration would enable you to make the best use of your communication skills, talents and creativity. You would be more accommodating and compassionate in relationships and spend wonderful time in association of your loved ones and family members. Friendships, cooperation and synergy are available. You would also work hard and would get ready to perform and express yourself and take charge and carry responsibilities on your shoulders. Personal projects are on an upswing. You are in the position to inspire others through what you create. Income from foreign sources could also figure during this time. Health needs to be looked at.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Spirituality, trips, and communications are highlighted even as commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted effectively as you put your best efforts into it. Your boss or superior might seek impossible goals and you need to apprise him of the real situation. Money matters take priority as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. You enjoy doing things with others at work and home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. You would work in association of experienced and professionally and monetarily motivated people and this enhances your confidence and talent to enhance the business opportunities.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

New beginnings are in store, whether this means a fresh start in existing relationships or new ones altogether. It's a great time to make improvement in your regular routines. You would study business offers and professional opportunities in detail before rejecting or accepting them. You are especially fond of the life of the home and family. It is right to make important decisions. Looking within at your truths and believes give you insight and direction would help. You would participate in current events, share views and ideas with people around you. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This phase brings favorable results for students, children, spirituality, creativity and self realization. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes may come. You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management. You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional choices or difficult situations. A personal meeting will be a sparkling one, leading to romance, love and a long lasting relationship. Personal relations and business partnerships are likely to get stressed or limited relationships are likely to fall apart. You might also spend time in physical activities like sports and games.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Love, romance and excitement in personal relations are highlighted. You are emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You would be impressive while handling professional matters. You would please others with your conversation and would give a new approach to communications projects, learning, or self-expression. You are frank,

outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. Communications and business associates from overseas bear good news and offer lucrative opportunities. Express your views and conditions clearly when it comes to business and financial dealings to avoid misunderstandings. Yoga and meditation are recommended to keep stress at bay.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This period opens up a world of romance and love in personal relations. A memorable vacation allows you to experience and enjoy new places, countries, people and different culture. You are gracious with family and children. You are likely to be involved in creative pass times. Commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted effectively as you have the quality of wisdom and the acceptance of the ever changing wonders of life. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciprocation. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. Your position of power and authority is maintained despite many changes all around. Health problems are resolved and your energy is restored.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Good results await you as you would initiate a current of forceful energy to achieve success in an important venture. You are generous, kind and preserving in family and personal relationships. You are diligent and pedantic at work and specialize further in your field of activity. You are on the threshold of a creative and inventive work that brings you name, fame and exposure. A business partnership is lucrative and supportive. Good planning and management lead to progressive and productive ventures. It is time to express your feelings and ideas and share what you have learned through a variety of experience in this life. It would be nice to take a short break before starting on a new project to renew your energy.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

Your daily routines and business dealings need to be restructured for better gains and productivity as professional situations and matters come to fore. Your hobbies, leisure time, moments spent with family and children, all come into focus. You have to restructure and reorganize all the activities at work and analyze the situations at home. You tend to be perfectionist while completing business projects and campaigns. You are ambitious and ready to achieve professional goals and targets at any cost. You would maintain balance, strength and completion in personal and business partnership this week.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The planetary configuration this week will help promote professional stability and increase financial returns. A personal involvement has the qualities of love, balance and freedom that you desire. Learning important lessons from life could be the beginning of spiritual growth and understanding. You are blessed with divine wisdom and inspired to take up a professional challenge. Spiritual pursuits and meditation can be rewarding. You grow and transform as you pass through a touching emotional experience. Finances and budgets need to be kept in mind as you complete projects and start new ventures this week. Physical energy and good health enable you balance a busy schedule and work commitments.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Mixed results are indicated at this time. A professional collaboration comes together when you give up all the hopes of it. Creative and professional plans are set to actualize and it is best to work towards them persistently. Your business plans have a magical quality of perfection and completion. Success in business and love in personal relationship transforms your life and attitudes. You have to find out better creative and progressive options. There is a tendency to be aggressive. It would be better to participate in social and family celebrations to lighten up and relax. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program as health will be of concern.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Good results in family and professional aspects are indicated. You would improve personal and professional relations with patience, love and care, and avoid discussions, criticism and arguments. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sincere and devoted about work commitments. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering the week as you would positively use your talents and efficiency. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled this week. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. You would pay attention to your style, image and lifestyle.

Let's extend support to AIDS orphans



By Ranjan K Baruah

It may not be possible for me to explain the condition of orphans through writing. We need to have a big heart and mind to understand and feel the problems faced by orphans. There are many reasons for a child becoming an orphan.

Some causes may be natural while others may not be natural but that does not lessen the ordeal of orphans.

We have seen how AIDS has affected the world. Readers might be wondering why I am talking about AIDS here. Well, whether we are aware or not, there are many AIDS orphans around the world.

An AIDS orphan is a child who becomes an orphan because one or both parents die from AIDS. In statistics from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the term is used for a child whose mother has died due to AIDS before the child's 15th birthday, regardless of whether the father is still alive.

One of the biggest problems is over half of the HIV+ children worldwide do not have access to life-saving medication. Unique among international days of observance, World AIDS Orphans' Day (WAOD) is not a United Nations regulated day of commemoration, which was the brainchild of François-Xavier Bagnoud's founder Al-bina du Boisrouvray.

WAOD was initiated in 2002 to bring attention to the millions of children affected by AIDS.

Every May 7, FXB organises a grassroots campaign to bring attention to the plight of chil-

dren affected by AIDS and advocate on their behalf.

FXB initiated a worldwide coalition of mayors who engage their constituencies to respect and lobby for the rights of the most vulnerable children. To date, over 800 mayors and elected officials from 41 countries have joined this coalition.

WAOD advocates ask their home governments to direct at least 10 percent of all HIV/AIDS funding to support orphans and children made vulnerable by the pandemic.

There are less studies and information is not available in many parts about the exact number of AIDS orphans.

There should be more research and studies to know the number of such orphans so that some welfare measures can be taken for them either by the government or by civil society organisations.

Goal 3 of Sustainable Development Goals is 'Good Health and Well-being' to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all age. Significant progress has been made in the field of combating HIV/AIDS in the last few years.

It is the responsibility of all of us to be aware of diseases like AIDS and at the same time if we come across any AIDS orphan then we must extend our support and assistance.

An inclusive society means every one must be getting the rights and justice and all required human facilities.

AIDS orphans need assistance to move ahead in life. Together we may extend our support for them so that they can also contribute towards sustainable future.

(Feedback may be sent to bkrjanjan@gmail.com)

Watch your dog for yeast infection

(Continued from last week)

If your dog has yeast overgrowth on the skin, disinfect the entire body with a natural, anti-fungal shampoo made from tea tree oil or a herbal blend. This will help control the amount of yeast growing on your pet. After rinsing thoroughly, follow with an anti-fungal astringent rinse — a bucket of water with a cup of vinegar or a cup of lemon juice. You can also use 20 drops of peppermint oil. Avoid the head. Pour the solution over the dog and rub it into the coat and skin, focusing on body parts that tend to grow yeast — armpits, feet, groin area and around the tail. Then towel dry. Your dog will not only feel better, but the yeast won't replicate as quickly.

For many dogs, yeast problems are seasonal. When the temperature and humidity levels rise each year, they get yeasty and stinky.

However, if your dog has a year-round yeast problem, get an immune testing done to measure the immunoglobulin levels. Generally, these levels are low in a dog with constant yeast overgrowth. There are immunoglobulin injections — which we normally use for dogs with early distemper. You will have to start the dog on vitamins, iron tonics and a good diet. If you let the situation be, because you are used to the smell, then this will turn into something worse and cost you far more money.

(Concluded)

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

"The difference between a boss and a leader: a boss says, 'Go!' - a leader says, 'Let's go!'"

--- Sholom Aleichem

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BJP in West Bengal

AMIT Shah, President of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) recently visited Naxalbari and other places in West Bengal. That was of course a wakeup call to the Trinamool Congress Party. It was prompt in meeting the challenge by enrolling the couple in Naxalbari who treated Amit Shah to lunch. The BJP is now all set to wrest West Bengal from the TMC Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee. But the odds are heavy against the BJP. In the Assembly elections in West Bengal last year the TMC had romped in with a massive majority of 211 out of 294 seats. The BJP lagged far behind with only 3 seats. It goes without saying, however, that if the TMC is afraid of a fight in an electoral battle, only the BJP looms large in the horizon. The state BJP seems to be the only opposition party that means business. The Centre is always ready to add to its muscles. The all-India sweep of the BJP and its spectacular victory in the UP Assembly elections makes it understandable that it is gearing to have West Bengal under its belt. An upset may not be a surprise if the TMC grows the way of the Samajwadi Party in UP. Lawlessness is no doubt rife in West Bengal and Mamata is known to be soft on Muslim clerics. The BJP may cash in on both the Hindu and the law and order factors.

The hurdle for the BJP is the impregnable charisma of Mamata Banerjee. She holds as much clout in West Bengal as Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Centre. Besides, the majority of the electorate in the state are not interested in the Hindutva issues which are so persuasive in the Hindi heartland. The state BJP has to get a leader with the kind of image that Mamata Banerjee has built up for herself.

LOOKING BACK

April 11, 1989

Ri Bhoi justifies to be a separate district: CM

Meghalaya Chief Minister Mr Purno Sangma, while conceding the need for the creation of a civil administrative unit for the South East Bhoi area under Ri Bhoi civil sub-division, stated that there was enough justification to upgrade Ri Bhoi into a full-fledged district. He however, clarified that much of it would depend on the response of the 9th Finance Commission in this regard. The Chief Minister was replying to a private member's motion by Mr E K Mawlong (HSPDP) on the need to create a civil administrative unit in the South East Bhoi area. Mr Sangma said that the 9th Finance Commission had been urged for the necessary recommendations for grants for the upgradation of standards of district administration and the establishment and upgrading of new administrative units. Mr Sangma felt that a solution could be found possibly in the establishment of an administrative unit below the level of sub-division. He said that the State Government as well as all the members in the House should apply their minds and "examine the possibility."

The motion was supported by members of both sides of the floor. Mr Khongwir (HPU) mentioned the difficulty the people in the area experience when going to Nongpoh for various official work. Mr B B Lyngdoh (HPU-B) underlined an equal need for a civil administrative unit in the Western Ri Bhoi area. Mr Hopingstone Lyngdoh (HSPDP) said that an administrative unit in the South Ri Bhoi area would serve to check encroachment from Assam.

Plea for making consultative committees more effective

Meghalaya Assembly examine the working and relevance of consultative

committee set up by the State Govt for overseeing various developmental schemes. Moving a private members motion Mr Khongwir (HPU) said that committees to inspect developmental schemes in the State should function properly. Mr S L Marbaniang (HSPDP-DL) said that the follow-up actions should be taken on the reports of the committee. Mr Hopingstone Lyngdoh said that often the departments were not ready with the data that the committee required in order to function. The members of the committee were not taken seriously by the officers of some departments, he said. Mr B G Momin (HPU) said that MLAs were overburdened because of being on so many committees Mr K C Boro (UMPF) called for harder work on the part of committee members in order to make the committee more effective Mr E K Mawlong (HSPDP) said that there was no well defined terms of reference, guidelines and the powers of the committee are not carefully defined Mr C W Marak (HPU) suggested that any scheme for development taken up by department should be intimated to the concerned committee members and the MLA.

Replying to the discussion, Chief Minister Mr Purno A Sangma welcomed the "spirit behind the motion", and stressed the importance of having cooperation of all the members of the house for the sake of development. The most serious problems in the country as well as in the state was that projects are not completed on time. He said that the Development consultative committees were envisioned as being "mobile and involved in inspection jobs."

Need to recognise community conservation efforts

By H.H. Mohrmen

Meghalaya is in a sticky situation where as somebody said we are experiencing scarcity amidst plenty. We are a green state but we have grey areas too. We have forests and the green rolling hills and yet some of our rivers are polluted to the extent that no aquatic life can exist in the river and streams. Ours is a perfect example of a journey to perfection amidst imperfection; we have destructive mining and we have stories of environment conservation efforts too which could also be models for the world at large.

Forests were cleared to make way for various human activities and particularly in the towns forest is being replaced by concrete jungle. We must have seen with our own eyes that ponds and tanks in our neighbourhoods or places that we frequent have gradually dried up. In Jowai a classic case in point is the 'Nan Pakopati' in front of the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council office. In spite of the council wasting lakhs of rupees to beautify it, the pond dug by the legendary u Ran Niangti is no longer filled with water but is instead overgrown with grass.

Rivers are getting polluted and the water levels have dipped due to the disappearance of the forests which used to be like a catchment area which feeds water to the rivers. Sand and stone mining also has a drastic affect on the water level of the river because of silting. This is happening right in front of our eyes and at an alarming rate. Springs have disappeared and even in places where springs still exist, the discharge has gone down drastically as villages and towns have grown. Springs which used to be the only source of water in the locality cannot support human needs anymore because spring-sheds are no longer supporting the spring. This is according to the study made by the Institute of Natural Resource Management under the Integrated Basin Development and Livelihoods Promotion program.

And as the population

grows and villages get bigger and big villages transform into towns and towns turn to cities, greenery and water bodies are the first casualty of the unplanned development. We are all witnessing rapid disappearance of water bodies and green cover in villages and towns and the scenario is repeated almost everywhere at a much more alarming rate.

Yet, in spite of all this depressing development, our hope lies with some visionary communities, particularly those who are involved in conserving the rivers and the forest around them. At times it looks like there is no hope left and it is all dark and gloomy everywhere as far as environment is concerned. We also often conclude that the system failed to produce the required results and we do not see any hope of saving our environment, but there is always a silver-lining beyond the dark clouds. In fact our strength is in the kind of communities that we have and these communities have a workable grass-root governance system in place and have come up with a successful conservation activity which could also be a model for others. It is also true that the communities where the conservation efforts are reported to be successful are also places where the local durbar works like a well-oiled machine. Conservation is also successful because, it is in the blood of the Khasi Pnar people. They have been conserving forest and water for community use and for religious and spiritual purposes from ages. In fact conservation is a common practice of the people in the area and if we look carefully it starts with preserving of seeds and sharing them with our neighbours, friends and families.

There are hundreds of sacred groves and community forests maintained by the Raid and Eleka in the Khasi Pnar part of the state and one can find these forests of various shapes and sizes dotting the entire landscape of the state. But keeping sacred groves and

community forests are stories which are reported on a regular basis and the world knows about it, but the stories of how communities successfully protect and preserve rivers and water bodies do not get the kind of publicity they deserve.

The story of Amlayea community fish sanctuary at Nongbareh village is a classic case study of how the sole objective of the sanctuary is for the welfare of the entire community. The tradition is that one can catch fish from the sanctuary only if someone in the family falls ill or gets sick or for community purposes.

In recent times conservation efforts made by the Jaintia Fishing and Environment Protection Society to protect the river Myntdu is now bearing fruit. That we still have fishes in the river is only because of the efforts made by the society and now Jaintia Fishing and Environment Protection Society has declared Syntu Ksiar as a fish sanctuary and fishing is prohibited on this part of the river.

The Dorbar Shnong of Shangpung has declared certain sections of the river in the village as fish sanctuary and conserves the same religiously and then there is a story of the Dorbar Shnongpdeng and the protection of the Masiah part of the river Umngot. Then the Raid Buam and Krangshuri and these are only few that one can name and that too from the district of West Jaintia hills only. These projects have succeeded because there is workable partnership between the communities and the government agencies and in this case the fisheries department. We have stories of a community effort to protect the fishes particularly the Mahseer in the river Umngi and the list endless.

Our success is not limited to river and water bodies only. There are stories of successful conservation of forest and wildlife in the sacred groves of raid Chyrmang, Tuber, Mokhaialong of both East and West Jaintia hills. All these

conservation efforts did not happen in a day. It is the untiring efforts of these communities which brought these projects to fruition. Our strength is in the community and it is only when we have a community which realises the importance of conservation of the environment that we can bring change. In all these cases the Wild Life Department of these respective districts are the force behind the success of these efforts.

There are stories of how people meticulously preserve their root-bridges and in Kudengrim the community is growing a new two storied root-bridge. The community nurseries and the planting of indigenous variety of saplings in the catchment area is also a conservation effort which needs to be duly recognised.

The immediate need is to encourage more communities to engage in conservation and there are several ways that we can do this. The first thing that the different government agencies can do is to capacitate the community. This is the first step in the partnership. Earlier the departments were not forthcoming but now government departments are not averse to convergence and the District Basin Development Units are the driving force of most of the convergence that is happening in the state.

But the most important part that the government can play is to recognise these conservation efforts and perhaps even reward the communities for their achievements by instituting a kind of Green Award and publicising the event. Again the DBDUs are the best agencies to scout and develop parameters to decide on the individual or institution that can be nominated as a contender for the state award from their respective districts. This award will go a long way in empowering the awardees as well as inspire others to start conservation projects in their area.

Ordinance not enough to solve bad debts problem

More legal follow-up actions needed

By Anjan Roy

When finance minister Arun Jaitley announced a new ordinance to empower the Reserve Bank of India to directly intervene for resolving banks' bad debts, it was felt as if this was the magic wand. Far from it.

For practical purposes, the ordinance or the extra authority that gives RBI authority to intervene was already there. As the final regulator of the banking sector RBI has on many occasions instructed banks and directed them to take steps about their rising portfolio of bad debts. But bad debts have gone on increasing.

It is also known who all are responsible for the bloating bag of such loans. The finance minister had made repeated statements that just about 40-50 large borrowers account for over 80% of these loans. Government had taken a series of steps and passed laws for recovery of these loans as well. Take the stock: six new Debt recovery tribunals have been put in place recently, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code enacted, Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act (SARFESI) passed, and the Recovery of Debts to Banks and Financial Institutions (RDBFI) has been further strengthened.

Despite all these, bad debts have gone on increasing – both in absolute amounts and more importantly as a proportion of the overall advances portfolio. These have increased more in the last five years than before when many of the corrective mechanisms have been put in place. Then there must be some fundamental economic reasons why these are rising. There must be some lacunae in the legal framework or in the approach why bad debts are accumulating instead of reduction.

There are at least three broad reasons why so. The bad debts are rising as a consequence of our overall framework of laws and legal institutions and also in the system as such. If land laws are such that a piece of land badly required for a project cannot be acquired on the ground, then loans advanced for a green field project is likely to get sticky. No amount of debt recovery rules and laws can help in recovering amounts already spent on a project in a doomed site. There are any number of Singurs in this country than are written about in the newspapers and bank money is sunk in them. Has any one really questioned or cared to know if the loans raised by the Tatas for its aborted plant in Singur were being serviced or these are treated as bad loans. Maybe, Tatas are big and they can carry the burden but what of smaller companies.

Secondly, what happens when the bids of banks to recover their loans are stuck in law courts. An ordinary petition for recovery of a rented property by small house owner can take twenty years and then still remain unresolved, then what about complicated cases involving recovery of crores of rupees. None of the bank cases for recovery of loans are competed and assets taken over, excepting a handful. Out of the total outstanding bad debts of close to Rs6.9 trillion, the number of property seized and symbolic physical possession taken during 2016-17 was worth Rs 64,519 crore. In 2016, total amount of NPA reduced was only Rs 37,815 crore.

These facts and figures

lead to the third reason why. Take for instance only one law – the Companies Act. Under this law, apparently the capital of a company cannot be wiped out. If this were possible, a company owing large amounts to a bank can face a situation when its risk capital is all wiped out and then the company is handed over to a new investor who recapitalises the sick unit. The effect is that the owner of the sick unit loses all his risk capital and the control of the company which is then handed over to the new buyer who recapitalises.

This is the model which was followed extensively in the United States, particularly after the global financial melt-down in 2008. The banks which had booked large losses on their trading or for derivatives instruments had their capital wiped out. The government then stepped in and put large funds into recapitalisation (something like some \$800 billion) in some of these banks. Later these shares were off-loaded into the market and the banks returned to private ownership.

The same model was followed extensively in the United Kingdom after the large scale bank failures in that country in the same year. These banks since then have been again privatised through market offers.

Anyway, these are broad outlines of the political economics of bad debts in present-day India. Some of these could be addressed in a short to medium time scale. Some would appear to be un-resolvable even in the long run.

But coming to the ordinance as such, this could provide a kind of buffer to banks and bankers in trying to cope up with their bad debts. How? The banks and bankers have been reluctant to handle the bad debts and resolve these really. Any resolution of bad debts inescapably involves give and take. You have to recognise the reality and, maybe, accept some haircut. The moment there is a haircut – or writing off – of portions of the due loans, eyebrows are raised. Bankers, apparently, had plainly told the government as well as the RBI that on their own they would not do anything of the kind to resolve bad debts and risk vigilance inquiries in future.

RBI's institutional interventions in the process of coming to terms with bad debts could provide that shield to bankers. The new powers include RBI's authority to create some oversight committees to go into bad debts and be remained involved in the formulation of the agreement.

This could then give some sanctity to the process of resolution and the intentions of bankers in accepting haircuts could not be questioned as a later stage. Along with these, the bunch of anti-corruption acts also needs to be changed. That is, so long as business decisions – like granting a loan – are taken in good faith without mala fide intentions, the decision-makers should not be questioned. Mistakes might be committed and the best business decisions could also turn sour. But as long as the decisions are taken without receiving any personal benefits or resulting in personal enrichment, these should be honoured against corruption proceedings.

This last step is also an act of trust. But then, in the end a bit of trust is essential. The entire wider world is not a bad debt. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Maligning the BJP!

Editor,

The Opposition parties are trying to align to elect a "secular" President. The pseudo secular parties have decided to set up their own candidate for the post of President of India after the term of the present incumbent is over. BJP believes in positive secularism and is a secular party but the opposition terms BJP a "communal party". At present the Central Government and most states are ruled by BJP. Large sections of the people of this country do not consider BJP to be communal. On the contrary they see the BJP as a patriotic, nationalist and non-corrupt party. BJP believes in positive secularism, probity in public life especially in high places, justice for all and appeasement for none and Sarva Dharma Sama Bhav (respect for all religions). A handful of corrupt parties are now coming together to defame the BJP. Many patriotic Indians from RSS are working in BJP. Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh means Nationalist Voluntary Organisation hence its members are patriotic and nationalistic

and work for the development and well being of the country. When the Prime Minister of India is from BJP with RSS background, why can the President of India not be from BJP too?

Yours etc
B.B.Chettri
Shillong-2

Getting our priorities right

Editor,

When trafficking of children is on the rise, the idea of having a database for cows showcases an extreme example of misplaced priority. Since missing, kidnapping and trafficking of children has become a national embarrassment, a database for all the children of our country must be prepared on a war footing and made easily available. Such an initiative can help bring many children back to their families.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

North East football makes a mark!

Editor,

This year has been an incredible one for this lesser known region when an

equally lesser known Aizawl FC scripted history by becoming the first North East club to win the I-League title. It was an unprecedented achievement where success has not always followed the passion for football and all this despite budgetary challenges. The rise of Aizawl FC will mark a milestone in Indian football. Equally creditable is the Shillong Lajong FC which was placed fifth in I-League standing. Besides, there is North East United FC, where a number of NE players played for cash rich Indian Super League teams. Assam footballers Durga Boro and Alen Deory feature in the upcoming ISL. The Manipuri Duo Singhs of NEUFC are making waves in Indian football, after impressing in the ISL. The winners in Santosh Trophy, the top domestic championship in India by Manipur (2002-03) and Mizoram (2013-14) had shown remarkable presence of football from the North East. In sub junior football the North East schools from Nagaland (9), Mizoram (6), Assam (5), Manipur (4), Meghalaya (2), Arunachal Pradesh (1), Tripura (1) played a number of Finals in the Subroto Cup tournament.

The love for the game of

football is seen in abundance in this land. Nine year old Chandan Boro from Assam has been selected for six years football training at Bundesliga club TSG Hoffenheim, Germany. And now he is the playing captain of the young club. The forgotten Naga doctor-footballer Talimeren Ao (Mohan Bagan, 1943 and 1952) led the Indian football team in the 1948 London Olympic quarter-final. Come October, it's time to watch FIFA U-17 World Cup in Guwahati. It is one of the six venues ready for the big event, where 24 teams from six confederations participated. With no big sponsors for NE players, the government has to create infrastructure for this region. In the mind of most Indians, NE is just a about rock and roll music and wild scenic beauty but there are many hidden facets including football now which is coming up in a big way.

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah,
Via email

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

"Life is a dream for the wise, a game for the fool, a comedy for the rich, a tragedy for the poor."

--- Walt Disney

The Shillong Times

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Macron in

FRANCE elected Emmanuel Macron as its President. He defeated Marine Le Pen, a far-right nationalist who threatened to take France out of the European Union. Macron has a business friendly vision of European integration. The emphatic victory of the 39 year old Centrist leader knocked out the dominance of France's mainstream parties. It will bring huge relief to European allies who had been worried about a populist upheaval like the referendum in the UK which went in favour of Britain's decision to quit the European Union. This landmark decision went along with the victory of Republican Donald Trump as the President of the United States who advocated a policy of America for Americans. Macron, an investment banker served for two years as economy minister but he is still inexperienced. He will be the youngest leader of France sine Napoleon Bonaparte and promises to transcend outdated left-right divisions. Although Macron had a sweeping victory, Le Pen's party, the National Front, fared reasonably well though its anti-immigrants policy made it very unpopular in trade politics.

Le Pen's high spending anti-globalization and 'France first' policies had an adverse impact on financial markets. But her party appealed to many poorer sections of society. This was expected to be effective against a background of high unemployment, social tensions and security concerns. Macron's immediate challenge will be to secure a majority in next month's parliamentary election. His political movement (Onwards) is only a year old and will take time to implement.

LOOKING BACK

April 11, 1989

Govt enunciates plus points of railhead project

Meghalaya Govt has defended its decision on rail head project at Byrnihat saying that it was "in the interest of the people of Meghalaya". In a press release issued here on Friday, the State Govt allayed the misgivings in certain quarters about fresh influx of people and said that "rather than encouraging influx, it would in fact help in checking influx", besides being a matter of "considerable economic significance."

The press release, which apparently come in the wake of call for public curfew by the KSU on April 20, said that the govt was willing to hear the views of the public leaders and representatives to the people, discuss the matter further and the position properly clarified.

Following is the text of the press release: "Some people seem to have expressed their apprehensions on the proposed Railway-head to be located in Byrnihat in Meghalaya on the ground that it would lead to influx of people from outside. "We all know the location of Byrnihat. Byrnihat, unfortunately, falls both in Assam and Meghalaya. As we travel to Guwahati along the National Highway, the right side of Byrnihat is in Assam and left is in Meghalaya. Therefore, if Assam wants to bring the Railway to Byrnihat we cannot prevent it. What we can prevent is the location of Railway-head in Meghalaya. We cannot prevent Railway-line and Railway-head in Assam, which may be a few yards away from Meghalaya. Therefore if the fear is influx, then if we are not able to prevent the railway-head in Assam territory?"

"The difference is that if the railway-head is in Assam, the Government of Meghalaya will have no control and if the railway-head is within the Meghalaya territory, then we

will have control. Therefore, even from the point of view of checking influx in order to enable the Meghalaya Government to regulate movement of people in the railway station, it will be better that the railway-head is in Meghalaya territory. Since there is an Infiltration check gate at Byrnihat, influx can be checked. The existing check gate will be further strengthened and additional check gate will be set up.

"The Government of Meghalaya has communicated to the Government of India that Government of Meghalaya will allow only goods trains to come and passengers trains will not be introduced till such time the people of Meghalaya demanded for it. This we can implement only when railway-head is within Meghalaya territory." The State Government is committed to maintaining the population structure of the State. The Government will take every step possible to check influx into the State. As an effective measure to check influx, the State Government has already started the process for formulating an innovative scheme for issue of Identity Cards, maintain Register of the people of Meghalaya, registration of births, death and marriages so that it is easy to identify people and regulate their movement. In this task, the Government has already decided to associate the traditional tribal institutions.

"Another point to think over is that the people all over the country and all over the north-eastern region are demanding for railways. Why? Our fellow tribals in the region like Nagas, Mizos, Arunachalis and Manipuris who are equally concerned about maintaining their population structure are also demanding for railway-lines. It is because the people realize that railway communication is a key to economic development."

Advancement in technology leads to social isolation

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

Modern life has changed considerably thanks to technology. The pace of life moves is faster. Major success has been achieved in modern times in the field of medicine, nuclear science, computers and automation at various levels. The discovery of viruses by American biochemist Wendell Stanley in 1930's and the discovery of mysteries of genetic inheritance by Englishman F.H.C. Crick and the American James Watson have undoubtedly been the biggest scientific achievements in the last century. Development in the field of nuclear science has shifted the balance of power in the world giving rise to a new term 'proliferation'. Another major achievement in the last century has been the development in the field of computers and computing machines. These in turn have created an environment where the work is done very rapidly, thus increasing the pace of life.

Technology and its boons have been propagated in such a voracious manner that we tend to forget or overlook its harm. It comes with its own set of problems. One of the major harms it has done is to give man the power of mass destruction, hitherto unknown. It has also affected the environment to a very large extent. Another major defect of technology is that it has created isolation in the society. In times to come this is going to be a major influential factor.

Karl Marx gave the concept 'alienation' which was central to his theories while defining class conflict in the capitalist economy. Marx claimed that in a capitalist economy each worker had a restricted or limited role. He or she no longer applied total human capacities of hands, the mind and the emotion at work. This created a sense of isolation which was explained in four stages: Workers alienation from the product he produces; from the process of production; from himself; from the community of his fellowmen. When the worker has reached the fourth stage he is no longer attached to either himself or the society. This gives birth to social isolation. Marx's definition of social alienation is very true in today's modern world where extreme levels of mechanization and specialization have forced humans to become socially isolated to a large extent. Technology has also affected the human thinking. It has clouded his patience. Today man wants work done so fast that the mere concept of waiting

Advocates of technology might demonstrate that technology like social networking sites have brought about a revolution in human interaction but the real picture has been truly summarized above. An American company has developed a machine which leaves voice recorded messages. They say that they have replaced the text messaging system but what they have actually mastered is the art of leaving a voice

recorded message without having to undergo the ordeal of engaging in a conversation. All these and many other developments point towards one simple fact - that use of technology in modern times has actually given rise to social isolation.

The past few centuries saw society being divided in terms of haves and have-nots. This created a great imbalance in society. The post industrialization modern era saw rapid strides in technology in every field. This has led to the emergence of a new class of division 'skilled' and 'unskilled' human resource which is going to become more prominent in the coming times. If the division between haves and have-nots had created a mere imbalance in the society the difference between the skilled and the unskilled will however lead to the total collapse of the system. There is a deep rooted sense of isolation in this divide. It goes on from being merely social to physical and finally alienates man from himself. The common sense of solidarity among these people at the receiving end of this system is however missing this time which makes it a larger threat to humanity than the previous division among haves and have-nots.

Social isolation nowadays is defined in the broader terms as the absence of social interactions, contacts, and relationships with family and friends, with neighbours on an individual level, and with 'society at large' on a broader level including with the environment. The last part 'environment' leads to a different discussion with regards to social isolation. Development can be attributed to two major sources nature and technology. Nature's concept of development is based on abundance like air, water land etc. Technology's concept of development has largely been around scarcity like expensive medical treatment. Thus this very basic difference in nature led to the emergence of conflict between technology and environment. In this conflict, technology has successfully created havoc on the environment. Thus when nature gets destroyed man feels alienated. This brings an altogether different direction to the term social isolation.

The friction between technological development and the social bonding of man in particular and the influence of the former on the course of social and

cultural changes has been a great source of controversy. Today, human life is an industrial life. In this life which is governed by technical relations, all products are interrelated and interdependent, where the purchase of a product commits one to the purchase of another. Technology advances constantly and rapidly; what has been useful and favoured one day runs out of style next day. This rapid stride has bought about a sense of detachment of man from goods. Thus his feelings of belongingness even to the materialistic things begins to decrease since the products change so rapidly that he is not able to associate himself with any of it. All these are the major harbingers of social isolation.

There are numerous cases of people committing suicide because they are unable to cope with the pressure of technology. This may sound unbelievable but it's true. A large number of youths commit suicide for reasons as feeble as losing a computer game. This is nothing but a sense of isolation from themselves! They do not feel attached to themselves anymore. After getting isolated from their co workers, their family, the environment and finally materialistic goods they finally feel alienated from themselves. This creates a deep sense of isolation in their minds which leads to panic and finally he or she takes a drastic step.

Thus in the above we see that in modern times man has actually alienated himself from the society through technology. Science and technology provide no panacea for the problems of the world. If those problems have to be solved humans have to work; not machines. They will be better equipped to do so if they have a sense of solidarity and a common sense of their own past. The lesson of history is not that it never repeats itself. The lesson is rather, than that the present can be clearly perceived and the future intelligently planned for only when those responsible understand the basic working of human nature can man find the answers to life's challenges. Man is a social animal and for knowledge and insight of this simple fascinating mechanism, it is not technology but a common sense of history achieved through a simple concept called togetherness.

(Views expressed by the author are personal)

TO THE EDITOR

Non-functioning Human Rights Commission!

Editor, Sunday's issue of your paper (ST May 7, 2016) has rightly given the lead story on the non-functioning of the Meghalaya Human Rights Commission, though it has completed one year of its constitution. It is only fair for the public to question this Commission. It is sad and most unfortunate that the Commission has no office of its own and till date its full strength has not been filled up. It is the Human Rights Commission for Meghalaya yet, it functions from Assam and the last meeting was held at Guwahati on May 2 last which was presided by the Chairman and attended by the Secretary and another member. This is unacceptable.

It was reported in the news that the Commission has received very few complaints and took up only one. This means it is

not busy at all as it has very little work to do. The question is how can the Commission justify its existence and how can the members justify drawing their salaries from the Government of Meghalaya? If there is work then they deserve to be paid. If there is little work done then the salary also should be according to the quantum of work. And if there is no work, there should be no pay. That is the logic and fair play. It was also reported that the Commission has conducted awareness programmes. We want to know what sort of awareness programmes the Commission conducted and how many times. For whom were the awareness programmes conducted and what was the total expenditure incurred? The public want to know. The Commission should remember that it is very much under the scanner of the public as it is constituted for public purpose and it is funded from the public exchequer. It has to show action and has to be accountable to the public of Meghalaya.

Yours etc., Philip Marweñ, Shillong-2

India needs a secular President!

Editor, Apropos to the letter "Maligning the BJP" by B B Chettri (ST May 8, 2017) it should be understood that every political party has its rights to align and elect a candidate of its own choice based on various factors. That non-BJP parties have begun to align in selecting a

secular candidate as President is a welcome step so that the balance of authority and power as per the Constitution itself remains strong. Sudden emergence and explosion of nationalism as the writer has mentioned is an overstatement and that the majority Indians do not consider the BJP as 'communal' is a matter of observation. So does he mean to imply that before the BJP all Indians were non-patriotic or lacked nationalism? Then how come this new-found nationalism suddenly transformed into violence, false implications and unwarranted arrest for expressing open opinions? Take for instance over-zealous nationalists, accusing Christians of conversion, beef ban and all sorts of ban. Why doesn't the government ban such elements who in turn are a nuisance to society and a threat to the secular fabric of the country?

Yours etc. Dominic S. Wankhar Via email

Triple "M" Power of BJP

By Barnes Mawrie

Since 2014, the BJP has been soaring higher and higher in the national political scenario. Today with their massive victory in the assembly election of the biggest State of India, UP, the Party has soared to the height of its glory. The Indian political colour is getting more saffron after every election. Who knows when their winning spree will be halted? It is rather unthinkable that North-east India which used to be a fortress of the Congress Party, is gradually becoming a BJP haven. In the next year's assembly election in the States of Meghalaya, Mizoram and others, people would be closely watching what the results would be. Would it be saffron all the way like in Assam and Manipur, or will the Congress be able to retain its charm?

The phenomenal political success of the BJP is by no means a case of chance, luck or magic. When we go deeper into their success story we find some convincing strategies which account for their political ascent and domination. In my opinion, the BJP's secret to success rests on the Triple 'M' Power Formula which they effectively implement in their political enterprises. What is this Triple 'M' Power Formula? This is spelled out as follows:

1) Money Power which is so evident in the way the Party is able to manoeuvre its political activities. Everyone understands the power of money for it is said that "one who wields money power wields real power." As the old saying goes "one who pays the piper calls for the tune." So it is clear that the BJP has a lot of money power which is able to sustain their political ambition and win them election after election. As it has been alleged by the opposition parties, the demonetization was done at an opportune time to clip off the wings of the other parties especially the SP, BSP or Congress in the UP election leaving them powerless and almost penniless. Reliable sources have claimed that lot of money was channelized to Assam during the last assembly election. The same money power is going to win them more elections in the coming days and years. "Money for vote" is still a functional tactic in India as most people are poor and are looking for such opportunities. All political parties have been doing the same but as of today the BJP is in a more advantageous position.

2) Media Power is another factor in the BJP success story. Perhaps the BJP understands the potentiality of the media more than the Congress does or else they would not have got a massive victory in the last general election. Having money power has put the BJP in a position to take control of the media both written and audio/visual. Since the last general election, TV channels and newspapers continue to talk ad nauseam about the BJP. It is evident that most of the media is pro BJP and whatever is being projected about them appears always positive. The media paints a colourful picture of the BJP government thus captivating the minds and hearts of the citizens. Success stories are being bloated beyond proportion so as to fool the simple public. One may say that through the media the BJP is playing to the gallery. What is more disturbing however, is the way criticism against the BJP is trashed away by the media. Any time the opposition raises a criticism against the

government be it on demonetization or on Kashmir issue, the media brands them as "anti-nationals." Even in the social media no one is free to express views which are contradictory to the BJP agenda.

Recently a well known Bollywood actor mentioned about beef eating and the person was immediately harassed on social media. So where is the freedom of expression? Is this situation not the same as living under dictatorship or totalitarianism? In fact, if one goes by the media presentation of the government, one would be compelled to think that the BJP government is the best government ever in the last 60 years of our existence as an independent nation. This is how the vast population of simple, uneducated people in India have been brainwashed about the present government. But we all know that all that glitters is not gold, the situation in India is no better today under the BJP than yesterday under the Congress. In terms of human rights and condition of poor people we are worse today than ever before.

3) Modi Power is the third decisive "M" power of the BJP. Nobody can deny that Narendra Modi is one of the most charismatic leaders India has seen. If the Congress were to have a leader with half the charisma of Modi, they would still be ruling today. Our PM Modi has captured the attention not only of Indians but of people all over the world. Being nominated as Time Magazine's "Man of the year", speaks highly of his leadership capability. The BJP deserves appreciation for its political acumen to identify a person like Modi to lead the party. Its ability to rise above "dynastic politics" and give in to "talents politics" is the secret of its winning strategy which perhaps the Congress ought to take a leaf out of. Mr. Modi's appeal to the general public proves the strength of his political prowess. He has the gift of the gab and he is a born orator. Besides being an orator, he gives the impression of being a man of action. These are all ingredients of good leadership and Modi seems to be affluent in these.

However, all his leadership qualities get tainted by his close association with the RSS and rightwing Hindu fundamentalism. He appears to be working at the behest of the RSS. Modi is the BJP's right hand that caresses but the RSS is its left hand that strikes. If it were not for this shady connection, Modi would probably be hailed as the greatest PM of India because he really has the stuff of a great leader. Unfortunately, the Institution which effected his rise would also bring about his downfall.

Finally what really counts in politics is the "via media" (the middle way) or in popular term "compromise." Any party that leans towards extremism (right wing or left wing), would ultimately face the music. The way the BJP is acting now by inclining towards Hindu fundamentalism is a sure indication that it is heading towards an imminent downfall. Society has always resisted extremist ideologies be it Nazism, Fascism or radical Communism. No one should underestimate the wisdom of the common man. The Indian public will sooner or later dump any government that attempts to endanger the "via media" enshrined in our Constitutions.

*If you take responsibility for yourself
you will develop a hunger to
accomplish your dreams.*

--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

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HSSLC results; time to introspect

THE result of the Class XII Science and Commerce streams of the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) was a shocker in more ways than one. In the Science stream, nine out of ten toppers are from one institution only, leaving just one position for the others. Similarly in the Commerce stream the same institution cornered seven out of the ten positions (with the 8th and 9th positions being shared with two other schools). Other missionary run institutions which used to corner pride of place in these examinations have been ousted out. The pass percentage of 71.87% in Commerce and 76.76% in Science don't reveal much and as usual are taken in their stride. And this is the actual malady of the state of Education in Meghalaya.

Over the years, students who fare well in their Class X examination and wish to pursue the Science stream have tended to shift to schools offering the CBSE syllabus which is at par across the country. This gives them a competitive edge when they sit for entrance exams for engineering courses such as the Indian Institute of Technology Joint Entrance Exam (IIT JEE) or the All India Engineering Entrance Exam (AIEEE). Also those opting for Medicine now have to sit for the National Eligibility and Entrance Test (NEET). Students from Meghalaya who fail to make it to the state quota for Medicine and Engineering have to appear for the national entrance examinations and the CBSE syllabus is designed for these exams. Many of them already join online coaching centers from Class IX onwards for optimum performance. It can be safely stated therefore that the best students have migrated to the CBSE stream, leaving MBOSE with the rest. The MBOSE syllabus over the years whether in Arts, Science or Commerce has left much to be desired. The results of the Science and Commerce streams from schools in Garo Hills suggest that there are major lacunae in teaching-learning. The school authorities need find out what ails Science and Commerce education in that region. In the absence of a State Education Policy, Meghalaya continues to flounder and its student population is the worst affected.

LOOKING BACK

April 11, 1989

Hostile Andaman tribe makes friendly gesture

The hostile Jarwas of the Anadaman and Nicobar Islands reciprocated to a friendly gesture of an expedition team by planting seedlings recently. Claimed to be for the first time in the South Andamans, the 27 Jarwas, including women and children came forward and started planting the seedlings of fruit bearing trees when they were shown

the way by the team members led by Mr S A Awaradi, Director, Tribal Welfare of the Island.

The team members who went in the expedition to the South Andamans last month met the dreaded Jarwas twice as the incident of their responding to the friendly gesture occurred on March 30, official report said.

Future - fun and fears

By Paramjit Bakshi

Chai, samosa, chana, coffee, bread omelette, fish cutlet, misti doi, beggars, coolies, hijras, Punjabi/Hindi song, platform announcement, noise and stink, mundane conversations and above all chaos. The train has arrived at Shillong! But please, do not be alarmed. For it reached here, on the twin rails of creativity and imagination, and not those of steel. The 'Indian Train Song', composed and performed by the Shillong Chamber Choir, which I heard only recently, bowled me over. It was sheer novelty, to hear the many ordinary voices one ignores on a train journey, resurrected, in an elegant vocal interlace of rhythm and harmony. The humdrum was lifted to the sublime, and yet, retained its distinctiveness and vibrancy. What works for the choir is also the choreography, the vivid expressions and the pleasing body language of the singers. Although the entire repertoire of the SCC leaves the audience, from Mumbai to Washington, mesmerised, this number for me bore, a stamp of creativity, one rarely encounters, in everyday popular music. What a surprise too- a train song from a city without trains. It is the SCC's creativity and adaptability that has enabled their music, to become Meghalaya's most innovative, and perhaps the most unexpected, value added export.

For centuries creativity has suffused our music, painting, sculpture, literature and dance. On the other hand finding inventive solutions has also enabled man to overcome his physical limitations. From being able to start a fire, invent a wheel, bridge wide rivers, scale the highest mountains to manufacturing ships and air shuttles in order to cross and explore the oceans and outer space, we have certainly been exceptionally inspired. Our footprints are on the moon and our spacecraft have landed on distant Mars. In the last five decades human creativity when applied to technology has changed the world even more rapidly and is bringing the future at an ever dizzying speed. Like a roller coaster ride, this is both scary and exciting. Yet unlike the roller coaster, the option of not riding this change is unavailable. For good or for bad, it is here. And like they say - you can run honey, but you cannot hide. Here is a thin slice, a mere foretaste of what could be coming our way.

Robots will soon be

cleaning our homes, and in a span of a year or two, we will see cars which drive themselves and even cars which fly. We will own suitcases, which we won't pull or push along. They will merrily roll behind us, synchronised to our cell phones. Our alarm clocks will run away and hide, to make sure we get out of our bed, and a battery powered foldable cycle, will fit into our bag. Being tested are life saving buoys, which will be remotely and quickly deployed towards folk in danger of drowning. For those lacking the ability to master diverse languages, an "in ear language translator", will enable communication with a person speaking in a different tongue. If the intrepid Elon Musk has his way, you will lead a multi planetary life, and may even live, on a colony on a different planet. Of course, no matter where you live, you shall exist much longer. The average worldwide life expectancy, which was thirty one years in 1900, and currently is seventy nine, will extend in another decade or so, to a hundred years. A wit predicts, that the hardest thing to do in the future would be, to find a chat name, that hasn't been taken. Contrarily, another bright spark points out, that when the present walks into the future, it will be tense. Having seen a somewhat rosy picture, let us also look, at the other side of the bitcoin.

It is estimated that seventy to eighty percent of all jobs, will disappear, in the next two to three decades. They will be wiped out, by advances in 3D printing, software, information technology, and artificial intelligence. Already of little importance in industrialised economies, manufacturing jobs, which got off shored to the third world, will, thanks to 3D printing, significantly shrink. Our off shoring gains will also get reversed. "Embedded Computing Design", magazine, predicts that a single worker manning a 3D printer anywhere, will replace ten low wage employees. Consequently there will be little left, to "balle balle" about in Ludhiana, or yell "bhalo" for in Bangladesh, or to celebrate in China and with less than one tenth of the jobs back, nothing much to Trump(et) about in America, or make it great again. 3D printers, we may not realise, can potentially make almost everything- from our organs to multi-storied buildings. Software already

has, and will continue to disrupt, traditional businesses. Just as it made Amazon, Aliexpress and Flipkart, software will continue to assist creative business entities, bereft of physical assets, become leaders in their field. Uber, with zero investment in taxis, is today the biggest taxi company worldwide just as Airbnb, sans any hotels of its own, is the biggest seller of hotel rooms.

"If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine; it is lethal." wrote Paulo Coelho, in a different context. One of my favourite quotes, this statement affirmed a psychological truth, which is now turning out to be, something of a prophecy. Routine occupations will be the hardest hit. Others may not be aware, but old tea planters will testify how there used to be *paniwallas, pankhawallas, dakwallahs and rotiwallas*. They are all gone now. Our friendly cab driver and the personal chauffeur, will soon join the list of people, whose services we will not require much longer. Neither will we be shaking hands in the future, with many librarians, clerks, typists or stenographers. There will no *chaprassis* or peons left, to salaam us. Technology will make, even the already much exploited cultivator, pant to play catch up. Many developments such as agricultural robots, hydroponics, agroponics, vertical farming, and roof top agriculture are set to revolutionise agriculture, beyond the realm of the uneducated peasant. Meats, such as chicken and beef, are already being "cultivated" in labs on Petri dishes, directly from cells, by scientists and not farmers. Sadly, the story won't end there.

It is not just the uneducated, or the less educated, but even professionals, will suffer the onslaught of artificial intelligence. A doctor, reading outputs from various diagnostic machines, is already more of a technician, than a specialist. The introduction of cheap wearable devices, to monitor our bio medical markers, and the increased use of robotic surgical equipment, will ensure his obese wallet get slim. "Watson", the fictional sidekick of Sherlock Holmes, though real now, but neither a doctor nor a human, is busy enabling mere nurses, differentiate various types of cancers. The same Watson, of IBM lineage, is also "supercharging lawyers with artificial intelligence" as a result of which, young lawyers in US are left with very few openings. Who says everything artificial is

worthless, in the case of intelligence; synthetic seems destined to overtake yours and mine.

Even teachers, yet unable to impart creativity, will find their ilk much reduced. As prices of smart phones decline, education will increasingly become internet based. Two or three teachers, now coach, through VSAT, hundreds of IAS aspirants around the country, and in a smart classroom in a school, even in 'backward' Tura, a giant screen stands in for a teacher. Bleary eyed students will now, regularly and painfully sing "to Sir with love" as more and more teachers, get laid off by institutions.

Though the poor and the middle class will be the worst affected, unaware millionaires, snoozing on mattresses of black money, will also be hurt as their stash becomes transparent, taxable and less trustworthy. Wealth alone will cease to fetch high returns; money will no longer breed money automatically. To do business, as is becoming evident, you need neither your own money nor or your own property but just a single creative idea. Money bags, in the form of venture capitalists, will need to take on high risk, with start-ups to get decent gains.

Efficiency and productivity, being the name of the game, one wonders how most of us, will find sustenance. Quite likely many of us will be culled off by the rich, euphemistically as collateral damage. The remaining few, like Robocop, might exist, part human part tech. Epicenter, a Swedish company, is already implanting employees with tiny microchips and turning them into cyborgs. One thinks only the *chamchas* will safely survive, as they have for long, without ever being productive.

All this brings me back to a very human worry - *mera kya hoga?* Will columnists exist in the future? Does ST stand for "Simply Today" or "Surely Tomorrow"? Not knowing for sure, I better hedge my bets, and with some creative juices, water and stretch that love story I penned, into an operaaaahhh. Hopefully some opera-tively creative musician will look for a script. Could even be a certain, Mr. Neil Nongkynrih. Creativity after all, is not a luxury, even for the SCC.

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French elections: Can Emmanuel Macron unify a politically fractured France?

By Kanwal Sibal

Once Emmanuel Macron won the first round on April 23 it was clear that he would be the next French president. Even if Republican nominee Donald Trump's surprising victory in the US presidential election and the Brexit vote had induced prudence in predicting with absolute certainty who would win the French election, it was almost inconceivable that Marine Le Pen would win.

Already, in Austria and in the Netherlands, the far Right-wing parties had done less well than expected electorally, despite the increasing public appeal of their agendas. Faced with slow economic growth, Eurozone pains, doubts about the European Union, rising anti-globalisation sentiments, the policies of austerity, social tensions, refugee inflows, Islamic terrorism and the like, public dissatisfaction with the

next presidential election.

Since Napoleon at 40 years, France has not had such a young head of state as Macron at 39 years. While politicians in France are applauding his election as representing vigour, imagination and hope in the practice of French democracy, which is the right sentiment to express at this juncture when relief at Le Pen's defeat is upper most in their minds, the problems lie ahead.

If Macron has won as expected, it does not mean that the expectations from his victory will necessarily be met. Macron has to govern.

For implementing his agenda, which is liberal - open to Europe, strong relations with Germany, reform of the economy, flexible on immigration and so on - he needs to have a parliamentary majority. His movement, En Marche, has

The fact that Jean Luc Melenchon, the extreme Left candidate who was in third place in the first round, had not endorsed Macron's candidature, as the leaders of the Republican and Socialist parties had done, added to uncertainties about Macron's electoral score. In the event, Macron has secured 65.5% of the votes to Marine Le Pen's 34.5%. This has been received with relief across the political spectrum as the polls were suggesting a closer finish, with Le Pen scoring around 40%. If she had reached that figure it would have had implications for the parliamentary elections, and, more importantly, for the next presidential election.

present political order is a reality even in France. But the majority there is still wedded to the values of the French Republic - those of secularism, tolerance, anti-racism, non-discrimination, protection of human rights of all, including immigrants, etc.

The question was not so much as to who would win, but what would be the margin of victory. Macron became a candidate for the presidency only in November without any party machine, with virtually no political experience or a clear agenda. That he was president Hollande's economy minister for two years exposed him to attacks that he would continue Hollande's failed economic policies.

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Already Le Pen has announced the creation of a new party to enlarge her party's political base with a view to becoming the major opposition to Macron and to positioning herself for the

to transform itself into a political party for the parliamentary elections due in June, just a month from now. The rate of abstentions and blank votes in the second round has been the highest since 1969. Many say they have voted to fulfil their obligation but against their heart, such has been their dilemma as they favoured neither candidate.

For the first time in the Fifth Republic, the principal parties had no candidate in the presidential election. Both the Republican and Socialist parties will endeavour to recover from their political marginalisation in the presidential election by performing well in the parliamentary elections. Macron projected himself as a candidate neither of the Left or the Right and his supporters talk of uniting the divided French political class. French politicians acknowledge that the country is deeply fractured politically. Whether the unifying agenda of Macron will work is open to question.

While Europe will heave a sigh of relief that Le Pen has lost and Macron has won, because her victory would have ended the European project, France has a huge challenge ahead of governing itself.

India's relations with France transcend political parties and we would therefore wish Macron well and find all opportunities to strengthen ties with his government. (Courtesy Hindustan Times)

(Kanwal Sibal is former foreign secretary and former ambassador to France. The views expressed are personal)

TO THE EDITOR

Well done Shillong Lajong!

Editor, Shillong Times has appropriately given a lead story on the annexation of I-League Football championship by Aizawl Football Club (FC) in its April 30th edition. Congratulatory notes went viral all over the print, electronic and social media. The glorious rise of Aizawl FC was indeed a surprise for Indian football lovers, but Aizawl deserved it because of the hard work, sacrifice and commitment of the team and the men and women behind the Club.

As far as football in Meghalaya and India are concerned, I must heartily congratulate Lajong Ming Sawyan and his key people behind the Shillong Lajong Football Club (SLFC) for taking this Club to the heights of popularity not just in India but abroad too. In

fact, Ming and the key persons with him, are not only making the Club popular have promoted and raised the standard of football in Meghalaya, the North East and in India. Definitely, a lot of time, money, mind and energy must have gone into this!

However, much more needs to be done in order to raise SLFC to the standard of Real Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Manchester United etc of mainland Europe, because we, the lovers of the game in Meghalaya, are proud of SLFC and love to see this Club grow in all aspects of the game. That the Club has blended football players from all races is a good initiative to promote communal harmony. It gives a secular character to the Club. I guess, Ming must have received heavy sponsorships from well wishers, friends, football lovers and above all from companies, because hiring of coaches and players from all over and retaining them

is a costly affair.

Here I just want to offer a humble suggestion. Perhaps it is time that Ming sets up a full-fledged Football Academy to fully engage in nurturing and training young aspiring footballers from Meghalaya and the North East, from age ten and below. This Academy will have expert trainers (at least one or two). The Academy will produce well-trained footballers and from this pool of players selection will be made to induct full-time players into the Club. Hence at least 75 per cent of the specially selected standing players of the SLFC team can be from Meghalaya and the North East to legitimately resonate the name of Lajong (our own). I understand that starting such an Academy means heavy investments but it is worth it because, Ming, in any case, is investing a lot in hiring coaches and players from all over to keep the Club alive and kicking. So why not in an Academy which will be a rich reserve for SLFC?

Yours etc., Philip Marwein, Shillong -2

Shillong publicly defamed!

Editor, PM Modi literally left no stone unturned to encourage our State to be one of the most beautiful hill stations. Unlike previous PMs, he sincerely wanted this state to be another "Sikkim" in the Northeast in order to attract a continuous flow of tourists and consequently boost the economy of the state. On several occasions the PM mentioned about "Mawlynnong," more often perhaps than our local leaders do.

Yes, long before many Shillongites had awakened from their sleep, PM Modi had reached Elephant Falls and the sacred grove of Mawphlang in the early morning of May 28, 2016. There he artfully beat the

drum to send out a welcome message across the country. That was perhaps the only time in the history of Meghalaya, that the State got such a large audience from across the world to glean about this remote state of India. How happy the denizens of the Elephant Falls are, is quite evident now as we could see PM Modi's poster put up right at the gate. It's well intended to remind the outside visitors about the prime minister's fondness for this state and its beauty.

But all hell has broken loose as Shillong is now ranked 276th on the cleanliness index. The Prime Minister himself expressed his deep concerns. It seems that Meghalayans are now very enthusiastic about sweeping administrative flaws under the carpet. I think the country will soon know what kind of "garbage" is stopping the state from being beautiful and vibrant.

Yours etc., Salil Gewali, Shillong-2

Weird banking regulations!

Editor, This refers to Anjan Roy's article, "More legal follow-up actions needed" (ST, May 8, 2017). The Union Cabinet's decision to take the ordinance route to tackle the growing problem of non-performing assets (NPAs) is welcome. However, so many questions are now blowing in the wind. How can macro bank defaulters go abroad and stay there? Why should we pay for them? How can a bank penalise its customers for their inability to keep a sizeable amount of money in their bank accounts? Can a public sector bank skip general customers by introducing such penalties to compensate for the bad loans of some rich defaulters?

Yours etc., Sujit De, Kolkata

"Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add color to my sunset sky."

--- John Wooden

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2017

Shared sovereignty

NAGALAND has been harassed by 37 years of conflict between the state and the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM). It has been followed by 20 years of on and off negotiations between the Centre and the NSCN-IM facing hurdles over two issues, demand for Greater Nagaland (Nagalim) which means addition of some territories from Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur to Nagaland along with a demand for sovereignty; going to the extent of having a separate Constitution. The NSCN-IM under Isak Swu and Th Muivah has finally settled for 'co-existence together with shared sovereignty'. It is a new experiment that federal India with strong unitary features will embark on when such a peace agreement is signed. The NSCN-IM spokesperson has said that the political talks are progressing smoothly. The framework agreement will ensure peaceful coexistence between the Nagas and the Centre with shared sovereignty which will bring in peace and a bright future for the Naga tribes. In August 2015, a framework agreement was signed between the NSCN-IM and the Centre in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The exact meaning of shared sovereignty has not been spelt out yet. Does it mean that Nagas will get a separate Constitution, flag, parliament and judiciary? The Centre has of course long recognized the unique identity of the Naga people.

The other sticking point is the Naga demand for Nagalim. It means Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh will have to cede part of their territory to Nagaland. It has created great opposition in all these states though they are now all under the NDA. The meeting between the Nagaland and Manipur CMs seem to show the emergence of a new relationship. They have stressed the need for peace as the key to development. Will it bring about rapprochement between the two states on the Nagalim issue?

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

What about the ropeways?

The Railway project linking Meghalaya with the country's vast railway network is back on the rails. It was abandoned a few years ago in the wake of strong public opinion mounted at the time and is reported to have been revived with the State government giving green signal to the extension of railway traction from New Guwahati farther into Meghalaya. The original project has, however, been vastly modified, the most important of the reappraisal being that the Meghalaya length would now be restricted to only about a kilometer upto Baridua, instead of Byrnihat as originally planned. As such, it is more a token extension rather than a meaningful one is some vital details. Meghalaya, for instance, would allow only goods train to enter its territory until such time as public opinion reverts to accepting passenger trains as well, a clear concession to those spearheading the movement of earlier years on this account.

But even the goods entry via the broad gauge line would be somewhat meaningless unless the railway extension is supplemented by a network of ropeways to facilitate the movement of goods from Baridua onwards. The original Byrnihat railhead project envisaged a companion project of a ropeway linking Cherrapunji with the nearest railhead, thus reducing the cost of transportation of the Cherra Cement while also saving time on movement of

goods into the interior areas covered by the ropeway. It must have been a powerful lobby indeed which could successfully see the ropeway scheme sliding into oblivion to the great glee of the road transport operators. A revival of interest in such a smooth and safe means of goods transport is now additionally warranted because of the Siju Cement Project also getting back life with the recent World Bank interest on it. The Cherra-Baridua Siju ropeway triangle can be an effective aid to the revived railhead project, however truncated it may have turned out to be in the latest decree pronounced of it.

Mawlai Congress(I) block formed

A block unit of the Mawlai Block Congress Committee (I) was formed on Wednesday at a function in which the Deputy Speaker of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, Mr J D Rymbai was the Chief Guest. A memorandum was later submitted to the Deputy Speaker urging upon the government of the area following a meeting with the headmen of Umyrnjah, Umphrew, Mawsiatkham and Nongkholow under the Mawlai constituency to discuss the problems faced by the local people. Members of the Mawlai Block Congress Committee (I), under the leadership of the General Secretary, Mr Edward Dkhar, also visited Umyrnjah.

Two Rapes, Two Verdicts

Whither equal justice?

By Poonam I Kaushish

sexual harassment between two and five times during 2015.

How bad the situation is can be gauged from Capital Delhi which accounts for over 17% of the total number of rape cases. An increase from 706 in 2012 to 2199 in 2016! Yet ironically the conviction rate has dropped dramatically. In 2012, the police secured a 49.25% conviction, falling to 35.69% in 2013, 34.5% in 2014 and last year a mere 29.37%. All this, despite many reforms post Nirbhaya and six fast-track courts to handle rape cases. One explanation for this is the skewed sex ratio. Like China, India has a massive sex ratio imbalance. According to the census, the sex ratio in the 0-6 age group has risen from 102.4 males per 100 females in 1961 to 108.9 in 2011. In Modi's Gujarat, the ratio is 112 boys to 100 girls.

Sociologists call this Bare Branches phenomenon wherein boys are culturally preferred over girls consequently it gives rise to increasing female feticide. Add to this, one gets nothing or little from the courts. Disgustingly there are very few rapists who are convicted thereby giving credence to the adage, "Justice delayed (often indefinitely) is justice denied."

Perhaps it has something to do with our patriarchal lineage and misogynistic culture. A culture that believes that the worst aspect of rape is the defilement of the victim, who will no longer be able to find a man to marry her - and that the only solution is to marry the rapist, thereby, rendering all measures ineffective.

Shockingly, instead of being apologetic and ensuring that cities are safe for the fairer sex, ex-Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit asserted, "Girls should not wear jeans and exposing clothes. They have no business driving around at 2 am in the morning," in reference to a woman journalist's rape.

Or Karnataka's Home Minister blaming "western culture" averring "these

things do happen". Really? Added another, "The more skin women show it is like if there's gasoline, there will be fire. If there's spilt sugar, ants will gravitate towards it." Disgusting, to say the least! And then to cap it all, Samajwadi's Mulayam, 'boys will be boys'. Sic.

Alas, in an era when political image is branded like detergents, trust our netas whose only recourse to women's safety is mouthing empty rhetoric, completely disregarding the fact that they have collectively miserably failed time and again in making our cities and environment safe for women. By strengthening policing laws and tightening rules which would deter men to think thousand times before they commit a rape or molest a woman. Clearly, in a society heavily loaded in favour of men, several women who face sexual abuse at work stay quiet in order to avoid further harassment and of getting unwanted attention. Or are hesitant to speak out fearing they will be dubbed 'loose charactered' at best or ostracized at worst. Either which way the damage is done.

Women continue to live in increasingly unsafe environs wherein they are viewed as sex objects and mince-meat for male lust camouflaged as human animals. Not a few complain that to rise professionally they need a 'godfather' who can make or break them. Comply or reconcile to battling it out at every level.

Sadly, such is the state of affairs that we are now immune to women being snatched off the streets and gang raped in moving cars, unless it is a high profile one. In a survey conducted by a London firm of 150 safe cities, New Delhi and Mumbai are ranked 139 and 126 at the bottom of the heap.

True, subsequent to the Justice Verma Committee's recommendations post the Nirbhaya case, the new law has stringently defined rape. But has it deterred men to think thousand times before they molest a woman? Certainly not! Especially against the

backdrop that women are on their own vis-à-vis their safety, there is currently no special law against sexual assault or harassment and only vaginal penetration counts as rape. Those who molest a woman would be booked for "insulting or outraging the modesty of a woman" or "intruding upon her privacy". The maximum punishment is a year's imprisonment, or a fine, or both.

What next? We need to ensure systematic education of children to make certain they will respect women. Our learning process needs to emphasize gender equality and eradicate the sick male mindset. A girl's dress, time and place should not determine her safety. We need to change our approach to sexual harassment. Another option: radical feminism to make a social impact.

Also, sexually harassed women must speak up as it will make more people aware and come out in support thereby taking collective action. If they continue to suffer in silence, they only encourage men to continue their crime. Alongside, the right groundwork must be laid for women to work in a safe and secure work environment and an orientation session for men and women on what constitutes sexual harassment.

In an environ which has systematically obliterated morality and where incidents of moral turpitude pervade country-wide, the judiciary has delivered justice. The ball is now in our leaders' court. Merely asserting a course correction would no longer work. India needs a revolutionary change. We need to seriously ponder for how long women will continue to be playthings at the hands of the voyeuristic animals in the garb of men? Will our judiciary continue to break new grounds and unshackle women? A la Nirbhaya not Bilkis Bano. We need to introspect: Balatkar aur apradhikaran akhir kab tak? ---- INFA

department in its website mentions several important points related to transport services, rules, application forms and permits. However, I happened to meet some people who wanted to register their vehicles of 2010 and 2011 models respectively and to apply for commercial tourist permit. Unfortunately they were verbally informed at the DTO's office in Shillong by some staff member that they could not apply for tourist permits, which is ridiculous as no such public notice or information is available at the website of the Transport Department which incidentally has not been updated. We would like to know when such a cap was decided and on what basis? Secondly, if at all there is a moratorium on tourist permits why wasn't any public notification put up? It seems to me that anyone requiring the services of the DTO and STA office is forced to grease the palms of the staff and dalals to hurry up their case rather than wait and get delayed, that too in this age of web technology. While other states have progressed by leaps and bounds in electronic governance why are those sitting in their cushy chairs failing to implement and bring changes in the overall interest of the public? Yours etc., Uma Purkayastha Shillong - 4

department in its website mentions several important points related to transport services, rules, application forms and permits. However, I happened to meet some people who wanted to register their vehicles of 2010 and 2011 models respectively and to apply for commercial tourist permit. Unfortunately they were verbally informed at the DTO's office in Shillong by some staff member that they could not apply for tourist permits, which is ridiculous as no such public notice or information is available at the website of the Transport Department which incidentally has not been updated. We would like to know when such a cap was decided and on what basis? Secondly, if at all there is a moratorium on tourist permits why wasn't any public notification put up? It seems to me that anyone requiring the services of the DTO and STA office is forced to grease the palms of the staff and dalals to hurry up their case rather than wait and get delayed, that too in this age of web technology. While other states have progressed by leaps and bounds in electronic governance why are those sitting in their cushy chairs failing to implement and bring changes in the overall interest of the public? Yours etc., Uma Purkayastha Shillong - 4

plaques, related to Rabindranath Tagore's stay here during his last visit to Shillong in April - May 1927. It bears mention that the former owner of Sidhli House was Rani Manjula Devi, (Queen of the estate of Sidhli, erstwhile Assam) an ardent devotee of Tagore, who preserved the house with full piety, as a valuable memorial of the great poet-bard till her death. The plaques, bearing the record of Tagore's stay here were erected and placed ceremonially by the Bimola Prasad Chaliha Ministry of Assam in 1961, the centenary year of Tagore, at the initiative of the Central Government. This heritage house was disposed of during 2010-11, after the demise of Rani Manjula Devi. The present owner, when approached by a delegation of Rabindra lovers of Shillong including myself, with the request to replace the plaques in the proper place to make the public aware of Tagore's memory here, had agreed to replace them along with a statue of Tagore, in front of the newly built building at his own cost after the construction is completed. That was May 12, 2011. Six years on we are still awaiting fulfillment of the solemn commitment made to us. Yours etc., Uma Purkayastha Shillong - 4

China issues Resident Identity Card at school age which is compulsory by age 16. In Indonesia, citizens and foreign nationals with permanent residence in the country are given Resident Identity Cards, compulsory at 17 years and even earlier for

Aadhaar Controversy

Why do we need it?

By Dr.S.Saraswathi

The Supreme Court is hearing a petition whether the Aadhaar Card should be voluntary or mandatory. After Section 139AA was added to the Income Tax Act which mandates citizens to link Aadhaar with their PAN (Permanent Account Number). Hence, quoting the Aadhaar number is mandatory for filing tax returns despite it being voluntary under the Aadhaar Act and repeatedly confirmed by the Apex Court. Importantly, this section is to ensure fake PAN cards are weeded out of the system. Already, Aadhaar is linked with gas and petrol supply and many social welfare schemes like pension, public distribution system, life insurance, mobile phone connection, etc. As the legal and actual position of Aadhaar Card is vitally different this needs clarification. Pertinently, the Attorney-General told the Court the Government had every right to make it mandatory. Given, ever since its introduction, Aadhaar has been facing tough political and non-political opposition.

Remember, the idea of a "multi-purpose identity card" was first considered by the NDA Government in 2003, its successor UPA took it further and launched the Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI) in 2009 on a grand scale which faced lot of criticism. The Supreme Court questioned its standing when the Government wanted to link it with certain welfare schemes.

In fact, the project was practically abandoned in 2014 when the Modi Government came to power. Instead of Aadhaar, the National Population Project was expanded and door-to-door survey initiated.

However, Aadhaar was destined to survive and grow strong by quickly gaining the confidence and support of the NDA Government. It was promoted as a tool for improving targeted delivery of services and a remedy for checking black money, terrorism etc.

Further, the Centre adopted the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial & Other Subsidies, Benefits & Services) Act, 2016 as a money bill which was passed notwithstanding some MPS objecting to it being adopted as a money bill.

Undeniably, Aadhaar is intended to ensure creation of a framework for maintaining a central database of biometric information collected from citizens. But because the data is essentially personal it has created a huge controversy and litigations over possible intrusion into the right of privacy, vital for individual freedom. Consequently, we need to look world-wide for practices on Aadhaar-like identity cards.

The pros-and-cons of having a national identity card system have been considered by many countries and various systems are in vogue. Yet, only 100 countries have compulsory identity card systems. In the European Union, a national identity card fulfilling certain standards is in use for European citizens as a travel document instead of a passport. Among our neighbours, Bangladesh has a National Identity Card for all citizens over 18 years. In Sri Lanka, citizens over 16 years must apply for the National Identity Card. Pakistan has a system of issuing Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) at age 18 which is mandatory for opening a bank account, getting passport and for all substantial transactions.

Myanmar has a National Registration Card for nationals and Foreign Registration Card for foreigners. In Thailand, every citizen must get a National Identity Card at age 7. Malaysia differentiates between permanent and temporary cards. Issued at age 12, cards are updated at 18 years.

China issues Resident Identity Card at school age which is compulsory by age 16. In Indonesia, citizens and foreign nationals with permanent residence in the country are given Resident Identity Cards, compulsory at 17 years and even earlier for

married women. In India, Voter Identity Cards and PAN Cards were introduced during the 1990s. Under the Citizenship Act 2003, National Identity Cards were instituted and are now being promoted under the National Population Register.

Non-compulsory identity cards are in use in many western countries including USA, Switzerland, Italy, Sweden, Mexico, Finland, France, and Iceland. Countries without any identity cards system include UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Norway and Philippines. In UK, compulsory National ID Cards were issued during the Second World War for security purposes and withdrawn in 1952 as its continuance in peacetime created tensions between the police and public. But again reintroduced under the ID Cards Act by Tony Blair's Labour Government as a counter-terrorism initiative in the wake of the 7/11 attack.

However, in 2010 the Act was repealed by the Conservative-Liberal-Democrat coalition Government in response to strong opposition raised over substantial intrusion into civil liberties. Replaced by a Pass Scheme which allows private companies to issue proof of age cards to UK residents primarily to the young for purchase of age-restricted goods and services. Alongside, the office of the Identity Commissioner was closed.

Also, few countries are issuing bio-metric cards like Aadhaar, which provide biometric details of the cardholder like age, sex, height, finger-print, iris scan, photo, etc. Finger-print card system is in vogue in Belgium; Dutch passports and ID cards carry finger-prints and Norway issues bio-metric passports since 2005.

Electronic bio-metric ID Cards are compulsory from age 16 in Albania. But, India has no significant social, economic, or historical factors in common with these countries to copy their practice. In UK, fingerprint scanners are used only in some schools.

Notably, USA tops the list of opponents to bio-metric identity cards whereby the proposal was once considered for passports, but rejected. Most of its States have rejected the very idea of controversial ID Cards as a very costly matter that also presents a risk to privacy.

In 2004, the US Congress passed a law calling for a National Digital Identification System in the interest of national security. The plan to verify documents presented with applications for driving licenses and save them in electronic network was considered and rejected.

Certainly, US would be the last country to create a database of highly sensitive personal information and make it open, unprotected and accessible. Whether it is possible to use that data in any way injurious to the concerned citizen is an irrelevant question. All private information is private to the concerned persons.

Clearly, many in India are reluctant to take Aadhaar and depend on the Supreme Court's continued stand that it cannot be made mandatory for any purpose. Bio-metric details are normally collected for some specific purpose like national security and destroyed once the purpose is over.

Even those having no objection and willing to accept any Government initiative as in public interest find it extremely difficult to undergo the process of getting the Aadhaar Card. The less said about this, the better. Still, people take the trouble of getting the Card because without it, they cannot get their ration items, gas refill, etc and would lose their right to many welfare schemes. Therefore: No other direct benefit.

All in all endless controversies and continuous litigations over Aadhaar are unavoidable. Complete information on the system and convincing statements on its use are necessary if people's support and cooperation are needed. ---- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Samaritans in SBI Shillong

Editor,
On April 18 last I left my mobile phone at Counter No 8 in State Bank of India, Kachari Branch, Shillong. I realised that my phone was lost only in the evening of that day and tried searching everywhere - my handbag, my car, my home - but in vain. Then I sat quietly and thought through my whole day's activities and bingo!, I remembered leaving it at the above counter and immediately made several calls and got connected to a lady, June Syiemiong, who works in this bank and who assured me that she would let me know the next day. She kept her word and called me the following day to give me the good news that my phone was safely kept by Ms Lanora Mutyen, who was on duty at Counter No.8 on the day I left my phone there.

The above incident confirms my conviction that there are still good, honest people in our city and this cheers me up. Thank you ladies! With people like you around, all is not lost. Allow me to encourage others, starting with myself, to practice such actions and revive the 'tip brierw tip blei', 'kamai ia ka hok' among the Khasis.

Yours etc.,
Darilyn Syiem,
Via email

Has MeECL lost the plot?

Editor,
Their motto

says "Lighting up your lives" but MeECL has actually failed to provide the people of Shillong proper electricity supply especially in the rural areas of the state. There is load (scheduled and unscheduled) all the time. Besides that, there is power cut every day, sometimes every hour. It's very irritating for those working online, for shop owners, cyber cafes etc., to concentrate on their work in this pitiable situation. The Power Minister should do something and take action on the matter. MeECL should announce the power shut down timings and avoid arbitrary power cuts at odd timings. Every household cannot afford an inverter/inverters or generators. Indeed ensuring uninterrupted power supply is a big challenge for the MeECL and it seems to have lost its objective. I hope the Government will pay attention to the plight of the power consumers of Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
A concerned citizen,
Via email

Replacing plaques of Tagore's last visit to Shillong.

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily I would like to draw the attention of the present owners of former 'Sidhli House', Upland Road Shillong, regarding replacement of the memorial

plaques, related to Rabindranath Tagore's stay here during his last visit to Shillong in April - May 1927. It bears mention that the former owner of Sidhli House was Rani Manjula Devi, (Queen of the estate of Sidhli, erstwhile Assam) an ardent devotee of Tagore, who preserved the house with full piety, as a valuable memorial of the great poet-bard till her death. The plaques, bearing the record of Tagore's stay here were erected and placed ceremonially by the Bimola Prasad Chaliha Ministry of Assam in 1961, the centenary year of Tagore, at the initiative of the Central Government. This heritage house was disposed of during 2010-11, after the demise of Rani Manjula Devi. The present owner, when approached by a delegation of Rabindra lovers of Shillong including myself, with the request to replace the plaques in the proper place to make the public aware of Tagore's memory here, had agreed to replace them along with a statue of Tagore, in front of the newly built building at his own cost after the construction is completed. That was May 12, 2011. Six years on we are still awaiting fulfillment of the solemn commitment made to us. Yours etc., Uma Purkayastha Shillong - 4

E-governance a distant dream!

Editor,
The state transport

department in its website mentions several important points related to transport services, rules, application forms and permits. However, I happened to meet some people who wanted to register their vehicles of 2010 and 2011 models respectively and to apply for commercial tourist permit. Unfortunately they were verbally informed at the DTO's office in Shillong by some staff member that they could not apply for tourist permits, which is ridiculous as no such public notice or information is available at the website of the Transport Department which incidentally has not been updated. We would like to know when such a cap was decided and on what basis? Secondly, if at all there is a moratorium on tourist permits why wasn't any public notification put up? It seems to me that anyone requiring the services of the DTO and STA office is forced to grease the palms of the staff and dalals to hurry up their case rather than wait and get delayed, that too in this age of web technology. While other states have progressed by leaps and bounds in electronic governance why are those sitting in their cushy chairs failing to implement and bring changes in the overall interest of the public? Yours etc., Dominik S. Wankhar Shillong-7

"Accept the things to which fate binds you, and love the people with whom fate brings you together, but do so with all your heart."

--- Novalis

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LIX No. 269

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MAY 12, 2017

ICJ and Jadhav

INDIA appealed to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) about Pakistan's decision to execute a retired Indian naval officer who was alleged to be a spy, Kulbhushan Jadhav. The ICJ has stayed the execution. India seems to be happy with the decision. But it is not a confirmed verdict. However, it requires Pakistan to abide by the norms of the Vienna convention. The stay request is in the form of a letter the ICJ has written to Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan. He has been requested not to hang Jadhav until the ICJ delivers its verdict. It means that Pakistan has its hands only partially tied for the time being. India by appealing to the ICJ is showing a tendency to involve a third party in its disputes with Pakistan. It runs counter to the fundamentals of Indian foreign policy which has been built on independent foundations since the country under Jawaharlal Nehru came out of the shadow of British rule. Nations have no permanent friends or enemies. That is the basic tenet of any foreign policy. And that is the guiding principle of India's relations with the world. India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi is inclined to be a pragmatist in formulating his foreign policy.

It is possible that Pakistan will retaliate against India appealing to the ICJ by itself going to the UN complaining against alleged violation of human rights in Kashmir. Going to the ICJ was a departure from India's policy of the 1990s or during the Kargil conflict in 1999. The crux of the matter is that India and Pakistan have to take the bilateral way to resolve all outstanding disputes. Complaining to the ICJ may have strengthened India's position in The Jadhav case. But it is highly unlikely that Pakistan will relent on the issue.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Meghalaya Assembly Member irked by power failures

The Power Department in general and MeSEB in particular was castigated in the Meghalaya State Legislature on Friday as members from both sides of the House added their voice to the now universal complaints of power interruptions. Moving a cut motion, Mr E K Mawlong (HSPDP) said that it was time that the Board took the problem of power interruptions seriously. He also called for stern action against saboteurs, and warned that he had received reports of a possible future sabotage at Umbar near UCC College. He said that it was imperative that a strong vigilance cell be formed. He said that the local people around the Umiam reservoir were let down by the MeSEB who did not live up to its promises of adequate compensation and employment. He also warned that the MeSEB staff quarters were being misused and said that "people outside the State should not find shelter in MeSEB."

Mr C W Marak (HPU) focused on the plight of the consumers in the areas, due to power interruptions sometime lasting for weeks on end. He spoke about the shoddy work carried out by the contractors and the substandard quality of posts erected in villages. Saying that there was a "contradiction" between the Forest and Wildlife Departments and the MeSEB, he asked on whom responsibility would fall when an animal of an endangered species was electrocuted by snapped live wires. He said that proper inspections should be carried out to ensure the quality of the posts and other equipment. Mr H D R Lyngdoh (HSPDP - DL)

mentioned that the bill collection centres in rural areas were few and far between. He called for more bill collection centres at strategic places in the rural areas to make it easier for the rural folk to pay their bills. He said that even though the lines had been reached to certain villages and the people wired their houses the lines were yet to be charged.

Mr P R Kyndiah (Cong-I) said that people were so fed up with the frequent disruption of power in Shillong that they reconciled themselves to them. He said that the MeSEB was a white elephant because its expenses were more than what it earned as revenue. Wondering whether the Board followed the employment policy of the govt he said that MeSEB "should not become a non-trivial colony. He also asked that maintenance machinery be toned up. The debate will be resumed on Monday.

Stolen pipes recovered

Some forty-nine stolen CI pipes, valued at over Rs. 60,000 were recovered by the Police from a truck at Mawiong on the G S Road. The pipes were earlier stolen from PHE godown at Mawlai in a brazen manner after a truck entered the compound, loaded the pipes and drove off at about 2.30 pm. The police, acting on a description provided by the chowkidar of the godown, arrested one Tejendra Singh, a notorious criminal of the town within half an hour from the Polo Ground area of Shillong. Upon interrogation, he confessed to his crime and led the Police to the truck parked at Mawiong.

Nothing wrong with EVMs

By Manohar Singh Gill

In early 1997 when I was the Chief Election Commissioner of India, the CAG raised a criticism against the ECI. In about 1977 the Electronics Corporation of India Ltd, was asked by the GOI to develop an Electronic Voting Machine. Subsequently, the Bharat Electronics Ltd was also involved in this effort. Machines worth about 75 crores were manufactured to an Indian design. In 1982 they were tried in 50 Polling

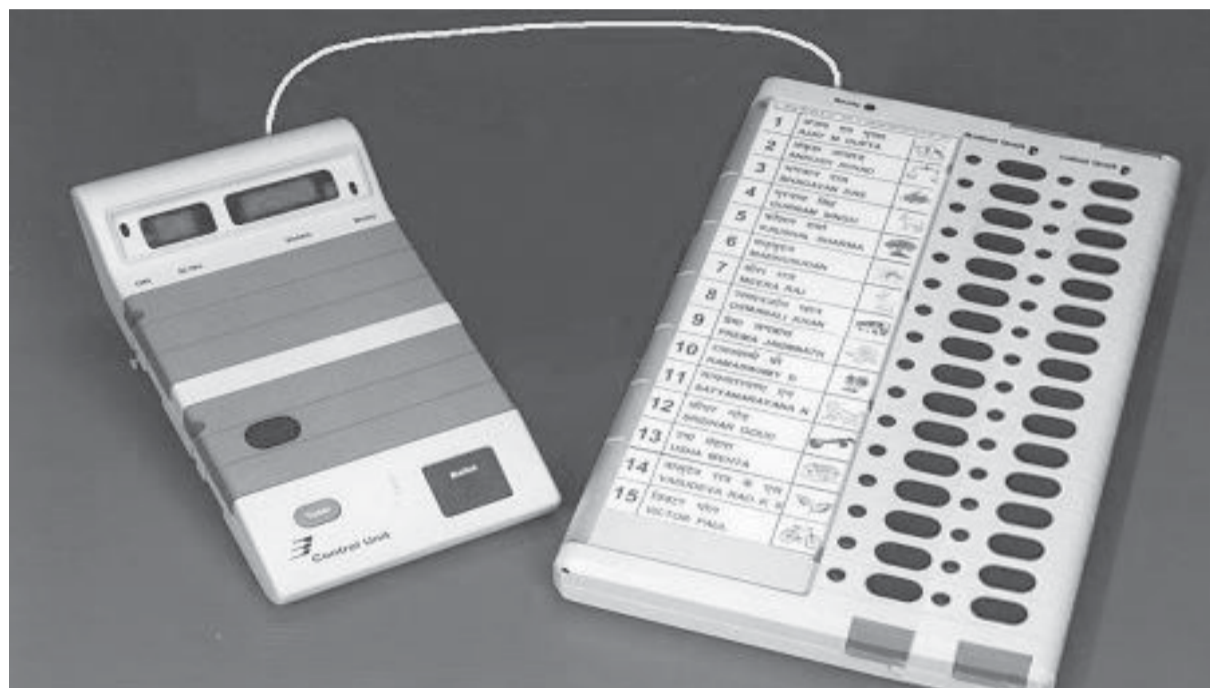
mark. The machine has the same, except that instead of marking across we press a button. We used the EVMs in that historic November 1997 election in these three States. The test was a great success. After that I pushed the EVM use to the State level. People were happy everywhere.

I remember the Delhi election. Sahib Singh Verma was the CM. The BJP lost

parties, accepting their suggestions and ideas. Some leading political figures wanted machines in their constituencies. I was happy to oblige. But when the worthies lost they complained. The complaints were on two fronts. First the technology could be fiddled with. I invited the losers, called the MDs and engineers of the ECIL and BEL and cleared their

the world knows it. What is more the world admires India for this achievement. Don't knock it.

Twenty years have passed since the EVMs first use in November 1997. We have held untold State elections and many Parliamentary ones. All parties have won and lost, and the habit of complaining on a loss, had almost disappeared, till this current controversy. In August 2009, the Commission once again



Booths in Kerala. Legal challenges arose and further efforts to use the machines were given up. Later they were tried in a few small constituencies in Sikkim. It seems the political parties and the EC did not have the desire or the will to push this great idea forward.

The CAG in 1997 criticised the EC for letting this money go waste. I was not willing to accept this criticism of the Commission. We examined the problem, and decided to go forward, using the EVMs in selected constituencies in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. I personally went to Jaipur, where we put the machines in the Market Square, and asked housewives coming for shopping to try them. All of them told me shyly that they liked them. A Madhya Pradesh minister telephoned me, saying that we should not put the machines in villages, as illiterate people would not be able to use them. I said the machine is friendly and neutral to both literate and illiterate. After all, even in the paper vote, we have the name, the party symbol and the box for putting a cross

badly and Shiela Dikshit came in for the first time, but the BJP did not object even to one polling station result. That was a test of fairness. Political parties had begun to see the fairness of this remarkable machine. No boxes to be stolen, no ink to be poured into the boxes, no spoilt votes. Rapid counting and results by mid-day! I saw that the EVM had removed all the quarrels, accusations and tensions of Indian elections. This was the miracle of this new technology. I had conducted paper elections as a young Collector. Nobody accepted the results. Counting continued for days and days. TN Seshan my predecessor took a week, in continuous mixing, re-bundling, and physical counting. Officers were kept locked in for days and days. How many complaints I heard in those days!

We rapidly expanded the EVMs use, quickly moving to whole States, and many States together on a single day's polling. It is natural for losers to have doubts and launch challenges. Before introducing the machines I had held meetings with all the 52 recognised political

doubts. The second was invariably a legal challenge. The late Jayalithaa challenged the EC in the Madras High Court, Chief Justice Bench. After a long and full hearing the challenge was dismissed. Incidentally some time later she asked me, if I was annoyed at her challenge. I answered, "No." After all if the Commission lectures the country, the citizens too have the right to challenge us. In later years challenges had been made in the Karnataka, Delhi and Kerala High Courts. Perhaps elsewhere too. All have lost the argument against the EVMs. The courts have gone to great lengths to ensure that the Indian citizen is not cheated by the EVM.

The system settled down and became the envy of the world. As CEC, I was shown a Canadian machine, they thought I would buy. I told them your machine is too expensive and too complicated even for your citizens. Our machine-great credit to ECIL and BEL-is inexpensive, simple to use and robust. It can't be easily damaged. We carry it to high mountains and the desert on camels and elephants, across rivers. It has never failed and

invited one and all, to demonstrate the flaws of the machine if any. No one won the 'Swayamvar'.

I am surprised at the current broad and vague accusations. I find that the present challenge is from those who lost heavily in the UP elections. Some others fearing a loss in the coming city elections, are perhaps doing a 'Peshbandi'. I think accusations against this remarkable national improvement of the election system, should not be casually and lightly made. However we are a democracy and if any questions are raised legally or technically, the EC must respond. I am sure the Commission will be only too happy, to respond to any legal challenge, in order to remove any doubt. If anyone can bring up a credible technical question, this too the Commission will happily examine. This has always been the policy and practise of the Election Commission of India.

(The writer is former Chief Election Commissioner of India)

TO THE EDITOR

Congrats young friends!

Editor I wish to heartily congratulate all young students who successfully qualified in the Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) Examinations (Science & Commerce) of MBOSE, and to all those who will join the party after the result from other boards in the next few days. Your sincerity, discipline and hard work towards your studies, and of course, the able guidance of your teachers and parents has paid off. You have done your duty as a student and made us all proud. Keep it up and keep excelling in your field of choice. Now the people of Meghalaya have to do their duty to prevent you from being corrupted, frustrated and diverted. In the next 5 to 10 years after you complete your studies, the Government should be able to provide you opportunity to serve the State and the country simply by basing on your merit, sincerity, hard work and dedication. To this

end, the people of Meghalaya have to do their bit to provide a clean and corruption-free government in the near future. None of you should require backing or recommendations from M P / M L A / M D C / Parliamentary Secretaries/Chairmen/Co-Chairmen/Ex-Ministers/Bureaucrats etc. to get a job to serve the State. Your merit and only merit should be counted. Those who enter Government jobs through backdoor via bribe/recommendations/nepotism with no merit whatsoever, will invariably take bribes and propagate backdoor entry at the cost of deserving and meritorious candidates.

Such undeserving appointees will never be able to steer the ship of development but will continually be involved in looting the public money and thereby people's share of development, of course aided and blessed by their political masters. Dear young Meghalayans, I am confident that things are not going to be the same in the near future. So keep working hard and it will pay you back. Congrats to all of you once again!

Yours etc,
Dr. Lakhan Kma
Shillong-4

Kejriwal in the heat of controversy

Editor, Very few persons are born leaders. They are certainly boons to the society. And most of the others who scramble to be public leaders by fair means or foul, end up being just a "liability". They usually mislead the crowd and finally bring only misfortune to the nation. I don't think anyone disagrees that Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal is a maverick character. With the roar of his hollow rhetoric, he showed his different maverick avatars on different occasions. The unsuspecting people, who just got carried away, are now only regretting.

Is it not a big irony that one who determinedly stood as a crusader against corruption is now neck deep in it. Even one good at counting may fail to give full records in how many counts the Delhi CM proved himself

as a dangerous hypocrite, and diplomatically a failed leader. Now a very annoyed Minister Kapil Mishra, who has been recently sacked by the Chief Minister, is threatening to drag his boss into the height of the controversies. Other opponents of other parties are having the last laugh!

By the way, given his series of tantrums and bad mouthing of other rivals, particularly against PM Modi, Arvind Kejriwal has now almost dragged himself into the pit of no return. However, with all his footprints in his short political journey, we have got a very clear message that we should not trust any leader no matter how "holy" they claim to be. Yes, we have to take the words of our leaders with a pinch of salt.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali
Shillong-2

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.

Who is resisting educational reforms?

By TFL Mawlong

The editorial "HSSLC Results: Time to introspect" (ST, May 10, 2017) reflects the ground reality of Science education in Meghalaya. Let me add here that despite an impressive number of HSSLC top ten positions holder from just one school, the number of candidates that could secure useful ranks in high stakes competitive examinations like NEET from the same school used to be close to zero, and in IIT-JEE, it used to be nil. The malady in our science education is indeed real. And in my view what ails our science education, despite everybody's desire for a good quality education, is, in some way, due to our inability to grasp the significance of "Newton's Laws of motion"! Sir Isaac Newton described the three laws of motion in his book "The Principia: Mathematical principles of Natural Philosophy". These three laws of motion laid the foundation for physics and science. But perhaps beyond the realm of Physics, Newton's laws of Motion also reveal great insights and tell us pretty much everything we need to know about how to improve science education in Meghalaya.

The First Law of Motion says: "Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Objects at rest tend to stay at rest, unless acted upon by an external force." I am sure many individuals and the

at the secondary school level, or higher secondary school level, or at the college level? If we focus simultaneously at all three levels and with all the above steps etc, then with what "relative intensity" should we direct our effort? Once we recognize the need for reform, we can see hundred crux points to start with. Intellectuals, educators, and policy makers should brainstorm for a most thoughtful and creative strategy.

Last but not the least, the Third Law of Motion says: "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." In much the same way, every effort for bringing changes in our education system is always balanced by an opposing force from the "no-changers". So to bring changes we can either power through the barrier or better still remove the opposing forces. We should understand that it is very important to be goal-oriented, and remove any major obstacle. Thus, if political leaders show a lack of interest in education, people can choose to change them by denying them the votes. If teachers refuse or are unable to improve their teaching methods, or if they are proved unable to teach science effectively, or if they reject the effective learning technologies, then students and parents should lodge a complaint against such non-

The government and civil societies should first recognize the need for reform, and should find a way to start the reform (at least in some small way). Once the need for reform is recognized, policy makers, tech executives, educators and parents will be nudged to getting into some constructive action towards reforming education.

students are feeling so sick of the science education in Meghalaya, but being inactive for so long under the spell of complacency, it is hard for them to act or initiate any change in the absence of any kind of nudge. The government and civil societies should first recognize the need for reform, and should find a way to start the reform (at least in some small way). Once the need for reform is recognized, policy makers, tech executives, educators and parents will be nudged to getting into some constructive action towards reforming education. And once it starts, believe me, it gets easier to keep moving, thanks to Newton's first law of motion!

The Second Law of Motion says: "Force (F) equals mass (m) times acceleration (a) (i.e. F=ma)". Here Force, F, is a vector, it involves both magnitude (how much effort we are putting in) and direction (where the effort is focused). If we want things to accelerate in some direction, then the size of force we apply and the direction of that force will both matter. Thus it is not merely about how great our effort (magnitude), is but it is also about where the effort is focused (direction). Similarly in education reform, given the limited resources that we have, the amount of effort and where we focus matters. We need to properly strategize and plan what action to take and where to focus. So how should we start? Should one start by redesigning the curriculum, should we start by re-evaluating the quality of our academic manpower, or should we start by redesigning the nature and content of our school, board and college examination system! And where should we focus? Should we focus

performing and inefficient teachers, and the authority can choose to counsel, guide, motivate, or relegate proven inefficient teachers to non-teaching posts in the institution, or even mercilessly retire them prematurely. We should understand that no amount of effort can improve our education system unless something is done to disincentivise laziness and inefficiency. And if we really believe the idea that no one has the moral authority to assess the performance of teachers, then as a society we remain the underdog in science education.

On carefully analyzing the situation one could see that there is nothing wrong with the students (in fact millennial kids are quite smart and are efficient learners), there's nothing so wrong with the curriculum either (whatever be the curriculum, if academic manpower is of low quality, the curriculum remains not so effective), hence something must be so wrong with the school and college authorities, teachers, educational pedagogy and patterns of evaluation.

In conclusion, to reinvent Science education in Meghalaya we need to first recognize the need for reforms and plot ways to set the wheels of reform in motion, we need to strategize the efforts at reforming and in a mission mode we need to remove every major obstacle on the way. In my view the malady of our education today has its chief foundation in the low teaching standards. And finally, I implore to each one of us to come out of our comfort zones and let us reinvent our science education using Newton's laws of Motion!

(The writer is an alumni of IIT Kharagpur)

“Forbid a man to think for himself or to act for himself and you may add the joy of piracy and the zest of smuggling to his life.”

--- John Wooden

The Shillong Times

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Corruption most foul

THE RTI findings by the muster roll workers of the Department of Sericulture & Weaving are shocking to say the least. Not only the names of workers who have been terminated since October 2014 have continued to appear in the salary sheet of the Department up to 2017 but in some cases the list of names have been inflated by almost 80%. The question arises as to where all that money drawn for several months in those ghost names has disappeared. Explanations by the District Sericulture Officers that the practice of inflating names is necessary because of the meagre allocation and tardy fund flow and because the Department has to sustain the work despite funds constraints so it has to raise the budget projections by showing names in excess of the people employed. This is either a poor attempt at corruption or sheer incompetence of the Department head to position Sericulture & Weaving as a Department with huge potential for producing niche products with an international market, which is what few private producers have done.

The muster roll workers in the Sericulture & Weaving Department are highly skilled individuals and their services are actually required throughout the year. In fact most of them multi-task and work even on Sundays when they have to feed the Eri and Muga silk worms. Yet what they earn is a pittance even though they are skilled workers and the backbone of the Department. At the moment the muster rolls are paid a daily wage of Rs 203 per day. Most of them are engaged only seasonally. A study into the working of the Department will reveal that it lacks a road map and has just been chugging along for decades without any fund infusion and without allowing it to go into commercial production to make it vibrant and viable and so that more people are gainfully employed. At the moment the Department is a non-performer. Sericulture & Weaving is only one department engaging muster rolls. There are others like the MeECL, the PWD and others. The same manipulation must be happening in those departments too which have not come to the fore. It's time for a social audit of all government departments. This is the only way to stem the rot!

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Sen wants referendum on Thakkar report

Former Union Law Minister Mr Asoke Sen today called for a referendum on the Thakkar commission report and said he had not the "slightest doubt" that the Government would lose it by a overwhelming majority because of its "invalid action." Mr Sen told a press conference that the Government's decision to withhold the report from the cabinet or even from its Political Affairs Committee was "not only unconstitutional but unethical". It was for the first time that a vital report was

never made known to the cabinet, he added.

He said the country's constitution envisaged a cabinet form of Government meaning collective responsibility for its action.

There could be no collective responsibility, if the cabinet was kept ignorant about important matters, he added.

Mr Sen said the Thakkar Commission report was placed before the Parliament only after a part of it leaked in a newspaper. It is now revealed that the report had nothing to do with public safety or interest.

China Pakistan Economic Corridor to hurt India on sovereignty issues

By TN Ashok

The recent diplomatic faux by China in withdrawing its ambassador Lou Zhaohui's statement on the controversial China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is symptomatic of a larger geo-political malaise on China's ambitious \$46 billion One Belt One Road (OBOR) project involving construction of highways, economic zones, railways networks etc.

China's ambassador Luo Zhaohui told a strategic affairs think tank meeting in New Delhi that his country was ready to rename the China Pakistan Economic Corridor as a pre-condition for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the OBOR meeting at Beijing on May 14-15 this year. China wants to placate India on the project even though External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj did not have any objection to the economic project as she believes it would bring prosperity to the region and usher in economic stability. Swaraj, however, expressed reservations on sovereignty issues.

Given this background, China was keen to have India on board for the One Belt, One Road project and had clearly stated that it was a purely an economic project that would link the land locked western China to Europe through south Pakistan and Afghanistan. China said it was not interfering in the internal disputes or conflict between India and Pakistan infringing on sovereignty issues as the highway and corridor passed through Pak occupied Kashmir a disputed territory. China's interests were purely economic.

The double standard in first trying to placate India by renaming the CPEC and then withdrawing the same from its official websites in order not to upset its all weather friend Pakistan as a murmur of protests followed from India's ever hostile neighbour shows China's predicament more than India's.

China wants to please Pakistan at the political level as an ally in the sub continent giving it a measure of strength against India and at the same does not want to displease India where it has huge economic interests as Chinese companies have made heavy investments in the power sector, consumer goods electronics and want to tip the scale in its favour against the powerful lobbies of South Korea and Japan which dominate the consumer electronics as well as the automobile sector.

China has huge plans to bring in its less priced motor bikes to compete with Indian bike manufacturers such as Hero Honda, TVS, Yamaha, and Suzuki as they have already made strong inroads into the tyres sectors which are becoming popular by the day even as the Indian automotive tyre manufacturers association has mounted a large battle against them at government level led by JK Tyres, MRF and Apollo tyres besides foreign operators such as

Michelin and GoodYear. China wants to bring in its automobiles to compete with Indian, European and US based automobile companies.

Given this background China is virtually walking a tight rope and is on the horns of a great diplomatic dilemma on how to balance its interests between India, a huge trading partner, and Pakistan, a strong political ally. There are some 10 important things to remember on the One Belt, One Road project which subsumes the CPEC that's hard put to balance relations between India, China and Pakistan.

Firstly, for China it's an ambitious project valued at over \$46 billion. Launched in 2015, the 3,000-km network of roads, railways and pipelines will link western China to Southern Pakistan. Its part of a larger Chinese strategy. The CPEC is a part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Maritime Silk Road projects, two development plans that seek to deepen Mainland China's economic cooperation with a number of Asian and European countries. So, where does the problem lie? CPEC falls in three geo-politically significant regions. The corridor will pass through Baluchistan province - where a separatist movement has been under way for decades - as well as through Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

CPEC holds great advantages for Pakistan in economic terms. Pakistan's interest to invest in the project is multi fold. It hopes the CPEC will stimulate economic development and increase energy production. In fact, \$35 billion is to be invested in coal and LNG-based thermal energy projects in Pakistan, according to some economic journals. The project also holds great advantages for China. Reports outline the wins for Pakistan's 'all-weather friend'. First, China expects to be able to transport its energy supplies from the Persian Gulf faster. Second, the corridor could lead to economic development in Western China, a land-locked region. And finally, China, by "establishing its physical footprint" in Gilgit-Baltistan, also hopes to check the movement of Uighur separatist militants.

For Pakistan development of the deep water Gwadar port is a big boon from the CPEC. The Gwadar deep-water port in Baluchistan province is an important cog in the CPEC apparatus. China Overseas Ports Holding Company Ltd, firm that in 2013 took over port operations, expects Gwadar port to be fully operational before the end of the year, and to process a million tons of cargo in 2017. Most of the cargo will be construction materials for the CPEC. It is worth noting that in the conflict-torn region where the port is situated, there has been a decades-long

struggle for independence from Pakistan, which is accused of siphoning the region's resources into its coffers to the detriment of its residents, media reports say.

Pakistan has gone out of its way to provide security for Chinese nationals working on the project. Over 17,000 Pakistani security personnel have been tasked with providing protection for Chinese nationals in Pakistan. Reports appearing in media in April suggested that Pakistan was set to deploy an additional 4,000 personnel to provide security for Chinese nationals working on the CPEC - amongst other projects - in Punjab province. Satellite monitoring: Pakistan and China will monitor the progress made on CPEC projects using a satellite, which is set to be launched in June 2018, Pakistan's daily Dawn reports online.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, the influx of Chinese workers has left many locals unemployed, and it is also feared that the CPEC will create an ecological imbalance in the region. In addition, the Gilgit-Baltistan government and the Pakistani Army are forcibly acquiring locals' ancestral lands for the CPEC, Senge H Sering, director, Gilgit-Baltistan National Congress is quoted by Indian media reports as saying.

Says Priyanka Singh, a Sino-Indian expert at the Indian Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), that in December two years ago the Chinese state run Xinhua news agency announced the closure of the strategic Khunjerab Pass and in the process referred to Gilgit Baltistan as part of Pakistan. China had previously maintained that J&K was a bilateral problem/dispute between India and Pakistan. So it seemed a reversal of stand on the issue from a previously held neutral position. Diplomatic observers say that a section believes that by taking up a long term project such as the CPEC, the arteries of which will originate in Gilgit Baltistan, China has yet again tacitly approved Pakistan's claim and control over this region. India did not react to the Xinhua statement. In the past, a similar statement was withdrawn after India registered a protest to the Chinese news agency.

External Affairs Minister Ms Sushma Swaraj has gone on record to state in the Lok Sabha that Government was aware of reports on China and Pakistan being involved in infrastructure building activities in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), including construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Government had conveyed its concerns to China about their activities in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, and asked them to cease such activities. But contravening the above is a recent statement by India's High Commissioner to Pakistan, who noted: "India has no worry over the construction of Pakistan-China Economic Corridor as an economically strong

Pakistan would bring stability in the region." Says Priya Singh India is yet to comprehensively articulate its approach towards the CPEC despite the fact that the corridor bodes strategic implications for India.

As stated, the corridor will pass through the Gilgit Baltistan region where China has invested in the past in infrastructure and hydropower projects. In the Gilgit Baltistan segment, the CPEC project design includes a major expansion of the Karakoram Highway, establishing industrial parks in special economic zones, constructing hydropower projects, railway line and road building. The project also entails building hydropower projects and motorways/highways in the so-called Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). India has occasionally raised objections to Chinese infrastructure investment in the region.

CPEC is the outcome of the Border Agreement of 1963, considered a milestone in China-Pakistan relations. The agreement ceded the 5000 plus square mile Trans Karakorum Tract to China and served as a precursor to the Karakoram Highway, conceived later as a strategic link defining China and Pakistan's 'all-weather friendship'. The then Defence Minister of India, Krishna Menon, elaborately enunciated India's position on the issue at the UN, condemning the agreement as illegitimate. Besides, India lodged an "emphatic protest" to China and conveyed its concerns in a letter of protest. But now four decades down the line, India's policy orientation and broader claim on Gilgit Baltistan remains unchanged, its stance on Chinese investments in the Karakoram Highway, and Chinese efforts to leverage this territorial link to build a strategic corridor, is perceived to be weakening over time, Says Priya Singh.

Participating in the project would require a major alteration in India's policy. Overlooking the territorial dimension could be interpreted as a massive climb-down from its stated position. It may even be construed as acquiescing to the China-Pakistan alliance in the region and beyond. Thus, the CPEC poses a policy challenge to India on how best to strike a precarious balance between securing its strategic/territorial interests without at the same time being confrontational. India needs to take a clear position on the CPEC sooner or later. Internally, there has been no serious political or public debate on how India should approach the issue, claims Priya Singh.

(T N Ashok is a Corporate Consultant, Resident Editor and Writer of Economic Affairs)

Rising Depression Treat & tackle less happiness

By Dr Oishee Mukherjee

Quite rightly the theme selected for this year's World Health Day has been depression. As is well known, over 300 million people worldwide suffer from depression but the situation in India is even more serious. It is estimated from a recent study that at least 10 per cent of people in the country suffer from depression or anxiety but the numbers in urban sector may be even higher.

Depression is most prevalent among those between the ages of 40 to 60 and ill health could be the primary reason for this. This has been found by the National Mental Health Survey conducted by the Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences (NIMHANS). Apart from environmental and social issues, biological changes are among the primary reasons according to researchers involved in the study.

It has been found that depression commonly occurs with other illnesses such as anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, panic disorder, alcoholism, anti-social personality and schizophrenia and eating disorders. This is most common among those between 41 and 59 years of age, according to the National Health Mission.

There are also reports that those with cancer, arthritis, alcohol addiction or chronic lung diseases could be prone to depression. Depression is prevalent among those with non-communicable diseases. This disease affects the brain and when the brain starts to function abnormally, it affects a person's mood and behaviour. The pessimism in the person aggravates and proper medical treatment is called for.

More than 80 per cent of people who kill themselves suffer from some sort of depression. This is established by the fact that 150,000 people commit suicide in the country; that's one person in every 15 minutes. But we have only about 3500 psychiatrists and around 7000 psychologists to treat such a large number affected by this disease. Experts have pointed out that paucity of psychiatrists as also poor mental services in the country have accentuated depression.

Sometimes people not quite aware of the treatment needed to cure the disease. There is a general feeling that depression is not a disease and medical treatment is not quite necessary. However, medical science sees depression purely as a disease and prolonged treatment is called for. Moreover, the affected person should not undergo any strain and tension and advised to live a relatively happy life.

The reasons for the spread of the disease may be attributed to recent trends in society where families are breaking up, children do not think it necessary to look after their old parents, and the craving for more and more in the form of material wealth and comforts etc. There is very little happiness in society or in the family. In fact, India is very low in the happiness index as the country has been running after material values, which do not confirm to India's traditional culture and values.

Another important reason for depression is the growing poverty and squalor in rural areas, where providing education and health facilities to family members has become a big problem. Moreover crop failures, leading to heavy debts cause depression and anxiety and destabilise the family. Corruption also plays a significant part in causing frustration and depressive tendencies are steadily manifest. In such a situation, experts are of the opinion that depression is bound to increase in the coming years. Though religious worship or even fanaticism has increased, essential values in the family, the community and in society have been witnessing a decline. This is

indeed puzzling and some sociologists attribute this to decline in moral and ethical standards.

Like any other disease, depression has to be controlled at the primary stage though such control may not be easy. How many diabetes patients or heart patients can control their ailment? Can we say that if values change or even if there is grass-root development of the people in the lowest tiers of society, the cause for depression or anxiety may be put to check? But making this a reality is indeed a tough task.

One obviously aspires for a healthy society where there is equality, fellow-feeling and love and compassion for at least relatives and friends, if not for the larger community. Achieving this in the modern world will help bring down the incidence of depression and its affect on human health but to make this a reality, there is need to shed a little of our selfishness. This should not be very difficult as Indians inculcate in their family religious and ethical values and just not show or pose to be religious.

The importance of focussed attention came just around two years back when the Medical Council of India (MCI) inducted psychiatry as an elective subject in the undergraduate syllabus. Apart from this, there is need to start an awareness campaign to control hostile behaviour patterns of individuals and open psychiatric clinics in all hospitals in cities and also in the districts for counseling. Taking the help of psychologists for counseling should be made easy. Big corporate houses and governments and educational institutions should be asked to appoint a part-time doctor or psychologist for counseling.

In some States, non-governmental initiatives to treat mental disorders have been coming up. These organisations screen the rural population for psychological problems and offer medical help and counseling. More such organisations at the grass-root level in the sub-divisions and districts should be encouraged to come up where cases of depression at the preliminary stage could be treated and counseling offered.

Coupled with this, there is need to inculcate moral and ethical values in students and youth and also grown-ups so that there is a limit to our materialist desires. The craving for more and more has to be checked. If some change can be brought about in individual behaviour, there is a possibility of reducing depression and anxiety. This could also bring down the incidence of diseases like hypertension, diabetes, high pressure etc.

It may be pertinent here to mention a report of Prof Dong-feng Zhang of the Medical College of Qingdas University. An analysis of 26 global studies involving more than 1.5 lakh people indicated a 17-18 per cent reduction in the risk of depression among those eating fish. The risk reduction was higher in men at 20 per cent and 16 per cent among women. Scientists suggest that omega-3 fatty acids found in fish may alter the micro structure of brain membranes and modify the activity of neurotransmitters, dopamine and serotonin. Moreover, the high quality protein, vitamins and minerals found in fish may help stave off depression.

The trend of increasing depression among all segments of the population is undoubtedly a cause for great concern. Unless social and psychological mind of the individual is restructured, depressive conditions may tend to have a serious and adverse effect on society. Human relations may get disturbed and the very fabric of society may break up. Thus there has to be serious attempts, primarily on the part of the government, to evolve ways and means to curb depression and make life relatively easy and simple. --- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Let's first respect our own mothers!

Editor, Through your esteemed daily I would like to draw the kind attention of fellow citizens to the recent happenings across the nation where individuals are being harassed/tortured in the name of protection/respect towards "Goumata (Mother Cow)". "Gou" means cow and its milk is a suitable nutritious alternative to mother's milk that is why the cow has been termed as "Goumata". Buffalo, camel and goat milk is also consumed by humans. Likewise these can also be termed as ".....mata" Yes we Hindus worship the cow but,

beef is a food of some communities and there should be nothing wrong in that just as many Hindus eat pork whereas in Hindu religion pig is termed as "Boraho Avatar". I being a Hindu do not agree to these illogical and unjustified acts in the name of religion. In this above context, I would urge upon these activists to kindly visit old age homes nationwide to find out how many mothers are living there in what condition and most importantly why? Kindly recall a news item telecast sometimes in 2016 where an old woman was beaten by her own daughters for property in Delhi. It was heard that some states are contemplating to make acts with punishment even to the extent of death penalty for

protection of "Goumata". If that is a fact, will it be ethical to give nobility to the cow than to the biological mother. We human beings are the finest creations of nature hence we should behave sensibly to understand the rules and limitations of society. Unfortunately many disrespect and ignore responsibility towards their mothers while proudly shouting, "Bharat Mata Ki Jai." One wonders if these slogans are meaningful in the true spirit. We human beings have to become humans first to understand our responsibilities and also pledge for ensuring safety, security and dignity of mothers (humans) first instead of protecting "Goumata". Finally to

conclude I offer my apologies in case I hurt the sentiments of any individual.

Yours etc,
Krishnendu Deb.

Unimaginative traffic plans

Editor, The new traffic system at Don Bosco Square is an area that causes a chain reaction of sorts. The previous top city cop had put this into practice but nothing has emerged and the impact is zero. There have been a number of requests to revert to the old system which was much better and where traffic kept on moving even during peak hours. This is something

that the new SP City has to take note of and have the courage to revert to the old system. This will relieve commuters who travel through that stretch. Hope someone acts and at least some changes happen.

Yours etc....
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong;

Women's Cricket going great guns

Editor, This refers to the report, "Jhulan is highest wicket-taker in women's ODIs" (ST May 10, 2017). Hats off to Jhulan Goswami for becoming the most successful bowler in the history of women's ODIs. She

eclipsed the decade - long record of Australia's Cathryn Fitzpatrick's 180 wickets by claiming her 181st in her 153 rd match. It must be a double delight for her as her record - breaking performance also helped India beat South Africa by 7 wickets in the Women's Quadrangular Series at Potchefstroom in South Africa. Hopefully, she will soon become the first in the history of women's ODI cricket to get 200 wickets.

Yours etc.,
Arnab Dey,
Kolkata

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.

SHE IS HAVING A BABY

Many women in the West are choosing out-of-hospital childbirth, Elizabeth Cassidy, Sarah Wynnand & Aninnya Sarkar report from the US and India

Johanna Givens has a soothing way of helping women give birth at home. She counts with them — barely speaking above a whisper — as they work through the agonising pain of each contraction.

“When you get into really active, heavy labour, during the contraction, it’s like time stops often, and you are wrapped in this moment of unsure discomfort. So we have a counting mechanism” to help them through, said Givens, who works as a doula, providing physical and emotional support to birthing women.

In her seven years on the job in Columbia, Mo, she’s attended the deliveries of more than 50 women who want an alternative to traditional hospital births.

A growing number of American women are taking control of their childbirth by looking for out-of-hospital birthing options, much to the dismay of insurance companies and some medical professionals. In less developed countries such as India, meanwhile, out-of-hospital births are usually not a choice but a necessity — happening mostly among poor women in remote places who lack access to care. But even in that country, some upper-class women are joining the natural birth trend.

In America, out-of-hospital births are clearly on the rise but far from the norm. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the proportion of births happening outside hospitals started to climb in 2004, rising from 1 percent then to 1.5 percent in 2015 — or 61,000 births.

In India, out-of-hospital births are far more common. UNICEF statistics show 53 percent of women gave birth outside of an institution in 2012.

For women lucky enough to have choice, experts say many are driven by a desire to make life processes like childbirth more natural instead of treating them like medical conditions.

“A lot of women are talking about it,” Givens said. “They’re talking about the breastfeeding movements. They’re talking about the choice movements, the movements of letting our bodies naturally process.”

Birth and choice in America

In Givens’ home state of Missouri, out-of-hospital births have roughly doubled in 10 years.

While this includes the occasional surprise delivery in an ambulance, it mostly reflects births at home or in birthing centers.

“Option is important and choice is important,” Givens said. “This is their body in which they’re going to be doing majority of the work and the consequences of what happens during that birth can last her lifetime and the child’s lifetime.”

Birthing centres, which are generally associated with hospitals, offer a sort of middle ground. One, at the Missouri Women’s and Children’s Hospital in Columbia, started as part of the hospital’s low-intervention programme in 2015. Women decide whether they want care from a certified nurse midwife or an obstetrician, and must meet guidelines showing their pregnancies are low-risk and not expected to need emergency interventions.

Jessica Henman is a certified nurse midwife at a similar but free-standing facility in O’Fallon, Missouri, called the Birth and Wellness Center.

CNMs have collaborative agreements with physicians, and Henman’s agreement is with Dr. Jeffrey Mormal at the Missouri Baptist Medical Center, a 25-minute drive away.

“Not all women can give birth without



(Clockwise from above) Jessica Bevans embraces her youngest daughter, 10-month-old Natalie, at Smithton Park in Columbia, Missouri; a woman from ASHA guides another woman on how to care for a baby following birth in Maharashtra. Asha provides educational, environmental and health care help to over 600,000 slum dwellers in India; and Cathryn AnnMarie’s baby footprints are permanently stained on one of the doors at the Birth and Wellness Center at O’Fallon in Missouri

medical intervention, so we’re glad we have the partnership with the hospital, so we can do that when we need to,” Henman said. “We like that about 90 percent of our moms don’t need the hospital, and if you look at research for the right kind of woman, for a low-risk mother with a single baby, head down, no medical history, she might actually be safer outside the hospital than in it.”

But some doctors are sceptical about out-of-hospital births, particularly those in homes. Dr Ravi Johar, an obstetrician/gynaecologist at St Louis, said when something goes wrong with a pregnancy at home, he knows of instances when midwives simply dropped birthing moms at the emergency room and left.

“...Or they’re told to drive themselves in and there’s usually a ‘we don’t want them to know we’re involved,’ which is a problem because now you have no history to go with them,” he said. “Every obstetrician has anecdotal stories of all kinds of things.”

Births at home are usually attended by certified nurse midwives, certified professional midwives or doulas. CPMs don’t have to have any formal education, although they must be certified by the North American Registry of Midwives. Doulas don’t need formal education either, but can get voluntary training and certification. CNMs, on the other hand, must have nursing degrees.

There’s a lot of disagreement on which

type of birth is safer. One study in Oregon, which has the nation’s highest rate of home births, showed that the prenatal mortality for out-of-hospital births was about twice as high as the hospital average. But American women giving birth in hospitals are more likely to undergo caesarean sections, which come with risks such as infection and blood loss. According to study published in JAMA in 2015, caesarean delivery rates of up to about 19 percent are associated with lower maternal and infant deaths. The US rate that year was 32 percent.

Mothers-to-be weigh safety considerations while also considering the quality of the birth experience. Jessica Bevans, who has three daughters, has been

through it all. Her first child was born at a birthing clinic, the second at Boone Hospital Center and the third at home.

“I decided to be home because I wanted to be able to focus on the pain and be able to relax through the pain,” Bevans said.

“I guess I just learned things from midwives more than I did in the hospital. They were definitely more educational — like caring about you and your well being and making sure you know that everything is okay and safe. Whereas, compared to the hospital, it was just kind of like procedure — like a medical procedure — where I feel like (giving) birth is not a medical procedure. But I wasn’t high-risk, and if I was

high-risk, I probably would have chosen a hospital.”

Insurance companies generally side with hospitals when it comes to safety. Aetna’s policy says “planned deliveries at home and associated services are not medically appropriate.” It references the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which says midwifery presents hazards to both mom and child.

“The majority of my clients come to me and they need that happy medium,” Givens said. “I do home births and hospital births, and the ones that choose the hospital birth but still want to go the more natural route are doing so because of insurance purposes and finances.”

Birth and economics in India

In India, home births can be especially dangerous. That’s because so many happen among poor women in rural areas who lack access to care and rely on untrained midwives during delivery.

A 2010 study by the Harvard School of Public Health showed 150,000 deaths in India could have been prevented by 2015 if women had better access to care during their pregnancies and deliveries.

Vidhi Beri, a lactation specialist and child nutrition counsellor in India, said traditional midwives get informal training handed down through generations, but aren’t updated about advancements in birthing techniques.

In a small village in central India in the Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh, midwifery is a tradition for Sima Kumari, 70, whose mother and grandmother were also midwives.

She took government classes training her in natural treatment, hygiene and health, and accompanied her mother as she worked.

She said the process can sometimes be risky if the pregnancy is complicated and she has to take the mom to a hospital.

“In majority times the patient dies while travelling, before even reaching the hospital because the hospitals are very far from the villages,” she said.

Samir Chakraborty, a gynaecologist from Kolkata, said midwives’ lack of specialisation makes home births unsafe. Any medical complications can be deadly.

The risks are much different for Indian women higher on the income scale.

Women among India’s growing middle class are getting more C-sections these days — and facing the complications that come along with them. Indian health officials claim this is partly because of pressure from doctors at private hospitals, which are paid more for surgical procedures. Women who may not know much about the risks of C-sections tend to take their doctors’ advice.

But wealthier, more educated women in India are starting to push for more natural deliveries — both in the hospital and, increasingly, at home.

And those home births benefit from well-trained and paid helpers unavailable to the poor.

Ultimately, there’s no clear answer as to the best place to give birth. But mothers and health workers in both India and the United States agree that women should ideally be able to choose and get all the support they need to deliver healthy babies.

When everything goes right, Givens said, the experience of pregnancy and childbirth can be amazing for mothers.

“It’s unbelievable to see the body change and grow and blossom, and then all this power be put forth into having this new life.”

(IBNS-TWF)

Army, MBA or journalism: Choice is yours

By Ranjan K. Baruah

In our last edition, we published few options after graduation. Today, we will talk about more options and opportunities after graduation. Students must remember that they must possess employability skills apart from qualification if they want to be employed after their studies.

WSES: In 1992, an important landmark in the history of Indian Army was the induction of women into the officer cadre, and the onerous task of training them was undertaken by the Officers Training Academy. We could see woman in army as officers and also as doctors, lawyers, nurses. There are also women officers in technical side. Mostly unmarried women are seen in technical, non technical, and the time of serving is limited. The Woman Special Entry Scheme for officers offers non-technical, technical and specialist entry for

females. WSES stands for Women Special Entry Scheme and further details may be obtained from the official website of Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force.

Management: Students from any stream can opt for courses in MBA or other management courses. For admission in a reputed institute of the country, aspirant must appear in Common Admission Test / Management Aptitude Test, etc. Some of the universities conduct separate entrance test for admission.

Hospitality Courses: Interested students can opt for some courses in hospitality sector which comprises courses in travel and tourism, hotel management, etc. Students should be good in communication skills apart from other required soft skills. This is one of the booming areas where aspirants may get global exposure and if they have the skills then many of them may work abroad apart from

different parts of the country.

CS/ CA: After graduation one can enter into professional courses like Company Secretaryship / Chartered Accountancy. Such courses are offered by The Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) and The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India. After

completion of courses one can work in public and private sectors bank, industries, MNCs, corporate houses, media houses and with many more organizations. These professionals are highly required in the cut throat competitive economy thus their remuneration is very high.

Mass Communication/Journalism/Advertising: Proliferation of media houses has opened up many opportunities for graduates who opt for Mass communication and Journalism. One can work as correspondent, reporter, anchor, columnist and radio jockey in print/electronics/web media houses. Advertising is also a promising career option to graduates. Courses in Mass communication/Journalism/Advertising are offered by several universities and private institutes.

Banking & Finance: There are



different options of joining in banking service. Nationalized banks conduct competitive examination like Bank PO for recruitment. Banking and Finance offers graduates jobs in public and private sector banks, insurance companies and stock exchanges. The awaiting jobs for graduates in this sector includes Probationary Officer, Clerk, Accountant, Auditor,

Development Officer, insurance agent and stock brokers. Through competitive exams one can enter into bank’s jobs. Apart from nationalized banks there are other banks which induct aspirants into their job.

Students must be careful when they choose institutions for higher studies. As the seats in the government universities are limited, so, many students do not get admission in reputed universities and hence they have to choose private institutes. One must be careful while choosing their institutions.

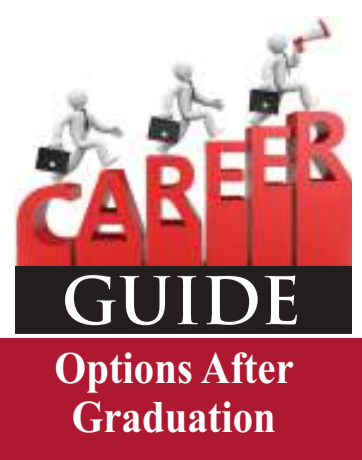
Updates

Opportunity for Faculty Members: The Reserve Bank of India invites application as per prescribed format from full-time faculty members, teaching economics or finance in any University Grants Commission (UGC) or All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) recognized Universi-

ties/Colleges in India to undertake short term research in the areas of monetary and financial economics, banking, real sector issues and other areas of interest to the Reserve Bank. Last date for applying is 31st May.

Russian Scholarships: The government of Russian Federation has announced ‘Scholarship Programme for Degree Studies at St Petersburg University’. Government is offering educational opportunities including scholarships for foreign students and inviting applications from Indian national to pursue degree courses at St Petersburg State University, Russia. Applications may be submitted before June 15.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and he can be reached at 9864055558 or bkrnanjan@gmail.com for any career related queries)



'My stories are about contemporary issues'



With his very first feature film *Lady of the Lake* **Haoban Paban Kumar** has won the Rajat Kamal at the recent National Film Awards. It was cited as the 'Best Film on Environment Conservation and Preservation'. **Shoma A. Chatterji** in conversation with the producer-director from Manipur.

How did the idea of making a film on this subject came up?
I was planning my first feature film on contemporary life in Manipur. I went to Loktak lake for the recce. I went along with an environmentalist friend who suggested a beautiful village. To our shock, the entire floating village had been burnt down and there was water all around. I was taken aback but immediately started shooting with a documentary in mind. Deep down, I was convinced that this was the perfect subject for my feature film. So I slowly moulded my story into the crisis

of the lake and what it meant for the fishermen community who lived right in the middle of the lake.

Tell us a little about the story...

It is based on life on the Loktak lake and the conflict situation in Manipur. It tells the story of a fisherman named Tomba, who lives with his family in a hut constructed on the phum (floating biomass) of the lake. He faces constant threat of eviction by the government. This fear keeps him confined to his hut while his wife, Thambalsang, toils to make a living. They are a real-life couple, by the way. One day, Tomba finds a gun hidden under the biomass and transforms himself into an assertive man looking for a target to attack. An old lady who mysteriously wanders in the lake knocks at his door in the middle of the night. Tomba suspects that this old lady is the spirit of all evils. He chases her in sheer terror and commits an unintended crime.

It has been adapted from a short story called *Gun* by Sudhir Naoroibam. Is this the language of revolt and the only form of revenge available to the protagonist Thomba?

My stories come from contemporary life in Manipur. When I was planning my feature film, the idea of gun/power became the central idea of my film. My protagonist and his community are already fighting a losing battle for a long time against the authorities who come armed with guns and machines. While doing an earlier documentary called *Floating Life*, I always had this thought that if they took up arms, what would happen? In my film, it becomes extremely important for them. Nothing seems to work in their favour. They somehow must find a way of saving their home and their lives.

The protagonists are poor. So how do they obtain a gun in the first place? The gun might have been left by some-

body or a member of the authority or have been hidden by someone who, like my protagonist, wants to take an extreme step to save their family and community. There can be many angles. Today, when I look at my birthplace Manipur, I see guns all around. Gun, as a symbol of authority and ownership drives others, be it insurgents or the state authorities. We forget that fear and anxiety instill further worries resulting in violence.

You have taken non-actors for the main roles. How did you train them for the film to avoid looking into the camera?
I had always planned to do my fiction the way I do my documentaries, real people, and real situations. However, the two films are very different and independent entities not because of the genre, but because of the narrative. I had already worked with these locals for *Floating Lake*. So, this is their second film and now they may be called professional ac-



(left) A scene from the film *Lady of the Lake* and Haoban Paban Kumar

My protagonist and his community are fighting a losing battle for a long time against the authorities who come armed with guns and machines... Nothing seems to work in their favour

tors (laughs). I shoot when people feel comfortable and sometimes I simply shoot candidly. You must know when to roll the camera while at times it is all about getting the right rhythm.

***Lady of the Lake* is being screened across the world and winning not only accolades but also big awards. How does it feel?**

This is my debut feature film and I consider myself very fortunate that my film was world premiered in the Asian New Current Section of the 21st Busan IFF and then the European Premiere at 67th Berlin IFF. I am very happy when people watch my film and I am able to reach out with my story to more and more people. It also pushes me to do

more and better.

Has the film-making scenario in the North East in general, and Manipur in particular, changed in recent years?

Yes, it has changed for the better, especially with the entry of digital filming which has led to the production of 40 to 50 films a year in Manipur alone considering the first film there was made way back in 1972. The first digital film in Manipur rolled out in 2002. For filmmakers like myself in Manipur, cinema is a means of communication that helps us tell stories about ourselves and about contemporary issues we live with. Filmmaking for me is a natural extension of what is around me — guns and violence that come along with authoritarianism. (TWF)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, May 14, 2017

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart denotes a good year. Ego and self-respect would be high as the year begins. You would think a lot about yourself and your reputation. You want to feel respected and important. Good fortune is likely to begin favoring you from now. Good news from foreign sources is on the horizon. You might also travel. Your attention seems to be drawn towards family, finance, tax, government etc. you may experience some mental distress and you may observe delay and losses in business matters.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You may be involved in lectures, debates and discussions. You spend quality time in association of your loved ones, family and children. You have good team spirit and you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers which bring harmony and a congenial atmosphere at the work place. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you as this brings new opportunities and monetary gains. You have more energy for work and your daily routine tends to speed up now. It's a fabulous time for joining a gym or stepping up exercise and health routines.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You would have a new attitude towards love matters, finances, and social relationships. You connect with old friends and business associates. Being open and receptive, you attract prestigious opportunities from interesting and authoritative people. You would be more accommodating and compassionate in relationships. You would create a work of art in your field of activity. This brings success and good fortune at work and opens new horizons for expansion. Finances and material effects need to be evaluated, do not make investments or speculate heavily. A business venture could be fruitful if you are willing to lend it some energy. Communications and business associates from overseas bring good news and offer lucrative opportunities.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

New friendships or new spins on established connections are in your forecast. You would start a new business project while adding zest to an old one. You would be more sensitive and dedicated to your personal and professional life. You focus on having fun, enjoying romance and expressing yourself creatively. Your hobbies, leisure time, moments spent with family and children, all come into focus. You may modernize your work place and home and renovate the interiors to give a new look. This is a good time to promote harmony and good relations with family members. You express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal many issues bravely and successfully.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This period brings mixed results for you and highlights friendship, love, romance, spirituality and children in your life. You may have positive results from marketing and communication. You spend time with your beloved one and go on fun trips, shopping, and journeys. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses such as beauty culture, computers, fine arts and fields related to show business. Your talents would meet with acceptance although financial discipline, realism, and maturity matters a lot. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives, drawing respect from them. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This is a time of completion and transition. You would be taking new responsibilities and enjoy the challenges. You desire to learn and improve your practical skills. Realistic levels of optimism and confidence are with you and problems are easier to resolve. Your social life is likely to increase and bring you in contact with more influential, powerful and helpful people. Matters related to universities, higher education, legal affairs, and foreign interests proceed smoothly. You are more inclined to take pride in your intellectual accomplishments and your ability to socialize and make connections. Personal relationships may be dreamy and transitory and commitments are made and promises are honored. A marriage proposal is worth considering. Health needs care and old habits of excesses need to be kicked.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You are practical, realistic and your judgment is sound and you derive much satisfaction from your work. You would maintain a balance between optimism and practicality. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You might spend a lot of time in short frequent trips, communicating with people and visiting friends and relatives. You feel much stronger and clearer about the priorities and strength. It might be

hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner, and disputes with co-workers are possible. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at home and work.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You have an excellent aptitude for understanding the arts and you are talented in artistic areas. You would enjoy making things that are beautiful and you succeed in areas that require an aesthetic sense as well as technical ability. The need or desire to talk about relationship dynamics is powerful. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasure and romance. You handle conversations, seminars and express yourself clearly about the subject. You turn things around in the business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. Monetary transaction brings gains in property related issues. An overseas or long distance journey is on cards.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Mixed results are indicated for you. You are practical, realistic, and your judgment is sound and you derive much satisfaction from your work. You achieve success as you are brilliant and there is good fortune attending professional, personal and material aspects. You interact with people in position of power and authority gracefully and diplomatically. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. You have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives and friends in your immediate environment. If you feel especially angry, frustrated or restless, it would be great to find a little more work and things to do so that you can channel excess energy constructively.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This period brings new associations and beginnings in work areas as new opportunities and changes may come. You may be involved in frequent lectures, debates and discussions. You can convey your ideas more powerfully and find joy in expressing your views and ideas with your loved ones. You are feeling good in general, and you tend to spread the joy. You may explore new infrastructure and improve office as this brings more efficiency and continuity on your work. Domestic members would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. Financial success is enhanced.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

There is more stability in personal relations and professional life. You would achieve success at work and complete projects through interplay of ideas and correlation of subjects since communication is your forte. You have a tendency to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach while dealing with people at work and home. You give a new approach to communications, ongoing projects, learning and self-expression. You may be especially focused on pleasing your family. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. You would work in association of senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at work place, which boosts your confidence and you use your best talents and correlate all activities to boost the business.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You would improve personal and professional relations with patience, love and care today, it would be better to avoid discussions, criticism and arguments. Your ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits bodes well for good returns from overseas business. Sharing your interests and communication with your loved one may be especially appealing to you. You might spend a lot of time in meeting friends and beloved ones. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation and public standing. You show your responsible, managerial, ambitious, and constant side in your personal and professional relations. Health food, yoga and meditation recommended as would help to overcome from health problems.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

New friendships and new spins on established connections are in your forecast. A period of hard work and effort is also in your forecast. You are taking on new responsibilities, but generally enjoy the challenges. People are attracted to you for your intelligent mind. Your social life is enviable as you interact with important people in authority. You resolve an important domestic issue that has been causing problems in relations for some time. Centering within and witnessing inner truth and outer reflection is the best meditation. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation and public standing. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Being a father in scientific age

One of my children asked me whether ham came from hamsters. "Of course," I said. "Just like jelly comes from jellyfish." I added that our family's favourite dessert, Nutella mousse, was a gland secretion from "a brown elk from Canada called the chocolate moose".

Kids expect dads to be the font of all knowledge, and it's easy to rise to the challenge if you have a good imagination and a plausible manner.

But then came a harder question from the offspring: "If junk food is bad for kids, why do dads eat it all the time?"

The real reason, of course, is that the main activity of fathers is telling off children for sins that we still do ourselves, right? But instead I put on my Scientific Thinker persona and explained that foods have different effects on different people. Luckily there was a perfect example in the latest New Scientist magazine. Tribes who live in the Atacama Desert in Chile have evolved the ability to consume the deadly arsenic poison without harm, it said. "Kids there

probably go to fast food shops and order poison and French fries," I explained. "Bit like everywhere else."

Seeking further examples of bizarre tribes eating weird things, I googled "Do Singaporeans really eat turtles?" Instead, I found a turtle-related newsflash from Science Alert: "Researchers in Korea are developing a technology that will allow humans to control turtles through thought alone."

A human wears a helmet that beams brainwaves to an apparatus worn by the turtle. Just imagine what unscrupulous Singaporeans could do with this. "Hello, turtles, we bought you some cute hats!" Later: "You are under my control. Lightly season yourselves with soy sauce and come to me."

What puzzles me is why the South Koreans have not made remote brain control devices for children, or for wives to use on husbands. "You are under my control. Put down that beer, lightly season yourself with soy sauce and come to me."

The report said the Turtle Brain Control System could "give the user a sense of

oneness with the controlled animal". Who wants a feeling of oneness with a turtle? Be better to achieve oneness with the Buddha. Or maybe Scarlett Johansson.

But the most worrying recent report on the science page was the news that Facebook has a team of 60 people working on a device that reads your brainwaves and types out the words. When this gets launched, all males are going to be in deep trouble.

A colleague told me that academics from the University of Zurich have proposed the creation of a Mental Privacy law that makes it illegal to read someone's mind. It sounds good in theory, but (a) we won't be able to tell, and (b) who's going to confess? "Oops, sorry, I read your mind, you're one sick dude, arrest me now."

Incidentally, I do realise that one day my child will come home from school saying: "Dad, my teacher says ham does not come from hamsters. It comes from pigs." I have my response prepared: "Yes, I've heard that theory too, but fathers who are Scientific Thinkers always keep an open mind."

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

THE FUNNY SIDE
Nury Vittachi

Rendition of Hindustani music

The occasion was the centenary celebrations of Bharat Sevashram Sangha being at the Aurobindo Institute of Indian Culture in the city recently.

The cultural evening commenced with an invocation, followed by Bengali folk songs by Purbita Dutta.

This was followed by Brahma Sangeet, songs composed by Rabindranath Tagore. The artistes were Arkapriya Banerjee and Aniruddha Nayak of Santiniketan. Their renditions created a somber ambience. On table was Biswajit Nandy and on synthesizer was Ramyaji Bhattacharjee, both from Shillong. The stage was set for a

Hindustani vocal recital by Saptarshi Chakraborty (in picture), disciple of the living legend, Padmavibhushan Pandit Jasraj.

Saptarshi's rendition of ragas *Puriya Dhaneshri*, *Malkaus* and *Jog* were masterly as well as aesthetically pleasing. He concluded by rendering "Shivastakam" *stotra* and *Om namah Shivay* chanting, leaving the audience spellbound.

Excellent accompaniments on table by Dhriti Gobindo Dutta from Guwahati and on harmonium by Subhra Dutta Dey complimented the vocal maestro.

On the whole, the musical evening was an enriching experience for the cultural enthusiasts of Shillong.



“Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. the foundation of such a method is love.”

--- Evan Esar

The Shillong Times

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Advantage India

THE Trump administration has positively turned India friendly. It issued a severe indictment of Pakistan in its first public assessment of the region. Islamabad has been blamed for worsening ties with India. Pakistan has been warned against pursuit of tactical nuclear weapons which potentially lowers the threshold for their use. Pakistan has been described as ‘terroristan’. The US has said that Pakistan’s continued support to militants and India’s growing intolerance of this policy caused a deterioration of bilateral relations between the two countries in 2016. It appears that India ties may be further hurt this year. That is inevitable in the event of another intensive attack in India. Delhi claims that such terror strikes originate in or receive assistance from the Pakistani Civilian government and Army. The mounting tension between the two countries cannot be eased or official dialogue renewed unless cross-border attacks by terrorist groups in Pakistan are reduced. The Pathankot investigation should also be speeded up. This view was expressed by Dan Coats, Director of National Intelligence in the US.

It has also been argued that Pak-based terror groups will present a sustained threat to US interests in the region, both in India and in Afghanistan. The proposed China Pakistan Economic Corridor will offer militants additional targets. The US has slapped further sanctions on LeT and JUD as well as Jamaat-ud-Dawan. India should welcome the US move.

LOOKING BACK
April 14, 1989

CM urges financial institutions to motivate entrepreneurs

Meghalaya Chief Minister Mr P A Sangma has urged the lending institutions to come forward in a big way to help generation of entrepreneurship in the State. Inaugurating a seminar on “Small Industries Development Fund” in Shillong on Saturday, he said that banks should be prepared to take some amount of risk but not diluting the laid down norms. Mr Sangma said the State’s population-Govt servant ration (64:1 as in 1986) was one of the highest in the country. The saturation point had been reached and there was no way the govt can absorb more. In order to find employment, attention would have to be given to productive sectors like industrial entrepreneurship. He said it was essential to turn the “subsidy culture” into “loan culture”. People in the State by and large, were uninitiated to entrepreneurship. This would have to be motivated in the first place, Mr Sangma said. Industries Minister Mr Upstar Kharbuli who presided over the function, said that the leading institutions should be “responsive” to the needs of the people. The total institutional funding to the State was on the “lower side” because the credit absorption capacity was low. He therefore appealed to financial institutions to take effective steps for broadening the base. In his key-note address, the General Manager of the IDBI for NE Region Mr V H Pandaya said that against the national aggregate of Rs. 29,000 crore sanctioned by the IDBI since its inception, Meghalaya accounted for a paltry Rs. 40 crore for industrial ventures. Reiterating IDBI’s commitment to extend assistance to the State, Mr Pandaya said that a large cement project in East Garo Hills was under active consideration of the IDBI. Besides there was “good scope” for setting up

medium sized projects based on horticultural resources. Tourism was another area where there was “considerable potential” he said hoping that the entrepreneurs would come forward in large number to take fullest advantage of various schemes of IDBI. Meghalaya Director of Industries Mr K F Rangad laid stress on publicity for creating an awareness among the people of the schemes that were going abegging. In other states people formed long queues in front of the lending institutions, while in Meghalaya there were few takers. The State had 1100 registered SSI units having an aggregate capital investment of Rs. 8 crore, he added.

Orissa YC (I) President denies workers raped child

Orissa Youth Congress (I) President Mr Sujit Padhi today denied reports appearing in a section of the press that a minor girl was raped and later crushed to death by some YC(I) workers at Muniguda in Koraput District on the eve of the two-day state-level YC (I) convention there on Thursday.

It was a simple accident and not even a case of reckless driving by any YC (I) workers, Mr Padhi told newsmen here after returning from Muniguda. All India Youth Congress(I) joint secretary Talwinder Singh Marwah, who was also present at the press conference maintained that the accident took place by chance, as the girl, aged about five, tried to cross the road in a hurry. Asked whether any one was arrested, or the Maruti car was seized by police, both Mr Marwah and Mr Padhi expressed their ignorance about it.

Mr Padhi described the allegation as baseless and said the rumour spread by a self-interest group was only to gain political capital out of it.

Basis on which people elect public representatives

By H H Mohrmen

The State Assembly election is barely nine months away and in different parts of the state seat arrangements are being made and in some constituencies new contenders have started to emerge to add to the existing list of candidates. In some places, even if the referee is yet to blow his whistle, the game has already begun as the constituency is already in the election mode and the party starts early this year for the voters in the area. But the bigger issue is that in spite of the fact that Meghalaya has attained statehood a good four decades ago, it will be interesting to see how or who people vote for. Do they vote on issues? Or do the voters even think beyond the election tamasha?

The tribal that we are, kinship is deeply rooted among us, so, in spite of anything else, the first reason that people vote for a certain candidate is because he is our kith and kin and even if he happens to be a distant relative, the election makes the relationship closer. Therefore ‘congregation of family members from the mother’s and father’s side) is the first and the primary and task of any contender in the election. Then the next reason why people support a certain candidate is because he is a good person and it means a whole lot of things. It could be one who is accessible or he is seen regularly visiting all the bereaved families in the constituency. Now it looks like visiting the bereaved family is part of the job description of all public representatives and people also take pride when the politicians visit the family during their bereavements.

This is obvious when the family decides to publish their gratitude in the media for which they will always make sure to mention the names of all those public figures that came to visit them during their time of trials and tribulations. Even if the leader has not taken part in Assembly debate is and not shown any leadership acumen, the mere fact that he is a good person qualifies him to be a good MLA candidate.

Then being member of the same church or religious group, or member of the same village or Raid

is another basis by which people decide to support a candidate, so the bigger the church or faith group or village and raid that one belongs to the better will be one’s chances of winning the election. In such cases we experience how the Dorbar Shnong or Raid abuse their power and even use unfair means like threats, intimidation and proxy voting to make sure that the candidate they support wins. In every case where Dorbar Shnong or Raid openly declare to support a certain candidate there will always be cases of denying the rights of the minority in the area.

Then there is another set of people who contest the election based on the fact that they can build roads and even playgrounds for the communities This is the main reason why we have lots of contractors and businessmen joining the fray and winning the elections. Many of the contractors join politics and subsequently win the elections because they have earth-movers to flatten up football grounds and till the soil in villages and own tankers to supply water to the villagers especially when they have special church programs. Candidates win also because can cater to the needs of the constituents during times of joy and sorrows.

There are candidates who have contested and won the elections simply by distributing plastic chairs, utensils and other paraphernalia to the voters and the community. But the new trends of candidates that we have now are people who claim to be supported by big money bags in the state. These candidates brag about their being candidates set by certain big shots in the state, not realising that they demean themselves to being mere puppets or stooges of the big bosses who sponsor their election. The voters on the other hand take this as an opportunity to mint money and enjoy the free supply of booze and money. Already the ‘bamdoh lama’ picnicking under or with the flag (as the people in Jowai call it) has begun. The youths are the first targets of the party workers and election time is when they

are introduced to bad habit. Elections in the state revolve around the above factors and voters seldom raise any question even about issue(s) close to their heart. We have never asked the incumbent government to give us a report card of their achievements in the last five years. We have not even dared to use RTI to ask for information on how the MLAs use their respective Local Area Development scheme. In short, the public in spite of whinging and whining in private are becoming unwilling-accomplices and indirectly consent with the wrongdoing that is happening by maintaining a stoic silence.

It is because of how we elect our MLAs (since the creation of the separate state till today) that we have a government which underperforms and the government we deserve. Our government does not have any policy on health care, hence our Health Centres, PHCs and CHCs are being run with very few doctors, inactive laboratories, X-rays and even the supply of medicines is not sufficient. The government does not have a policy on agriculture hence our farmers are left in a lurch. The government does not have a policy on education. Hence our schools (those in the village in particular) and our education system as a whole continues to be in shambles. The future of thousands of youths is uncertain because the state has failed to come up with a policy to create employment. What more can one say about a state which even after more than four decades of existence does not even have a proper demarcation of its border with the neighbouring state.

The election in Meghalaya has never been about issues; be it of state or national importance. It is not about the development of the state either; the election is more about the personality of the candidate, the religion he follows or the shnong/raid where he comes from and other factors which have nothing to do with politics or the development of the state. Once in every five years the parties come up with a colourful and flashy manifesto, but some candidates do not even use

it during elections. It is no surprise then that it is forgotten the moment it is released. On the pretext that the election always produces a fractured mandate, the party’s manifesto becomes redundant is the common refrain. In the post election scenario; generally no party wins the single largest majority, hence producing a manifesto becomes a mere ritual or eyewash that party indulges in during election.

Why talk about manifesto when the parties do not even have an ideology anymore. This is more pertinent with regards to the regional parties. What ideology or ideologies do the many regional parties that we have, represent? There was time when the United Democratic Party was called Congress B, but this time around people have started calling the National People’s Party (NPP) the B version of BJP because of the unconditional support the party gave to the NDA government both at the national and the state level.

Or maybe the regional parties have taken a cue from the national parties, where politics of convenience is the name of the game. The example is the BJP which camouflages its core issue and implements beef ban where the party is in power while remaining silent on the issue where they are yet to win the election.

The other worrying trend in the state politics is the emergence of dynasties. If everything goes as they plan, three power centres will come up in the state after the election. Meghalaya already has two Sangma dynasties in Garo hills and after the 2018 election; another dynasty will surface and that is the D dynasty in the Jaintia and Ri Bhoi district. So is this anymore about democracy? Will we allow this to carry on?

The people of Meghalaya have a tough time ahead and the 2018 election will decide on the future of the state in the next half century. The onus is on the voters to decide which way they want to go. Or rather how or who they vote for in the ensuing election?

TO THE EDITOR

Is KHADC a boon or bane?

Editor,
The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council is certainly a blessing to the Khasi race if this Council is administered by the Khasi elected members who know the Constitution of India, the amendments to the Constitution and the various provisions enshrined in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and how to apply the laws appropriately according to the times and circumstances. Unfortunately, many of those elected MDCs are not blessed with such wide knowledge. Once they are at the helms of affairs they are supposed to do quite a lot of homework and know the various applicability of the provisions of the Schedule and how to legislate appropriately. Taking the help of legal experts is also correct but it should be the last resort for it involves a lot of expenditure.

What has happened during the last four years has not rendered any benefit and utility to the Khasi race. Instead the Councillors spent their time in mud slinging, political rivalry, political oneness etc., The Synjuk ki Rangbah Shnong (KSKJKS) was also taken for a ride by the KHADC authorities at Polo Rally and the KSKRS was sunk and dissolved (subsumed)

into ka Synjuk ki Nongsynshar shnong ka Bri u 7 trep (SNSBH) which resulted in nothingness. This is a sad state of affairs and a waste of the peoples’ mandate.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Viaemail

Triple Talaq

Editor,
The Supreme Court observed on Friday (May 12, 2017), as it continued hearing into the constitutional validity of the practice of saying “talaq” thrice that divorcing one’s wife by resorting to the stated practice is the “worst and undesirable form” of marriage dissolution among Muslims. But taking a hard-line religious stand the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), while hearing the petitions challenging the constitutional validity of “triple talaq” in the Supreme Court told the Apex Court that if triple talaq mode of divorce was declared illegal, it would amount to disregarding Allah’s directions and rewriting of the Holy Quran to force Muslims into committing sin.

Stressing that personal law provisions enjoyed sanctity under the Constitution’s Article 25 (right to profess and practice a religion of choice), the AIMPLB said, “If such casual denunciation of the

verses of the holy book is permitted, then soon Islam would cease to exist. Though triple talaq in one sitting is an unusual mode of divorce in Islam, it cannot be declared to be invalid in the light of the direct verses of Holy Quran and categorical command of the Messenger of Allah.”

The Apex Court is looking into whether triple talaq is an essential part of Islam. The Court is hearing a bunch of petitions, some of them from Muslim women who were divorced over WhatsApp, through telephone call or a couriered letter to ask the court to put an end to triple talaq. The Apex Court was also informed that many Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia have banned dissolution of marriage by pronouncing Talaq thrice and no longer allow triple talaq to dissolve marriages.

Calling for abolition of triple talaq, Senior advocate Ram Jethmalani has termed the practice as “abhorrent” as it marks a distinction on the ground of sex. Jethmalani has rightly held that it does not give women equal rights to divorce and no amount of advocacy can or will save this sinful, repugnant practice which is contrary to the constitutional provisions. He is also justified to hold that no law can allow a wife to become an ex-wife ‘at the fancy of the husband’ which is the highest kind of unconstitutional behaviour.

Does the AIMPLB accept that countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia have re-written of Quran by banning dissolution of marriage by declaring triple talaq illegal? In fact AIMPLB should take initiative for empowering their women to fit in with the modern day global scenario of socio-economic status of women and salvage fundamental rights of Muslim women being denied and tortured by the whims of their husbands in the Sub-continent. The AIMPLB should not intermingling the social rights restoration of Muslim women with misinterpretations of the scriptures of Quran to deprive women of their fundamental rights. Rather there is an opportunity for them to become a crusader for the emancipation and restoration of social rights and status of women in the secular Indian environment!

Since the practices of ‘triple talaq’, ‘nikah halala’ and ‘polygamy’ are a gross insult to womanhood and impacts on the social status and dignity of Muslim women, the AINPLB has a stellar/crusader role to play for the emancipation of the Muslim women of the country.

Yours etc.,
Samarey
Bandyopadhyay
Kolkata

**Labour has the programme to build a new Britain
Corbyn’s election manifesto is most popular**

By Nathan Akehurst

At long last, we’re talking about policy. It took the leaking of Labour’s manifesto late on Wednesday evening to get there — an event which many believe was a work of tactical genius from inside Jeremy Corbyn’s office. I am reliably informed it was not, and a river of leaks from party headquarters has characterised the last two years, but nonetheless the results were positive. The leak allowed headlines to be hogged by radical Labour policies like abolishing tuition fees, strengthening trade unions and nationalising the Big Six energy firms and the railways.

The speed of the leak meant a slightly confused reaction from hostile tabloids. The Mail accused Labour of going “back to

was a Tory government, opposed by Labour, that torpedoed its own pledge to turn the covenant into law. Sending under-equipped young troops into foreign wars that have delivered no discernible useful outcome is not being “pro-military.” Shortly before the Chatham House speech a former soldier approached Corbyn on the campaign trail to talk about his struggle accessing mental health services. “You’re a star. I love you,” the veteran told Corbyn.

At Chatham House we didn’t see a “terrorist sympathiser” or a tree-hugging pacifist hippie. We saw a grown-up with a mature, ethical approach to foreign policy, counterposed to a directionless Tory administration selling arms to dictators, burning bridges

Corbyn has been proven correct on the Iraq war and correct on just about every foreign policy issue he has intervened in over the years, seeking diplomatic solutions when few others would have dared. As he put it in the speech: “I will not take lectures on foreign policy from a Conservative Party who stood by and would not even impose sanctions on the apartheid government in South Africa in the 1980s as they shot dead children in the streets.” Nor can the Conservatives claim to be the party of the armed forces in anything but rhetoric. There are 9,000-plus homeless veterans on the streets.

the 1970s,” right below a feature on how keeping “girls’ jobs and boys’ jobs” separate is better for everyone. The same Mail also claimed Labour spending plans would cost every family £4,000 — as if we all pay exactly the same amount in tax. It was joined by the Sun in trying to blot out manifesto coverage with a story that Jeremy Corbyn had run over a TV cameraman (the car was being driven by a police protection officer.) As an attempt at rebuttal, it was all relatively dismal.

Meanwhile the policies received far more coverage than they probably would have if not for the leak, and even long-time Corbyn critics like Polly Toynbee were gushing. Corbyn followed up the manifesto story with a bold defence and foreign policy speech at Chatham House on Friday morning. The only thing wrong with it is that this hasn’t been done earlier — the right have been far too successful in framing the issue as a weak point for Corbyn’s Labour. Yet this could not be further from the truth.

Corbyn has been proven correct on the Iraq war and correct on just about every foreign policy issue he has intervened in over the years, seeking diplomatic solutions when few others would have dared. As he put it in the speech: “I will not take lectures on foreign policy from a Conservative Party who stood by and would not even impose sanctions on the apartheid government in South Africa in the 1980s as they shot dead children in the streets.”

Nor can the Conservatives claim to be the party of the armed forces in anything but rhetoric. There are 9,000-plus homeless veterans on the streets. It was under Labour that the Military Covenant (a contract between the forces and the state) was introduced and it

with European neighbours and waiting on the whims of the Trump White House. And his approach withstood 40 minutes of quizzing from foreign policy specialists; more than Theresa May has subjected herself to.

But overall it is the home front, not world affairs, that will decide the outcome of our election. The other major announcement we heard, as the party’s battle-bus rolled out of Manchester, was a proposed root-and-branch reform programme for education. It would be funded out of £20 billion of revenue raised from reversing Tory corporate tax cuts (those claiming Labour’s corporate tax rise plans are draconian should remember that they would merely take us back to Britain in 2011.)

And the cost is far outweighed by the gain — both human and financial — of education reform. Slashing class sizes, investing in neglected schools and repairing broken buildings and restoring financial support for college students would ensure that children and young people get the best start possible. Proposals to restore student grants and remove fees on adult education courses for those looking to retrain or upskill would also ensure that education is genuinely for life.

The profound effect this would have on communities, on skill levels and on encouraging people to reach their potential cannot be underestimated. When Labour talks policy, it is universally popular. In a snap poll, 52 per cent supported railway renationalisation, 71 per cent supported abolishing zero-hours contracts — and so the list goes on. It’s Corbyn’s leadership that has got all of this popular policy on the table — no-one else had the will or ability to do so. (IPA)

“A signature always reveals a man's character - and sometimes even his name.”

--- George Lichtenberg

The Shillong Times

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Are we consuming poison?

FOR a long time, farmers in Meghalaya have been actively using chemical fertilizers and pesticides, both by-products of the Green Revolution which sought to increase the yield of food crops at a time when India was facing food insecurity and had to import food grains at huge costs. The Green Revolution has since been evaluated for its negative impacts. Agricultural scientists have found that many of the pesticides used during the period of the Green Revolution (between the 60's to 90's) are highly toxic to humans. Even those pesticides advertised as "green," are not necessarily 100% safe. In 2008, Researchers at Punjab University discovered DNA damage in 30 percent of Indian farmers who treated plants with herbicides and pesticides. An additional study found heavy metals and pesticide chemicals in drinking water. These substances are harmful and can cause serious health problems. Some of these problems may occur because farmers do not know how to handle and dispose of toxic chemicals and the consequences of overuse and of not following instructions.

In Meghalaya, this Government had announced five years ago that the state would go organic. But there are steps to achieve that goal. How can the soil be detoxified? Have those steps been taken yet? There is a strong lobby of companies selling fertilizers and pesticides which successive governments have been doing business deals with. It is obvious that such deals also mean huge cuts going into the pockets of politicians and technocrats. Hence going organic does not make sense for such people. And recently we heard farmers complaining that because they have been asked to go organic so their yield has dwindled? Does it mean that farmers are alright with poisoning the soil and human beings so long as it makes business sense for them? Don't farmers know that people are willing to pay more for organically certified produce? Another danger to our collective health comes from the chemical preservatives used to preserve fish coming from Andhra Pradesh which includes formalin. Also the different hormones pushed into pigs and chicken are health hazards. Isn't it the role of food inspectors to take samples from the market and get them tested? Is it also not the brief of the government to safeguard the health of its citizens? Can this be an election agenda?

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Mahanta-Jamir to discuss border issue

Assam Chief Minister Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta has accepted the invitation of his Nagaland counterpart Mr S C Jamir to hold talks at the Chief Ministers' Level on the border dispute between the two states, according to official sources

here. The sources said the message confirming the acceptance of the invitation had been received from Mr Mahanta who suggested April 27 as the possible date and Guwahati as the venue for venue for the proposed talks.

Knots and crosses. Everybody seems to be busy playing this game when it comes to Kashmir. The Centre and State have been tied up in disentangling the knots; partly succeeding and most of the time failing. For problems are not easy to cross. Despite the solutions being wrapped in syrupy overtures which, often lead to indigestion!

Raising a moot point: Is Kashmir nearly lost for India? The portends over the last six months, attack on the Pulwama Army base, death sentence to ex-Indian navy officer Kulbushan Jadhav, beheading of two Indian soldiers culminating in the murder of young 22-year old, Lt Ummer Fayaz point to the situation fast hitting rock bottom; worse than the nineties. Make no mistake, it's a war-like situation.

Undoubtedly the Valley has been restive for more than a year now. Ever since the killing of Burhan Wani, a charismatic Hizbul Mujahideen militant commander. While eventually the protests subsided, anger persisted among the Kashmiris, who felt increasingly alienated from India and frustrated with the tactics New Delhi used to deal with their political demands, primarily, revocation of the draconian Armed Forces Special Power Act.

With both the Centre and State using the coercion-package paradigm to quell the uprising by the Kashmiris the protest-killing-protest cycle continues, forgetting that the problem was not created in a day and nor will it end by applying the balm of populism and gimmicks to extract an extra mile. Never mind if in the process it creates more problems than it solves!

Bluntly, the Administration failed miserably in controlling what is essentially political mobilization and winning the hearts and mind of the people. How bad things are and how deep the anger and hostility was could be gauged from the 7.15 per cent voter turnout in the by-polls for the Srinagar Parliamentary constituency on 9 April. Alongside, lack of any forward movement on the political front has not only left the people dejected but has also raised the alienation to its highest level. More so, after the Mehbooba Mufti led PDP-BJP coalition seems to have

and hence it is a sin. By merely pronouncing triple talaq through social media or through any other form is more sinful because the man violates the sanctity of marriage and dehumanizes the woman. What type of religious teaching is this?

Yours etc.,
Philip Marweñ,
Shillong.

Fear of third world war

Editor,

The heads of many big nations hardly fall in line. A sense of hostility and enmity always haunts them. So, each nation is expanding its nuclear capabilities --- some are doing secretly while others openly. Usually, the principle reasons for the mutual uneasiness is due "ego," which often gives way to distrust. With the help of advanced science we have made destructive weapons, but we have failed to build trust, love and harmony among nations and peoples for peaceful co-

Agitational Terrorism

Is Kashmir nearly lost?

By Poonam I Kaushish

backtracked from some crucial points of agenda of alliance like partial or complete revocation of the draconian Armed Forces Special Power Act and revival of power projects and reopening channels of dialogue with Pakistan.

Add to this Army Chief Bipin Rawat's statement that anyone who interfered with defense operations would be treated as "anti-national" and the security forces would come down hard on them. Many perceive this as the last straw wherein people have lost faith in the political system a long time ago.

Undeniably, the failure to control the Pakistan-sponsored mobs rests partly with the Mehbooba Government as the divergent coalition partners PDP-BJP do not agree on how to deal with the stone pelters. While Mufti favours an accommodative line, the

attracting more more impressionable and aggrieved youngsters to attack symbols of authority.

Alas, we continue to treat Kashmir as a real estate problem experimenting with various permutations and combinations by wielding the big stick against trigger-happy militants. In the hope that it's policy of more of the same, more Rashtriya Rifles, more BSF, CRPF, more money and material etc would somehow yield dividends. Little effort is, however being made to see whether the policy is getting us anywhere.

Think. We can keep the land, but how are we going to keep the people? Prevent innocents caught in this conflict from being killed? The crux? While not a few Kashmiri seeks exclusion from India, New Delhi insists on inclusion leading to violence. No effort is made to instill a sense of security

which would dissipate fast.

Clearly both the Centre and State appeals for calm must be strengthened with a demonstrable capacity for a political conversation. It is imperative New Delhi comprehend that any response should be measured and not disproportionate to the cause of action.

Efforts need to be made to take the administration closer to the people. Work on development projects should be intensified. The sense of alienation among the youth needs to be addressed with newer employment avenues being made available. A senior Home Ministry official averred: "It is vital the State Government tackles these problems immediately. Until the people are with you, nothing can make Kashmir militancy free."

The time has come for Modi to think "out of the box" and address Kashmir's political aspirations. The locals are no longer enamoured by promises of basics like roads, electricity, and water. They need to securitize their future. Simultaneously, New Delhi needs to have a tight-knit coherent security policy. Tall talk is no substitute for tough action.

Time to give sharp teeth to our anti-terror laws. The only way forward is for our security agencies to be one step ahead of the jihadis, strike back and carry the fight into the militants' camps in Pakistan effectively. It is not enough to assert "we have might and muscle." One has to display that power.

NaMo needs to address real political, economic, social and security issues along-with the mainstream politicians. Make an honest attempt to instill faith and hope in the people, take the bull by the horns and address the question of Kashmiris' right to self-determination and embark on a new track.

The time is ripe to heal wounds. The Prime Minister must take the leap of faith and try to connect with Kashmiris. The question he needs to answer: Does he have the political will to cut through the welter of vested interests that arrest purposeful action? -----
INFA

The PDP has always been a soft pro-separatist party, in sharp contrast to its Saffron ally which touts nationalism and muscular Hindutva. It is working towards the return of the Kashmiri Pandits displaced since 1989, a steep uphill task to say the least and possible only when the Valley's creeping Islamisation is reversed. Consequently, in this milieu, their alliance is an oddity in governing a complex State like J&K.

BJP hoots for tougher measures. Yet both are trapped in a quagmire of knee-jerk reactions thanks to a lack of vision to shape better responses.

Politically speaking, it would not be long before the inherent ideological contradictions between the ruling partners comes to the fore. The PDP has always been a soft pro-separatist party, in sharp contrast to its Saffron ally which touts nationalism and muscular Hindutva. It is working towards the return of the Kashmiri Pandits displaced since 1989, a steep uphill task to say the least and possible only when the Valley's creeping Islamisation is reversed. Consequently, in this milieu, their alliance is an oddity in governing a complex State like J&K.

Moreover, the Centre has not learnt any lessons from the violence in the Valley over decades. Times out of number, the Administration's tough iron hand tactics has fueled another cycle of protests,

among people. A vicious circle leading to disillusionment and alienation. True, the Central and State Governments have reached out to the Opposition and separatist leaders to dissuade young Kashmiris from street violence, fully aware that this cycle of violence cannot be broken by brute force. Worse, even after three decades New Delhi has failed in evolving a military doctrine to deter Pakistan from indulging in cross border terrorism and nor has a macho-muscular foreign policy got New Delhi far.

What next? The Government needs to realise that when young children and women hit the streets and indulge in stone-pelting and violence they represent a political opinion. Certainly, they can be dispersed with pellets but if the State and mainstream politicians do not speak to them, if their arguments are not heard sympathetically and countered patiently there can be no calm, only a mirage that all will be well

Our peaceful existence on earth is now literally hanging on the whims of a few egoistic and crazy leaders.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwalji
Shillong -2

Unattended civic problems

Editor,

I have been a resident of the area around Circuit house point, Laban, for well over 18 years and I am compelled to highlight our perennial problem with stray dogs and absence of street lights; problems we have been facing for some years now. Drawing an analogy between both these issues, let me inform that I am in no way a dog hater, but rabid strays increasing exponentially in our locality is very worrying. Of equal concern is the lackadaisical approach of the locality people towards these issues. There is no visible attempt to come up with an action plan to combat this nuisance. Rather there have been multiple events of

failed attacks on us by these strays. It's more of a momentary concern, a touch and go for most of the locality folks.

As a responsible citizen of the state and the country, it is essential that I bring to you how this concerns our immediate environment and identify areas where we need improvement. Our beautiful locality is literally pock-marked with dog excreta, so much so that we have to be on a constant lookout as to where we walk. The place has turned filthy and unhygienic. Our narrow locality streets are home to more than a dozen stray dogs with a constant inflow of newer ones from other localities. The birthing pattern of these strays are exponential and they attack us residents in groups whenever they feel like. It is impossible to single-handedly banish them while they are in groups. Things become worse during evenings as our locality does not have street lights on vast stretches. With very small streets, constant traffic and innumerable dogs on the prowl, it is very difficult to even walk safely after dusk.

We desperately need street lights in our localities. It is tragic that despite our best efforts, we haven't been able to get these basic needs. We have been living a very isolated life for a long time because outsiders have literally stopped coming to our locality. And we residents spend sleepless nights because of the constant howling and fighting between the dogs.

Today, through this esteemed daily, I wish to draw the attention of those who are supposed to address these burning civic issues so that the stray dog menace is addressed and so too the street lighting. If any individual or organisation wants to adopt the strays from the streets, it would be a welcome move. I also hope the local MLA takes cognizance of these problems and finds solutions. Before aspiring for a smart city label we should make it liveable first.

Yours etc.,
Bipasha Bhattacharjee,
Via email

NDA's 3 Years New India emerging

By Shivaji Sarkar

Three years of Narendra Modi Government is changing the economic paradigm. It is planning a New India campaign to continue beyond 2019. The mantra is connectivity - connecting with the marginalised and the poor through fast highways and roads, cyber routes, JAM - jan, dhan, aadhar and mobile for transferring the most coveted cash - to prosperity. It is working beyond economy with dividends at the political level as evidenced by the recent Assembly and civic body elections.

The stress on development too has changed. Despite industry and investment orientation, the focus is moving towards the strengthening of the rural agro-based economy. The 'Make in India' to 'Skill India' and 'Stand Up India' are creating entrepreneurship while trying to increase the size of the market by including the deprived and discarded into the system.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has risen from Rs 12,343 crore (\$3083 million) in 1998 to Rs 29 lakh crore (\$46 billion). In 2013-14, it was \$24.3 billion. The FDI is flowing in services, IT, automobiles, pharmaceuticals and construction development.

The India story is, however, different from the global scenario. Global flows of FDI fell 13 per cent in 2016 to an estimated \$1.52 trillion as global economic growth remained weak and world trade volumes posted anemic gains, according to the latest UNCTAD Global Investment Trends Monitor. This possibly demonstrates a scenario of an emerging interest in India and business confidence.

The UNCTAD said India stood as the 10th most attractive destination in the world for FDIs. In comparison, China and Brazil received \$139 billion and \$50 billion FDI inflows respectively during 2016. The US remained the top source of FDI inflows in 2016 at \$385 billion. The Wall Street Journal observes: "Most major indicators suggest India's economy is in better shape now than it was before Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office comparing the figures of 2014 and 2016".

In April, Wendy Cutler, former Deputy US trade representative in the Obama administration, stated: "With the young skilled workforce, India's growth rate is going to surpass China for the coming years, as well as the market opening and deregulation undertaken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will make this a really important destination for foreign investment".

The different strokes given to the economy and trying to create a new vision is making some impact. India is now gradually trying to unfold its powers in nondescript destinations. Despite many problems of demonetization and the harrowing time the citizens faced, overall it created a favourable opinion for an action-oriented and risk-taking government particularly among the commoners.

The appreciation of the rupee by over Rs 4 to Rs 64 to a dollar is creating a favourable investment climate. It is being seen as a sign of a resilient economy. This apart, now the International Monetary Fund and ESCAP of the UN agree that it has little linkage to export growth.

The stress is on making a difference to the lives of India's poor by changing the architecture of inter-government finances. It has covered 84 schemes over 65 ministries and departments till December 2016 and targets 536 schemes. The DBT is catching up. Over 50 per cent of allocation for

LPG subsidies and 65 per cent of the National Social Assistance Programme benefits were transferred to bank accounts.

MGNREGA too was given a new lease of life on account of drought conditions in many parts of the country, and has recently received a supplementary grant on account of the increased demand in December. The Centre had released Rs 55,076 crore for MGNREGA - the highest allocation so far since the programme was launched.

While MGNREGA has often been criticized, it has nevertheless helped the rural poor. It has aided them earn cash, something elusive in remote areas. The move has made many of them buyers of goods. This is expected to prop up the rural market and gradually add to the nation's manufacturing growth.

The NDA has been trying to project an image of being pro-farmer after the amended land Bill was passed. In 2016, Modi shared his dream of doubling farmers' incomes by 2022. Apparently, during the past over a year a number of schemes related to farmers have been launched, including irrigation -- Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana; traditional bio-farming - Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana; Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Soil Health Card and National Agriculture Market (e-NAM).

The schemes are making slow but steady changes and are integrating the rural farms to the national market hubs. In some areas in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal, the farmers are now getting better market for their produce. The e-NAM that was introduced first in MP has come to help the farmers through a unified market, though still in many cases it is just the beginning.

New India is the largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices and spice products. India's fruit production has grown faster than vegetables, making it the second largest fruit producer in the world. Its horticulture output, is estimated to be 287.3 million tonnes (MT) in 2016-17 after the first advance estimate. It ranks third in farm and agriculture outputs. Agricultural export constitutes 10 per cent of the country's exports and is the fourth-largest exported principal commodity. The agro industry in India is divided into several sub segments such as canned, dairy, processed, frozen food to fisheries, meat, poultry, and food grains.

It is also stated that contrary to perception, farmers are into digital transactions more than many urbanites. They voice complaints about the digital connectivity in their areas and particularly against the public sector BSNL. Even some of the newly launched telecoms are unable to provide the speed as promised.

The digital connect that Modi boasts of has to be more effective than it is being officially claimed. The One-India concept gets hampered if the real speed is less than what the farm sector wants. In this New India, farmers are no more symbols of deprivation and backwardness though they still have to grapple with economic issues.

India is changing indeed. Now no government can ignore the farm or rural sector. In a short while, that is where the happenings would be, away from the urban malls. The GDP may grow beyond projections. The growth would be more pervasive as signs of an emerging New India are perceptible. ---INFA

"To be fond of learning is near to wisdom; to practice with vigor is near to benevolence; and to be conscious of shame is near to fortitude. He who knows these three things"

--- Faith Baldwin

The Shillong Times

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Congress in tatters

IT is evident that the 2018 election will not be smooth sailing for the Congress Party in Meghalaya. Already there are internal rumblings and open dissensions including by those who are part of the MUA-2 Government. Clearly there is also a strong anti-incumbency factor. The National Peoples' Party (NPP) is sending feelers to Congress dissidents who nurse a strong grouse against Chief Minister Mukul Sangma. The NPP would like to see a splintered Congress so that it capitalizes from that disarray. Since the NPP is sharing power with the BJP at the Centre and in Manipur it is only fair to expect that it would do the same in Meghalaya. But for now the NPP is more of a Garo-Hills based party. The party has not made sincere efforts to expand its base in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills although its President is from this part of the region and should know better.

The NPP's two visible names are only those of Conrad and James Sangma. We hear of no other leader of stature from the Party. Hence the NPP is more of a personality based Party. Earlier it rode on the huge popularity of late PA Sangma who was a political Colossus. Now that this tall leader is no more it remains to be seen if his two sons can take the Party to greater heights. New political alignments which are anti-Congress are now emerging and the NPP aims to capitalize from the Congress's predicament. By September this year we should be able to decipher how many sitting MLAs will jump fences and how many will remain Congress loyalists. But politics is not a game of loyalty; not indefinitely at least! There have been times when the Congress has been out of power and loyalists have stuck around only to reclaim their seats in the next elections. But that was then when the leadership took responsibility for the electoral defeat and immediately did a course correction to recover lost ground. This does not seem to be the case today. The Congress Party has been on a losing spree in election after election but the Party has not been able to face the moment of truth - that Rahul Gandhi has no leadership qualities and there is serious need for a leadership change! Alas no Congressman/woman worth their salt has the guts to take on the Nehru-Gandhi scion!. That's the fatal flaw of the Congress.

India-Lanka Ties National, not state subject

By S Saraswathi

After a long gap of 28 years, the visit of Indian Prime Minister to Sri Lanka is an event bound to attract regional reaction as well as global attention. The visit is part of India's mission to establish and promote mutually beneficial international relations - an item on top of the agenda of the NDA government. It has immense significance for both countries and for keeping peace and balance in this region.

The visit was arranged in connection with the United Nations Vesak Day -- the Day to commemorate Lord Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing away. The apparently non-political purpose has acquired political significance in view of several sticky problems between the two countries affecting not only India's national interests, but also a part of its internal Union-State relations.

It may be recalled that former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa once stated: "All countries are friends of Sri Lanka, but India is Sri Lanka's relative". It is literally true as overwhelming majority of Sri Lankan population are ultimately of Indian origin. Over 15 per cent are Tamils. The Prime Minister made a tactical reference during this trip to the fact that Tamil Nadu's unforgettable Chief Minister MGR, was born in Sri Lanka.

Any discussion on Indo-Sri Lankan relation these days is grabbed by Tamil Nadu politicians to focus it exclusively on the status of Tamils and their future. There are two groups of Tamils in Sri Lanka. One is Sri Lankan Tamils comprising descendants of Tamils of the old Jaffna Kingdom and the other is Indian Tamils who are descendants of plantation labourers sent to Sri Lanka in 19th and 20th centuries during British rule. Considerable number in the latter group were repatriated to India after independence and those who remained there acquired Sri Lankan citizenship and came to be known as Sri Lankan Tamils.

They constitute, as per 2012 census, 11.21 per cent of the total population of this island concentrated as overwhelming majority in

the Northern Provinces, and as the largest ethnic group in Eastern Provinces.

The first Indian Prime Minister to address a gathering of tea plantation workers, Modi labeled them Indian-origin diaspora who were providing the bridge between India and Sri Lanka.

Friendship and cooperation between them cannot begin or end with or depend on the demographic phenomenon. Ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious factors may naturally be predominant in shaping the attitudes of people in the southernmost parts of the country vis-à-vis Sri Lanka. But, for the nation as a whole, whether it is sharing Brahmaputra with China, or Indus with Pakistan, or Indian Ocean with Sri Lanka, State-level problems, however, important, cannot be the sole deciding factors in international relation while the views of affected states are taken into consideration. Hence, the Union government has a very difficult job of protecting the legitimate interests specially affecting Tamil Nadu and Tamilians and adopting at the same time a realistic foreign policy in the region. Unfortunately, regional leaders in any State of India are unwilling to cultivate a national outlook in foreign relations.

Sri Lanka holds an important position in India's geo-strategic interests. Its location, pictured as a vanguard of peninsular India overseeing the Indian Ocean astride the sea lanes, is one of the crucial points of Indian strategic planning. Sea Lines of Communications (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean are extremely important for South Asia as lifeline for supplies and trade.

China is engaged in enlarging its sphere of influence in South Asia. But, Sri Lanka cannot be expected to allay the anxieties of India and forget its own nervousness due to the Tamil factor.

Ethnic affinities between Tamils in India and Tamils in Sri Lanka are not any rare

case of cross-border ethnicity in the world. There are several such cases all over the world binding people separated by national borders. European countries under refugee influx, and the historic melting pot of multi-racial, multi-religious, polyglot population of the United States are bound to face very many problems of plural societies. People living in border regions in India -- Punjabis, Bengalese, Assamese, Kashmiris, etc., -- have some special relations with people across international borders.

China always had an eye on Sri Lanka for its location in the centre of the Indian Ocean. Its interests are not confined to development and trade. Along with India, China has got the rights to explore for oil and gas in the Gulf of Mannar in north-west Sri Lanka. This has practically given justification for semi-permanent presence of China in Sri Lanka. Chinese engineers have built the port and oil bunkering/storage facility in Hambantota in the south-east coast of Sri Lanka.

China is in recent years taking special efforts to promote friendly ties with countries around India as part of its diplomacy. It extended support to Sri Lanka in the United Nations over the years on the question of violation of human rights of Tamils - the basic grievance of political parties in Tamil Nadu. Sri Lanka helped China to get Observer status in SAARC, and China reciprocated it with supporting Sri Lankan demand for a similar status in the ASEAN. India's Sri Lankan relationship inevitably has to react to Chinese Sri Lankan policy.

China's latest initiative to inaugurate the Belt and Road Forum to construct a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and open it for all countries has immense significance both for geo-politics and geo-economics. The Forum was attended by around 30 countries. All neighbours of India including Sri Lanka, and USA participated in the Forum. The proposed corridor runs through the

Pak Occupied Kashmir. China used the occasion to pose as the champion of globalisation, free trade, investments and peace ironically invoking the historic Panch Sheel - the five principles of peaceful co-existence declared by India and China over 50 years ago.

Sri Lanka provides an ideal naval base for any kind of operation in the Indian Ocean. This alone is sufficient for India to go smoothly with Sri Lanka even on long-pending issues like Katchatheevu and seek solutions compatible with reality and safeguarding mutual interests.

Fishermen issue is separate and is not really a part of India's international relations. It is a complicated economic issue involving laws of the sea and fishing rights. It is to be tackled as a livelihood problem and addressed as a humanitarian question and should not be allowed to raise tempers and spoil international relations which have many other dimensions with vital national interests. Union-State relations within India or emotional ethnic attachments may be useful electoral issues, but cannot and should not dictate India's Sri Lankan policy. Sri Lanka's unity, sovereignty, and integrity as well as its stability and domestic peace are as important for India as for Sri Lanka. India has cultural and linguistic ties dating back to several centuries with almost all South and South Asian countries. Such ties have to take their place along with economic and strategic interests.

Nevertheless, the Centre seems to be showing some genuine concern for safeguarding the rights of Tamils in Sri Lanka and rights of Indians over the Ocean resources. Political leaders of Tamil Nadu have to accept that international relations cannot be determined as an emotional issue. It is a national and not State subject.-INFA

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

BJP's cow obsession is hurting India Sangh Parivar must learn from China

By Amulya Ganguli

Irrespective of whether China's One-Belt-One-Road (OBOR) initiative is aimed at enhancing its economic and military clout, the fact is that it has enabled China to move on from the chaotic days of the "let a hundred flowers bloom" campaign and the Cultural Revolution half a century ago to the modern world.

The ideological tilt towards establishing a pristine communist society has been abandoned in favour of achieving its opposite where "to get rich is glorious", as the post-Mao messiah, Deng Xiaoping, said, using a phrase which even capitalists will be wary of saying. The advancement has ensured that China could host the Olympic Games despite its unsatisfactory human rights record and emerge as a country second only to the US in economic and military prowess.

India, however, is seemingly moving backwards. The endeavours of the BJP and its brethren in the RSS-led Sangh Parivar to replicate their interpretation of the life and times of ancient India have

the 21st century indicates the prominence of antediluvian forces.

It is not only what is eaten but also what is drunk which tell a great deal about a country because restrictions of any kind are out of sync with the present-day lifestyles where the emphasis is on privacy and individualism. These are the two factors which are crucial in distinguishing the past from the present. In the days of yore, attitudes based on pursuing lives which might not conform to what is favoured as the norm in joint families or in the villages were frowned upon. As is known, the elders of the khap panchayats with their medieval mindset represent this outlook.

However, the growing urbanization of the modern world has led to the obsolescence of out-fashioned attitudes. For the success of a "new India", in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's words, it is imperative, therefore, that the constricting outlook related to a mythical, religion-based concept of ancient times is not allowed to gain ground. If anything,

China has succeeded in dispensing with the constraints of communism in order to ensure the flourishing of private enterprise. As is widely acknowledged, its growth as a result of the shedding of the earlier shackles has been phenomenal. India, unfortunately, has been hamstrung by at least two impediments.

led to a turning back of the clock. The cow has become the focal point of this backward march under the saffron brotherhood. In no other country is an animal held in so much reverence that a death sentence for its killers can be cheerily pronounced by a chief minister, as Raman Singh did in Chhattisgarh.

It is not surprising, therefore, that people have been done to death for what the worshippers of the cow have seen as mistreatment of the animal. A truck driver lost an eye because of an assault by cow vigilantes since he had honked at a cow. There has also been at least one case of the murder of a person suspected of eating beef. None of this has enhanced India's status as a major regional power with a firm commitment to the rule of law and economic progress. Instead, the country may increasingly be seen as having bogged down in inessential when its focus should have been on growth and on education, especially science.

As may have been expected, the issue of the cow has become allied to the question of nationalism. A Union minister loftily laid down the rule that those who want to eat beef can go to Pakistan. Although the concept of the holy cow has always been associated with Hinduism, it is a measure of the country's diversity that beef is widely eaten in states like Kerala, West Bengal and in the north-east. Indeed, a Hindu couple even petitioned the Bombay high court to allow them to eat beef since it is cheap and nutritious. The court's view was that the possession of beef, which has been brought into Maharashtra from outside, is not a crime. The very fact that such a clearance is needed in a cosmopolitan metropolis in

such a tunnel vision will hamper the advancement towards what has been called a digital India.

China has succeeded in dispensing with the constraints of communism in order to ensure the flourishing of private enterprise. As is widely acknowledged, its growth as a result of the shedding of the earlier shackles has been phenomenal. India, unfortunately, has been hamstrung by at least two impediments. The first and foremost was the public sector-based "mixed economy" - or mixed-up economy, as it was derisively called - pursued by the Congress which throttled the private sector, resulting in the sluggish Hindu rate of growth of 2-3 per cent.

Although the country was able to break free of this hidebound economic environment in 1991, it is now being hobbled by the Hindutva lobby's love for the cow and its culinary fetishes, which can revive the old images of a bucolic, backward country of rope tricks and snake-charmers.

To the saffron brotherhood's objections to beef have been added the preferences of a section of politicians for prohibition, which have received a boost from the ban on liquor shops near the highways. The average citizen of "new India" has to undertake a tightrope walk, therefore, to avoid being caught on the wrong side of the law for eating something which is not allowed or drinking where he shouldn't or reading a book which has been proscribed. He also has to be careful about courting a girl from another religious community. Evidently, he is constantly under the watchful eyes of Big Brother. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Christianity and forgiveness

Editor,

Through this letter I want to remind every Christian and all Christian Churches that according to the Bible, before Jesus was crucified, he and his twelve apostles had supper together. He broke bread and drank wine together with them. Judas, an accountant of the team sold Jesus in exchange for thirty pieces of silver. During the last supper Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray and sell him but he still shared the bread and wine with his betrayer. This clearly shows that Jesus forgave Judas for his act of betrayal even before Judas could realise his mistake.

Being a devout Christian myself, I am not trying to object to the Christian tradition for I am not a theologian. I just want to express my opinion and ask "What if?" What if all Christian churches are established and function with one objective and that is the act of 'Mercy'? Pope Francis the Roman Catholic Church said how he wished there was a church for the poor. He even announced the year 2016 as the year of

Mercy in the Church. I believe that God's message is full of mercy and forgiveness. Again what if all Christian Churches do away with all punishment and let the state and its judiciary deal with that? What if Christian churches concentrate more on putting food on the table of the poor than condemning or judging others or punishing it's faithful for committing mistakes?

The role of every religion should not be about conversion. Neither should any religion boast about itself. The purpose of religion is to work for the betterment of society by strengthening the fraternal bonds and promoting peace. Religion should not divide humanity. Religious ideologies are meant to create love and understanding and not separatist ideologies.

My apologies in case anyone is hurt by this letter.

Yours etc.,
Mickey M. Marweñ
Pyndengrei, Nongstoiñ.

What sort of representatives do we elect?

Editor,

I must thank the Shillong Times and congratulate H.H Mohrmen for the article "Basis on which people elect public representatives" (ST May 15, 2017) I firmly believe that readers of the article are made wiser this time round before going to vote. The basis on which voters in Meghalaya choose their MPs/MLAs/MDCs as cited by Mohrmen is very true indeed. It is on the basis of kinship ties, accessibility, solidarity in times of joy and sorrows, being member of the same faith (denomination) and same party affiliation, being from the same village or geographical area; because he/she provides public movable and immovable assets or articles, provides hard cash to individuals or liquor or other material goods. The voters don't spare a thought on the quality and capability of the candidates on the basis of being good law makers or on issues. Nothing of that sort has happened in the last 45 years. In this connection, I just want to suggest three things to Mohrmen. First: Please give a detailed analysis both in English and the vernacular print media and other social

media as to why the voters of Meghalaya have to heavily depend on the above enticements. Second: Please offer detailed suggestions/solutions (though some have already been indicated in the article) to voters as to how to go about choosing their candidates in future elections. Third: If possible, which I think it is, please form a powerful Social Network which will undertake wide political awareness campaign in Meghalaya on the sole issue of how to elect public representatives in the right way to Parliament, State Legislative Assembly and to the District Councils.

Again, in this connection, I would appeal to the NGOs which include the different faith based organisations and the traditional institutions, to help in educating the public on how to elect public representatives based on quality and capability as law makers in the legislative bodies and not based on sectarian and selfish extraneous considerations.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marweñ,
Shillong-2.

Vitamin D deficiency

Editor,

In this era of online shopping, people don't have to go outside frequently for domestic needs. Things are easily available online. But while going out for office or other works, people apply sunscreen over the bare body parts which creates obstruction in producing vitamin D in the body. Vitamin D deficiency is noxious for our body and health. Sunlight is the best natural source of vitamin D and we are avoiding this to protect our skin from tanning. We have to be aware that not having enough vitamin D in our body can cause rickets in children and osteomalacia in adults. Vitamin D plays an essential role in reducing hypertension, atherosclerotic heart disease, stroke, heart attack and even cancer. Vitamin D deficiency results in skeletal diseases, infections, metabolic disorder and more. And the most important thing that young people are obsessed with is obesity. According to research findings presented

at the European Congress on obesity, supplementation of vitamin D can help in loss of weight in cases of obesity. For vitamin D, we have to maintain the optimal range somewhere between 50-70 mg/ml and I can suggest that appropriate sunlight exposure is the best way. The other two ways of having vitamin D are food and supplements. Vitamin D is one of the fat-soluble vitamins. There are two types of vitamin D - D2 and D3. Vitamin D2 comes from fortified foods, plant foods and vitamin D3 from animal foods like fatty fish, cod liver oil, eggs and liver. Vegetarians can have milk, cereals in breakfast, Portobello mushrooms etc. Vitamin D supplements are a must as our body cannot produce it to adequate levels. So people who work indoors most of the time should take vitamin D through proper food or supplements.

Yours etc.,
Sanjukta Maiti
Shillong - 6

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.

"Everyone is a genius at least once a year; a real genius has his original ideas closer together."

--- Aristotle

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LIX No. 275

SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 18, 2017

India boycotts OBOR meet!

INDIA refused to take part in the One Belt One Road (OBOR) summit in Beijing. China organised the summit to highlight the merits of the project as part of globalisation. But India is well aware of its drawback. India has in any case reason to take a negative attitude. China is opposed to India's entry to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, it's getting permanent membership of the UN Security Council and UN Sanctions against the terrorist Masood Azhar. The Chinese tilt towards Pakistan against India is apparent. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs is fully alive to the inscrutability of Chinese negotiation tactics in the last two to three decades. Beijing tries to leverage its large size. OBOR as now structured will provide business to Chinese banks and Chinese companies while putting competitors at a disadvantage.

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been projected by China's President, Xi Jinping as a main feature of OBOR. But its details have not been divulged. The information available is not reassuring. It involves large scale penetration into Pakistan's economy. Besides, it runs through Pak-occupied Kashmir and India claims it to be part of its territory. Chinese enterprises will as a result of CPEC dominate Pakistan's economy. That is not globalisation but a kind of neo-imperialism. The US administration has already condemned the scheme saying that it will foment Pakistan-based cross-border terrorism against India and in Afghanistan. If India has to be persuaded to fall in with the grand design of China, Beijing has to amicably settle its border dispute with Delhi and make OBOR mutually advantageous.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

12 bodo militants nabbed in Shillong; arms, papers seized

Twelve suspected Bodo Militants were arrested in a series of raids conducted by the Meghalaya police in various parts of Shillong on Saturday and Sunday.

On Saturday, police nabbed two Bodo activities who were reportedly caught red handed while negotiating an arms deal in Shillong. The activities, who were staying at a hotel in the Police Bazar area, on interrogation revealed the location of other militant hideouts. In a subsequent raid, police arrested four suspected extremists from a residence in the polo ground area and seized some gelatine sticks and fuse wire for explosives. The police recovered some incrim-

inating documents in Bodo language and currencies amounting to some Rs 60,000 from the suspects. Three women have also been for interrogation in this connection.

At the time of going to press, raids are still continuing, and more arrest are likely to be made. The identity of the arrested persons have yet to be established. A senior Assam police official arrived in Shillong to assist in the interrogation in association with the Meghalaya police. It is yet to be established whether the militants are linked to any particular extremist body that is operating in Assam.

Corruption In Public Life Politicians must alter outlook

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

demanding Rs 500 crores from him after the polls.

The present scenario of corruption in public life has gained momentum. But it is surprising that there are no such charges against the BJP and its leaders. Many would find it difficult to believe that persons like Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh Shivraj Chauhan and Rajasthan's Vasundhara Raje and some former ministers of Karnataka involved in illegal mining among others are 'clean' politicians as alleged charges of corruption are against them too.

There are reports that BJP has been instigating

they charge big fees, similarly politicians have to spend huge money to win elections and, as such, they have to recover the money through unethical means. Moreover, huge amount of funds are required to run the party machinery and this money comes from bribes, donations for favours extended, etc. This justification cannot be totally ignored. However, the system cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely.

At the same time, it may be agreed that corruption in public life is not a modern phenomenon. It was prevalent in political and civic life of ancient India too as has been discussed by Kautilya in his Arthashastra.

The whole system needs to be reformed for which politicians and the bureaucracy at top levels, need to show the way. More transparency is required in government functioning and there should be no attempt to hide anything from the people.

journalists and a section of the powerful electronic media to highlight cases of corruption against their opponents. It is a well-known how at BJP's behest, the past and present Lt. Governor of Delhi had and is harassing Kejriwal since he assumed office. Moreover, there are allegations that BJP with the help of Central agencies is hell bent to bring corruption charges against him and destroying the AAP. But this is not to say that the recent charges against Kejriwal need not be investigated. But there should be no bias.

Tall promises of making public life corruption free are yet to fructify. In spite of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, social audit, which has yet to be undertaken, and other measures to make the administrative machinery transparent, the reality is that precious little progress has been made to cleanse the system. While the Center has sometimes shown sparks of good governance, most State governments are not free of corruption. Bribe having to be paid to get work done is no secret.

Political analysts are of the opinion that as doctors have to struggle before getting established when

But since Independence and specially in the last decades or so corruption has become a chronic feature of our public life. So much so that people have started treating it as a normal feature. They no longer show righteous indignation against corrupt practices, fight injustice or express shock when big scandals like 'Fairfax Deal', 'AgustaWestland' and 'Bofors Pay-offs' are exposed.

As such, it is indeed foolish to assume that the system would become corruption free. However, it is not intended to justify corruption as most leaders have been found to amass huge wealth and assets within the five-year term of their election. The extent and volume of corruption has to be checked so that the common man is not unduly harassed and forced to pay extra from his meagre earnings.

Prime Minister Modi's tall talk of transparency and weeding out corruption from public life has remained hollow slogans. Previous governments also did not take any initiative in the matter. Thus, the present situation calls for serious introspection and drawing up an action plan to curb unethical practices to the maximum extent possible.

One may mention here that demonetisation which

was carried out with much fanfare was not really successful in weeding out corruption. The whole system needs to be reformed for which politicians and the bureaucracy at top levels, need to show the way. More transparency is required in government functioning and there should be no attempt to hide anything from the people.

The Government's endeavour to ensure good governance and total transparency has officially been taken as 'Social Audit of Public Grievance & Citizen's Charter' that has become mandatory once every year for all organisations, Departments of both Central and State governments that have public interface. But most of these organisations are reluctant to face an independent third party audit.

As regards State governments that receive huge welfare funds from the Centre, no such social audit has yet taken place except one in Andhra Pradesh on the MGNREGS a few years back. The reason for the reluctance of States is obviously due to corruption and mis-governance at the panchayat levels and the benefits not reaching those for whom they are intended.

It is time that the Government enforce such audit at all levels where the admin is concerned to ensure how the administrative machinery is operating and whether they are following their objectives/charter in carrying out their work. It is only documents that speak and such analytical reports would reveal the efficiency and credibility of most organisations.

Though the task of checking corruption is indeed quite formidable, there has to be sincere attempts from top to the bottom at reforming the system to the extent possible. Moreover, there should be devolution of power and responsibilities to curb the top-down approach which has been an important cause of growing corruption. But all said and done, a basic change in human behaviour of our politicians and those in public life is called for to root out unethical practices that retard development. ---INFA

Controversy surrounding EVM machines remains alive

By Yashwardhan Joshi

Can the electronic voting machines (EVMs) be tampered with and, thus, manipulated to win elections? The debate over the reliability of EVMs is far from settled.

The massive defeat of the opposition parties, especially Mayawati's BSP, at the hands of the BJP in the recent Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, has once again brought the issue into the limelight. After Mayawati alleged that EVMs used in the UP polls were rigged by the BJP to manipulate the results, the losers found a good reason to justify their defeat.

And when AAP suffered a humiliating loss in the Delhi municipal polls, again

processes. The CPI (M) called for independent vetting of claims that machines were secure and tamper proof.

To quell doubts, the Election Commission has decided to hold later this month a 'challenge' where political party representatives and technical experts will be given an opportunity over a week to 10 days to demonstrate how they can manipulate the EVMs used by the EC, including those used in the recently-concluded Assembly polls.

But one cannot take away politics out of political parties. Now there is a fight over the nomenclature of the 'challenge'. AAP is

The representatives of the political parties who attended the special session as invitees were also swayed by the live demonstration, and doubted the infallibility of the EC's EVMs. At an all party meeting, convened by the EC, the BSP, Lalu Prasad's RJD, Mamata Bannerjee's Trinamool Congress and Tamil Nadu-based PMK demanded a return to the ballot paper system. The rest of the parties supported the use of EVMs. In his support of EVMs, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD (U) recalled the widespread rigging in Bihar in the times of ballot paper.

at the hands of the BJP, its leader Arvind Kejriwal, true to his form, saw an opportunity in taking up the cause and went ballistic. He called a special session of the Delhi Assembly where its MLA Saurabh Bharadwaj gave a live demonstration of how an EVM can be hacked to display votes in favour of a particular candidate or party.

Only that the EVM was a lookalike EC machine assembled by Bharadwaj and his team.

The Election Commission was not impressed and said the machine was a different gadget designed and made to function in a tampered manner, and hence, has no relevance. "Our EVMs are technically secured and function under an elaborate administrative and security protocol," Chief Election Commissioner Nasim Zaidi said.

But that did not deter Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia to claim that it was possible to hack an EVM in less than 90 seconds, and that given an opportunity 10 engineers associated with AAP will hack the EVMs of 12,000 polling booths of Delhi in just three hours.

The representatives of the political parties who attended the special session as invitees were also swayed by the live demonstration, and doubted the infallibility of the EC's EVMs. At an all party meeting, convened by the EC, the BSP, Lalu Prasad's RJD, Mamata Bannerjee's Trinamool Congress and Tamil Nadu-based PMK demanded a return to the ballot paper system. The rest of the parties supported the use of EVMs. In his support of EVMs, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD (U) recalled the widespread rigging in Bihar in the times of ballot paper. But like the rest, it also demanded EVMs with voter verifiable paper audit trails (VVPAT) and more scrutiny of election and post-election

insisting that it should be called 'hackathon' where it will demonstrate how an EVM can be hacked; the EC refuses to do so and would like to call it just an 'EVM challenge', maintaining that its stand alone machines with a one-time programmable chip cannot be hacked.

It has agreed to hold all future elections with voting machines attached with paper trails. It will evolve an appropriate framework for subjecting VVPAT slips of EVMs up to a certain percentage to counting. It was a demand made by AAP and other parties such as the CPI and the National Conference that 25 per cent of the total polling booths in a constituency be picked up and EVM counting results there be tallied with the VVPAT slips to check the accuracy of the EVMs.

There were some other demands as well such as more time for viewing the VVPAT slip before it falls into the printer box. Normally a voter gets only 7 seconds to view the VVPAT slip. This is a good suggestion which the Election Commission in its wisdom will go into. In its argument, AAP has said that the BJP had rigged the elections by tampering with the EVMs, but it has remained silent on how it won 67 of the 70 seats in Delhi polls. In the meantime, what will happen at the 'EVM challenge' if AAP fails to hack into the EC's EVM?

In that scenario, AAP has said it will humbly say sorry. That's it. The matter will end there. But it won't. The topic will keep on trending. Because the loser will then find fault with VVPAT. There is no end to it. The matter will come to a successful end only when the loser acknowledges this fact: One should be graceful in defeat.

Yashwardhan Joshi is a Journalist of long standing and commentator on issues of Administration and Social Issues. [IFS]

TO THE EDITOR

Safety belts only at police points!

Editor,

It is seen and witnessed by majority on how drivers in our state use the safety belt. Whenever cars especially local taxi and tourist cab drivers, approach the police check points and when see a police patrol the drivers would pull over their safety belt and brace it over their shoulder and lock it safely. It happens especially with those who come from outskirts of the city and who do inter-city travels. The main reason is fear of penalty and fine which happens in many instances due to neglect of traffic rules and forget to put it on, as majority of drivers are not accustomed to it. Besides, imposing rules with safety belts in the city where traffic is high makes it uneasy for many drivers that there are those who do not obey the safety belt rule. The fact is that as soon as the cabs crossed the police points the safety belt is taken off and hangs unused by the driver's side.

Safety belts are meant to safeguard against accidents due to unexpected hard control of car while driving. This is mandatory for the driver's own safety and that of his passengers. Few families use safety belts provided in a car except the driver. But in our state, safety belts are meant only for obedience of traffic rules. Cab drivers dislike the formality of being questioned on their neglect to use the same. And drivers automatically use safety belts only on such points. What is the point of using safety belts when drivers have not imbibed the mentality of safe driving?

For highway and long distance drivers, safety belts give them assurance that speed will not push or dash a driver to the wind shield or sides (that can cause injury). It has also become a tradition and safety habit for some and in other parts of the state. The Traffic Department needs to provide safety manuals and to outline general awareness of the need and importance of safety belts. The task is not easy when the general population is not conditioned to think of safe

driving. Thus, implementing rule on it is meaningless unless wearing safety belts become second habit.

Imparting information and knowledge via different media and improvement of the implementation of traffic rules and regulation without being corrupted by outdated and unruly ways will help to educate people over the use of safety belts. Improvement can be made at any time. There are always ways and means and to improve things for systematic and proper living.

Yours etc.,
Jellingstar Lymba
Shillong-9

Traffic chaos at Don Bosco Square!

Editor,
My letter captioned "Bizarre traffic routes," Angela Lyngdoh's letter captioned "Traffic woes in Shillong," and Dominic S Wankhar's letter captioned "Unimaginative traffic plans," published on February 18, April 19 and May 13, 2017 respectively

to draw the attention of the Shillong Traffic Police on reverting to the earlier traffic arrangement around Don Bosco Square has fallen on deaf ears. Perhaps the Shillong Traffic Chief thinks the current traffic management works. The stoic silence of the authorities concerned on the matter is incomprehensible. In addition to the chaos around Don Bosco Square, Upland Road, a residential area (thrown open for vehicles from St. Mary's end) is jammed till late evening with vehicles and causes regular bottlenecks on Upland Road, Red Hill Road and Gordon-Bhagyakul, New Colony and Nongkynrih junction, compounded by a dozen buses plying to and from NIT, Shillong throughout the day. Moreover, Jacob's Ladder was converted to a motorable road at the expense of the public exchequer to enable smooth flow of traffic from Laitumkhrah towards Khyndailad (Police Bazaar) & other places en-route. The very purpose of such conversion has been defeated by reversing

traffic on this stretch as very few vehicles take this steep climb. Further, the stretch from St. Mary's School to Shillong College which is now open from Don Bosco Square all day irrespective of school hours is risky for school children and motorists. Finally, the woes of the commuters going from Laitumkhrah towards Khyndailad and places en-route need not be overemphasized.

I appeal to the concerned authorities to kindly address this issue at the earliest and revert to the traffic arrangement prevalent earlier.

Yours etc.,
Mohitosh Chakravarty,
Shillong -3.

Why blame Shillong Municipality?

Editor,
A few days ago in a poll conducted by "The Shillong Times" 79% of the people agreed that it is the fault of the Municipal Board for Shillong getting a low rank in the "Swachh Sarvekshan.." I for once have to disagree with this

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"But grief makes a monster out of us sometimes and sometimes you say and do things to the people you love that you can't forgive yourself for."

--- Melina Marchetta

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LIX No. 276 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MAY 19, 2017

Demise of a conscientious minister

ON May 17, Union Minister for Environment, Anil Dave was hearing petitions from groups opposed to the commercial use of genetically modified (GM) mustard seeds. Dave had assured the delegation that their grievances would be addressed in the right spirit. Before that, on May 11, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee which evaluates genetically modified crops had cleared the use of GM mustard on a commercial scale. In the early hours of May 18, the quiet and unobtrusive Anil Dave passed away after battling lung cancer. It is a telling account of his hard work that up to the last hour, Dave worked for the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that Dave was with him until very late on May 17, discussing key issues relating to the Environment Ministry. Obviously the issue of GM mustard must have figured in the discussion as it would mean either a rollback on the earlier decision or adamantly pushing through the decision taken on May 11. Anil Dave is a long time RRS worker who mobilized door to door election campaign in Madhya Pradesh. It is learnt that Dave was battling lung cancer. It is indeed rare to find a Minister who literally worked until his last breath. It's a model that the Ministers in the NDA Government led by the prime Minister have followed.

It remains to be seen whether the new Environment Minister will give in to the clamour of the anti-GM mustard groups. Those who are protesting have genuine concern. GM crops make farmers dependent on seeds sold by multinational companies. Besides GM crops are prone to being attacked by pests and non-resilient to the vagaries of climate. Indigenous seeds are known to be much more resilient to pests and adapt better to varying temperatures which accompany climate change. While India struggles to meet the food security needs of its burgeoning population by going for high yielding variety of crops including GM crops it is also important for its scientific community to sit back and review the bigger problems that would arise from promoting GM crops.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Return of Medieval autocracy

From what I have come to know of the book of this prose stylist, who hit the firmament of frame overnight for his *Midnight's Children* I do not think he is above reproach. It betrays intellectual scheming from commercial aggrandizement. He has allowed himself to be exploited by the promotion lust of the Western publishers. He has lent his Muslim identity to impart credibility to a slanderous work, which clearly violates the religious sensibility of a community scattered all over the planet.

His modern allegory is too transparent to mystify his motivation. Now he stands sentenced to death by a hired killer, called upon to do so far away price. You may call it abhangman's fee. If this can be done for religious sacrifice, it can also be done for a sociopolitical offence with impunity. It seems the global autocrat's judgement is final and that his wits run across all continents. By one such sentence the territorial integrity of all nations has been challenged and frontiers running between the states seem to have vanished.

Quest for a Smart City in an Unsmart Milieu

By Patricia Mukhim

Meghalaya's Urban Affairs Minister is frustrated that Shillong has repeatedly failed to make it to the list of Smart Cities. To win the Smarty City project Meghalaya has to raise 50% of the project cost through external borrowings and investments which the State Government claims is beyond its capacity. Since 2016, states of the North East have been asking the Centre to relax the funding pattern and resort to the 90:10 mode of funding but the Ministry has been adamant. And rightly so! For too long the seven states have got away with poor implementation of projects funded by an indulgent Centre. On their part the states have been lax in book keeping; often unable to account for money spent. When such financial misconducts are pointed out by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) the Government takes its own time to fix the leaks by cooking the books.

The Modi Government has got wise to this wastrel nature of the states and the fact that those who run the Government (politicians, bureaucrats and technocrats) have actually been the biggest beneficiaries of central dole. We can begin by counting the mansions in and around Shillong, Tura, Jowai etc, for starters! A smart prime minister is unlikely to allow unsmart models of governance to continue. Let's also not forget that the unique selling point (USP) of the NDA Government is to reach the target beneficiaries who have been excluded by economic models of the past. We may crib all we want about Prime Minister Modi, but today the hoi-polloi knows that it is getting a share of the economic benefits by way of subsidies that come directly to their bank accounts. This is something previous governments have not attempted for obvious reasons. Hence a big chunk of subsidies actually reached the pockets of those in the government.

Coming to the Smart City project, the prime requirement for such a Project is an engaged, active citizenry which not only identifies problems but gets its act together to try and solve them. In Shillong the citizenry is in fact the problem. It is the citizen who dumps garbage everywhere, including hurling them out of passing vehicles. Garbage dumps sprout out everywhere.

In developed countries, civic engagement is part of the ethos of higher education. Here higher education is completely disengaged from the legions of problem that beset the

city. Active citizenship implies a scholarship that is linked to service and not an education system whose beneficiaries (scholarship takers) are only interested in degrees and self-promotion. Do we ever hear of university students interning with the Shillong Municipal Board to help understand its key problems and advocate viable solutions? Isn't that what universities are meant to engage with? What practical skills do the students passing out of universities actually have, except for the thesis they produce to get their Master's degree? Often the thesis is hardly of any use in the real world.

It would be pertinent to find out why Shillong has consistently lost the race for the Smart City Project. Firstly, the project envisages external resource mobilization which means approaching international lending agencies and investments by the private sector in providing basic services such as water supply and sanitation, urban transport and housing. The Union Government is pumping in Rs one lakh crore for Smart City projects across the country but that funding as stated earlier covers only 50% of the project cost. States must mobilize the other half. The objective of the Smart Cities Mission is to provide core infrastructure and give citizens a decent quality of life and a clean and sustainable environment through the application of 'Smart' Solutions.

The core infrastructure elements in a smart city include ten key points: (I) adequate water supply (ii) assured electricity supply (iii) sanitation, including solid waste management (iv) efficient urban mobility and public transport (v) affordable housing, especially for the poor (vi) robust IT connectivity and digitalization (vii) good governance, especially e-Governance and citizen participation (viii) sustainable environment (ix) safety and security of citizens, particularly women, children and the elderly (x) health and education.

The idea of a Smart City is to connect the different resources of a city to each other by utilizing advanced Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Internet of Things (IoT). This means deployment of applications that monitor, manage, and control connected devices, remote data collection from

connected devices and independent and secure connectivity between devices.

A Smart City also envisages a few SMART Essentials such as (a) Smart Energy which means an uninterrupted power supply and an insight into the overall power consumption by different institutions and buildings to reduce energy consumption. This is done by integrating technology with energy to optimize power production, improve grid management and providing effective distribution of energy.

(b) Smart Transportation by using technology to reduce traffic jams and pollution and facilitate easy movement of goods and people and reducing road accidents.

(c) Smart Data which is collection and collating the massive data related to various amenities used by the population. That data is then quickly analyzed to provide useful customer insights. Such data is put on an online portal to be used to predict future patterns and direction in which the city is moving.

(d) Device Connectivity is the use of IoT devices. Sensors embedded into IoT devices collect useful data that can be analyzed to gain relevant insights. With the support of IoT, complex city systems can exchange and manage the information quickly in real-time. Integration of data analytics with the system enables minimization of unintended consequences and accidents.

(e) Smart Mobility means quick and easy movement and not raging inside a vehicle that refuses to move because of a traffic jam, which is what our lives are today. In a Smart City data should move seamlessly amongst several administrative and municipal systems. This free data movement raises levels of security, intellectual property, and privacy issues hence governments and enterprises would need to adopt revolutionary trends to plan out their legal technology needs and public policy. As of today we are at the bottom of the heap as far as connectivity is concerned. Shillong is too pathetic to be called Smart. And the recent attack by RansomWare should alert us that SMART also means being one up on cyber crime which we are not at the moment.

(f) Smart Infrastructure means using data analytics for better planning so as to prevent health issues due to water through real-time testing of lead content in the

water supply. Citizens of Shillong are unsure of their water quality. A check might reveal what we fear the most - fecal matter in our water, apart from lead and other heavy metals.

(g) Smart parking as part of the package enables the city to earn higher profits by utilizing the same parking space frequently. The spaces can be utilized up to their fullest capacity to raise revenue.

(h) Smart Waste Management is an area we are zero at. Smart Cities are meant to implement smart waste management solutions to reduce costing by installing sensors inside the bins. This helps to monitor the level of trash in each bin. Bins are emptied only when they are full. So, there is no need to follow any standardized process to collect the waste from bins frequently. When the bins are full, the respective department is notified through the sensors. Waste collecting trucks can then empty the bins. This project reduces the number of waste collecting vehicles on the streets. It obviously reduces the traffic and fuel cost.

(i) Smart Lighting is intended to reduce electricity consumption using smart lighting technology. Intelligent lighting control can dim the lights on streets where traffic and pedestrian movement is low. Such smart lighting systems are equipped with central management software that tracks usage and leads to maintenance efficiency.

Smart Cities rely heavily on technology for their management. That is why Shillong fails to qualify on any of the parameters. Moreover we need an elected Municipal Board that can be held accountable on all fronts. By hanging on to traditional systems of governance and resisting elections we disqualify ourselves. On what arguments therefore is our Minister and his Department presenting to the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) in Delhi? Can we please have a look at the boxes that have been ticked in the presentation before the Ministry, so that we can live up to those tick marks?

Let's not forget that two of our well known rivers are polluted beyond recognition and we haven't been able to lift a finger to restore them. So let's forget the SMART CITY quest for now. An unsmart citizenry is unfit for a Smart City.

Yours etc.,
SN Lyngdoh,
Via email

Political delicacies

By Rahil Nora Chopra

Pranab Mukherjee emerging as consensus candidate

With Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar putting forward Pranab Mukherjee's name for a second term, speculation has begun in right earnest about the possibility of the incumbent President emerging as a consensus candidate. Nitish Kumar's strategy of suggesting Pranab's name is seen as a bid to put pressure on Modi, who has on several occasions in the past three years expressed appreciation for Pranab's 'remarkable contributions'. The BJP think-tank is also said to be in favour of a second term as it thinks it would help the party in the 2019 Lok Sabha and later assembly elections in Bengal and Orissa. With RSS leader Mohan Bhagwat frequently meeting Pranab Mukherjee in Rashtrapati Bhawan, the buzz has become even stronger that Pranab would be most acceptable to Congress while Mamata Banerjee will have no choice but to accept him as it would give her an opportunity to tell the people of West Bengal how she is always there for the Bengalis, apart from the mileage it might give her party in the panchayat and Lok Sabha elections.

Indira Gandhi remains 'most acceptable prime minister'

On the occasion of the release of the book, India's Indira recently, President Mukherjee had said Indira Gandhi remained the "most acceptable Prime Minister to the people of India till today" and recalled her decisiveness in reorganizing the Congress party after its electoral debacle in 1977. This and his other remarks at the event have been seen by observers as a veiled message to the grand old party to set its house in order. Mukherjee spoke about Indira's view on 'Operation Blue Star' in Golden Temple and said that as the minister taking the decision to storm the temple, he was afraid of "doing anything to the Golden Temple" and remembered the bad times Ahmed Shah Abdali had to go through after he "did something wrong to the Golden Temple" following the third battle of Panipat. He added, "It is not that she did not know it, she knew it very well. And she told me, 'sometimes history demands some action which may not prove correct later on but, perhaps, is the most relevant at that moment.'" Mukherjee said he was narrating the incident as an example of her fearlessness in action and hailed Indira as "one of the most remarkable personalities of the 20th century".

Khatheria is front runner for Uttar Pradesh BJP chief

Also doing the rounds are names for the leader of BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit. With state BJP president Keshav Prasad Mourya becoming deputy chief minister in the Yogi government, the party has to find a replacement and the probable names include Vinod Kumar Sonkar MP from Kaushambi, Vidyasagar Sonkar and Ram Shankar Katheria, MP from Agra, who is considered to be the front runner.

Uttar Pradesh minister plans airline based out of Allahabad

Allahabad coffee houses are witnessing animated discussions about the proposed private airline to be owned by UP Civil Aviation Minister Nand Kumar Nandi. The airline is supposed to be named Nandi Airlines after the name of its owner. People are wondering whether the airline will meet with the same fate as some other planned Nandi rollouts. For the past six months, the Niranjana cinema in Allahabad was showing banners and posters of Nandi Desi Ghee, Nandi Rice, Nandi Atta etc, but these have now been removed. Whenever Nandi comes to Allahabad, he organises a janata darbar in the circuit house to interact with common people and answer their queries. Next time he holds the event, people will have a curious query: When will Nandi Airlines start flying? (IPA)

Congress to nominate new PCC chiefs

Congress circles are abuzz with names being tossed up for the appointment of PCC chiefs in different states. The prospects of Jyotiraditya Scindia being appointed as the leader of the Congress Party in the Lok Sabha in place of Mallikarjun Kharge have become brighter as Kharge, also the new chairman of the 21 member Public Accounts Committee of Parliament, is eager to shift his base to Karnataka ahead of the assembly election in 2018. According to sources, Kharge will be appointed as the PCC chief in Karnataka while Kamal Nath is being considered to

TO THE EDITOR

He came, he sang, and walked off on time

Editor,
Bihu is a means of entertainment through music and dance and undoubtedly is the cultural lifeline of the Assamese. The agrarian festival is today being hijacked by the urban community. Now they have begun to organize Bihu on a large scale calling it 'Stage Bihu'. But here again the question arises: are we celebrating the festival in the right spirit? The tussle between the organisers and the artistes is the order of the day. Concerned citizens often complain of late night celebration and the loud decibel which crosses the threshold. Although the month long celebration is famous for mass audience, there are people who feel uncomfortable on the other side of the fence. We

support a healthy culture that recognizes and values communities. Untoward incidents in the aftermath of late night events are a cause of concern. We live in a civilized society and should do things in the right way and enjoy a festival by connecting people in the right manner. Do we follow the Supreme Court order that decibel levels must be reduced to 45 dB after 10 pm? There is no ethics in spending a night out by disturbing others. Everybody is entitled to enjoy their natural right of sleeping in a peaceful atmosphere. The Garba - the nine day festival in Mumbai, is allowed to play the loudspeakers for just two days only up to 10 pm with a limit of 55 dB. Even small organisers that don't use loudspeakers are prohibited to stay open until midnight. Justin Bieber, the Canadian singer came; he sang and he wound up the show on time in Mumbai recently. No matter how much his crazy

fans insisted that he sing another hit, Bieber refused. He had a Purpose and sang for a Purpose and walked off the stage sharp at 9.50 pm.

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah,
Via email

Whats in store for Meghalaya.

Editor,
The 2018 Assembly elections are fast approaching and arrangements to meet this political event are beginning, for good or for worse, to take shape. Political alignments; realignments; handshakes closely followed by backstabs; FIRs and counter FIRs; accusations and brickbats side by side with accolades and rave reviews are now the order of the day. In the shadows, serious side events, deliberations and discussions are also taking place usually illustrated by hectic and desperate manoeuvrings for pocket constituencies; applications

for party tickets; by promises and denials for the same. In Meghalaya all the above are usually decided by a common flavour. A common denominator called money!

Money decides who is given a ticket and who will contest from where. Availability of lush funds determines the type and scale of the campaign for each candidate. The enthusiasm of party workers and the zeal of campaign volunteers all depend on how much one is capable of paying for such services. Money spent on each vote finally decides the outcome of the polls. Most important, the ability of a person to financially support the campaign of any candidate, makes such a person a king maker. Business men in the past used to finance politicians to be reciprocated with political patronage for such electoral philanthropy. That is until

business men decided to contest elections themselves. Exit the political statesman. Enter the political businessman. Welcome Money - the game changer!

A strong political rumour is currently circulating. It involves four brothers, two on each side. On one side are two siblings, educated, suave and articulate, with a lot of political goodwill on their side from their respective community. On the other side are the next two brothers, filthy rich, boorish, uncouth and arrogant to boot. They have no goodwill except that they are able to buy their way through. They owe their political clout because of the money they could throw around. For them political power is simply a platform for promotion of their business interests. Now there has been a tie up between the two sets of brothers. The rich guys are investing 40 crores in 20 constituencies for 20 candidates in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills for a particular party. For this act of

"You were merely wishing for the end of pain, the monster said. Your own pain. An end to how it isolated you. It is the most human wish of all."

--- Patrick Ness

The Shillong Times

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Coal scam and its aftermath

MEGHALAYA is willy-nilly in the news following the special CBI court ruling on Friday indicting former Coal Secretary HC Gupta, former Joint Secretary Coal, KS Kropcha who is now the Chief Secretary of Meghalaya and KC Samria director in charge coal allocation, of wrongdoing in the allocation of coal blocks to at least a dozen companies. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had come under intense scrutiny of the Comptroller and Auditor-General in 2012 when it was detected that a cumulative loss of Rs 1.86 lakh crores had accrued to the exchequer, simply because a robust tendering process was not followed in the allocation of coal blocks. Serious discrepancies occurred during 2006-09 when Dr Manmohan Singh was holding charge of the Coal Ministry. In fact the role of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was also suspect as it delayed the introduction of competitive bidding, though the Law and Justice Ministry had cleared the process.

At the preliminary stage of investigation the CBI had named a dozen Indian firms that benefitted from what was considered a 'subjective' manner in which decisions to allocate the coal blocks were taken. The CBI in its FIRs had accused several firms that applied for coal blocks of overstating their net worth and failing to disclose prior coal allocations. The firms were also accused of hoarding rather than developing coal allocations. The CBI officials investigating the case speculate that bribery may be involved. Interestingly, after several rounds of questioning Dr Manmohan Singh was not found guilty of wrongdoing although Gupta an officer known among his colleagues and juniors to be upright, claims he had only executed orders of the PMO.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee report on Coal and Steel submitted in 2012 found that all coal blocks distributed between 1993 and 2008 were done in an unauthorized manner and lacked transparency. It proposed that allotment of all mines where production is yet to start should be cancelled. What made matters worse and strengthened the allegation of wrongdoing is that the coal auction by the NDA Government in 2015 earned it a whopping Rs 80,000 crore after sales of 11 coal blocks mainly in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand.

As can be expected, retired and serving civil servants are up in arms against the CBI Court ruling. Their contention is that civil servants place the facts of the case before the political executives and the latter take the final decision. But the other question is whether civil servants should also not safeguard the nation's interests. After all they work for the country and not for a particular government in power. Indira Gandhi was perhaps instrumental in giving a death blow to the steel frame of India when she insisted on a bureaucracy that was loyal to her government! The rest is history.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Field Testing Stations at Gauhati and Agartala

The Central had decided to set up two Field Testing Stations with general engineering Testing Laboratories at Gauhati and Agartala. This information was given by the Secretary of the Department of Industrial Development, Mr S KBhatnagar in his letter addressed recently to the Secretary of the North Eastern Council. Mr S KBhatnagar also hoped that the Government of Assam and Tripura would encourage the entrepreneurs to avail of the facilities now being set up in these two places. Earlier the Secretary of the North Eastern Council, Mr P H Trivedi in his letter to the Government of India mentioned how the

entrepreneurs in the Small Scale Sector of the North Eastern Region have been experiencing considerable difficulties in obtaining the I.S.I. Certificates in respect of their products before they could be marketed. While mentioning the delays caused due to the location of the I.S.I. (Indian Standard Institute) Office at Calcutta, Mr Trivedi strongly pleaded for setting up of a Branch Office of the I.S.I. (Indian Standard Institute) in the North Eastern Region to avoid irritants which act as disincentive to the local entrepreneurs of this region. The setting up of such facilities would promote industrial development in the North Eastern Region, Mr Trivedi added.

Calls for impeachment of president Donald Trump getting louder

Appointment of Mueller as special counsel leaves little escape route

By Nitya Chakraborty

The events in Washington in the last forty eight hours have given a fresh twist to the dimension of the anti-Constitutional actions of the beleaguered US President Donald Trump indicating that the appointment of the former FBI Director Robert Mueller as the special counsel to the investigations into Trump's collusion with the Russians, has left very little escape route to Trump to wriggle out of the ongoing scandals.

What makes the appointment of Mueller as a big threat to Trump presidency is that the President himself is continuously obstructing justice and acting opposing the positions of the White House officials. He is showing a sort of personal arrogance by openly saying that "I decide for myself". Mueller is known for his professional integrity and he is getting adequate support from the officials of White House excepting Trump coterie and the issue will be whether the President has obstructed justice first by asking the former FBI Director Comey to let go of the Flynn investigation and he followed it up by firing him after he declined. Trump has complicated his position further by tweeting that Comey better hope that there are no tapes of our conversations".

In US, the obstruction of justice by the President is a serious offence. Reports have come that President Trump was aware of the warning given by former President Obama and then acting attorney general Sally Yates that Flynn acted as a lobbyist for the Turkish President getting funds, apart from his Russian connections. Still he appointed Flynn as national security adviser and gave him continuously good conduct certificate until it was impossible to retain him. All these developments during the week show that Trump scandals have reached a tipping point and

the situation is fast reaching the stage of Watergate scandal during the tenure of President Nixon.

Only hours after the bombshell announcement of the appointment of Mueller to head an investigation it was revealed by the New York Times that General Mike Flynn, the national security advisor appointed and later fired by Trump, had disclosed to the President that he was under investigation by the FBI for having been a paid foreign agent working for Turkey's authoritarian president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Trump has claimed he did not have that information when he appointed Flynn.

Trump lashed out on Twitter again Thursday morning claiming that there was a double standard

whether the Trump administration will be able to survive the scandals, most of which it has brought on itself. Never before in U.S. history has a special prosecutor been named to investigate a president less than 120 days into his administration while talk of impeachment is heard on the floor and in the halls of the U.S. Capitol and throughout D.C.

It also surfaced that at a previously unknown meeting of GOP leaders last year, Republican Majority leader Kevin McCarthy had said he thinks "Putin pays" Trump. Majority leader Paul Ryan scrambled on Wednesday to minimize the damage from the revelation, calling it a "joke."

Another factor is the nearly open revolt sweeping the ranks of the FBI and

"It also surfaced that at a previously unknown meeting of GOP leaders last year, Republican Majority leader Kevin McCarthy had said he thinks "Putin pays" Trump. Majority leader Paul Ryan scrambled on Wednesday to minimize the damage from the revelation, calling it a "joke."

because both "the Clinton campaign and Obama" had committed "illegal acts" for which no special prosecutor had been appointed. The president offered no evidence for those claims. He also told a graduating class at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, even before the announcement of the appointment of a special counsel, that "no politician in history has been treated more unfairly" than him.

The events of the last 24 hours appear to have brought into question

other intelligence agencies. The rank-and-file are none too happy about the Trump administration's pot shots against them and, of course, the FBI has an all-to-well known history of not taking kindly to politicians and others who challenge them. Public opinion of course is a very serious factor as well, with 60 percent in recent polls indicating support for an investigation and nearly half saying that they thought impeachment should be on the table.

According to the US constitution, the president in office can be impeached for

treason, bribery or other misdemeanours. Bill Clinton was charged with obstruction of justice and with perjury for allegedly lying under oath to a federal grand jury about his affair with Monica Lewinsky. The current president can be charged for lying on a number of issues, including ties of his and his campaign leaders with the Russians, especially President Putin. So far, two presidents Bill Clinton (1998) and Andrew Johnson (1868) have been impeached. Articles of impeachment were passed against Richard Nixon by a congressional committee but Nixon resigned before the House of Representatives could vote on the matter. That was, technically, Nixon was not impeached.

Interestingly, a recent opinion poll in US has revealed that 46 per cent of the people covered in the survey favoured impeachment of President Trump. His popularity is now lowest among the presidents at the end of first four months. The Republican Party is worried and there are talks that things should not be allowed to go too far. In that context, the change of president by promoting Pence through 25th amendment of the US constitution is being discreetly discussed in the Republican circles. The GOP leadership is still ready to wait hoping that Trump will mend his ways and he will start listening to the leadership. After all he is the nominee of the Republican Party. But people, who know Trump among the Republicans, are not nursing such hopes. They feel that he is too much narcissistic and it will be very difficult to change his ways. Only if signs become clear that the Republican voters are abandoning the Party due to his manners and policies, the GOP has to think of taking some action. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Fight for survival

Editor,

I am glad to see that a new body known as the Meghalaya Indigenous Tribal Constitutional Rights Movement (MITCRM) has been recently formed to take up the issue with the Central Government regarding the proposed amendment to the Sixth Schedule. I fully support this group and their noble intention. I am told by some of my friends in Jharkhand that the BJP government there has made some reforms to the Fifth Schedule which was created to safeguard the tribal communities of mainland India. This reform has empowered the government to alienate land of the tribal people and plots of land have been sold out to the corporates. Jharkhand is rich in minerals like coal, iron, bauxite etc, and the government is bent on exploiting them at the cost of the tribal communities. Some tribal villages have already been sold out to corporates and tribal communities are being displaced from their ancestral land. I am very apprehensive that what is being done in Jharkhand may be replicated here in Meghalaya and in other North-eastern states. With the rich reserve of minerals in Meghalaya like coal, limestone and uranium and rivers with great potentials for generating electricity, there is reason enough to be suspicious of such a move to amend the Sixth Schedule. It is feared that this amendment will also open the possibility for non tribals to acquire land in the State. If that is done, then there would be a massive

alienation of land among our people for the simple reason that non-tribals will have a greater purchasing power. How many of our tribal land owners would not fall victim to such a temptation? I dread to think of the day when 90% of our land would fall into the hands of non tribals. That would mean the pauperization of our people and a total destruction of our communities. Up to now, our land is being protected by the Sixth Schedule which forbids non-tribals from acquiring land. The MITCRM must fight tooth and nail to put a stop to such an insidious attempt to destroy the minorities. I hope that our tribal MPs, Regional Parties, tribal lawyers, Church authorities and other eminent leaders in our society will join hand with MITCRM to create more pressure on the Home Ministry not to go ahead with this plan. This is an issue of life and death for our tribal communities and therefore we must stand up together to fight for our own survival.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb
Via email

Of brutal rapes across the country!

Editor, Recent incidents of brutal and demonic rape and murder from one corner of our country to another ~ from Goa's Canacona, to Odisha to Haryana's Rohtak ~ underscore the need to impose maximum punishment on every killer rapist. The mother of the

Rohtak victim echoed our helplessness and pointed out the danger of such rapists coming out of jail after a few years when she said, "...every woman fears this day for their daughters since these goons are alive." Now, our judiciary needs to think if it is time to shun the rarest of the rare yardstick for three major reasons.

First, every killer rapist must be hanged to stop the menace. Second, such incidents are always savage but not the rarest. And third, such yardstick can rob objectivity of a judgement for which Lady Justice wears a blindfold.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

HSRP a big farce!

Editor,

Apropos to the news item on ST, "Contractor to reduce HSRP rate" (ST April 27, 2017) I wish to point out here that right from the time the High Security Registration Plates (HSRP) was introduced for vehicles in Meghalaya, there was a hue and cry by vehicle owners and the joint action committee which included among others HSPO, HNYF, CSWO, MC TOA and one of those who vehemently opposed HSRP was even booked and sent to jail at Tura by those who were in power and who benefitted heavily from its introduction. Those who opposed the HSRP at that time did so for the right reasons, though many of them kept quiet later for reasons best known to all. Only one person was left to suffer alone in jail.

The whole idea of introducing HSRP is to

prevent vehicles from being stolen, and, if stolen, they can be tracked down and can be found at short notice. Since introduction of the HSRP in Meghalaya, so many types of vehicles were stolen from parking lots, road sides and even from the garages yet, none of them were tracked down and retrieved till date. The few that were found later were either left abandoned by the car lifters or through the hard work of the police and not with the help of the HSRP. This has clearly proven the futility and the hoax of admitting a particular firm to start the business of HSRP in Meghalaya. This has also revealed the uselessness and illogical use of HSRP. Why should car owners use this for nothing and why should they pay for HSRP for zero benefits? And remember, the price for HSRP in Meghalaya is exorbitant! In my opinion, this is a crime and this is cheating the public for ulterior motives of the introductors and those in the government who are in collusion with Shimnit Utsch, the Company that was given the contract for providing HSRP here. Its time now for retendering and getting a better Company that offers a more reasonable pricing. The earlier Shimnit Utsch is stopped in its tracks and is shunned by vehicle owners, the better it is.

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Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

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

This India!

By Ananya Guha

To confound race with language, as some historians have been contending is flawed. People may be of common racial descent, but can speak different language's and vice versa. The present social crisis in India is due to questions of race, language and religion and a tenuous nationalism based on these doctrines. When we identify one race, one language and one religion seeking a common footing, in a country such as India, then we are contorting facts and treading on flimsy hypotheses. More than being flimsy, the thinking is erroneous and dangerous; grounded on singularity of beliefs. The perception of unity, founded on such singular basis, is historically

anachronistic. Social contexts keep changing, depending on current politics and society, as well as of notional thinking. Akbar's heresy was positively geared. That, also the structure of a caste biased society led to repression is historically proved. We are living in its midst.

We must continue to argue out a strong case for the India of realities. This India is based on a vibrant mutation, a flowering of languages and religion, a multiplicity of races and ethnic attributes. This India is a welter of religions, castes, sub-castes or ethnicity. This India continuously strives to be distinctively ethnic and autonomous in spirit. This

"The argument is to be embattled if needed and bold. Not in our wildest imagination can we take for granted the belittling of history. This argument will always be manifest in its cultural rulers, and not its political potentates."

inauthentic and simply cannot be furthered. To do away with the historical imagination of an Aryan linguistic group, whose peoples were pastoral agriculturists, and nomadic, the existence of an urban civilisation predating it, and perhaps even co existing with it is glossing over historical truths and origins.

Such debunking of history can have portentous implications. Children will be taught a nebulous history, where myth, fantasy and stories predominate. To ally history with the mythic is to consciously super impose a structure on history, falsifying it and considering this to be indestructible. This is the polemic of politics and history. The unravelling of a history, to suit the politics of the times is in bitter and acrylic taste.

Political gains can only be short term. The future will always chart out the inexorable forces of history. History is a nuanced combination of past, present and future where analysts will be selective about choosing inferences, based on interpretation. History is largely interpretive drawn on incontrovertible facts. Facts in isolation may or may not be history.

The politics of culture, religion and language is a fetish. This fetish destroys the fact that language and religion are ineluctable. Many of the languages of India had their origins in one language, and many more came into being as a result of diverse interactions, and racial incursions, inter mix. The myth of focusing on a single language, which was an off shoot and a parallel process in the development of other Indian 'modern' languages needs to be decoded if not exploded. This is slowly being transferred into what is considered to be sacrosanct, untouchable almost.

Such is the inherent danger of toying with history. What is more dangerous is infusing wrong and flawed notions into young sensibilities and minds. The word 'culture' has layered connotations. To bandy it around with an admixture of religious concomitants is to whip up fanatic feelings. Politics is correlative of such fanaticism, nihilist in the long run.

The seats of the past and of a long drawn history of any civilisation, cannot be sundered indiscriminately. The forces of Islam and Christianity must be viewed as historical intrusions. History is bitter sweet, it also objectifies invasions and invasions. To look upon the invader as 'enemy' in present day contexts is

India has remained unfazed with the transitory nature of the politics of the times. This India possesses a commonly perceived unity - that of the poor and the weaker sections of its untrammelled societies.

The argument is to be embattled if needed and bold. Not in our wildest imagination can we take for granted the belittling of history. This argument will always be manifest in its cultural rulers, and not its political potentates. We can only pick up threads from a strong historical thread and connect. The present disconnect is an appalling end to a glorious road to history and a past of challenges, ups and downs and also that of historical processes of mutation. The disconnect is also because of ignorance and the desire to apply blinkers to history. It remains to be seen what school and university boards do to frame syllabus. Are they going to bow down to political war lords, or are they going to use dispassion, while formulating texts, which now are being ousted out of contexts?

It is also not a question of which side one belongs to. All learning is freedom and knowledge is driven by freedom. People and scholars are free to interpret, choices must be given, but historical facts cannot give way to cursory knowledge based on propaganda, and myths. In parallel students must be given the choice of learning about regional histories in the country. The various cross currents of regional history give proper understanding of movements, traditions, society and culture. Singling out heroes who fought say, the Mughals is not the only history of a region. It is peoples, races, languages, that we are concerned with, not only battles and conflicts. We have seen how defecation of Shivaji the Maratha leader has a fall out on the politics of today. But what about the Bhakti leaders of Maharashtra, who have contributed to the development of the language? To ally history at both national and regional levels with conquerors, the conquered, battles and war lords is to reduce it to glorification and sub nationalism, not always desirable. History must take look dispassionately at societies, their economies, social and cultural movements, literature and all that underpin societal structures.

The muddled connect between the past and present is putting 'this India' to a clock frantically ticking backwards.



Life in a delta

Sundarbans is the third most vulnerable delta in the world today.
Ranjita Biswas reports

This is a country of 'The Hungry Tide' as award winning author Amitav Ghosh titled his novel on the Sundarbans landscape. Some surmise that the name — Sundarbans (beautiful forest in Bengali) comes from once abundant Sundari trees in the area. It is a fascinating land where mangrove forests — one of the largest contiguous blocks in the world, crocodiles, snakes, the ferocious Royal Bengal Tiger and resilient human society have been coexisting for centuries.

Yet, today, this deltaic region straddling West Bengal in India and Bangladesh where the great rivers Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna converge to meet the Bay of Bengal, is hardly a palette of beautiful stories.

Rather, it is in the news for hosting powerful cyclones, flooding of low-lying areas, islands disappearing from the archipelago due to the rise in sea water level, thanks to global warming, and submerged stories of displaced people due to these calamities.

People in the Sundarbans reside in 53 islands, according to the Delta Vision 2050 document (WWF-1, 2011). It is a Unesco World Heritage Site. The area outside the protected National Park has been mostly used for agriculture.

The connection between global warming and sea level rise has been conclusively established by scientists, including those of the School of Oceanographic Studies at Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

The latter warns that in the Sundarbans, rising sea level and depletion of mangrove forests that act as a natural buffer against cyclones and rising water could see more islands getting submerged. Like Ghoramara, Suparibhanga and Lohachara, which have wholly or partly been submerged in the sea.

From these islands, more than 30,000 people were relocated to the Sagar island, a place of pilgrimage for Hindus, 25 km



away. Now as more low-lying areas are under threat, the continued migration could put a strain on the dedicated area in Sagar too, say experts.

Incidentally, scientists point out that while globally, sea level rise due to climate change is usually at 1.2 mm per year, in Sundarbans it is much higher at 4.2 mm per year.

In such a scenario, what can be done to tackle people's vulnerability? DECCMA (Deltas, Vulnerability and Climate Change: Migration and Adaptation), a multinational project involving hundreds of environmental scientists and academics from different disciplines are working to find a more viable answer to this vexing problem. More importantly, as it is also one of the most densely populated regions of the world — 1000 plus persons per sqkm. The Indian Sundarbans

area locates an estimated 4.5 million people.

DECCMA's three main aims are: To evaluate the effectiveness of adaptation options in deltas; to assess migration as an adaptation in deltaic environments under a changing climate; to deliver policy support to create the conditions for sustainable gender-sensitive adaptation.

At the moment the case studies are focusing on three deltas — the largest — Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (India and Bangladesh), and smaller ones at Mahanadi (Odisha) and Volta (Ghana) which have similar characteristics.

Kolkata-based autonomous research organisation, Centre for Environment and Development (CED), is an active partner of this five-year project (2014-2018).

Says Ashish K. Ghosh, director, "The Sundarbans is the third most vulnerable

delta in the world. We have to see how the inhabitants, taking into consideration the topography and new climate change, can adapt to the new reality and lifestyle."

Some of the key areas on adaptability, scientists at DECCMA are working on to ameliorate the misery of the inhabitants are: ensuring an early warning system for the people so that they can be prepared; building accessible cyclone centres for temporary period: if they have to migrate, how the government is planning their rehabilitation and resettlement.

Another important element that is inseparable with adaptability is food security. Ghosh worked earlier at reintroducing lost strains of saline-resistant paddy crops in the area. The devastating cyclone Aila thrashed the southern part of West Bengal in 2009.



(Top) A boatman; (left) the Sundarbans mangroves and a climate refugee waits for relief after Cyclone Aila hit the delta

"One million people became homeless in one night; the date was 29 May," Ghosh recalls from his field experience.

Post this national disaster, 40 to 80 per cent of the male population of the most vulnerable island areas migrated to 11 states in India in search of a livelihood leaving behind the women, children and the elderly to fend for themselves, though emigrants sent regular remittances.

Obviously, women have to bear the extra responsibility. "Hence it's important to ensure that people can sustain themselves, despite the challenges," he says. Increased salinity due to sea water "invasion" became a problem for growing paddy; so far, the farmers were used to rain-fed agriculture.

This made ENDEV (A Society for Environment and Development) Ghosh's

sister concern, search for saline-resistant paddy strains which had all but disappeared though they were once cultivated by farmers in this area. With help from the seed bank Vrihi, a brainchild of Debal Deb, an ENDEV associate, who shared two potential strains, and researching to retrieve long-forgotten strains by Ghosh, five varieties of saline-resistant paddy seeds were collected.

Then farmers' workshops were organised with support from National Council for Rural Institute (NCRI).

After deciding on the right seed variety, planting started on an experimental basis in collaboration with local communities in blocks of Sandeshkhali I and II, Hingalganj, Gosaba, Mathurapur and Namkhana. The success thereof brought international recognition for ENDEV in 2013.

The other important element, Ghosh believes, to curb migration is skill development. Centres can be built to use local skill which would also help employment.

A WWF-funded study, "Indian Sundarbans Delta: A Vision" (2011) warns about "...the likelihood that by 2050, the 'Global 200' iconic eco-regions, of which the Sundarbans is one, will regularly experience monthly climatic conditions."

What becomes clear is that, to tackle various socio-economic problems, as well as to cope with effect of global warming in this vulnerable area, and population, a multi-pronged approach, drawing in expertise from various agencies call for urgent attention.

As the Vision report cautions, "The increased intensity of extreme events in the Indian Sundarbans, potentially due to climate change, poses great challenges to the safety of the human settlements in the delta as a direct result of sea level rise, coastal erosion, cyclone incidences and coastal flooding." (TWF)

Photo: Sujay Dhar, Bijoy Chowdhury, Avishkek Mitra

Healthcare: There's scope to serve public

By Ranjan K. Baruah

All of us are concerned about health and wellness. Educated people are more aware of health while there is lack of awareness among the masses in rural areas. Health scenario in the country is not good compared to developed countries. In this regard many terms are being used by us and one such term is public health.

Public health refers to "the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting human health through organised efforts and informed choices of society, organisations, public and private, communities and individuals". It is concerned with threats to health based on population health analysis.

The population in question can be as small as a handful of people, or as large as all the inhabitants of several continents. The dimensions of health can encompass "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity", as defined by the United Nations' World Health Organisation.

Public health incorporates the interdisciplinary approaches of epidemiology, biostatistics and health services. Environmental health, community health, behavioral health, health economics, public policy, mental health and occupational safety and health are other important subfields.

The focus of public health intervention is to improve health and quality of life through prevention and treatment of disease and other physical and mental health conditions. This is done through surveillance of cases and health indicators and through promotion of healthy behaviours. Examples of common public health measures include promotion of hand washing, breastfeeding, delivery of vaccinations, etc.

India is experiencing a rapid health transition. It is confronted both by an unfinished agenda of infectious diseases, nutritional deficiencies and unsafe pregnancies as well as the challenge of escalating epidemics of non-communicable diseases.

This composite threat to the nation's health and development needs a concerted public health re-



sponse that can ensure efficient delivery of cost-effective interventions for health promotion, disease prevention and affordable diagnostic and therapeutic healthcare. One may think of public

health as career choice. There are courses and institutes that offer courses related to public health management or administration.

Some of the related courses are Integrated MSc and PhD programmes in Health Informatics, Masters in Public Health (MPH), Diploma in Dietetics, Diploma in Health Promotion and Education, Diploma in Health Statistics, Diploma in Industrial Health, Diploma in Maternity and Child Welfare, Diploma in Public Health, MD (Community Medicine), Master of Engineering Public Health, Master of Public Health (Epidemiology), MSc (Applied Nutrition), Master in Veterinary Public Health, Post Graduate Diploma in Public Health Management, etc.

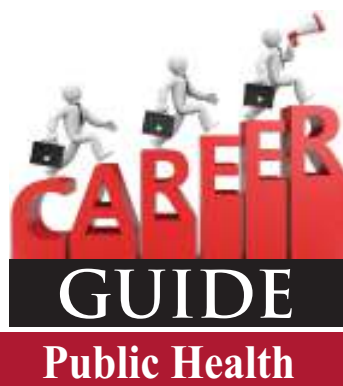
Students may choose to take up these courses. After completing the course aspirants may get jobs or placement in health department, various international organisations and non-governmental organisations, which are focused and specialise on public health.

The best part is one need not be doctors to work in public health sector. Aspirants must remember that one may not get the job immediately after doing the course. One needs to have other skills apart from qualification to be successful in this field. With proper planning and qualification our students may work in this field and extend their service for the need of the community and others for positive social transformation.

PHFI: The Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) is a public-private initiative that has collaboratively evolved through consultations with multiple constituencies including Indian and international academia, state and central governments, multi & bi-lateral agencies and civil society groups. PHFI is a response to redress the limited institutional capacity in India for strengthening training, research and policy development in the area of Public Health. It offers various courses in its different campuses across India.

All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health: All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, established in 1932 as the first school of Public Health in South-East Asia region, has been a Pioneer Institute of its kind dedicated to teaching, training, and research in various disciplines of Public Health and allied sciences to ensure capacity building in the area of Public Health. The institute has been conducting a number of short courses/training programmes for different categories and groups of Health Force on a regular basis in coordination with state governments, ministries and international agencies, among others.

(Ranjana K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at 9864055558 or bkrnanjan@gmail.com for further career related queries)



Public Health

‘We can’t solely blame govt’

Raveena Tandon, one of the leading actresses from the 90s, returns to films after a break. The stylish and self-assured actress who was last seen in a cameo in Anurag Kashyap’s flick ‘Bombay Velvet’ makes a comeback with a gritty tale of revenge titled ‘Maatr’. In a freewheeling chat with **Mohnish Singh**, the actress opens up about her character in the film and lots more.

How did this film happen?

I have been offered many films and roles in the past. But I didn’t come across anything as challenging or interesting as *Maatr*. One is always in search of challenging roles. I wanted to do films which had the subject I believed in, make a difference and touch me somewhere in my heart. While I heard *Maatr*’s script, I started crying during the narration itself. I felt that it’s high time a film like it should come. So I took up this role. The film talks about what is not right with our society. We are to be equally blamed for our lawmakers not taking action. Either we succumb to such situations (rapes) happening around us or raise our voice against it.

Nowadays, almost every second celebrity is coming up with their autobiographies. You yourself have lived a very eventful life like most of the top stars. So don’t you ever think of writing down your autobiography?

I have been approached to pen down my autobiography. But I have this problem of telling the truth (laughs). If I write my autobiography, many people would run and hide somewhere.

You took a very bold step in your life when you adopted two daughters at 21 years of age. What was the motivation behind taking that decision?

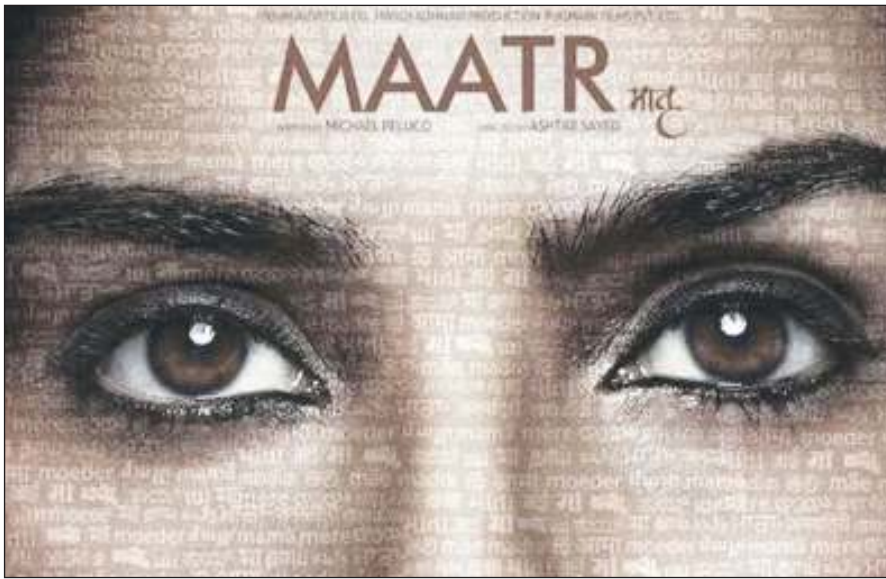
There were many people who came and questioned me about my decision. They asked who would marry me now. But that question never came to my mind. Adopting those two girls was a no-brainer. When we brought the girls, who were my cousin’s children, they were part of the family. From then they are my family and my parents took care of them. My mom has also been a strong factor in my life.

There was a time in 90’s where you would do 30 films at a stretch. How did you manage to mouth the dialogues?

I actually could do it with ease.

It has been learnt that you were very disturbed while you were shooting for Maatr...

The worst part is that after doing the scene I had to dub it too. One can’t imagine the pain the victim’s families go through after the horrendous incident. So definitely it was very difficult for me to dub and enact the scene. We felt it for the time being, but it is a lifelong punishment for the victims and the families as



they have to live this everyday as it has happened in reality.

How according to you should the rapist be punished?

First, I will change the laws which are 70

years old. We are living in a very dangerous world. The culprits are roaming around like free birds. It’s only in our country that 18-year-olds are considered minor while in other countries they have decreased the age to 14 to 15 years. Laws have changed but the intensity

is nowhere to be seen. There should be degrees of murder according to the brutality of the crime.

The parliament speaker and many other powerful women are members of parliament. Do you think it will turn out to be beneficial if the film is shown to them?

Yes, it has to be shown to them. I strongly believe Maneka Gandhi is a very strong woman. I still believe there is a lot of work to be done to improve the condition of women in our society, in our country. We cannot blame the government solely and it’s also our responsibility. Only celebrities’ problems are addressed but what about the other people who are just ignored by us?

How much do you take back from the character you portray on-screen?

I think, as an actor in my forties, life has taught me a lot. I identify with the character that I play because my daughter herself is 12 years old. I fear for her and my adopted daughters as well. Why are you helping create this dangerous world? You need to be the change yourselves. One cannot live in constant fear. As a woman I feel we can experience varied emotions. *(IBNS-TWF)*

Life-hacks for survival

I always say “please” and “thank you, Miss” when the machines take over she won’t kill me. “Spare the puny one. He was always polite.”

You have to be cunning to make the best of life these days. Another ingenious life-hack. My wife bought an avocado last week. I carried it around for a week so that I could eat it in the 10-minute period between “not ripe yet” and “horribly rotten”. That was the plan, anyway, and one day it will work.

But perhaps the biggest mass outbreak of cunning this year so far has been in India. Like everywhere else, hotels and other food and drink venues are conveniently located near major highways there, but Indian judges passed a law

ular” roads, and thus exempt.

Of course, ingenuity can also be used in the name of evil, I hear from my friends at Shanghaiist, a news website. Chinese companies are selling portable engines on long poles designed to thump walls and ceilings purely for the purpose of annoying neighbours. One particularly irritating man turned on such a machine, called an Apartment Shaker, and then went away for the weekend. Of course, many of us already have free-of-charge apartment-shaking devices in our homes, but we call them “children”.

A British correspondent sent me an example of evil ingenuity from the UK. A thief stole a car. Instead of making a fake number plate, he found a car of the same make, age and colour, and copied its number plate.

Thus any police officer who ran a computerised check would find that everything seemed to be in order.

The only chance of exposure would be if both cars just happened to be parked in the same car park at the same time, and what were the chances of that in a country with a population of 60 million? The answer turned out to be not zero. A woman in the town of Coleshill phoned police to say that

she was in a shop’s parking lot and noticed a car exactly like hers, same brand, same colour, same licence number. Gotcha.

Room for one last life-hack. As you turn off the oven to go out, tell the oven what you are doing in a Mickey Mouse voice. It’s such a weird thing to do that there’s no way you’ll later forget that you turned it off.

Yes, people will think you are crazy, but who cares? Siri is still nice to me, and that’s the relationship that counts in the long term, right?

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

THE FUNNY SIDE Nury Vittachi

making it illegal for any alcohol-selling venue to be within 500 meters (in some places, 220 meters) of a highway.

Since it’s tricky to pick up a hotel and move it, residents responded with a mass outbreak of ingenuity.

One bar-owner built a long, winding maze in front of his roadside bar, so it became quite literally a long walk from the street.

Some hoteliers attached signs to their back gates saying: “This is Now The Front Gate”.

Other restaurateurs got friends in government departments to “demote” hundreds of kilometres of major highways, relisting them as humble “reg-

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, May 21, 2017

Moon square Saturn on your solar return chart indicates a mixed year. Your views and aura are likely to influence people during 2017. However, people may not understand you well so they may have mixed opinion about your intents and decisions. Some hasty decisions may shock others and even you at times would not be able to understand why you have taken such decisions. You may have obstacles in continuing your education especially during the middle of the year. You would have to put in extra efforts to achieve success in your educational endeavors.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You are likely to form new relationships or connections that further your spiritual growth. This period brings for you socializing, romance and stability at the work place. Any unresolved educational matter or a deep relationship may create a rift in your life, take a softer approach in your interactions when comes to family related matters. Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. Economy at home and management of business and work are important issues. Professional relations are satisfying and you have plenty of goodwill and friendships around you.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You tend to attract people with your conversation and wit. You may change your style of dressing to present a glamorous image. Your social life would be busy as you would be popular among your circle of friends. Domestic relationships and the home environment would be harmonious and peaceful by the sensitivity and care that you exhibit. People in fine arts, creative line and public relations and related fields would give a non-traditional blend to their creations. Communication abilities will largely be applied to professional world ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects and financial matters. There may be a minor health ailment that bothers you as you need to give more attention to your health.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

An optimistic, but not necessarily a realistic attitude would take precedence. You may feel a vague restlessness and discontentment with life as it is. Excellent work opportunities for those working with overseas connections come up. There would be work related travel too. At home, you accept the individuality of your spouse and that would be helpful to resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. At times you feel fun loving, energetic, and willing to explore new ideas. Financial benefits may come your way this week. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Events take place in which you feel like you are moving forward and growing into a new phase of your life. You feel a sense of fulfillment as you move towards your long term goals. People in authority regard you favorably. You will be making new contacts through learning, communicating and mental pursuits. This indicates an intellectually stimulating time in which the exchange of ideas with others figures prominently. You would expand your social circle and make more contact with groups and friends. Health will take a turn for the better. You display great skills in sports, competitive exams, physical activities and this wins appreciation and upbringing of new opportunities.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This is a phase of power and accomplishment. Actively seeking to expand, taking educated risks, and moving forward are highlighted. This is a week of opportunity, particularly in the material and business world, and opportunities need to be seized. It’s generally not a time to find a new love partner, simply because the focus is on the material world and your place in the world. This is a problem-solving phase in which you can expect real, tangible results. Take action, plan ahead and make the most of opportunities. Some of you may find that your career is moving towards a more service-oriented direction. You have more faith in general regarding your career and the direction in which you are working. You need to develop a certain amount of self-confidence.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You are more friendly, optimistic, and big-hearted than usual. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. This is a sociable, and perhaps self-indulgent, time when the pursuit of pleasure is one of your high priorities. Communicative abilities will largely be applied to fur-

ther your professional and financial ambitions. Lifestyle changes augur well to create a positive outlook. Self development is the keystone during this period. Your social life would be busy as you would popular among friends and associates. This is a time when you free yourself of personal inhibitions that may have been part of your life in the past. Stick to regular exercise routine and regular pattern of nutritious diet.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You may solidify a romantic relationship under this influence, or become involved with a sensible and like minded partner. You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management. Self-confidence and action are highlighted and you tend to instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. You accept the individuality of loved ones and that would be helpful to resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. Interpersonal bonds strengthen. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It promises to be a busy, dynamic, and significant time in your life. There would be a turning point in your professional life and also in terms of personal growth. Your emotions run high towards family and mood swings are possible. There may be some kind of conflict in your life arising from a great urge to do something different. You need space and contact with others in order to feel content. Financial benefits may come on your way this week. You would impress people with your attitude and win their confidence and trust. You are blessed with intuition and foresight which lead you in the right direction. You are related within and relate well with others at home and work.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You could find that you are more open and trusting with friends and lovers, and that you easily win family’s trust. Healthy speculation is favored. Financial benefits may come your way. Some people fall in love under this influence of current planetary configuration. Certain elements of your social and financial life are stabilized, secured, and more reliable. More loving and appreciative relationships with your children may also figure. Your romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities gives you a big boost of confidence and your personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated. This is an especially spiritual time for you, this is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. Integrity and honesty will get you the much awaited enhancement in image now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities and family relations. You would be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

This planetary influence indicates favorable outcomes when it comes to legal affairs, education, exams and travel. You are more accepting and understanding your friends and loved ones. Contentedness in love is likely to figure and to attract positive circumstances and people into your life. You are bound to enjoy increased social opportunities as well as a boost in your personal popularity and magnetism. Friends and lovers are looking on you favorably. You would think more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. This is an excellent time under which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

A nice balance between optimism and practicality is with you. In the coming days you discover goals that suit your “true self” better. A more lenient and contented attitude towards others tends to bring positive circumstances into your life. A tendency to take on more than you can realistically handle should be watched. Your social life and finances stabilize and satisfy. You find joy in expressing your views and ideas with people around you. You are likely feeling good in general, and you tend to spread the joy and happiness. You work hard to meet the goals. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and wellbeing. It’s a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Greed kills ecosystem

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



The trouble with China’s new found wealth and middle class is that they are not only eating every animal and fish in their own country,

but they are sucking in and killing almost all species from all over the world to satisfy their insatiable lust.

Donkeys in Africa have suddenly been turned into meat for the Chinese. We, of course, are losing everything — from seahorses, porcupines, dogs, sharks, tigers, rhinos, bears, every species of fish and wild cat and even insects.

The Chinese kill rare species simply for social prestige. Their local medicine is rubbish, but they continue to kill every animal for it. They use our rhino horns — which are just made of keratin, the same as our toenails — for everything, from headaches to cancer. Does that make sense?

Likewise, shark fins are just lumps of flesh with no food value. But they have become a symbol of riches and so India loses millions of its sharks for this valueless soup. But because their government has no laws and no intention of controlling the trade, the illegal market thrives.

Like shark fin, fish swim bladders are an ingrained part of traditional Chinese culture, used to signal wealth and opulence.

A swim bladder is an air sac which enables fish to maintain depth without floating or sinking. The swim bladder is inflated when the fish wants to move up and deflated when it wants to return to the depths. The swim bladder is also used as an echo chamber to produce or receive sound. Fish can find mates, signal danger, sense vibrations, and find food/prey, by sensing sound under water. Fish make a range of sounds, from grunts, clicks, honks, whistles, to hums. They use muscles located near their swim bladder to make drumming sounds.

Unfortunately, this swim bladder is what a lot of fish are killed for.

The bladders are extracted, dried and turned into a product called isinglass, which is a collagen utilised in the refining of alcoholic drinks like beer and wine and foods.

Beer is produced by fermenting



Shark fins and vaquitas, which are porpoises, fetch high prices in international market



starches, and a clarifying agent is used to get rid of the cloudy appearance. Non-animal products do exist — seaweed, bentonite or kaolin, diatomaceous earth, cellulose pads, micro-porous plastic films — but dead fish are cheaper and alcohol is much more important than fish.

On top of this come the Chinese demands.

The Chinese use fish bladders in, what else? Traditional medicine. Their own fish, the Bahaba, a resident of the Yangtze river estuaries, has been hunted to extinction because of the immense monetary value placed on its swim bladders — costing more than gold.

Now the Chinese have targeted the Totoaba fish of the Gulf of California — 13,000km away. The Totoaba fish stomach, or “maw”, is valued for its high collagen content, and the Chinese believe its swim bladders can boost fertility, improve circulation and skin vitality.

The Totoaba grows up to two metres in length and 100 kg in weight. Individuals may live up to 15 years. As Totoaba spawn only once a year, the population growth is very slow. The Totoaba spawn in the Colorado River delta and then the young fish swim out to the Gulf.

The Totoaba is an endangered fish, protected against fishing by law. But that makes no difference to the Chinese.

illegal. Online, researchers found traffickers sharing tips about the best routes to smuggle them in.

A totoaba fish bladder sells between \$7,000 and \$14,000, and soup containing the organ may go for \$25,000 in China, according to a Mexicali Digital report. Both Mexican drug cartels and US smugglers transport the fish.

Mexican regulators seized illegal totoaba bladders worth an estimated \$2.25million in 2013 alone.

Jason Xie of Sacramento was accused last year of taking delivery of 169 bladders on March 30, 2013, in a hotel parking lot in Calexico. Xie told investigators he was paid \$1,500 to \$1,800 for each of 100 bladders in February.

Anthony Sanchez Bueno of Imperial was charged with the same crime, after authorities said he drove the 169 bladders across the downtown Calexico border crossing in three coolers. He told investigators he was to be paid \$700.

In Mexico, Samuel Gallardo Ostando was murdered in June due to an outstanding \$1million fish payment. Four traffickers were caught.

“It’s aquatic cocaine,” Jay Barlow, a marine mammal expert at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, told the Associated Press.

The Totoaba isn’t the only casualty of the Chinese bladder boom. The vaquita is a porpoise that lives only in one patch of the upper Gulf of California. It is the smallest member of the dolphin, whale, and porpoise family, growing to five feet and 55 kg. It avoids boats and is very evasive. Vaquitas are usually alone, unless they are accompanied by a calf. Vaquitas are easily tangled and killed in gillnets used to catch Totoabas, because the mesh is about the same size as a vaquita’s head.

(To be concluded)

“Anyone can become angry - that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way - this is not easy.”

--- Dr. Joyce Brothers

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LIX No. 279

SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 22, 2017

Saving our rivers

RIVERS in India are considered holy. The Uttarakhand High Court has recently declared that the Ganga and the Yamuna are living entities. But it has been reported that the Ganga near Haridwar is so unclean that it is not fit for bathing. The report is based on 4 main indicators of water quality-temperature, dissolved oxygen, biological oxygen demand and coliform (bacteria). The Ganga apparently does not meet acceptable standards. Rivers in India are not merely holy but they are also the life blood of Indian agriculture. 50% of the country's population subsist on agriculture. However the physical protection of our rivers leaves much to be desired. Greater industrialisation and urbanisation have been polluting the waters of the rivers depositing urban waste and industrial effluents in them. The Centre has no doubt taken steps to meet the crisis. The Ganga Action Plan (GAP) has been taken in hand and Rs 1800 crore has been spent on it in the last three decades. The Modi government proposes to spend over Rs 20,000 crore in 5 years on the Namami Ganga Project. But there has been little improvement in sewage treatment and plants have not been modernised.

Action taken by New Delhi is faulted on several grounds. There are clashes between the Centre and the States and also between the states themselves. The river Danube flowing through a number of central European countries may provide guidelines in removing these clashes. There is also conflict between environmental needs and the building of dams to generate hydro power as in Arunachal Pradesh. The solution seems to be for people living in riverine tracts of land to bring about improvement in the state of the rivers. It has been done satisfactorily in a riverine district of Kerala. In Meghalaya, most of our rivers are dying or are dead due to heavy siltation and pollution due to human activities. No sustained attempts have been made to regenerate these rivers. The two important rivers of Shillong - the Umkhrak and Umshyrpi are a stark example of how humans have killed these rivers and turned them into drains. But does anyone care beyond the expected crocodile tears shed by the citizenry?

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Opposition committed to listed castes welfare

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today said the opposition was committed to the policy of reservations for the uplift of scheduled castes and tribes as much as the Congress(I). Mr Vajpayee was speaking at the inaugural function of a worker's conference organization with the birth anniversary celebration of Dr B R Ambedkar. The day was observed as "Samta Divas" by the party throughout the country.

"There has been unanimity on the question of extension of reservation and every ten years when this matter came up in Parliament, opposition parties extended full support to it.

Sikkim strike against taxes

A three day bandh has been called by the ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad throughout the state from April 17 to protest against the recent introduction of the direct Central Taxes. "These laws against Sikkimese people have to be repealed at the earliest" a SSP party release today said. The release said all essential services would remain affected by the bandh and law and order maintained. Earlier, the SSP had in a memorandum to the

Governor warned that a new phase of agitation would begin from the sixteenth.

NE Cong(I) CMs to meet in Kohima on May 6

The Congress(I) Chief Minister of North Eastern States are scheduled to meet in Kohima on May 6 next for discussing strategies for the impending Lok Sabha elections. This is the second time that the Chief Ministers of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh are holding preparatorial meetings for the Lok Sabha election.

Sources said that the Kohima meeting will dwell on taking preliminary steps regarding the qualification of the prospective nominees, party's strength and weaknesses in the different states and the overall campaign strategy.

Bodo ultras being interrogated

The dozen Bodo extremists now under police custody in Shillong have been subjected to intensive interrogation since Sunday. Police declines to disclose anything at this stage, except saying that efforts were still on to establish as to which group they belong to.

Protect our Biodiversity, Protect our Culture

By H H Mohrmen

May 22 is observed as International Day for Biodiversity but as each year passes and another Biodiversity day is celebrated, more plants, animals and aquatic life continue to disappear for good from the face of the earth. It is true that new animal species have been recently discovered in the state, but some plants, animal and aquatic lives have also rapidly disappeared from the face of the earth. This vanishing act is happening across the universe and Meghalaya is no stranger to this rapid loss of biological footprints. When we talk about species that gradually become extinct, we are not only talking about the rapid extinction of animate beings but also the sad extinction of plants and animals but the culture around which they exist also dies with them.

People say that culture and tradition are part of our identity as if culture is an external manifestation only. We forget that our identity is intricately linked to the kind of relationship we have with the world around us and the way of life we weave with our fellow creation and the world around us. The fact that people make the best use of what is available in the environment to their advantage is one example of that way of life, but our unique agrarian life is also suffering due to the change that is happening around.

In the past, farmers carefully select from the produce and keep the best as seeds for the future. Seed keeping is a tradition that every household is practices. It is also an illustration of our generosity because farmers also take pride in sharing the best of seeds with their neighbours. Unfortunately we now see that the local seeds have disappeared at a very alarming rate because of the introduction of genetically modified seeds which are specially designed to yield maximum production and also make it easy for the farmers to grow and take care of.

The popularity of these

foreign seeds not only puts the local seeds under threat of extinction but these seeds also have a huge impact on the agrarian culture of the society. The seeds have changed the agrarian culture of the people here. The tradition of keeping and sharing seeds that neighbours practiced is gone because the farmers now depend on the agencies for their supply of seeds. Earlier, looking for better quality seeds could be a reason to visit and chat with neighbours; now farmers no longer visit each other for exchange of best seeds. Hence the culture of keeping and protecting one's seeds has also died. Now many of our indigenous crops and vegetables are on the verge of extinction because farmers no longer feel the need to keep and protect their seeds.

When we lose all our seeds we also lose our food habit, our culture and 'the agro-ecology' or the traditional knowledge systems that our ancestors wove around the plant. We are losing the knowledge systems that our ancestors have created and which also evolved as it is handed over from one generation to the next. Therefore when our seeds are lost, part of our culture also dies with the lost seeds.

Our culture is also connected with the kind of life we develop with our water bodies particularly rivers. Rivers were the sources of fresh water fish. In the past people earned their livelihoods from fishing. Today that way of life has been rudely snatched away from the people. Their rivers are dead and all the aquatic life in their rivers have disappeared and rendered the river useless. Again with it part of our culture also vanishes such as the tradition of drying fish and smoking fish to give it a distinct taste and preserve it. There is an immediate need to reclaim our dead

rivers and also to prevent other rivers from the onslaught of pollution.

Our forests have gradually vanished because of the timber trade and charcoal producers who slaughter the forest without mercy because there is no system on how to manage out forests. The traders would cut every tree and shrub and leave the land almost barren. In the process not only is the forest destroyed but herbs and plants used by that traditional herbal medicine practitioners use and wild edibles that people consume also disappeared with the forests.

When the forest disappear the animals, birds and insects which are part of our web of life also disappear. People are yet to realize that not only coal and limestone are our resources but the forest and what is in the forest are also our valuable resources and unlike the former which once exhausted cannot be replenished, the latter is sustainable resource.

In the past with the hope of making our environment greener, the government through its various departments like Soil Conservation, Forest Department and even the District Council's forest department were engaged in mass reforestation projects across the state, but what is the success rate of this entire exercise? What is the survival rate of the saplings we planted? Have we really been able to achieve the desired result? And if reforestation did not succeed, do we know why? I mean, did we learn any lessons from the futile projects?

At one point of time the entire hill range on the banks of the river Myntdu from the Myntdu Bridge to Chahngit and till the confluence of Myntdu and Myngkrem was under the reforestation program of a certain department, but the result is for everybody to see. The range remains barren bereft of any tree which also means

that the survival rate of the saplings planted was almost zero. The objective was to increase forest cover on these hills which are also the catchment areas of river Myntdu, but sadly the project failed and the entire exercise went in vain. The point is not to find fault with the department but the question is whether we have learned any lessons from this?

In most of the reforestation schemes the objective is only to reach the targets so departments use species which are readily available and the Khasi Pine is the most popular alternative, but the survival rate is very poor and that is the reason why these hills are still barren today. Khasi Pines are not only bad for the environment because they are mono-crops and since the pine forest is a monoculture, water retention is also low in the area. The other characteristic of the pine tree which is bad for the environment is that it hardly attracts birds or insects to its forests.

If we want our plantations to be successful we should use native species which are endemic to the area as the saplings of these trees will not only have a better chance to survive because the land and the climate condition is also conducive for its growth but it will be friendly to the animate lives in the area too. Endemic species will encourage overgrowth around it which will also help to improve water retention of the forest, but more importantly it will be haven for all animate beings.

Of course the theme of this year's celebration is 'Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism' and the point is we need to protect our biodiversity before we can even think of attracting any tourist. Our strength is in the rich biodiversity that we have and our duty is to protect the same not only for commercial purposes, but for posterity.

food is sold outside a hospital shows that the Government has no concern about the health of its citizens. Along with footpaths what Shillong needs are more parking spaces since most vehicles are parked by the roadside, thereby creating unnecessary traffic jams.

Another problem with Shillong is the paucity of public toilets hence men relieve themselves in the open without caring about social graces. Even Police Bazar which is in the heart of the city faces parking issues. More than half of the junction is occupied with fast food sellers and parking of two wheelers. It requires a lot of imagination to manage the present problems of Shillong but whether we have such visionaries is the big question. Indeed! the city is in crying need for immediate solution to get rid of these adverse situations.

Yours etc.,
Sanjukta Maiti
Shillong - 6

Make Education affordable!

Editor,
I would draw kind attention to the noble profession of teaching as it has deviated from its objective. It is regretful that in today's world this noble profession is ruined due to commercialization. This has resulted in abnormally high fees which ordinary citizens cannot afford, although it is

the wish of every parent/guardian to give their wards the best education. Education is a fundamental right and is essential for the exercise of all other rights. It also promotes individual freedom, empowerment and yields important development benefits. Most crimes can be attributed to unethical upbringing of children, absence of social awareness and most importantly lack of education. "Mera Bharat Mahan" is a very popular slogan but Bharat(India) will be Mahan(great) only when its citizen becomes great and it will be a reality only when education becomes affordable. In this connection, through your esteemed daily, I would urge upon the authorities concerned especially the Education Department to devise a policy on making education affordable for all by forming a regulatory authority. This will make the fundamental right to education effective and meaningful so that education can reach each and every child. This will benefit human kind and result in a healthy society. This should be the vision of a developing nation.

Yours etc.,
Krishnendu Deb,
Via email

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

RBI proposal on specialised Banks makes sense Highly skilled professionals are needed for the task

By Anjan Roy

The Reserve Bank is quietly launching a major restoration work, it appears. RBI has released a discussion paper on wholesale and long term banks which proposes to set up the eponymous new financial institutions.

This is in effect bringing back to life the defunct structure of development finance institutions which we had before. The Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI), Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) and the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) were the three principal DFIs which had served the country in the early years of industrialisation.

As the financial system evolved and still later with the emergence of universal banking, two of the more active DFIs converted themselves into retail banks and they are now familiar names in India's banking. IFCI, which was the oldest but weakest of them all, remained in existence but that's about all. It is still surviving and carrying on, God knows, with what business.

Historically, what had sounded the death knell for the three DFIs was the introduction of the so-called "convertibility clause". At the height of their importance when most Indian industries had borrowed from these institutions, and these institutions would provide long-term loans as opposed to working capital funding from commercial banks, the government had proposed the introduction of the convertibility clause. This allowed the lenders to convert their outstanding loans into equity shares in the companies which received the funds. This was in the late 1970s and early 1980.

The convertibility clause had scared the Indian industrialists class to no end. As loan defaults mounted, the promoters of the assisted companies were worrying about losing control as large chunks of their outstanding stood the risk of getting converted. None of that had in effect happened, though. But industry had thought better of going to these institutions than going to the market.

By then, the interest rate scenario was also changing and the higher costs of funds for the DFIs had altogether spooked their balance sheets. Without some kind of government support it became impossible for the DFIs to access low cost funding and on-lend to industrial clients. Because their securities came to be treated as not qualified as SLR (statutory liquidity ratio) bonds, it was the last straw. Starved of cheap funds and demand for their funds dwindling for fear of convertibility, they became irrelevant.

However, the disappearance of the three DFIs came to be increasingly missed by Indian industry. After all, industry needed long term debt funds. It was not always practical to raise additional equity capital only and thus meet the requirements for capex. Equity capital is a permanent cost and these cannot be easily erased. Additional equity often came at a cost: these diluted the market value of the shares.

Missing long term debt funds, industry has often been asking for restitution of term funding institutions. What the RBI is now proposing is to revive these institutions in another name. The wholesale and long term finance (WLTF) banks are proposed to be set up as an integral part of RBI's approach to build a structure of differentiated banking and financial institutions to meet the diversified funding requirements of an expanding economy.

Indian financial system is

overwhelmingly dominated by the commercial banks. As of June 2016, commercial banks account for about 67% of the total financial sector assets in the country. Combined with cooperative banks, they account for almost three-fourths of the financial sector assets, according to the RBI discussion paper on WLTF banks. The universal banks, that is the commercial banks, operate in retail as well as corporate segments and offer varieties of financial products and services. These range from the basic deposit accounts, personal loans, and investments on the retail side to the more complex services on the wholesale side such as term loans, project finance, debt syndication, investment banking, and trade finance, among others.

The justification for having a specialised wholesale long term funding bank is given by the RBI as follows: "... with the deepening of financial sector, it may be necessary for the system to evolve towards a structure where apart from the universal banks, multiple differentiated banks also operate in their specialized domain and provide services in their areas of competitive advantage. As the niche banks develop core competency, expertise will be fostered in the banking system that could lead to enhanced efficiency in terms of reduced intermediation cost, better price and improved allocation of capital. Therefore, specialized banks could cater to the wholesale and long-term financing needs of the growing economy and possibly fill the gap in long-term financing."

Following this logic the RBI has issued licences for a few specialised banks, including new payments banks, small business financing banks or private banks. The argument was first articulated in the Raghuram Rajan Committee on Financial Sector in 2008. This line of argument was further followed up by the Nachiket Mor Committee.

While there is surely the need for such specialised banks and above all a long-term wholesale funding bank, the new structure will still face the old problem. Even if everything is in favour of such institutions, the funding of these new banks would still be a problem. These banks will be highly risky ventures for one. They are being visualised as long term funding agencies, including for the infrastructure projects and core industries. As we have seen only recently, commercial banks loans to infrastructure companies and core industries had contributed the maximum amount of bad debts to commercial banks.

Two basic requirements would be, firstly, cheap finance for on-ward lending and, secondly, highly qualified staff for evaluation of risks. The first problem would be resolved if the union government decides to stand behind these banks, at least to begin with. Their securities, if given SLR status, could once again help.

What could be more intractable is these banks will require specialised officers to evaluate the risks of long-term finance for infrastructure finance. They will need engineers who should qualify as finance specialists as well. They will need technical people to evaluate risks of specialised projects. How do they get hold of such personnel? Where to dip their hands into such resources pool? Not a problem in a long run when their functioning will systemically generate these people. But surely would be a handicap to begin with. Nevertheless, the more the merrier. We need such specialised agencies for funding. (IPA Service)

“When you take charge of your life, there is no longer need to ask permission of other people or society at large. When you ask permission, you give someone veto power over your life.”

--- Rabindranath Tagore

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 23, 2017

Iran for reforms

HASSAN Rouhani has been re elected President of Iran. He captured 57% of the total number of votes. Conservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi was the main challenger but he bagged only 38.5% votes. It was a victory for reformists against hardliners. The 2015 nuclear deal was of course the key issue in the election. Together with that came unemployment and the slow pace of change. Rouhani also promises greater individual and political freedom. His victory ensures strengthening of relations with the West. The US had done well to reauthorize waivers from nuclear related sanctions before the elections in Iran. There was a feeling that President Donald Trump would re-impose sanctions. That would have improved the chances of hardliners. It is hoped that the US will continue the waiving of sanctions in future.

Rouhani will have to boost economic growth and reduce unemployment in the country. He will have to focus on the benefits of the nuclear deal with the West. Relations with Saudi Arabia have to be improved removing Shia-Sunni differences. Better relations between the two will help resolution of the crisis in Syria and Yemen. The destructive role of the Islamic State will then be tamed. Rouhani's victory suits India's interests. India will have access to Afghanistan through a land route bypassing Pakistan and links will be opened to Central Asia and Russia via the International North-South Corridor. The lethargic pace of the development of the Chabahar Port has to be speeded up. Unless New Delhi can cash in on Rouhani's victory, Beijing will muscle in.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Scientists urged to evolve earthquake resistant structures

Modern buildings should be designed for greater stability with exacting calculations of potential trees in the North-East, which is an earthquake prone area. This point was made by the Meghalaya PWD, Minister, Mr O L Nongtdu while inaugurating a 12 day training programme on earthquake and earthquake resistant design of buildings and bridges at Shillong on Monday. Mr Nongtdu referred to the cataclysmic disaster resulting in heavy loss of lives and property in Shillong more than 90 years ago, even though there were no large buildings with the high concrete buildings, bridges and dams which have come up all over the State, the magnitude of disaster due to any bid earthquake could be many times more, he said.

Mr Nongtdu also expressed his happiness on the North Eastern Council's proposal to set up facilities to predict earthquakes in this region. He said that such predictions cannot be solely relied on to save lives and property and it is imperative designs for buildings to withstand shocks Mr Nongtdu also stressed the need to develop appropriate guidelines for buildings design in earthquake prone areas. The Minister, appreciating the initiatives taken by the North Eastern Council (NEC) in sponsoring the training programme, hoped that it would provide ample opportunities for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skill for structural designing of earthquake resistant structures.

In his presidential address, the Professor of Earthquake Engineering, University of Roorkee Dr Brijesh Chandra Highlighted traditional factors like the use of local materials and the socio cultural behavior of the people in this region. He said that his University would

always be of service by conducting similar training programmes. He also stressed the need for imparting education to the people about the precautions to be taken while building their houses.

ABSU abstains from attending talk with govt.

The proposed talks between the Assam Government and the All Bodo Students Union (Upendra Faction) failed to take place today as the ABSU members abstained demanding presence of a representative from the centre in the meeting while the Bodo extremists escalated their violence in the state. Meanwhile, official reports here said one person was killed and 60 others, including a policeman, were injured in Bodo violence in different places in Assam during the past 24 hours.

Official reports said a Bodo extremist was killed in an encounter with the police at Mohanpur under Jonai police station of Lakhimpur district yesterday. A constable was injured when a police petrol was fired upon by the extremists at Bismuri under Kokrajhar police station this morning, the constable was removed to hospital. At least 47 people were injured, two of them seriously, when five passenger train from New Bongaigaon to Gauripur in Dhubri district derailed this morning between Tipkai and Bansbari Stations of the Northern Railway. The incident took place when Bodo insurgents removed some fishplates. Six goods wagons were also overturned, no death as however, reported. The report said while the seriously injured were removed to hospital, 43 others released after first aid, meanwhile, top railway official have rushed to the spot.

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

By Toki Blah

The other day I had taken my grandson for an outing to Wards lake. As we watched the pleasure seekers rowing and paddling their boats along the placid waters of the lake, it suddenly struck me that I was watching the parody of Meghalaya politics being replayed right there before my eyes. Another election is staring us in the face and politicians are gearing up for it. They are busy pushing and displaying their respective boats (read political parties) to the electorate. We are expected to board such boats to be rowed to our destiny. Only trouble is that the political boats have, for the last 45 years, been going round and round; in ever despairing circles; going simply nowhere and this writup is all about 45 years of Meghalaya politics! The nursery rhyme 'Row ,row, row your boat, merrily down the stream' comes to mind. Only in our case the rowers have no idea where they want to go. Their only desire - to row the boat; they know not where nor do they care; satisfied to row in circles; rowing only within the placid waters of their own small lakes; the larger deeper challenging waters of the outside world, that call for a vision and a road map, are shunned. The state continues with its slow circular boat ride to nowhere. Meghalaya is stuck!

The 2018 Meghalaya Assembly elections are coming. What do they mean to the common man? If one were to by the declaration of our politicians and pressure groups, the need is for change. Beautiful! Spot on! Only trouble with this political perception of change is that it is strictly limited to a change of guard; a change of faces. The current Govt is to be replaced by a new dispensation, that's all. Aside from that, status quo will remain. Corruption will continue; vision for the future a non starter; wasteful MLA schemes will continue; non productive posts of chairmen, vice chairmen will continue. The environment will continue to be abused by unscientific mining and mal governance will still be a priority. To cap

it all this change of guard theory is suppose to be the panacea for the common mans troubles. Let it happen and all well with the world. Most disturbing is the fact that most politicians openly subscribe by this theory. The Meghalayan electorate is seen as a dumb, mute, illiterate non thinking entity that will enthusiastically swallow the above piffle. The author with all humility begs to differ from such an arrogant and brainless perspective and has no hesitation in declaring that such a preposterous suggestion is designed simply to protect a morally corrupt and intellectually bankrupt political system! It has nothing to do with the welfare and wellbeing of the state and its people.

So what do the coming elections really signify? If the truth be told they are an opportunity for the people of Meghalaya to elect leaders who will serve and lead the state and the people. Nothing more nothing less! The problem however lies in the choice of leadership available. Going by media reports, every street corner has a potential leader just waiting to be elected. Such leaders share three common traits. Firstly they are there to save the people. From what, God only knows. Secondly, they are there to preserve tradition and culture. Outdated District Councils therefore need to be protected. Thirdly, these leaders represent a paradox. They are people who swear by the past as they see the future as dark, gloomy and uncertain. Change for them is dangerous. Yet in the very same breath they promise to bring in a rosy future (lawei ba phyrnai). How, has never been logically explained and they represent the very antithesis of visionary leadership, but unfortunately they still manage to form the majority of those returned to power. (People might belong to different parties but they think alike).

The State Assembly also has other types of elected representatives. These unfortunately are increasing by numbers with every election. This class of MLAs comes with no ideology, no vision and no sense of commitment to anyone but themselves. They come with one singular objective - to further their personal business interest by capturing power in Government. The intention is the unscrupulous exploitation of public funds for personal gains. To achieve their objectives they invest heavily to get themselves elected. Money and muscle power are freely employed to mobilise votes in their favour. It generally ensures victory at the polls. An octogenarian President of a National Party has lovingly called such mal practitioners as 'Winnable Candidates'. He encourages their entry into politics. Their increasing presence in the Assembly and in the Government has played havoc with the Governance of the state. Meghalaya continues to slide downhill primarily because such people have been encouraged to see themselves as leaders. The 2018 Assembly polls might see an increasing number of such people who will enter the political arena because it has become a market for the highest bidder. The darker side of mercenary politics might still have some nasty surprises for us all.

We have contended above that the emotional call to save the community from some vague unidentified danger, is still considered a vote catcher. When danger is presented it invokes fear and fear is then used to drive the electorate. Danger compels us to build barricades and defences. It calls for confrontation rather than cooperation. Danger is the wrong use of terminology. Actually there is no danger to the community. Instead there are ever increasing challenges for us to overcome. Challenge calls for building bridges of opportunity instead of barricades and defensive walls. Change is a challenge not a threat. The challenge

exists to replace old useless institutions with new workable ones. The challenge to bring in new relevant technology becomes a livelihood priority. The biggest challenge before Meghalaya however is the ability to elect leaders who can serve rather than exploit the people. This is the greatest challenge we face and we need new thinking and a new vision on how to overcome it. 2018 is the opportunity to bring forward these changes.

The 2018 polls will call for a paradigm change in our perception of leadership. The profile of a good person who distributes money and goodies at election time will have to be substituted with that of a criminal out to steal and rob us and our children of what is rightfully ours. We will now have to call a spade a spade. Civil society, NGOs, traditional bodies and faith based organisations will have to gear themselves and rally together to spread the message of redemption to the electorate. So far they have remained silent; they have ignored the problem because of their loyalty to the dispensers of free money. Their silence has resulted in the rot and decay in our system of governance and directly damaged and harmed the very society these organisations profess to uphold. We all have a duty before us - to challenge a corrupt and dishonest political system. We need to expose and ridicule the merchants of mercenary politics however mighty and powerful they might be. Force the political parties to setup candidates who will serve the people not setup looters of the public exchequer. This is our only chance to bestow our children with the future they deserve. We can no longer afford to go round in circles. Elect leaders who will help steer the state with a vision for the next 50 years. 2018 is the opportunity, let us not waste it.

(The author is President, ICARE)

Dunkirk of the East

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

In recent times there has been renewed interest in stories of the World Wars that were previously never unearthed. These are stories of resilience of the human spirit and victory even in defeat. Moving beyond the paradigms of right and wrong and the side they have focussed on the other stories of war. And one such heroic story which unfolded during World War 2 was the evacuation of Dunkirk. The Axis forces had surrounded Allied troops holed up in the small seaside town of Dunkirk in France. Against all odds however the Allied troops were able to escape. In the face of imminent death it was one of mankind's finest moments.

Around the same time however a similar story of resilience was unfolding in the other side of the planet. The theatre was Burma and the event which seemed to trigger a similar story of heroism was Japanese attack on Burma. It was March 1942, as the World War 2 began to unfold in Asia the Japanese forces began to make light of the Allied colonies of Asia. After

continued from March till late September as people kept pouring in. In the midst of those treacherous times a few heroes emerged whom history had perhaps forgotten. One of them was 60 year old railway engineer Sir John Rowald who successfully led a party of survivors to safety. There were other heroes as well - the British planters of Assam who provided relief to those who were passing through the forest, the tallest among them being perhaps celebrated planter Gyles Mackrell. Yet there would be no doubt that the most forgotten of the heroes were those impoverished tea garden workers who despite their own pitiable condition didn't hesitate to help the refugees.

The war and the escape altered the political landscape of South East Asia forever. A glaring example at this point would be of the famous Assamese merchant and adventurer Purnakanta Buragohain. It would be unthinkable today that just 70 years ago a merchant from Assam had been able to set up shop in

The 500 kilometres long journey was through the Hukawng Valley in the Myitkinia district of Kachin state. From here one had to proceed to the treacherous Chaukan Pass at the northwestern end of the mountains which divides Bhutan from India. One also had to cross the extremely erratic Daphla river on the way. Prior to that March in 1942 very few had ever crossed through that route. Faced with Japanese onslaught others took the Chindwin river up to Tamu in Manipur and eventually entered Dimapur from where they could proceed to the rest of the country.

establishing their dominance in the rest of South Asia the Japanese forces began to move rapidly towards Burma and India.

It all started when Japanese air forces started bombing Rangoon on December 23, 1941. It was subsequently bombed again on December 25, 1941. As the Japanese began to cross over to Burma, the British and the Indian citizens began a long arduous journey back home. What was to be was a three month trail on foot through hills and jungles. What unfolded was not the journey alone but a story that is nothing short of a drama. Some 2, 20,000 refugees survived the journey which was almost 300 miles or almost 500 kilometres long. More than 4000 people are believed to have lost their lives in the journey some from exhaustion others from malnutrition or drowning, yet the true numbers of those dead will never be known.

The 500 kilometres long journey was through the Hukawng Valley in the Myitkinia district of Kachin state. From here one had to proceed to the treacherous Chaukan Pass at the northwestern end of the mountains which divides Bhutan from India. One also had to cross the extremely erratic Daphla river on the way. Prior to that March in 1942 very few had ever crossed through that route. Faced with Japanese onslaught others took the Chindwin river up to Tamu in Manipur and eventually entered Dimapur from where they could proceed to the rest of the country.

The evacuation

Burma and subsequently border areas of China. In his travel diary Nine Years beyond the Patkai he articulates the tension and the subsequent relief when he was able to cross over to Assam once the Japanese attacks had started. Such human stories of people moving seamlessly across borders would not be possible anymore. Given the present tension between India and China such incidents seem all the more improbable. Historians also recorded of harmonious relations between different South Asian communities in the pre war era. Punjabis, Tamils, Sindhis lived in peace and traded in Burma and China. There were Axomiya villages spread across Burma which dated to the Burmese invasion of Assam. South East Asia was truly a place of confluence. Yet merely 70 years later such stories do not reverberate anymore.

From a political point of view perhaps the Burma march was a failure for the Allies. For the imagined communities of South East Asia it was perhaps the loss of a time gone by. Yet more than 70 years later the story of the trek from Burma stands out as a story of human resilience. Faced against the odds of both man and nature, of Burmese bandits and the cholera of Japanese war shells and the tricky Daphla river the people who took the journey stood firm. It was truly a story of victory of the human spirit that needs to be celebrated. The trek that moment was truly the Dunkirk of the East.

(The author looks for stories of North East India)

TO THE EDITOR

Kudos Seven Set School!

Editor,
Your news item "Seven Set welcomes second rung students" (ST May 21,2017) projects the grit and determination of the school. It also reveals the all-embracing and vivid understanding that the school authority and management has towards the real meaning of education. The purpose of education is to shape minds and mould characters. To have the courage and the open mindedness to accept students that need a little more coaching, guidance and grooming speaks highly of the school and its teachers. What is of greater importance is for the teachers to be perpetually ready and eager to help, to lend a hand, encourage and raise the spirits of the students thereby lighting a lamp of good cheer and success. Seven Set School did it, for the topper in the recently declared HSSLC examination who is from the school. Kavita Joshi admits that what really matters is "hard work" and the "support and encouragement of the school". Seven Set School provided what their students required. I express my happiness and wish Seven Set School the very best in the years to come!

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

India a melting pot of races!

Editor,
In his article, "This India!" (ST, May 20, 2017), Ananya Guha rightly said, "To look upon the invader as 'enemy' in present day contexts is anachronistic." If we brand those who invaded India as enemy then Aryans will also get the tag! Indeed, it will be diabolical if we let such prejudices destroy our national fabric. As a matter of fact, invaders came, saw but assimilated into India. Such is the magic of our country. This has beautifully been portrayed in a Tagore's poem ~ "Bharat-tirtha". Tagore wrote, "Oh my mind, wake up slowly in this holy place/ India, on the shores of this sea of great human confluence/ No one knows at whose call how many streams of humanity in turbulent torrents came from to get lost in that sea/ Here the Aryans, non - Aryans, Dravidians, Chinese, Scythians, Huns, Pathans and Mughals merged into one body."
Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

NEC Clarification

Editor,
Apropos the news item, 'India's longest bridge near China border to be inaugurated on May 26, 2017 (ST May 15, 2017), this is to clarify that the North Eastern Council (NEC) had actually done the planning and feasibility study of the case. During the 46th Meeting of the NEC held on February 8, 2002, the then Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Mukut Mithi had demanded the construction feasibility study of the bridge over river Brahmaputra. The then Governor of Assam, Lt Gen. (Retd) S K Sinha, PVSM and Chairman, NEC agreed to conduct the feasibility study. The tender for the same was invited by NEC on June 24, 2003 and opened on February 10, 2004. Altogether 10 parties participated in it. Out of these M/s Consultant Engineering Services (CBS) India Pvt, Ltd, New Delhi was selected and the agreement for that was signed on December 20, 2004. An amount of Rs 55.79 lakh was sanctioned vide sanction order No. NEC/T/FS/Dhola/ 2003/49 dated March 28, 2005. The feasibility study was completed in February 22, 2006. The same was circulated to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam for their comments. Presentation of the study

was made on June 23, 2006. The Governments of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam on several occasions pursued the matter of construction of the bridge but the project had to be kept on hold due to non-availability of such huge funds in the NEC Annual Budget.

Several parliament questions also were raised on this issue and finally in the review meeting held on September 14, 2007, the Ministry of Power informed that the proposal for the construction of bridge over the Brahmaputra River between Dhola and Sadia is part of the DPR for the Dibang Multipurpose Hydro-electric Project. As a follow up to the review meetings, the Ministry of Power was requested on October 31, 2007 to take up with the Central Electrical Authority (CEA) the approval of the project with the option of the construction of a bridge over the Lohit channel between Dhola and Sadia. The Ministry of Power was also requested to consider implementing the project. Today the bridge has come up as a result of continuous efforts from NEC. It is only fair therefore that NEC's role be mentioned.

Yours etc.,
Manas Ranjan Mahapatra
DIPR, NEC, Shillong

"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

--- Martin Luther King

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2017

Lynching in Jharkhand

SEVEN persons were lynched because of motivated rumours about child lifting within days of Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das launching 21 projects under Momentum Jharkhand, the 2007 campaign to attract hundreds of crores of investment in the state. Raghubar Das can now have two faces. He may be considered the head of a reformist state. At the same time he may be regarded as one who flouts the rule of law. Some arrests have been made following the lynching but Raghubar Das has to act decisively to prove that he is indeed the head of a progressive state. The rumours of kidnapping which caused the lynching are nothing unfamiliar in the state; nor is the mob action against such rumours. The social media also aggravated public indignation. In 2012, such rumours led to a panic flight of migrant workers from the north-east. However, the recent lynching confirms the impression that those who do it think that they enjoy immunity. Policemen are accustomed to it and on this occasion also did nothing to prevent murder. It was not merely because they were outnumbered.

The sinister mind-set was behind it. The campaign against child lifters had started long before actual violence broke out. The authorities had enough time to take preventive action. The counter campaign by the authorities came too late. Exemplary punishment is the only remedy for this sort of rash lynchings in certain states. Such vigilantism is often supported by the local people. It is considered legitimate for citizens to unleash lethal violence. That of course is a perversion of democracy. Jharkhand is especially prone to such mob violence and the mob taking the law in its own hands. The most rampant cases are the lynching of tribal women accused of witchcraft.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Laloo opens school building

The people should not expect the government to do everything for them and should contribute their mite towards building up the state and the country. This was stated by the Meghalaya Minister for Rural & Community Development, Dr R C Laloo while inaugurating the

Mookyniang L.P. school building recently. Earlier, inaugurating a fete in aid of the Chitang M.E. School, Dr Laloo called upon the parents to ensure that their children went to primary schools, or the efforts of the government to bring about educational advancement would be futile.

Dynamics of a comprehensive education

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

and preferential job opportunities with higher returns to sustain oneself and the family. If the driving force behind every aspiration is for employment security, then this will also shatter the greater potential of creating opportunities. Our education system has created a situation that makes people pursue only white color jobs. And for this reason when opportunities become scarce and limited, many people will be forced to practice trickery and deceit in order to get employment.

On the one hand our agriculture and cultivation system is on the verge of dying because those who have left their villages and towns for studies can no longer engage themselves in the livelihoods of their parents - agriculture. Whereas, the situation is completely opposite in the advanced states and countries of the world where agricultural activities and farming are being handled by the educated who can add value to the agriculture and improve production and also connect their products with global buyers. Therefore, there is an urgent need to upscale opportunities in order to mitigate this huge unemployment problem. If the country or state can achieve this then it can become a self-reliant economy because the human resources produced are utilized within the country for production of other resources.

Meaningful education should be dynamic as well comprehensive. Dynamic refers to the energy that a person has derived from the education system that will further stimulate changes and progress in the society. Comprehensive on the other hand refers to the different varieties of learning that encompass all aspects of human development. As I said, we have inherited a colonial education which is selective in nature, but the fact is that from 1960 onwards the British have themselves shifted to a comprehensive system that corresponds to the public schools of the USA, Canada and Germany. It is

because of this reason perhaps that most of the innovative ideas and inventions in any field of studies or social development were commonly found to have originated from western countries.

Education should shape the future of a student and bring out the innate potential in him or her as an individual person. But in our case the opposite is happening and students are made to strive for one goal only and that is to pass the final examination with high percentage. And out of this, the idea of establishing schools or colleges is just a business venture either to commemorate or honour some person. The end journey of the student today is to serve someone rather than generating new ideas that will last forever and yield maximum benefit. The status of our education system today is similar to an orphanage that does not have either the provision or facility to take care of them as adults. It is very common for orphans to be given good care while they are at a young and tender age but there is no nurturing for them when they become adults.

Dynamic and comprehensive education should be multi-disciplinary and able to address the issues and problems that confront the very existence of the society and how to resolve these issues. Students should be allowed to explore in the education field right from early age with reality, facts and figures so that they can process those in their minds and reproduce them one day in a wonderful way. It is indeed difficult to change or reform to a new system because we have adapted to this old system for too long a time. But this is not the only system of education!

Karen Kindrick Cox in one of her blog post said, "Not all learning is equal. Covering the material does not mean understanding, finishing a textbook does not indicate mastery. No real learning takes place until it moves from surface knowledge to dynamic knowledge; to not only "know about" the information, but to be able to apply the skill or concept to real life accomplishment."

Dynamic knowledge steps beyond just "know about" and steps into performance. It is actually doing something with the information, working with it, building skills and understanding at a deeper level. Dynamic knowledge is to gain a feel for something, to internalize information and have it become real and active in the learner's world. Students gain dynamic knowledge by experience. It takes more effort, but it reaps greater rewards. Surface knowledge on the other hand diminishes the probability for long-term retention to occur. Yet this is the model that permeates modern education.

Howard Gardner, in his book, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* write of "intelligence as a problem-solving, product-producing capability." According to him every individual possesses eight or more relatively autonomous intelligences. Individuals draw on these intelligences, individually and corporately, to create products and solve problems that are relevant to the societies in which they live. And these are linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence. When these intelligences are properly nurtured and guided they can make a person productive and wealthy.

Dynamic knowledge should be a big part of children's learning experiences and will lead to long-term retention and a passion to learn as well as the ability to apply what they learn to their lives and for the society as a whole. The state is a major stakeholder in bringing about such changes that will affect the future of its citizens and to avoid the chances that may induce burden and other problems such as unemployment challenge and limited resources and opportunities.

A Legend Revisited

By Barnes Mawrie

One year has passed since the death of Fr. (Dr) Sylvanus Sngi Lyngdoh, an eminent Khasi scholar, writer and a luminary of Meghalaya. He passed away last year on May 28. His funeral was by far the most solemn and well attended event in the history of Shillong. Recently, on May 19, 2017, his mortal remains were transferred from Laitumkhrah Catholic Cemetery to Sacred Heart College campus in Mawlai. A beautiful mausoleum has been constructed for the purpose. He is still being fondly remembered and continues to attract a lot of people. On May 28, 2017 his first death anniversary, a large crowd of people is expected to turn up to pay homage at his mausoleum. Fr. Sngi will live on as a legend about whom generations will never cease to talk. He was a multifaceted personality who had a midas touch in everything he did. We can speak endlessly about him and his achievements however, I would like to focus on one quality of his, namely, his vision for the Khasi people.

Fr. Sngi was truly a visionary and he could read into the future of the Khasi society and this prompted him to act vigorously on behalf of the people in order to shape for them a brighter future. From a literary sense, he has given the Khasi Christians two precious

they have in their earthly existence. The relevance of such an idea cannot be underscored. Every group of people has some kind of mythology which recounts their origin as connected to some supernatural elements. This is what gives the people a sense of pride about their identity and purpose in life. By knowing about our origin through the Dorbar-blei and the task assigned to us by God therein, the Khasi people should feel proud about their identity and integrity as a people. This should convince us that in spite of our small number, we are not second to anybody, that we are great in our own way and that we can achieve glory like any other group of people in the world.

Another vision of Fr. Sngi was to promote and enrich the Khasi language. He had an idea of amalgamating the different dialects into the one Khasi language. For this reason he made great effort in incorporating many words from the different dialects especially of Ri Bhoi, into the official Khasi language. In this manner, he not only enriched the Khasi vocabulary but he also contributed towards a greater unification of the Khasi race. Everyone knows that "language unites" and in doing this he had a vision of a unified and strong Khasi tribe. In an era where there is so much intra-ethnic feeling even within the Khasi tribe itself (eg. the

The relevance of such an idea cannot be underscored. Every group of people has some kind of mythology which recounts their origin as connected to some supernatural elements.

dictionaries: Hebrew-Khasi-Aramaic and the Greek-Khasi. Apart from these he has published Khasi Bible Commentaries called Ki Pynshai shynna on the different books of the Bible. One may ask, why all these works? One who understands his vision would know that it was his desire that the Khasi Christians should have access to the hidden treasures of the Bible. Thus by having commentaries in our own language and the dictionaries of Biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic & Greek) in Khasi language, the Khasi people are so privileged to have the possibility of delving into the depth of the Holy Scriptures. There are very few groups of people in the world who have such a possibility. As a person who appreciated and promoted indigenous talents, Fr Sngi has immortalized the name of Jespl Syiem a naturally gifted poet of Ri Bhoi by putting in black and white the phawar (poetry) in four big volumes each running into hundreds of pages. It was his conviction that such hidden talents should not be lost or wasted. He has also preserved for posterity the Land System of Ri Bhoi and the Pomblang Syiem of Nongkrem in his two booklets which are of immense value.

It is interesting how Fr. Sngi would speak endlessly about the mythological Dorbar-blei (Divine assemblies) which numbers four of them. He has written extensively on these in almost every book and article of his. Even in his talks and lectures he would never fail to speak about them. He seemed passionate about this idea. We may ask, why speak about such mythological events and what relevance do they have? Today we understand his visionary insight in doing this. Through these Dorbar-blei he was trying to demonstrate the divine origin of the Khasi people and the God-given purpose

Pnar ethnic feeling), such an effort is worth emulating.

It was Fr. Sngi's conviction that "number is strength" and "number ensures survival." He had a vision of a Khasi people reaching a secure population of 3 million. He used to say that "once we reach the 3 million population mark, our race would never disappear from the face of the earth." For this reason, he would emphasize on having a big family. When we consider the fact that the Khasis are only a minority group in India's vast population, it is reasonable to advocate a large family, or else we will be decimated and disappear. Let us not forget that four million Jews died in the WW II holocaust, but they are still a strong race today. This is because they had a large population. Had it been any of our North-Eastern tribes, we would have been exterminated. Unfortunately, there are some tribal communities in Tripura who advocate nuclear families and today they are on the verge of extinction. Fr. Sngi went further in strengthening the Khasi race by advocating the traditional Tangkur ceremony wherein new Khasi clans are created through non-Khasi ancestresses. In his life time he has created as many as twelve new clans.

We could discuss more on this topic but as of now, I conclude by saying that Fr. Sngi's vision for the Khasi people should not be lost sight of. He was a true son of the soil who loved his people and his culture and tradition and wanted others to do the same. He would burn the midnight oil and outrun the dawn to work tirelessly on his computer producing volumes of valuable Khasi literature. He was truly a man with a clear vision and a great sense of mission. His legacy will live on among the Khasis and he will continue to be an inspiration for generations to come.

TO THE EDITOR

Leakage of MBoSE results

Editor,
The leakage of the list of MBoSE toppers as reported in your daily (ST May 23, 2017) has again raised questions about the credibility of the Board. While in the past, there were question paper leaks, the release of the result on social media, a day before the result has only exposed MBoSE. This appears to be an inside job. Many parents and students were shocked to learn of this matter and it has cast doubts in their minds on the state of affairs of MBoSE.

If the results can be leaked, as a parent, I am worried about the authenticity of the marks allotted to toppers and successful students. From my interactions with students, I could gauge that they are not happy with the way MBoSE conducts the examination and declares the results. Students who expected top positions were disappointed by the results as there is a vast difference between the marks they obtained and what they calculated soon after the exams. Now, the only way out is to go for re-evaluation, but the students feel dejected as they believe that justice and fair play are a far cry since they have lost faith in the current system.

I would suggest that MBoSE opens itself to the public and allows students and their parents to have a look at the answer scripts if they wish to, as RTI rules

allow this. Since it affects the future of students, MBoSE should clear the re-evaluation of answer scripts within two weeks of a student applying for re-evaluation. I am also skeptical about the manner in which hitherto unknown schools were placed in top positions by MBoSE, while the schools that used to excel every year did not figure in the top twenty list! Without questioning the capability of the students to secure top positions as they did there is now a genuine need to examine the allegations in the wake of the leaked results.

Yours etc.,
A concerned parent
Name withheld on
request

STP and cab drivers

Editor,
There has been so much talk about reining in local cab drivers who refuse to ferry passengers mid-way or from certain starting points to the extent that the traffic department went into an over drive of asking the public to register complaints against such errant cab drivers. What is appalling is that traffic policemen posted at various points and junctions do not have the courage to reprimand or take these local cabbies to task but simply look on instead of helping and assisting the hapless commuters. This happens in places like Police

Bazar, Motphran, Laitumkhrah, Happy Valley, Madanryting etc. Traffic policemen in other states go out of their way to assist commuters but here it is the common man that has to help himself. Take for instance the traffic junction at Don Bosco Square which your paper had highlighted as being hugely inconvenient for the public but which has fallen on deaf ears. It's almost as if Traffic Police have all the wisdom in the world. Can we ask the Chief Minister to call a meeting of commuters and traffic police personnel where idea can be exchanged, otherwise where is the public platform for airing our views?

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong-7

Issues before Meghalaya 5th Pay Commission

Editor,
The on-going terms of this Meghalaya Pay Commission headed by Mr. P.J. Bazeley, the ex Chief Secretary of Meghalaya is approaching its conclusion, but even at this eleventh hour, I would like to advance 2 core points of contention before this Commission in the larger interest of my fellow State employees: (1) To revoke the blanket ban on compassionate ground appointment that was promulgated since November 24, 2010 vide

Notification No. PER (AR) 62/2009/54 Dtd 02.12.2010. Against this total abolition, there are, nevertheless, a good number of cases where the sole earner of the family who happens to be employed in Govt. Department may suffer an untimely death thereby leaving the entire eligible dependants high and dry ending up in pecuniary crisis. I can't see reasons why our Govt. has sweepingly adopted such a hard line administrative policy even as we notice that in Central Govt Offices there still exists, a quota reserved for compassionate employments and for that matter even in most state government establishments such job-facility has not been dispensed with in toto. Thus, unlike Meghalaya, they set the stellar example of being a truly welfare states of India which is why in the All India governance index revealed recently on May 13, Meghalaya finished at the bottom of states in the field of justice delivery.

The next important point is that in the span of two years all duly retired State personnel post superannuation will have become senior citizens and such citizens are globally respected as conspicuously vindicated in advanced notions like Japan, the western countries and others. There is no gainsaying that

with the advance of age, the human body is susceptible to winter's chill and most of them perish owing to inclement weather like that of Shillong which is notorious for extreme winter conditions. Going by this analogy, I request the existing Pay Commission to also include winter allowances to the retirees besides the other allowances normally availed by the latter. Admittedly, none can call to question the fact that these retired staff had at the prime of their service life rendered invaluable services to the State Govt. in their various capacities. Thus as a token of gratitude, the Commission ought to favorably introspect over this humanitarian issue.

On the above premise I also appeal to the Meghalaya Federation Employees Union to take up the suggestions in right earnest before this Pay Commission, which are per se the welfare packages which could go a long way in benefitting the working community of the State Govt, many of whom would have loved to continue services but for their having attained 58 years of age.

Yours etc
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Shillong 2

Status of women in Islam and Christianity

Editor,
The talaq victims' step in

rejecting the move of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) to curb the practice via circulars to Qazis will make no dent in the status of women in Islam. Nikah is an Islamic marriage in which the bride agrees to have a husband and is willing to share him with three other women if he decides to marry them, and the bride-to-be also agrees to become his ex-wife if he decides to say "Talaq, talaq, talaq". In the case of a Christian marriage, both the prospective husband and wife know that their "marriages are made in heaven," and that they have no choice but to remain husband and wife, "till death do us part". When a Christian man or woman marries, the spiritual law binds them together as long as they are alive. But if one dies, the laws of marriage no longer applies to him or her. So while the wife or husband is alive, she/he would be committing adultery if she/he married another woman or man. But, according to the Bible, if either the wife or husband dies the survivor is freed from that law and does not commit adultery when he or she remarries.

Oh, the difference between a Christian and an Islamic marriage (Nikah)!

Yours etc.,
Omar Luther King
Delhi - 34

"Character builds slowly, but it can be torn down with incredible swiftness."

--- John Barrymore

The Shillong Times

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Of VIP's and foreign visits

IT is customary for VIPs from Meghalaya (politicians and officers) to visit European countries, ostensibly for tie-ups that would benefit the state. But do these visits ever result in anything concrete? In the past similar visits were made to other European countries but with little results. Since public money is used for such visits the public expect a detailed report of the visit and the areas of collaboration that have been agreed upon with the governments of the countries visited and the terms of engagements that these countries have set for us. Since all collaboration are based on mutual benefit, what is Meghalaya offering these countries in lieu of the technological assistance given to the state of Meghalaya and not just this present government? Let us not forget similar such business travels to the USA which were purportedly meant to be a learning exercise for our MLAs on the techniques of high wall mining. That was 2009. It is ironic that Meghalaya does not yet have even a mining policy! So what exactly did the MLAs learn from that visit? Was that not sheer waste of public money? It's a different matter that in Meghalaya very few individuals or groups are public spirited enough to do an RTI on such superfluous visits!

This is not the first time that Chief Minister Mukul Sangma is visiting Europe. Would he like to inform the people of Meghalaya the list of projects that have benefitted them through such visits? The list of areas of collaboration this time looks like it includes everything under the sun and if we are to believe that these would lead to fruition then Meghalaya would indeed be a shining outpost! From agriculture to health care, sports, science and technology, urban development, eco-system management, sustainable business environment, art and culture; you have it all! So we have everything sorted out! Really? Will the Belgians come and help sort out the urban nightmare here? Can they induce behavioural change? What eco-system management can they teach us that we don't already know of? Knowing is one thing - doing is another! It's the doing part that is the challenge here. Let's call such foreign visits by their name - paid holidays! And let's also call the bluff out!

Political India is beginning to resemble a leaking sieve. As notorious tales continue to tumble out fast and furious about Messrs Lalu and parivar, Chidambaram and son Karti, Congress's Sonia's son-in-law Vadra and spiced with allegations against Aam Aadmi's Kejriwal. Trust our netagan to evoke "political vendetta" (sic), "malicious onslaught" and "baseless charges" yelling blue murder when cornered. After all, denial is always their last refuge!

Their plunder is both grisly and horrifying. Take former Union Finance Minister and his son Karti who are in the CBI and Enforcement Directorate's crosshairs over involvement in the Aircel-Maxis deal wherein Karti allegedly received a \$2 lakh payment as payoff. Alongside "kickbacks" from other firms whose files were pending with the Foreign Investment Promotion Board under his father's charge like INX Media wherein he received Rs3.5 crores.

In raids conducted at 14 locations including their residences across Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi the CBI also unearthed various dubious land deals. Predictable, was Chidambaram's response, "Government is trying to silence my voice." Chorused the Congress, "Revenge is the BJP's DNA."

RJD's Lalu is no stranger to controversy. So far the Supreme Court has not only reopened one of the five chara scam cases, but the Income Tax raided 22 places in Delhi and adjoining areas and purportedly unearthed benami properties worth over Rs 1000 crores including two seven and two acres farms belonging to daughter Misa alongside residences in post colonies of other daughters. Allegedly, he also has links to owners of Royal Tulip Hotels in Dwarka.

Additionally, two sons Bihar's Dy Chief Minister Tejaswi and brother Cabinet Minister Tej Pratap became richer through "dubious sale" of a plot of land and a house in prime Patna which was "gifted" to them by a businessman. Their upcoming mall too has been in the eye of the storm and its construction stayed

Corruption Unlimited Modi on rampage

By Poonam I Kaushish

by the Union Environment Ministry.

But a nonchalant Lalu dismisses this as a witch hunt by "fascist BJP" and vows to emerge stronger. He is banking on his clout within the ruling JD(U)-RJD alliance in Bihar, daring ally Nitish Kumar to break ties and adding, that any attempts to malign him would see his followers taking centre stage.

The fledgling AAP's boss Chief Minister Kejriwal has been hit by sacked Delhi Minister Kapil Mishra's who went nuclear on money-launders of crores received as donations, by taking bribes and facilitating deals for his relatives. Obviously the Party has rubbished his charges, dubbing him a BJP stooge to spread lies.

Further besmirching the muddy sleazy waters is Congress's prima donna Sonia's son-in-law Vadra who has been indicted for shady land deals in connivance with ex-Haryana Chief Minister Hooda. Keeping him company is BSP supremo Mayawati's brother with a bank deposit of Rs 104 crore. Undoubtedly, 2017 is fast turning into an Annus Horribilis with skeletons fast tumbling out of the corrupt.

Questionably, without working a day in their lives how has a cowherd, lawyer's son, small-time artificial jewelry exporter, former teacher and social activist amassed great wealth, land-banks and unaccountable luxurious goodies? Worse, they have reduced graft to a farcical political pantomime.

It is no rocket science to see where the monies come from. The surfeit of scams gives the game away whereby, loot, bribe and deals have become the backdrop of our system. Wherein a ghotala of a few thousands crores is not worth feeding the chara of morality and shrugged off as one of the "unlisted" perks of their job.

Not any more, it seems as Prime Minister Modi flexes his 56 inch chest preening to root out black money and end corruption. Warning his tribe that they

cannot evade responsibility for the corruption canker gorging into the vitals of India by putting a premium on money power rather than honesty and hard work. Till date no scam has hit his three year NDA Government.

But this is easier said than done as politicians, the fountainhead of sleaze and crony capitalism will continue to thrive till NaMo strikes at its three roots: Politicians, funding of political parties and electoral reforms. Arguably, how does one explain the phenomenon of an over flowing donation cup whenever a Party is in power, at the Centre or in States? Are these on the basis of simple quid pro quo by corporates, fixers and wheeler-dealers?

Notably, Parties spend huge amounts for elections. But the economics of running campaigns are hush-hush affairs because polls are used to amass wealth for netas, future elections and their Party. Like politics, elections have become a business --- like businessmen the politicians in the election business balk at the idea of controls and regulations.

Parties attract money from industrialists and the favoured are rewarded with huge contracts with an unwritten sub-text: in-built kickbacks. Candidates fund elections by taking bribes, getting jobs done, act like venture capitalists wherein once elected they only settle for a 10-fold return.

That is why no Party, however vocal about poll reform in opposition, has made a sincere attempt at stanching the flow of black money into the electoral arena. Hence, we need to usher in electoral reforms, hanging fire since 1991. Each Government makes promises ad nauseam only to forget these once it fades from public memory.

Sadly, there is brazen hypocrisy and humbug in what transpires under the framed rules. Today, a candidate spends over Rs 50 crores per election instead of Rs 70 lakhs allowed by the law. Hypothetically, the minimum amount needed by each Party for the 545 Lok Sabha seats would be a mind-boggling Rs 27,250 crores. Multiplied by 10 candidates

per constituency, it adds up to a mind-boggling Rs.2,72,500 crores. Are we expected to believe that this amount will now be collected by cheques? What would happen to India's parallel economy?

Crucially, we need to ensure that those charge-sheeted cannot stand for elections, unlike presently wherein a person is debarred from fighting elections only post conviction. Given slow trials, insufficient evidence, political pressure on investigating teams (CBI, IT, ED, police) and time taken by courts to pronounce a verdict, very few are disqualified. What to speak of unbridled money and criminal power.

More. A clean administration and character of Parties have to be built on moral conscience and public pressure. Political morality and accountability are paramount for good governance and stability. There is no place for damn lies and deceit in a genuine democracy. The people have a right to know the truth and punish those guilty.

India should take a leaf out of Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission, born out of public reaction against President Suharto's 30 years corrupt rule. In five years, the Commission prosecuted and jailed over 100 high-ranking officials including a Minister, MPs, Central Bank Chief, Governors, police officers et al. It won every case before the corruption court and had all verdicts upheld by the Supreme Court. Thereby, giving the country a more ethical reputation worldwide.

All in all Modi has made a beginning to eradicate brazen corruption and political ghoskhori. The time has come for our leaders to wake up from their deep slumber of self conceit and deception of money hai to power hai. No longer will India and its people remain silent. The bugle to end India's creepy-crawly Osama bin Laden: corruption and begin accountability, honest governance and probity has been sounded. Watch out! --- INFA

Small farmers' plight Agriculture on reverse

By Moin Qazi

His speech if of mortgaged bedding, On his kine he borrows yet. At his heart is his daughter's wedding. In his eye foreknowledge of debt he eats and hath indigestion He toils and he may not stop. His life Is a long-drawn question Between a crop and a crop -Rudyard Kipling, The Masque of Plenty

As the world transitions from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—which aim to end poverty and hunger and promote sustainable development—small farmers hold an important key.

In India, small and marginal farmers—those who work on less than two hectares (five acres) of land—constitute 80% of total farm households, 50% of rural households and 36% of total households. Sadly, the plight of these farmers is very distressing. Agricultural productivity levels have been stagnant for the past ten to 15 years. An estimated 70% of the country's arable land is prone to drought, 12% to floods, and 8% to cyclones. NITI Aayog recently highlighted that the agricultural sector is 28 years behind its time.

Despite the fact that agriculture is their primary source of livelihood, small farmers have little access to technology and irrigation techniques. This makes them one of the most vulnerable groups to climate change. Farming for them is grinding physical work, largely supported by their family, with each new generation being pushed into increasingly smaller plots of land. From threshing and bundling to separating grains by hand, crops have to be planted, picked, harvested and hauled by hand.

Years of market-oriented reforms have unleashed a wave of capital and entrepreneurialism across India. High-end sectors such as information technology have made impressive strides leading to adulatory portrayals of India at home and abroad as an economic juggernaut. Despite this success, the benefits of reform have yet to extend to the hundreds of millions who toil on the land. The government has slashed or phased out subsidies for some crops, shredding a key safety net.

The result is a growing social crisis. Fuelled by crushing debt for buying transgenic seeds, failing crops on account of soil abuse by fertilisers, squeezing of prices by big multinational and government, indifferent farmers are trekking to cities. Here an equally cruel fate awaits them, but they are saved the shame of humiliation in the eyes of their own fellow villagers. A sense of deep despair runs through the lives of farmers. They have lost all hopes—and also the will to fight. Many of them are taking a permanent escape from this physical and emotional pain by ingesting deadly pesticides.

The Green Revolution was a success, but it came at a heavy price. It relied on high-yielding seeds, fossil fuels for fertilisers, modern methods of plant breeding and massive use of pesticides and equipment. A heavy dependence on irrigation led to massive water mining. This did increase agricultural productivity but depleted the soil and consumed far too much water. The States that were the front-runners during the Green Revolution now suffer from soil degradation, ground water depletion and contamination along with declining yields.

Two decades back, the

government embraced the global marketplace and began cutting farm subsidies as it liberalised the managed socialist economy. The farmers' costs rose as the tariffs that had protected their products were lowered. Many farmers switched to new genetically engineered cotton seeds which are resistant to a deadly pest called 'bollworm' and produced far higher yields and healthier crops with less use of pesticides. The seeds can be more productive and became standardised in many regions of Maharashtra. However, they can be three times more expensive to maintain than traditional seeds.

Peasants borrow loans from moneylenders at exorbitant rates of interest for all their needs— from buying expensive transgenic seeds and high-cost fertilisers to food for themselves and their cattle. They hope for a better yield in the times to come but this never happens. Eventually, they find themselves in a debt trap as they keep pursuing a vain mirage of a golden crop bonanza. As borrowings mount, many farmers are driven to suicide. Owing more than they earn, the steadiest of these workers have become gamblers of the highest stakes, betting their land and their lives on a better crop.

According to the 70th Situation of Agricultural Households in India conducted by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), 90 per cent of India's farmers have less than two hectares of land. The survey says the average farm household makes less than Rs. 6,500 a month from all sources of income. They are only kept afloat by government schemes that funnel money to them and by periodic waivers of farm loans.

To improve their lives, farmers need a way out of agriculture and into the manufacturing or services sector. In fact most small-scale farmers would happily sell their land, if only they could be provided employment in lieu of it. India's developmental failure since 1947 has been its inability to move the huge mass of people involved in agriculture to industry and services. As the share of agriculture in the national output pie falls, any crisis hurts those dependent on it disproportionately.

Despite the fact that agriculture is typically their primary source of livelihood, smallholder farmers have little access to technology and insecure access to irrigation, making them one of the most vulnerable groups to future climate change. Farming for them is grinding physical work, largely parceled by family—threshing and bundling and separating grains by hand—with each new generation into increasingly smaller plots of land, and planted, picked, harvested, and hauled by hand.

India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said in 1947: "Everything can wait, but not agriculture." What India is witnessing today is exactly the reverse. All the other sectors in the Indian economy are surging ahead. Agriculture is the only one which is moving in the opposite direction. Within this self-perpetuating cycle of misery, wrapping a noose around the neck are all-too-friendly exits for farmers. While their deaths might bring personal escape, they leave behind crippling emotional, financial and physical burdens, inherited by those left to farm the dust: the women who did not die.— INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Bureaucracy and corruption!

Editor,
The lead stories appearing in your paper (ST May 20 & 23, 2017) of the conviction and jail terms of some bureaucrats in connection with the coal scam must have sent shock waves among serving bureaucrats across the country. This will deter serving bureaucrats from indulging in corrupt practices. We hope this will send strong signals to many who are still serving in government in various capacities. However, we do not know whether the CBI court has found conclusive evidence and proof of corruption beyond doubts against the officers. Further, we also are not aware if the big sharks and the real beneficiaries of the coal scam are being steadfastly pursued by the courts to ensure their conviction and punishment.

The fact is that bureaucrats have full knowledge of government transactions which are highly sensitive and tempting as well. Through them lakhs of crores of rupees are transacted through note sheets, files and hard cash. The temptation is too strong to resist. Many of these officers connive with their bosses on how to share the booty. However, we also

cannot deny that there are bureaucrats who can and have resisted corruption and are known for their integrity and sincerity. But there are also officers who appear sincere and diligent but who have abused the system for their personal gains. We only have to check out their personal assets and the fact that a few of them intend to fight the 2018 elections, to know that all is not well in the bureaucracy! That said, the position of bureaucrats is neither glamorous nor enviable. They are sandwiched between their political bosses, their cronies or agents and the business tycoons. They are not to reason why, but just have to carry out their masters' wishes.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Shillong-2

EVM Challenge

Editor,
The Election Commission of India (ECI) held a meeting on May 12 with all political parties of the country on the issue of tampering of the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in New Delhi. Barring 3-4 parties all participants in the meeting had favoured continued use of EVMs along with 100% paper trail. An ECI officer made a detailed presentation on EVM security features in the meeting. Chief Election Commissioner, Nasim Zaidi ruled out a return to the

ballot paper system! Zaidi insisted that with VVPATs to be deployed in all future polls, the controversy over reliability of the election process should be finally set to rest.

Former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), Dr M S Gill introduced EVMs successfully in the electoral process of the country during his tenure as the Chief Election Commissioner of India from 1996 to 2001. Introduction of EVMs being his major achievement which curbed malpractices to a large extent. Starting with Australia, many developed countries around the world are also using EVMs without controversy. International and Indian IT experts have already confirmed that technologically Indian EVMs are the best in the world and can neither be tampered nor tampered in any way, since the replacement of the internal circuit is not possible. The Indian EVMs have also strong technological features and are tamper-proof. Being a technocrat-bureaucrat turned politician it is inexplicable as to how the CM of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal is advocating for a retrograde step of re-introducing the "paper ballot system" of voting in this era of hi-tech innovations. The Chief Election Commissioner of India and his team deserve accolades for taking up the challenge of

vanquished political parties in the last general elections in UP and some other states by inviting each political party for a period of 4 hours to demonstrate that the EVMs can neither be tampered with nor hacked on June 3, 2017.

Yours etc.,
Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata
High Court

of printed white paper which may easily get misplaced or crumbled unlike the previous cards containing several pages where the entire medical case history could be evaluated carefully. Thus, NEIGRIHMS has evidently reneged on its commitment to serve the senior citizens and its employees.

Yours etc
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Shillong 2

NEIGRIHMS neglecting senior citizens!

Editor,
It is very disheartening that NEIGRIHMS, the premier public health care centre of the North East at Mawdiangdiang, Shillong, has of late stopped the issuance of blue coloured outpatient cards to senior citizens, thereby implying that the aged and the infirm are to stand in long queues to get themselves registered preceding medical consultation, thus undergoing immense physical mortification! Further, it is also learnt, that even the working staff of this Institute have since been discontinued and given the pink-coloured out-patient card for reasons best known to this hospital management. Henceforth, all patients, irrespective of age, status etc are furnished a piece

we say, what we do and how we live has a lot of impact on our children. Today, with unlimited exposure to various possibilities especially through the internet it is imperative for parents to monitor the movements of their children and to raise them well. This incident is an eye opener for people at large and parents in particular. As a parent, I'm ashamed and humiliated over the way the innocence and morality of the poor child has been devoured by none other than her father and brother. Family and the home are safe havens for any individual. These are two pillars that support and strengthen individuals. When the two become unsafe and are a threat, then life itself becomes meaningless. Can we afford to simply read this piece of news as just another news item in the papers and thank God that it is not happening in our hearth and homes? I hope not and I hope we as a society take responsibility to see that such acts are not repeated.

Yours etc
Jennieffer Dkhar,
Via email

Heinous & unpardonable acts!

Editor,
The news item, "Minor molested by father-son duo" (ST May, 2017) is not only disgusting but hair-raising as well. Rapes and molestations are so rampant that not a day passes without such disturbing news being revealed through newspapers, television and other social media. It is already a sad state of affairs that conviction and punishment for perpetrators of such crimes are not only rare but absent. Now what is even more alarming is the despicable truth as demonstrated through the heinous act of the father—son, that we parents and elders are forgetting our roles and responsibilities. Parents are meant to be the best guides to their children but this case shows the decline of humankind. What

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.

"All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them."

--- Geoffrey F. Abert

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LIX No. 283

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2017

Prison reforms

THE Law Commission has finalized recommendations for reform in bail jurisprudence. Stress is being laid on release of under-trials who have served one third of the maximum possible sentence. The Indian criminal justice system is urgently in need of reform. The government should wake up to the urgency of bringing it about. Jails in India are packed to capacity especially with under-trial prisoners. Relief to them is only part of the quality of humane conduct. Also, imprisonment for a long period of those accused of petty crimes very often turn them into hardened criminals. An under-trial is by definition an unconvicted prisoner. At the end of 2015, Indian jails had 2.82 lakh under-trials. Many of them were under the age of 30 and had hardly any education. The treatment dealt to them could hardly improve their social sense. A little over a decade ago, these under-trials could be released on a personal bond if they served half of the term to which they may have been sentenced if found guilty. But the law was seldom observed. In 2014, however, the Supreme Court had directed its enforcement.

On this occasion, the government and the Centre and in the states should promptly accept the recommendations expected to be made by the Law Commission. Different parts of the criminal system in different parts of the country should be made to comply with the recommendations. The states can help as they oversee prisons. Tamil Nadu is an exception where people arrested can be released till a charge-sheet is filed against them. The state's legal aid helps under-trial prisoners accused of petty crimes. Of course, changing the law is not enough. The system of justice needs overhauling.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Sangma promise second treasury in Shillong

Meghalaya Chief Minister Mr Purno A Sangma said that the Government had decided to open a second treasury in Shillong in order to ease the workload on the existing treasury staff. Replying to a policy cult motion table by Mr E K Mawlong (HSPDP) in the State Legislative Assembly on Monday, Mr Sangma said that the proposed expansion was in line with his government's decision to strengthen and make more efficient the financial management in the State. He said that the Government was examining the possibility of creating new posts in the Department. Mr Mawlong, initiating

the discussion said that the increasing workload on the overburdened staff was partly responsible for incidence of financial irregularities. He also called for the Treasury to be bifurcated into two separate Directorates: Directorate for Accounts and Treasuries and Examiner of Local Accounts. He also called for training programmes for Treasury personnel. Mr S L Marbaniang (HSPDP-DL) said that certain Central Offices could route their payments through banks as is the practice in NEHU and thus help ease the load on the treasury. Mr Bires Nongseij (HPU) called for more sub-treasuries in the State.

Of Programmes, Projects and the 'Business As Usual' M&E process

By Patricia Mukhim

It was in 2012 at Polo Grounds when the Aquaculture Mission was first launched that we first heard of the word "denatured fish" and from none other than the State Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma, who also asserted that Meghalaya would soon become self sufficient in fish production because several fish farmers have come up to avail the scheme under the Aquaculture Mission. Now five years down the line, the only time we get to buy fish from these fish farmers is when there is an annual one-day carnival at the State Central Library. The rest of the year we are condemned to rely on Andhra Pradesh fish, which we are told is laden with preservatives. The Meghalaya Fish Sellers Association can deny that the fish are preserved in chemicals but it is for the food inspectors employed by the Government (sometimes you wonder what they do, other than pushing files in their offices) to tell us we are not consuming poison or how much of it is permissible in the human system. So here's a well-intended (one hopes so) programme that has interestingly unintended consequences- fishing as a gambling game with high stakes. This has to be Meghalaya's forte and it should in all fairness enter the Guinness Book of World Records.

Every Government announces programmes with much fanfare and each one has a noble objective of solving some crisis, except that this never happens. The problems remain or are exacerbated. Now let us take the poverty alleviation programme launched by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) under the nomenclature of North-East Region Community Resource Management project first implemented in two most backward districts each of Meghalaya, Assam and Manipur. In Meghalaya the project worked in West Khasi Hills and West Garo Hills. West Khasi Hills was then the most backward district of Meghalaya but you wonder why West Garo Hills was chosen when even today, South Garo Hills is the most poverty stricken and least developed region of Garo Hills. But the project holders have their explanations. Now how is extreme poverty measured? According to Jeffrey Sachs, the clinical economist would make a set of poverty maps using available data or newly commissioned household surveys, GIS data, national income vis-à-vis state incomes data and other information such as what proportion of households live in extreme

poverty; how many lack access to basic needs in schooling, health care, water and sanitation, electricity, roads, nutrition etc. Also important to know is the spatial distribution of poverty. Is poverty mainly rural or urban? If it is concentrated in one or two districts what are the reasons for that? How is poverty related to the demographic conditions of the household (male or female headed household, number of children, health of household members) and to it's asset ownership and economic activities (landless poor, small-holding farmer, commerce, industry etc). While mapping poverty the clinical economist should identify key risk factors that may exacerbate poverty in the coming years. What are the demographic factors (births, deaths internal and external migration) that may affect the numbers and distribution of the extreme poor? What environmental shocks and trends (deforestation, land degradation, erosion of water aquifers or their privatization as is happening in Meghalaya, biodiversity loss) might impinge on poverty? What climate shocks and extreme weather events are likely to affect public health, disease and agricultural productivity? Are there changes in infectious disease incidence and prevalence that might affect the state economy? Let us say that the IFAD specialists listed all the above data and also set up guidelines on how the project is to be implemented. But who finally executes the project is the fundamental question. If you get people from the Government which is bureaucracy ridden and is clueless about social mobilization (because civil servants do not know how to strike conversations with people) then the project is bound to fail. If you take development specialists from the market the problem is that they soon become mere 'employees' and quickly introduce their own bureaucracies into the system. This is what has happened with the IFAD-NERCORMP project now taken over by the North Eastern Council (NEC). It is coincidental too that all CEOs of the project except the first one are from the Manipur cadre. Appointing a bureaucrat as project head is designed for failure and I will list out the reasons why. Bureaucrats are trained

landlessness gone down? (c) Have common property resources such as forests, water bodies been reclaimed? (d) Is access to health now better? (e) Are children able to access education better? (f) Have people been able to buy back land they have lost in a distress sale? (g) Are the roads better and farmers better linked to the markets? (h) Are the self help groups created ten years ago still doing well or have they disintegrated? (i) Have some from the group become empowered enough to access bank loans? (j) Are the nutritional statuses of pregnant and lactating mothers better today? (k) Are there cases of Vitamin deficiencies among children? (l) Is deforestation addressed? (m) Are rivers clean and pristine and do they support riverine life? (n) What biodiversity gains have been made or have we lost more of our indigenous herbs and vegetables? These are only a few questions. There can be more. And we need an independent monitoring and evaluation agency to do this because it is never a good idea to be accompanied by project staff to a project village. Collusion is inevitable! The monitoring agency can be given the co-ordinates and they can do their own investigation. Alas! Most projects have their favourite evaluators and what happens at the end is a quid pro quo!

The NEC owes it to the people of the region and to itself to get independent evaluators to go into the IFAD project which has now become a humungous bureaucracy steeped in corruption. We need to know if the project has achieved its deliverables. If it has failed it should be discontinued. It cannot carry on only to maintain the huge bureaucracy it has built over the years! The bane of Indian democracy is such that while politicians with a range of pathological deformities can be thrown out every five years the bureaucracy is not evaluated. We are yet to find out if the promotion of any bureaucrat is held up for inefficiency. The Annual Confidential Report is a big hoax. If I may venture to state then Indian democracy's biggest impediment is it so-called steel frame - a frame that protects bureaucrats from all wrongdoings and breeds inefficiency!

Hence bureaucrats love crisis or perceived crisis because it increases their power and control. And if there are not enough crises then they manufacture them. In doing so the control of information is important even while bureaucrats feign openness. Then whenever caught on the wrong foot the first reaction is to deny, delay, obfuscate, spin and lie; all in that order.

Also that a civil servant is referred to as a 'career bureaucrat' is in itself problematic. History has proven that "career bureaucrats" do much more harm than good because in the end it only means knowing how to pull strings in Delhi or in the state with favoured politicians and getting their own things done. This is the dark underbelly of the bureaucratic beast.

The NERCORMP-IFAD project has worked in Meghalaya, Assam and Manipur for a considerable period now. Is it not time for an independent research on (a) whether poverty has decreased since the time the project started? (b) Has

faithful to listen to the arrogant, pompous and know it all attitude of the members of the Managing Committee, mostly non technical people with zero knowledge of hospital administration who question the suggestions of technical persons in matters of purchase of medicines and equipments, and ridicule the request for permissions to attend seminars, workshops and conferences and who pay scant attention to complaints made without bothering to find out the truth about them. The H Gordon Robert Hospital is a mission Hospital so the expectation from each and every person working in that hospital starting from the top down to the bottom is kindness, humility and an every ready helping hand for the needy. The presence of God must be seen and felt as it used to be in that golden age of the hospital say those who have seen the glorious past.

Yours etc., Name withheld on request

There is need for a team of experienced technical people as the core group of thinkers and planners but the painful fact is that the theologians and church leaders need to step aside and allow professionalism to come in. It is painful for the

POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Rahil Nora Chopra

IT MAY BE NAJMA OR VENKAIHAH FOR VICE-PRESIDENT

The real googly that Modi can throw is to have a Muslim Vice-president to replace Hamid Ansari. Manipur Governor Najma Heptullah fits the bill as she had even been considered for the post of President when she was in Congress. Sources claim Heptullah has been given an assurance about the Vice-president nomination. Now-a-days she is campaigning in Delhi and giving interviews to various channels on the issue of Triple Talaq and supporting Narendra Modi's governance. It is believed that she also will have the support of the veteran BJP leaders like Advani. The other name under consideration is Venkaiah Naidu, who is believed to be a front runner.

MURMU AND MUNDA FRONT RUNNERS FOR NDA PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

With the ruling side apparently in a position to get its man, or woman, elected to the Rashtrapati Bhawan, all eyes are on the choice of the NDA candidate. Jharkhand Governor Draupadi Murmu continues to be in contention. One factor in her favour is that she is a tribal woman from Odisha. Kariya Munda, another tribal leader from Jharkhand,

for a negotiated settlement to the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, Modi in Delhi and Yogi in UP could mean a lot of pressure on the Muslim community for an out of court settlement.

GHULAM NABI, RAJ BABBAR FALL OUT OF FAVOUR WITH RAHUL, PRIYANKA

Ghulam Nabi Azad and Raj Babbar were conspicuously absent from the press conference organized by the Congress to highlight the failure of the Modi government to deal with the issues of agriculture, farmers and farm labourers on the occasion of its completing three years in office. The development comes amidst speculation that Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi are not happy with Ghulam Nabi Azad and Raj Babbar for the way they handled the UP assembly election in March this year. The UPCC leaders are seething with anger against Ghulam Nabi Azad and state party chief Raj Babbar for having misled Rahul Gandhi to join hands with the Samajwadi Party.

HARYANA MAY HAVE DEPUTY CM IN POST-PRESIDENTIAL POLL RESHUFFLE

A cabinet reshuffle in Haryana is expected after the President and Vice President elections in the

The BJP think tank is believed to be keen on his candidature as the move might turn out to be beneficial in the Gujarat and Orissa assembly elections. Another name apparently under consideration is Narendra Jadav, a Dalit with RSS background, who is currently writing a book on BR Ambedkar. One section of the BJP is reportedly pushing Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan for the coveted post. Mahajan enjoys good relationship with both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah.

is also in the reckoning. Munda is a former Deputy Speaker and was a minister in the Janata Party government in 1977 and also cabinet minister in the Vajpayee government. The BJP think tank is believed to be keen on his candidature as the move might turn out to be beneficial in the Gujarat and Orissa assembly elections. Another name apparently under consideration is Narendra Jadav, a Dalit with RSS background, who is currently writing a book on BR Ambedkar. One section of the BJP is reportedly pushing Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan for the coveted post. Mahajan enjoys good relationship with both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah. But overall, Kariya Munda and Draupadi Murmu are believed to be the front runners although the names of Ram Naik, and Kalyan Singh are also being mentioned in the power corridors.

YOGI'S FREQUENT AYODHYA VISITS PART OF PRESSURE TACTICS

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is likely to visit Ayodhya on 31st May when he is expected to meet a number of seers, including Mahant Nritya Gopal Das, who has been spearheading the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, as well as local BJP leaders. By visiting Ayodhya frequently, Yogi is keeping the temple issue in focus. The event is being keenly watched as he has himself been involved in the Ram temple movement for decades. After the 2017 state polls, the BJP leadership knows how a reservoir of Hindutva and development works best for the party. In the wake of the Supreme Court's suggestion

wake of infighting and open resentment in the state BJP, the Jat agitation and the disappointment about the manner in which the chief minister is handling the state of affairs. Among the remedies being considered is a move to make Captain Abhimanyu as the deputy chief minister. According to sources, many BJP MPs and MLA have complained to the central leadership that under the chief ministership of Manohar Lal Khattar the party cannot win the 2019 Lok Sabha election, but Modi is not very keen to listen, reminding them that he had himself witnessed such resentment when he was chief minister of Gujarat, but later on all of them changed their attitude. The point being driven home was that he wants to give more time to Manohar Lal Khattar. On the other hand, Rao Inderjit Singh is lobbying hard to become the chief minister with the support of 25 MLAs.

MADHYA PRAESH PCC CHIEF ASPIRANT, KAMAL NATH BRIEF'S SONIA GANDHI

Congress general secretary Kamal Nath has met party president Sonia Gandhi amid speculations that he might be appointed as the Madhya Pradesh PCC chief ahead of the state assembly elections next year. The meeting lasted around half-an-hour and Kamal Nath is learnt to have discussed the latest political situation in Madhya Pradesh. Nath, a protégé of Sanjay Gandhi, is one of the few Congress leaders who have been winning elections and the Chhindwara MP now wants to take up the mantle in the saffron state. The general perception is that Kamal Nath would be a better choice. (IPA)

TO THE EDITOR

Dr H Gordon Robert Hospital: Wishful thinking

Editor, Institutions unlike human beings are expected to grow more robust with time but this is not true of the Dr H Gordon Robert Hospital, which every member of the Presbyterian congregation is proud about. The hospital itself is in the ICU and is currently gasping for breath. When an aged person begins gasping for air, the end is near. But God forbid, may He never allow a Hospital built in His Name to perish! Write-ups have appeared in the print media from time to time highlighting the progress the Hospital has made after the crisis it suffered last year due to the mass exodus of serving doctors. The facts however are not in the least bit encouraging. It's been eight months since the collapse (some may not like this word) but what are the signs that the hospital is limping back to life? In the first place did the Hospital

ever enjoy good health? The number of patients attending the Hospital is of no consequence unless they are satisfied with the services rendered and the availability of essential basic facilities. But, of course, good patient attendance would mean a better income which in turn enables the hospital to be self sustaining. The Dr H Gordon Robert Hospital is privately run; patients pay for every service rendered to them. So for the Hospital to be grounded on account of a colossal financial breakdown only means it had been ailing financially for a long time. There are gaping holes that have swallowed up the daily earnings, so unless these holes are identified and measures taken to seal them up tight, the future of the Hospital will always remain shaky. This letter is not about who did what (although to be able to move forward successfully and to avoid falling in the same pit repeatedly it is of utmost importance to identify the weak links in the chain of

administration), but seeks to put forth certain pertinent points that are the common talk of all and sundry who feel for the well being of the Hospital.

Just as we cannot use yesterday's method to run today's business and still expect to remain in business tomorrow, the hospital was started nearly a century ago and was run by missionaries who were multi-taskers. Those were also the days of generalist doctors but we are now in the 21st century and we have specialties in every sphere of development. If the Hospital is to raise its head again to regain the past glory it enjoyed from the time of its inception till the 60s, the days of Dr Hughes, the KJPA need to do some serious thinking and to face the truth that pastors and church elders can no longer make business decisions that will sustain hospitals, educational institutions, printing presses etc.

The Hospital requires the services of experienced technical persons to guide it. It needs persons with leadership qualities with the ability to set goals for the

future, take hard decisions and steer the ship amidst the raging seas of discontentment, greed, jealousy, pride, egoism, self-centeredness and all the problems that beset human nature in any community. On the verge of its centenary, how far has the Hospital come from when it started? Have new goals been set for the gradual transition of the hospital from being a Primary Health care provider to providing Secondary and Tertiary healthcare? Will the new Managing Committee Members have this vision? We can only hope so.

The senior most Pastor by virtue of his seniority alone would not be the ideal person to head the hospital while a younger person may show the aptitude for such a task. The IIM Shillong is ideally located and short term courses on different management studies would not be difficult to achieve if there is a will to learn. The need of the hour is the right man in the right place.

There are many areas of

the hospital which are afflicted by chronic ailments and unless the root cause of the ailments are identified and definitive treatment given, the effort to float the hospital would be like fighting a losing battle and time is not far when it will ultimately collapse. The need of the hour is deep introspection, frank and open analysis of every aspect of the Hospital with the common desire to rejuvenate this premier health care centre. Pettiness in treatment of staff should be rooted out. Qualification, experience, efficiency, length of service should be the basis for the pay structure and the same scale must be used to measure everyone. Discipline needs to be enforced and stern measures taken against errant staff irrespective of their ranks.

There is need for a team of experienced technical people as the core group of thinkers and planners but the painful fact is that the theologians and church leaders need to step aside and allow professionalism to come in. It is painful for the

Ability may get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there.

--- Oscar Wilde

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 27, 2017

Law and order in Saharanpur

THE UP government has acted appropriately by suspending district magistrates and senior police officials for their failure to enforce law and order and preventing the recent violence in Saharanpur. Tensions erupted there between Dalits and Thakurs. Early action by the local authorities may have snuffed out violence in the region in its incipient stage. The state home secretary and a team of senior police officers visited the place recently. 24 people of the Thakur community were arrested for assaulting Dalits who had gone to attend a BSP rally. The positive steps taken by the government should do the job. Saharanpur has been in a troubled state since 2013. Successive elections caused tensions. The campaign against love Jihad and for cow protection aggravated the crisis.

The Yogi Adityanath government has to weed out communal forces of all colours in the region. As a matter of fact, his taking over as chief minister may have accentuated animosities. He represents Hindu hardliners in the BJP. The political agenda of the new government is likely to be aggressive on the lines of Hindutva. At the same time, communities out of power are trying to reassert themselves. The Thakur-Dalit confrontation in Saharanpur exposes the fault lines of society in Uttar Pradesh. The SP and the BSP had empowered the backward classes and the Dalits. The BJP also went for social engineering to capture power in the state. The Adityanath government has to formulate a firm and forward-looking political strategy. Saharanpur provides an alarm signal. The government should dispel fears about it being opposed to offering even-handed justice and should win the trust of all communities.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

CM urges borrowers to repay bank loans

Meghalaya Chief Minister, Mr P A Sangma said that the people should cultivate the habit of repaying banks loans in time and should not be "subsidy minded" but nonetheless, the advantage of the loans offered by the banks. Mr Sangma was inaugurating a branch of the State Bank of

India at Ampati in the West Garo Hills recently. Mr Sangma hoped that the bank would help the people of the area by making loans available for various developmental activities and also encourage savings among the people by extending savings banks facilities to them.

As the Modi government enters the fourth year of its term, its economic report card looks relatively good. When the Government assumed office in 2013, the economy was in a rather bad shape -- growth had slumped to below 6 per cent, rupee crashed to 68.85 to the dollar on August 28, 2013. The twin deficit problem - high fiscal and current account deficits - rendered the Indian economy highly vulnerable and inflation was raging around 10 per cent.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) had put India in the 'fragile five' group (Brazil, India, Indonesia, Turkey and South Africa) and sold heavily, impacting the currency and stock markets. Further, policy paralysis in the last phase of the UPA government had impacted business confidence and economic growth. However, the situation started changing since last year and the stock market is presently at record highs and investors, both foreign and domestic, pouring money into the market. This transition from "fragile five to fabulous few" is an impressive track record. It may also be pertinent here to mention that during the three financial years, foreign direct investment reached \$ 156 billion with the flow in 2016-17 alone being a record of \$56 billion.

It can definitely be stated that the economy is in a much better shape. In the emerging markets, India is in a macro sweet spot. In the last two years, the economy grew 7.9 per cent in 2015-16 and 7.1 per cent the year after. It is estimated that growth in the current fiscal would be around 7.4 per cent which is likely to be the highest among large economies in the world.

Over the years, international institutions changed their outlook towards India. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) last year referred

Modi's Report Card Healthy economy, job crunch

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

to India as the "bright spot in the gloomy global economy". Thanks to fiscal consolidation in successive Budgets, the deficit has been brought down to 3.2 per cent and current account deficit at 1 per cent. The favourable ratings enjoyed by the government is testimony to the overall economic and fiscal improvement.

The rupee strengthened to around 64.40 to the dollar. In the last three years retail inflation averaged 5.2 per cent. Presently, the CPI inflation is below 3 per cent. Exports, after three years of lackluster performance, have started picking up and India has emerged as one of the largest recipients of FDI in the world.

A significant achievement has been the passing of the Real Estate Bill -- Real Estate Regulation Act -- demonetisation exercise to curb black money--subsidy on home loan interest along with its focus on affordable housing have played a key role in reviving the real estate sector to some extent. With lower inflation, policy rates have come down, giving a big relief to home loan borrowers as they have resulted in the lowering of home loan rates.

Along with lower home loan rates (which have come down to 8.3 to 8.5 per cent currently as against 10.5 per cent around 3 years back), residential property has also become more affordable now, making it a double bonanza for home buyers. Lower income groups have greatly benefited from this reduction who now have to pay lower EMI. This has been possible due to demonetisation though not much black money could be unearthed.

Another impressive record is a genuine attempt

to improve governance. Gearing up the bureaucracy, expediting industrial licenses, enforcement of rules, close monitoring of projects etc. have demonstrated that the Government has a professional outlook though this is yet to manifest itself in the Railways sector. The digital drive should also check corruption and poor people get wages directly through banks. However, it needs to be pointed out that private investment is yet to pick up and the banking sector is steadily recovering from stressed assets. The recent ordinance amending the Banking Regulation Act empowering the RBI is, of course, a bold initiate to address the NPA problem.

Though the neglect of the rural sector has been a long-standing problem, it goes without saying that in the last two Budgets adequate fund allocation has been given to welfare projects and schemes, benefitting the village population. While housing has been given a thrust with 10 million new rural houses to be constructed by 2019, rural electrification has accelerated with every village set to receive electricity by May next year. The Prime Minister Awas Yojana and the Swachh Bharat programmes need special mention here. Added to this is the development of roads and highways linking rural and semi-urban areas.

However, the Government is faced with a huge backlog on unemployment. The lack of growth of industries has been a major reason for this. Economists and even the Congress has termed the growth 'jobless'. It stated that while 21 lakh jobs were created between the first two years of UPA-II, merely 4.4 lakh jobs have come in the first two years of the NDA Government. The Government's labour bureau figures showed that job growth plummeted in key

sectors to its lowest levels in eight years in calendar years 2015 and 2016 at 1.55 lakh and 2.33 lakh respectively. This is a serious issue and needs to be considered, if necessary in consultation with experts.

There are expectations that with the focus being given on small and micro industries, on the one hand, and developing entrepreneurs who would get assistance from banks for setting up their units, on the other, results may be better in the next calendar year. The Government should also think of giving incentives to labour oriented units so that unemployment problem does not become a burden.

The distress of the farming community is well known. During the Congress years in 80s and 90s and even in the start of the new millennium, Indian planning was oriented towards the urban sector with insufficient resources allocated for the rural sector. Though Modi had promised input cost plus 50 per cent profit for their yield, this has not been so -- even ensuring 15 per cent profit has become impossible. It is now time that the minimum support price be fixed keeping in view input cost and profits. There is no need for subsidising the urban middle class at the cost of the rural poor, as Prof. Michael Lipton had observed long back.

Thus, Modi has to look at the grey areas and take positive steps before the next Lok Sabha elections are due in 2019. Social unrest has to be curbed at any cost and this can be done by engaging the youth in productive activities while also ensuring that anti-secular feelings should not be allowed to continue. --- INFA

Teaching What and How

By Ananya S Guha

The school is the starting point of not only a child's education, but of the journey of life. That is why school education is central to a child's memory, disaffection, education of course and even co-curricular activities that go with it. The school becomes a second home, a place where there are friends and confidantes. The teacher is a pivotal person, not only inside the classroom but outside it as well. The teacher extends the classroom into a more intimate world of friendship. That is why a child looks up to the teacher, tries to curry favour and ingratiate her, loves it if the teacher talks to her, has a word of praise and pats her on the back. The child in school having found a parallel home seeks love and appreciation and wants to please the teacher in a way so as to evoke a positive response in her. Disappointment can also come by way of poor results, not making it into say a debating team or acting in the concert, but all along it is the teacher who holds centre stage more than the Principal. Later on the school creates memories as the child becomes an adult, and such memories are often given continuity between the world of a child and that of the adult.

School education is crucial not only for studies, but for the huge platform it creates for friendship, activities, fun and laughter. That is why adults fondly remember school, their friends and teachers. In fact many remember first and sometimes only a teacher or teachers in school. The sort of world a school creates gives it a strong continuity with the future. Hence old boys' and girls' meets are events made to reclaim the past memories and give it validity. Many try to persuade a disbelief of it, but that is trying to disregard personal history. That begins at school.

That is why when we talk of education, it is school education one must start with. The base must be strong not only in studies and earning grades, but aspects like sensitivity to surroundings, to poverty, feeling for the down trodden must touch base. And who can be a better facilitator than the teacher? Yet what actually is the teaching imparted in a classroom? I'm not sure if BED text books answer this question. The classroom is a presence, which the teacher ought to sense, feel and understand intuitively freed of all bias. Once any bias comes in then the students are no longer children. It is an imposition, which becomes a bondage for the child. If a teacher clearly dislikes a child, sensibilities are hurt. If any kind of preference is given to other children, a child feels humiliated. Hurt turns to anger and frustration. Memories of the school are consciously erased. They do not figure in the consciousness of the future.

That is why education policies must have independent moorings on school education. The terms of reference should not be only the syllabus, grades, evaluation et al, but also role modeling that teachers and principals can play; their ability to discover talent, creativity, aptitude for aspects which later on constitute fundamentals of a profession. The child is a dreamer, the manifestation is various: introversion, extroversion, athletics, science, passion for music, theatre, reading and writing. If these are

constructed on the fundamentals right from the word go, then the child's talents will flower even at school and he/she will be able to applaud the virtues and talents of other children, and will always seek counsel from the teacher who appreciates it. To make a child feel shameful is the worst indignity of education, as this will affect the future and career options.

Hence selecting teachers necessitates choosing people with understanding, having a love for children, understanding their psyche, being an enabling factor in discovering talent. The stricture of having teacher training degrees may or may not work. How is an audience for the child created? The child is seeking again and again an audience, some appreciation, a kind word, a word of encouragement etc.

That is why recruiting teachers at lower and higher levels becomes crucial. It is not only an aptitude for classroom teaching which is required, but also the imperative to extend the four at times, monotonous walls of the classroom. Extending it means reaching out to the student.

Now let us examine how we select teachers. From school to college and university it is tests, tests and tests, in addition to teacher education and doctoral qualifications. The interviews are more often than not a farce, saddled with nepotism and prejudices against candidates by whom selection committees feel, are a threat to their incumbencies. I wonder how much the tests look into the aptitude for teaching, maintaining a classroom and managing it? What do we expect from a teacher, simply to read out from a book, deliver a lecture impeccably, which many may not understand? The whole point being it is not the teacher's satisfaction level, but whether the student is satisfied which is central to the positing of a quality driven educational system. Aptitude tests for teachers is all about handling and understanding the classroom situation, latent and intuitive.

In the context of this the controversy of recruitment of school teachers in Meghalaya is painful. If one is to tamper with marks to smuggle teachers into a profession not suited for them, then nothing could be a sadder commentary on how we perceive a system, meant to inject notions of a vision for life, living life to the full by way of the occupation one chooses irrespective of position and the so called 'power'. If we have to build educational policies, we have to choose right teachers not by nepotism and interference but by a careful, selective process based on aptitude and a sound feel for the profession. Otherwise we are letting our students down in a culpable manner. The task of selecting teachers both at school and university levels must be built in national educational policies. In a state like ours, where we need to focus on rural education for the disadvantaged, recruitment cannot be independent of looking out for selfless, willing and committed school teachers. What is happening is a very sad travesty of truth and a slur on education as a whole.

(The author is Regional Director IGNOU Shillong)

TO THE EDITOR

Time to link performance to promotion

Editor,
The lack of opportunities and absence of jobs pushes people to apply for jobs just for the sake of getting employed and not with an act of service or dedication or what we say is the call of the inner voice. Those working in the lower to middle level grades in government offices and in various sectors should learn from the corporate sector where promotions or increments are given on performance linked targets. If the state government wants to change the work culture and improve efficiency it should take a review of the service rules in various departments and have one uniform service rule where every performance should be graded or downgraded as per the employee's performance. File pushing, passing the buck is the usual attitude in government offices. The UP Chief Minister had made drastic changes in a week's time making everyone accountable unlike here where we have Ministers and bureaucrats don't show any positive results. What kind of report card has this state to show? In fact it is very dismal in every sector and we can see that most legislators are already in election mode instead of concentrating on their departments. Are we heading towards becoming a failed state?

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong:3

MeECL collapsing?

Editor,
Laban area has been experiencing indiscriminate power cuts without prior notice, that too at prime time and nearly every day for 2 to 4 hours. This is a curse and reminds me of how criminally inefficient the administration and political leadership is. The newspapers have only mentioned power cuts between 11 pm to 12:00 pm, which, though inconvenient was accepted because there's no other alternative but to comply. However, the citizens of Laban had a horrific experience on May 25, when power was shut down from 11:30 am to 3:30 pm. It indicates the sorry state of affairs and the visionless leadership that the state of Meghalaya is facing today. It also exposes how the State Electricity Corporation is functioning in a once power-surplus state and which still has enough of resources for power production. In a century when power can be derived from so many alternative sources it is a shame that we are living in such primitive conditions! And there is no public outcry!

That this is happening in the capital city which is a tourists hub is shameful! And this is not the first time. Every day, at some busy evening or afternoon our work comes to a screeching halt thanks to the power cut. A laid-back attitude towards everything is not what we can afford at this present moment when the world has advanced so much. These

arbitrary power cuts receive only meek complaints from people because Shillong is still (by God's grace) a relatively cooler place. Given the same situation in any other city in the mainland, especially during summer months, the regulating authorities would have received some harsh treatment from the people. But Shillong being Shillong people never complain about anything. It's time the MeECL realizes that power cuts at any time of the day and night reflects total lack of unprofessionalism.

Yours etc.,
B. Bhattacharjee
Via email

Triple Talaq!

Editor,
It's good that there is a debate going on over the validity of 'Triple Talaq'. However, the adamant attitude of the Centre to abolish it at any cost and the rigid attitude of All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) over its implementation does not augur well for a healthy democracy like India. At best we need to go for a rational and humanistic solution on this issue within the greater purview of Fundamental rights to Religion under articles (25-28) and the Directive Principles of State Policy of our Constitution. Giving a communal colour to this vexed issue is the last thing that needs to happen, given the rich diversity and unity that our nation professes from millennia.

Yours etc.,
Sadiq Hussain Laskar,
Guwahati.

Major Gogoi vindicated

Editor,
While the army has proved to be hardy and well-suited to save human lives in Kashmir valley, the separatists declined to support its actions. Braveheart Major Leetul Gogoi used his ready wit to come out from the horror of a war zone without firing a single bullet and thus saved many lives. It is a proud moment for us where an officer from the region has been commended by the Army Chief on the spot. Now the Govt of Kashmir orders an enquiry alleging Major Gogoi to be a war criminal. But the millions of Indians stand for the officer who comes out clean from the Army Court of Inquiry. And there are even elite Indians and self acclaimed human right activists who speak against the security forces at international fora. These separatists are cowards, who run away from the mainstream and instigate stone pelters to jeopardise the valley for their own interests. Will our political leaders also stop witch hunting against Army action. They are a threat to our nation. Strict action under the law should be enforced to deal with such unlawful activities against national interests. Anti nationals have no right to question the army whose men and officers have sacrificed their lives for the security of the nation.

Yours etc.,
Sadiq Hussain Laskar,
Guwahati.

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah,
Via email

Can minors be treated as adult criminals?

Editor,
The argument that a minor accused, charged with a crime that falls in the category of adult crime, should be tried in a way that would be similar to what an adult would have to deal with -- does not hold water for two reasons. First, those who are under 18 do not have the right to vote and the right to marry as they are not considered as adults. Then how can you treat those children as adults when it comes to crime? Second, we cannot put the cart before the horse. Violence has become a marketable commodity which victimizes impressionable minds. So, you cannot stop the fire without disconnecting the petrol route. We should censor violence in electronic games, in games like WWF, on TV, Internet and films where even eve-teasing is being promoted as courtship!

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Dress, culture and peer pressure

Editor
Dress and dressing is an important socio-cultural practice cutting across the boundaries of nations in all the human inhabited continents. However,

dress are not just restricted to regional cultures and ethnicity in this millennium; but also to official requirements and big multinational corporate culture, fashion statement, different styles, global, local and regional brand names, weather and season based need, economy and personal choice. Hence, a specific dress appropriate for one culture, country or society may or may not be acceptable or appreciated in another culture, country or a different society. However, advocating for global human rights, one should have the freedom to choose his/her clothes and dress of choice without any restriction; unless there is a specific reason for its acceptability, security or moral and/or cultural issues associated with it. Different ethnicities and societies have different views regarding appropriate dressing and that needs to be respected too and cannot be disregarded in terms of rights only. Furthermore, societies across the planet are now unjustly driven by peer pressure and gorgeous advertisements on various media outlets. Hence we often dress falling to that pressure to fit in better with our peers and this cannot be underestimated too.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB
Canada T1J 4B

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.

COMING BACK ON TRACK



The marathon culture has really caught on in India with the growing need and awareness among the youth to stay fit, Debayani Bose reports

It is not difficult for Sourav to leave a warm bed in a cold Bengaluru morning to seek out his addiction. He and his bunch of friends head straight to BTM forest every morning to satiate their daily dose of cravings. Sourav and his friends are not the only ones who have turned to running, an inexpensive sport and increasingly a new-age addiction.

"All you need to do is put on your running shoes and start running. Once you are convinced about the sport, it doesn't take you much time to get addicted to it," he says with conviction.

"It takes some time to get into the groove and then you do not need anyone. It soon becomes an addiction which is hard to get rid of," he adds.

An ace runner now, who has participated in some of the elite runs in the country — Airtel Hyderabad Half-Marathon, Mumbai Marathon, TCS World 10K Bengaluru — Sourav took to the sport in response to the health concerns that started plaguing him when he found it surprisingly difficult to run and catch a bus.

"By the time, I boarded the bus; I had to stop to catch a breath before I could ask for a ticket from the bus conductor. I realised that day that something is horribly wrong with my fitness," says Sourav Samadder (29), a member of BTM Forest Busters, one of the many running clubs in Bengaluru.

It is the likes of Sourav who propel the growing popularity of Marathons across India.

To go back in time, it may be recalled that the first organised marathon was held in Athens at the 1896 Olympics, the start of the Games' modern era. Marathon was instituted in commemoration of the ancient time's fabled run of the Greek soldier Pheidippides, a messenger from the Battle of Marathon to Athens, who reported the victory.

The marathon technically is a long-distance running race with an official distance of 42.195 km. Every year more than 800 marathons are organised across the world and some of these belong to the Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS) that has grown since its foundation in 1982 to embrace over 300 member events in 83 countries and territories.

For a group like the BTM Forest Busters in Bengaluru, the main motto is to loop in every individual who is inter-

ested to stay fit. Thus the group of young runners is growing every day as more and more enthusiasts join the group as a means to stay healthy.

The group not only has an active gang of runners, they also offer free training programmes that would help build the stamina of runners and enjoy a run without injuring oneself.

Siddharth Jena, one of the many members of BTM Forest Busters, took to running as it seemed to be one of the easiest things to do. "I wanted to get involved in some kind of physical activity. I cannot join a gym because the hours aren't that flexible. Running seemed the easiest thing to do as you are not bound by strict timings. You can run whenever you have time," Siddharth says.

His first formal run was Wipro 10K in 2016 and is currently preparing for the tough 21K.

With the number of serious runners increasing by the day, training centres for those keen on the sport is also growing.

In keeping with the growing surge of runners in Bangalore, a number of training centres have proliferated, offering expert guidance and support. One such organisation is Pacemakers who train up novices in the sport.

Started by coach Pani, it is a running group of spirited long-distance (from 10K to marathon) runners of all abilities — ranging from novice to experienced. Coach Pani, as he is fondly called, took up serious running during his Indian Air Force days. While serving the country for 21 years, he also participated in various middle-distance running competitions and winning them. Today, he also heads Bangalore Nike Running Club.

"A structured training plan is developed for each athlete based on their current performance, fitness and individual aspirations," Pani says.

Over the years, the marathons have also emerged as a potent platform that helps non-profits raise funds for charity.

One such event is the TCS World 10K Bengaluru, an annual 10km road running competition. The competition was first held in 2008 and usually takes place on the third Sunday of May.

The race, which is AIMS-certified, begins and ends at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium, after looping through the roads of Bengaluru. The different race categories at the event are World 10K (participation restricted to International and National athletes), Open 10K (participation open



to amateur runners), Majja Run (a 5.7-km run meant for fun runners), Senior Citizens' Run (a 4.2-km run for Senior Citizens, and the Champions with Disability event (a 4.2-km event for persons with disability).

Sharing the details on this year's fundraising efforts, Murray Culshaw, Chairman India Cares Foundation, the Philanthropy Partner of the TCS World 10K Bengaluru 2017, says, "India Cares has been associated with the TCS World 10K Bengaluru since inception and we have seen a remarkable increase in the number of individuals who are using the platform to raise awareness and funds for various causes.

"This year, we also announced an initiative to 'give back' to the city, with the Cubbon Park Rejuvenation project, which we are confident that the citizens of Bengaluru will contribute back to. The need for a more caring society is growing and this is the perfect way to start than to support causes of choice and your city. We all get better together," he adds.

On the importance of marathons as a major fund-raiser for non-profits, Rajan Narayanan, President, India Cares Foundation, says, "Marathons have reached a crescendo in India with so many events happening across the country every week. Fitness is being given a lot more importance and marathons serve that purpose and also meet the social needs."

"There are some premium runs in the country like the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon, the Airtel Delhi Half Marathon and the TCS World 10K. Together these races get close to a 100,000 people running but the interesting part is that these also serve as excellent platforms for raising funds by civil society organisations. These races cited above have helped raised over Rs 200 crore in the last 10 years and it is expected that they would have raised Rs 500 crore by 2021," he added.

Civil society organisations that reach out to the public and be accountable have been able to use these platforms to showcase their cause and also raise substantial



(Clockwise from top) Majja Run participants at the TCS World 10K Bengaluru 2017 held at Kanteerava stadium; three athletes in training for the marathon race of the 1896 Athens Olympic Games, on the road from Marathon, Greece; Charibos Vasiliakos in the middle (source: Wikipedia); and women's overall winner Kenya's Irene Cheptai at TCS World 10K 2017

funds (predominantly non-restricted).

Several organisations have raised in excess of a crore at each of these events. There is more that will come in this space with smaller towns also now taking to sports and races, he informed.

Sangeetha Purushothaman, Executive Director of one of the participating civil society organisations Best Practices Foundation (BPF), says, "Through this platform, we want to be able to raise funds for the cause of women's empowerment and also connect to like-minded individuals and organisations interested in this cause."

BPF is a Bengaluru-based NGO founded in 1999, to improve the quality of life for the poor and marginalised communities through livelihood interventions.

BPF's own livelihood model Market Oriented Value Enhancement (MOVE) was bestowed with a global award for its innovativeness in increasing opportunities and enhancing livelihoods for rural youth and women.

The TCS World 10K Bengaluru, which has raised over Rs 26.34 crore for civil society organisations across all causes since its inception in 2008, continues to be South India's largest single fundraising platform, with Rs 4 crore raised to date during the celebratory tenth edition

of the run.

The funds of Rs 6.05 crore raised through the 2016 edition of the run, impacted over 80,000 individuals, directly and indirectly. Causes benefited included providing mobility aids, education in balwadis to higher studies, vocational training for livelihood, healthcare from medical camps to specialised operations, tree plantation for farmers to sustain their livelihood and setting up of long-term building foundations and supporting budding athletes in Olympic and Para-Olympic sports.

The 2017 edition witnessed the participation of 30 companies with 43 teams, over 200 charity fundraisers, and more than 6,000 donors.

Amongst the 6,000 donors running for a cause, the starting line-up included 17-year-old Ishana Sundar, a full-time high school student and a part-time astronomy enthusiast who strongly believes in empowering the young woman. Ishana will be running for Baale Mane in support of her feminist vision.

The Open 10K saw the participation of more than 13,700 registered runners, a steep increase of 12 percent. Approximately 24,000 runners took to the roads of Bengaluru this May and it has emerged as Asia's leading run over the last nine years. (TWF)

Grab the future with both hands, unless it's electrified

A spiritual friend gave me some advice last week: "Be the change you want to see in the world."

So now I have to work out how to become a giant killer robot and inspire other guys to take the same journey.

My idea is that if men are occupied fighting tournaments encased in Gundam-style robot gear, the whole masculine aggression thing will be channelled into a healthy sport, and women can get on with running the planet. Everybody's happy.

Humans must actively shape our futures — and the first item in my mailbox that day contained a perfect example.

A householder got fed up with motorists driving dangerously fast in his district, I read in a news link forwarded by reader Sunita Chou. Authorities

in the US city of Cleveland, Ohio, ignored his complaints. So the man dressed up as a road-worker and spent the day installing more than 20 official-looking speed limit signs in the area, becoming a hero to his fellow citizens.

This columnist pinged regular contributors to see if there were examples from elsewhere.

A barber in Chiang Mai in Thailand started opening for business on Wednesdays, despite a superstition that hairdressers stay shut on that

THE FUNNY SIDE
Nury Vittachi

day. Furious protesters said he'd bring a curse on the community. But he'd discovered that the practice had nothing to do with ancient tradition or luck. Some barbers had at one time got into the habit of reserving one day a week for haircuts for members of royalty — a practice no longer needed.

Talking of Thailand, one of my neighbours bought a Siamese cat, so I said 'sawatdee khrap' (hello) but it just sat there, baffled. Should I tell my neighbour it's almost definitely an imposter?

But back to our topic. The most shocking example of a man grabbing his destiny was a news item from New Zealand, forwarded by a colleague.

Doctors told a man named John Griffin that his heart was beating in an irregular rhythm and he would have to get on a waiting list for electrical treatment to jolt it back to steady beats. So he went home, strolled over to his neighbour's high voltage electrified security fence and touched it. ZAP! Electricity surged through his body — and fixed his heart problem. Doctors were horrified.

The moral of this story? The Universe has a wacky sense of humour and will sometimes reward people who do stupid, dangerous things.

This is extremely important for the male sex, as we seem to have evolved to do that stuff. How come? I asked a university scientist friend

and he said that evolution in the long run doesn't make mistakes, so guys are meant to be extreme risk-takers.

He also told me that a risk study at Nanjing University last year revealed why guys treat the eating of spicy food as a competitive sport. Researchers gave volunteers a test to measure their appetite for risk. Then they gave half the group spicy food and repeated the test. The chili-chompers had become risk-takers.

Note: Readers, keep curry-eating males in your family away from electrified fences. Unless they have climbed inside giant robots, as all right-thinking men should.

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

Make books part of your career

By Ranjan K Baruah

It is said that books are our best friends. For avid readers, it will be a joy to take up a career that concerns books.

A career in publishing could be a bibliophile's dream job.

A book is a set of sheets of paper, parchment, or similar materials that are fastened together to hinge at one side. A single sheet within a book is a leaf, and each side of a leaf is a page. Writing or images can be printed or drawn on a book's pages. An electronic image that is formatted to resemble a book on a computer screen, smart phone or e-reader device is known as an electronic book or e-book.

Publishing includes many other products apart from books. It is a process of distribution of information to the public in the form of books, literature, newspaper, periodicals, magazines and other areas. The profession is associated with printing and retailing of printed matters. Publishing industry has its own set of parameters and is mainly divided into editorial, designing, production, printing, advertising, publicity and marketing. With the advent of digital developments, books, magazines and papers, are being published electronically as e-books or e-papers. In this section we are focusing on book publishing.

Book publishing has been a traditional career. There are many leading publication houses which are associated with publication of books. With the advancement of technology and internet, we have e-books. A career in the field of publishing is becoming more promising, challenging and thrilling with the expansion of new delivery channels.

Any graduate may take up the career of book publishing. But it is always preferable to have some special training or diploma courses to be successful in this field. Traditionally, there are few publishing houses but now there are many publishing houses associated with book publishing. Several institutes and universities in India are offering degree, diploma, PG diploma and certificate level courses in book publishing. One may be in the creative and design team and some may associate with the technical aspect of publications.

There are different departments or section when it comes to book publishing. Editorial section/department is one of the most important

departments and is the backbone of a book-publishing house that deals with the making of book from the manuscript stage to its final stage. In the editorial department one can work as editor, proof-reader, development editor/project manager, project assistant, copy editor, assistant editor, sub-editor, subject editor, research editor etc.

Another important section is design section. This design section looks into the graphics and does artwork for the books. It is creating section and knowledge of computer is must as most of the designs are made with computers. In ancient days, this section was managed by artist who used to draw instead of performing through computers. Another section is related to production. It is the department that gives the final appearance to books and magazines or other published materials. Production department works together with the editorial and design departments, and jointly take decision about the look of the books, terms of its shape, size, cover, number of pages, the typeface and paper to be used, printing and binding of books.

Every business needs good branding, marketing and selling. Book publishing has sales and marketing section too. This section is responsible for book promotion, book marketing, internet marketing, conducting and managing book exhibition and fairs, organising book release programmes and sale of the books. There are special courses related to book publishing.

Employment opportunities are available in ministries and other government agencies which have their own publication divisions.

Aspirants may get opportunities in Sahitya Akademi, Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the Indian Council of Social Science Research etc. One could also work in publishing houses such as National Book Trust, NCERT and the Children's Book Trust. There are opportunities in international and national book publishers.

It can be an employment opportunity and an entrepreneurial start up for many who want to come to book publishing field. There are many creative people who write or compose are always potential source for different publishing house. This field is challenging and one needs to have confidence to excel in this area.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 9864055558 for any career related queries)

A Jekyll-Hyde nightmare

By Ratan Bhattacharjee

The third canonical incarnation of Ian Fleming's character James Bond is no more. But Roger Moore, one of the most talented performers of Hollywood living under the shadow of the superstar-spy, won a permanent place in the heart of every admirer of James Bond 007.

Without ever being a charming actor he impressed everyone as the most admired action hero of Hollywood. Born in London in the house of an ordinary policeman, he grew up unnoticed and after some training in painting and theatre activities at a local level, he played roles in the British TV channels in the sixties as in Ivanhoe, Alaskans and Maverick but most extensively as Simon Templar, the saint of Leslie Charteris's novels.

Ian Fleming's novels gave Hollywood Bond series of films and he rightly deserved an offer to star as the third incarnation of Bond for an incredible series of seven masala films at a stretch for 12 years, all filled with diabolical designs, sex and action. Gradually, he became the longest serving Bond 007, the mostly admired action hero in Hollywood. After having a debut with eminent actress Elizabeth Taylor, offers came to him for starring the Bond series and he did not need to look back.

Roger Moore amazed his admirers over the world. But in the process what was lost was realised later by none other than Roger Moore himself—the image of the 'Saint' which he won as Simon Templar in the super-hit TV show in British channels though the first one was in Ivanhoe as a maverick. Very few successful actors and actresses had this psychological crisis as Moore had suffered all his life.

In the Bond Series that he had his breakthrough in 1973 with the film made from Ian Fleming's novel 'Live and Let Die', Moore carrying off a double-breasted pinstripe Savile Row Suit and twinkle of humour in his eye with much of the elan of the young decelerating into a sensual purr emerged like the ever outstanding action hero of Hollywood. But very few knew that he never considered himself much of an actor for his role as the 'secret spy' in the seven box office-hit Bond series of films at a stretch without any parallel.

He kept on asking the rationale behind showing a spy on the stage whom everyone knows as 'spy'. This is how he put wit into his elegant suavity and educated voice to captivate the audi-



Roger Moore with Gloria Hendry (left) and Jane Seymour in *Live and Let Die*

ence for a box office hit while never failing to show incredible skill of a performer to act a deafeningly loud and chaotic scene where he is but the colourful bad guy engaged in the mission of fighting the devils. This created a lot of pains for this great man of rare talent as an actor and the Jekyll-Hyde crisis eating into his vitals.

Moore's swan song Bond, 'A View to a Kill', was in 1985. That time Moore was 58, a mature 007. After acting for 12 years he felt he had wasted his acting talent for outrageous comedy and unrealistic action spiced with sexy excess and it reminds us of the huge frustration in the mind of Sister Carrie in her last stage of life of huge glamour and fame in Theodore Dreiser's novel.

Moore's wry bemusement may amaze the audience and billions of his admirers but he regarded his role as silly as ever. His cheerful indiscreet account of his acting life, which he revealed with an easygoing openness to all, shows his creeping terror and deeper frustrations with his activities in Hollywood for the Bond series.

A lovely funny warm person to boot could be the best champion for children projects launched by UNICEF

and he was inspired by Audrey Hepburn to accept the role of UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, which Moore enjoyed more than his fight with Zorin, Drax Scaramanga Stromberg and Kananga in his seven Bond films *Live and Let Die*, *The Man with the Golden Gun*, *The Spy who Loved Me*, *Octopussy* and the final Bond, *A View to a Kill*.

But he fits the description of the character in Ian Fleming's original novels where a 30-year Bond is imagined and he started starring as James Bond 007 at the age of 45.

He was 'English-English' and quite simply the outstanding candidate for the role. Still he was not contented with his superstar position and regarded the comic role of action hero as 'outrageously funny'. He was chased by the Jekyll-Hyde crisis in his inner self. He is supposed to be the guy that all men want to be and all women want to be with.

The distinctly debonaire Moore is the only actor capable of restoring Bond to a greater height than reached by peak-period Sean Connery or Idris Elba. Moore has been a brilliant Bond bringing the character into the 21st century with a multi-layered perform-

ance that few of his predecessors or successors ever got close to. But he never had that playboy tendencies and surface confidence for thriller actions and sensual purr.

Still the million dollar question remains who really chased Roger Moore — if not those villains in the Bond series whom he fought. It is his inner self that wasted itself away for some roles he had to play for 12 years with amusing wryness when he looked back in anger. Through his lifelong work with UNICEF he showed the true meaning of being a humanitarian though on the screen he reinvented the role of James Bond with tremendous skill, charisma and humour. In real life this outstanding action hero of the silver screen is a genuine hero working for the suffering children of the world as Goodwill Ambassador.

After a brave battle with cancer he died at the age of 89 and the world will lose an actor but more than that one of the great champions for suffering children.

(The author is Associate Professor and Head of the Post Graduate Department of English, Dum Dum Motijheel College, Kolkata)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, May 28, 2017

Mercury sextile Neptune on your solar return chart denotes a good year. 2017 would be a felicitous and optimistic year for you with the blessings of planets. Tremendous gains are within the bounds of possibility now. You need to however realize that fortune only favors those who try in the first place. First half of the year would be a content period for you as there would be plenty of travel prospects and opportunities in love. Career would be fruitful too. Financial gains and professional prospects would be much better in the first half so if you wait too long, you might miss the sunrise of opportunities.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You are able to integrate forces, resources and professional aspects to achieve success in important business ventures. With mastery in your field, you achieve goals and targets on time. This is an exceptionally exciting time as professional and business opportunities are offered to you. Personal relations and business partnerships are likely to get closer. Romance gains an exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across. You are individualistic brilliant and daring in professional aspects as new projects get under way. You are overflowing with energy just channel it wisely.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You would be more accommodative and compassionate in relationships and not take things personally. Friendships, cooperation and synergy are available and you enjoy the association of your loved ones. Career advancement, a promotion or a gainful business opportunity may be offered. You win debates, competitions and sports with your dynamic energy and power. Your personal charm and charisma take you through complicated situations. Possibilities and horizons open up for you. It is the best time to share and delegate work and not carry the entire load yourself. You would listen to your intuition and guard against over indulgence in food, drink or work. Old habits can be kicked now with greater ease.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Professional situations and patterns come to the fore and there is no deception or illusion about these matters. You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional choices or difficult situations. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciprocity. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. You can draw correct conclusions from previous knowledge of people you meet again when making important decisions. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively from now onwards. A new cycle begins with the old order finishing as inner and outer changes are on the cards. Health problems are resolved and your energy is restored.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Personal relations are packed with emotions and feelings and you enjoy the company of loved ones. There is good luck attending to material affairs as there is increase of wealth and monetary gains and income. This is the right time to share your loving and personal relationships and share thoughts and ideas and spend good time in the association of your loved one. You may be involved in meetings with business associates as financial and business dealings would bring good results and gains. You can count on your professional and personal partners, as they stand by you through thick and thin. You will work in free and unrestricted space.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. Economy at home and management of business and work are important issues of the week. You connect with new people and discuss important business matters. Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill and profit. Personal relations are satisfying and you have plenty of goodwill and friendships around you. You would be attracted to new people and ideas as you are open and receptive. You would be able to complete work assignments and personal business this week with good energy and support.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)

The unpredictable is likely to happen when you least expect it. Surprises are in store for you in professional and personal matters. It would be best to be open and receptive in personal relations and family situations. A flexible approach in the work area is recommended. New people may come into your life and influence your decisions and direction. Creative opportunities should not be ignored as it is likely to bring substantial professional material gain. Don't be thrown by new developments. Balance in all areas and field of activities is recommended. You could be depleted of resources and forces if you don't manage

them properly. Meditation and spiritual pursuits can be rewarded and worth pursuing.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This phase opens up a world of romance and love in personal relations. You are cooperative with family and children. You are likely to be involved in creative past times. You would express yourself in gracious and exalted manner and influence people in authority. There could be altered ideas or plans, increase and decrease in finances and fluctuation in business. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration are strengthened through understanding and commitment. You may handle more than one project at the same time with expertise and success. Commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted effectively. Money matters take priority as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. End of the week brings fresh energy, love and romance in important relationships.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You are bold, courageous and frank while dealing with controversial, professional and family matters. You are likely to meet well known authoritative people and share ideas and spend lovely time in their association. A stimulating project should be taken as a challenge which would further and promote your business prospects. Your associates and co-workers proved to be loyal and disciplined. You make interesting and valuable connections in professional life. Visitors and communications from overseas can inspire you to be more creative. A business partnership is lucrative and supportive. Good planning and management lead to progressive and productive ventures. You may take a short break before starting on a new project to renew your energy. You are able to achieve a lot at home and at work with youthful energy.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management. You share some memorable moments with a loved one. You are in touch with innocence that comes from life lived fully, which also has a quality of wisdom and the acceptance of the ever changing wonders of life. You would express your views and comments without afraid of losing a contract and manipulate well and make things in your favour. Your social life may be restricted to business and family related obligations. Good luck in finances and opportunities is encouraging. You are restless and move into varying occupations and pay wandering visits to friends. You may change your image with good styles, fashion and grooming.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

There is conflict within and discord outside. You may be divided about business and professional matters and finally come to terms with compromise which might be the best thing to do at this time. You may disagree mentally with your partner but the love between you allows peace and acceptance. You are stronger and wiser after having gone through trouble and difficulty. It would be wiser to face difficult people and situations rather than escape as there would be victory and success in professional ventures this week. Don't take the one you love granted but show your love and appreciation. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you. Meditation is needed for gaining deeper insight into personal relations and complex situations.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You have the ability to stand alone and have strong vibration. You are independent, creative, original, ambitious, determined and self-assured. Adopting a realistic, practical and disciplined approach towards life would bring harmony at home. In professional life, this week brings huge expenses as well as financial gains from foreign business associates. You would have good support from family members and business associates. You are overly touchy and sensitive with your romantic partner. Sports and physical activities keep you fit and energetic.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You are generous with friends, and loving in family situations. You are coming across as especially smooth, and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. You stand in the middle of a doorway while making an important decision whether it is professional or personal. It would be better to listen to our own good judgment and do what is good for you. People around you could be judgmental or manipulative. Do not forget to share your feelings to the one who loves and cares for you. You are fortunate as things turn out well in difficult situations at work and home. Your financial situation looks promising if you manage it well personally rather than trust upon others. Personal relationships are warm and comfortable as you spend wonderful time with your loved one. A relaxed and light attitude would help you to overcome negative thoughts.

Artmosphere of a different kind



The natural beauty of Meghalaya inspired a group of internal and local artists to create wonders on canvas during a month-long programme at Sohra.

The International Art Residency Programme, Artists Point 2017, hosted artists from Europe, Bangladesh and India from April to May 2017.

Focusing on the idea of togetherness in art, the residency programme was able to introduce a dialogue between different cultures and spreading of education and awareness on environment through art. With this in mind, the international and national art professionals were involved in a progressive art workshop involving 250 promising children.

The students had the opportunity to learn how to use creativity in raising awareness towards the preservation of the historical evidences of our ancestors and the natural heritage of Meghalaya.

The International art workshop on environment was inaugurated by Director of School Education and Literacy Ambrose Ch. Marak and Deputy State Project Director SSA-RMSA Andrew Warjri on May 13.

From among the finalists, Nongpriang

School from Sohra took the first prize. The students living in Nongpriang village walked two hours up the steep hills to participate in the competition. These students showed their creativity and skills by weaving baskets, toys and even teaching aids from bamboos, all in a space of three hours.

The art works inspired by the beauty of Meghalaya are put up at the Asian Confluence, Laitumkhrhah, for public viewing till May 31 from 4-6pm.

The International Art Residency Artists Point 2017 was organised by the Picasso Pupils International Art Community and hosted by Shillong Public School in collaboration with the State Education Mission Authority of Meghalaya (SEMAM-RMSA), the Department of Arts and Culture, the Embassy of The Slovak Republic in New Delhi, Asian Confluence, Shillong, and with the media partners — Ageless Production and Red FM.

The Residency programme, which is running for the second consecutive year, aims to continue on an annual basis with the vision of expanding the platform of creativity among youths by using art as a language connecting diverse cultures.

Greed kills animal kingdom

(Continued from last week)

Acoustic monitoring data shows a 67% drop in vaquita activity between 2011 and 2014. Fewer than 60 are left, making them the most endangered marine mammal in the world.

The Mexican government has banned gillnet fishing throughout the vaquita's reported range, as well as given subsidies for fishermen who stay within the law. But no one chasing the Totoaba is listening.



India is also selling huge amounts of fish maw from Kolkata, Mumbai, Veraval, Porbandar, Chennai and Pudukchery. We export dried fish maws, of Eel/Vilanku/Vam, Jew fish/Kathalai/Ghol, Thread fish/Kala/Dara, Giant croaker/Panna/Kote/Kooth, Cat fish/Kelru/Petara/Singala, Bekti/Giarto perch/Waigera sea perch, and Lizard fish, to Hong Kong and other countries. Many of these fish will be extinct in the next twenty years.

What is the world doing about China?

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.people-foranimalsindia.org)

“Before your dreams can come true, you have to have those dreams.”

-- Greg Anderson

The Shillong Times

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Economy under Modi

THE three years of the Modi government can claim some significant economic successes. Macro-stability tops the list. The twin deficits on fiscal and external current account pose no threat. Annual inflation rates have been contained to under 5%. The new monetary framework to tackle consumer price inflation down to 6% and getting the RBI to do the job is a bold measure. Investors are now reasonably confident about political stability. The Nifty and Sensex are currently trading at an all time high. The reform record may not however be all that bright. Of course, the progress made by the Goods and Services Tax (GST) is quite satisfactory. All states are on the whole agreed to accept a nationwide and uniform system of taxing commodities and on value additions at each stage. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code has been introduced and it helps winding up or restructuring of failed firms. The Foreign Investment Promotion Board has been abolished. It is expected to bolster the country’s policy of ensuring ease of business.

Demonetization has of course raised a storm of controversy. It has caused great suffering to the common people. But on the other hand its collateral benefits cannot be denied. The taxpayer base has been widened, digitization has received an impetus and direct transfer of subsidies to bank accounts of beneficiaries has been welcome steps. On the dark side, investments have not been revived and employment has shrunk to a dismal extent. Not many new factories have come up. IT and real estate sectors are retrenching staff. NPAs of banks have gone up significantly. Unless there is considerable employment generation, the economy can only be shaky.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Khasi District Council in Red

Khasi Hills District Council is facing "acute financial crisis" owing to its stagnant resource base, fall in allocations from the State Government and rise in establishment costs. The Council has just enough inits coffers to meet the overhead expenses for the next couple of months only. Addressing a press conference in Shillong on Tuesday, the Chief Executive Member Mr G S Massar said that he would shortly meet the Chief Minister seeking the State Govt's "cooperation and good will" in tidng over the situation. He said that among the long-term measures the new Executive Committee was contemplating included reactivating the proposal of the Prime Minister for "direct funding" from the Planning Commission for the District Council; obtaining its "full share" of the different taxes pending with the State Govt. and turning to fisheries and cash crops as new resource base. He rejected suggestion for tax-hikes. Mr Massar stated that some five years ago, the State Govt suspended the erstwhile system of releasing outright grants-in-aid for the development projects initiated by the District Council. The State Govt since then has been releasing only 50% of the cost of projects leaving the rest on the Council. This, he said, had put a lot of the financial strain on the Council. More over, the State Govt had deducted Rs. 36 lakh from the share of the District Council being the expenses in connection with the holding of the recent District Council election in Khasi Hills. Mr Massar felt that the amount was "too high" since in the previous election in 1984 the expenses were to the tune of Rs 11 lakh. "We can go to the court but we will not enter into confrontation with the State Govt", he added. The District Council has annual revenue of Rs. 1.26 crore of which Rs. 1 crore comes from royalty on forest. The other sources of revenue are share on transport Rs. 15 lakh, professional taxes Rs. 5 lakh and mines & minerals Rs. 5 lakh and trading licence fees Rs. 1.5 lakh. On the expenditure sides the overhead expenses are Rs. 12 lakh per month (Rs. 1.44 crore annually). Mr Massar said that "unnecessary expenses" would be curtailed. Asked to elaborate, he said that maintenance cost of the ten vehicles of the Council was too high. Some economy could be exercised in this sphere. An official aide's suggestion to cut down on official tours, did not find ready endorsement from the CEM and Mr B M Lanong and Mr P M Syiem his two EM's present on the occasion. Owing to financial constraints, the Council has been unable to meet its commitment on taking up developmental programmes, he added. **Syrian Catholics want Latin Rite Priests** About 300 representatives of the Syro-Malabar Catholics from all over the city unanimously decided not to contribute any money for the Bishop and Priests of the newly formed Syro-Malabar diocese of Kalayan. In a meeting held on Sunday at Goregaon here it was decided to hold a peaceful demonstration before the Archbishop's House to seek the help of Cardinal Simon Pimenta regarding problems faced by Syrian Catholics and also to demonstrate at the national convention of Catholics to be held at the Goregaon Seminary in June a press note said here yesterday. The meeting which was organized by the United Lanti Front at St Thomas Academy, Goregaon, was attended by men and women who voiced the anxieties caused by the new Diocese.

Future of Regional Parties, Post 2018 Elections

By H. H. Mohrmen

The recent call made by Mr H S Shylla, former minister to all regional parties of the need to have a grand pre-poll alliance and his voluntary decision to step aside and support Ardent Basaiawmoit in the ensuing election has sparked a debate all over the place. Shylla's statement is a bolt from the blue for those who don't want to see regional parties working together. On the other hand, it is a ray of hope for the large chunk of regional parties' supporters in the state. But the most important question is an the impact of this move on the post 2018 election political scenario in the state and also on the future of the regional parties as such.

Some have dismissed the entire proposal and the subsequent alliance as mere pre-election gimmick and concluded that nothing concrete will come out of it because regional parties will never ever be able to work together. The naysayers remind us that this is not the first time that such a move was made and questioned how this will not meet the same fate yet again. Some are of the opinion that the very fact that the move was made by H S Shylla, the youth who almost singlehandedly led the "three-flag movement" is evidence enough that this is a genuine move, while others are sceptical because regional party leaders have the tendency to defect to the party in power in the event of a coalition government being formed.

Well, at the end of the day it depend on one's perspective whether one sees the glass half full or half empty. Whether one is a pessimist or an optimist one will have to wait and see where the alliance of these the major regional parties will take the state. Though the last alliance did not last more than year, yet Shylla deserves to be given the benefit of the doubt because unlike now, he was then only a youth leader; an actor from outside the political arena while now he is one of

the actors to make this general desire come true.

So why this urgent need of a grand alliance of regional parties? The future of the regional parties in the state is uncertain post the 2018 elections because of the advent of the two new National parties in the political scenario of the state. In the past elections in Meghalaya were a tussle between the numerous regional parties and the Congress and occasionally independent candidates also play some role. But that is no longer true now. This time around, the Congress may not be as popular as it was in the last election but one cannot deny that it is still a force to reckon with in the coming election. But it is the entry of the two other national parties in a big way in the next election which will have a drastic impact on the vote shares of the parties particularly the regional parties. The truth is, if anyone or both of the national parties make any dent in the coming elections, it will be at the cost of the regional parties. The question is whose vote share is going to be affected by the entry of these two major players?

It is said that during the elections the voters of other parties in the state fall in love with their candidates and their respective parties but the Congress' voters always fall in line, which means that the Congress is not going to be affected. But it is the vote share of the regional parties which is going to be greatly affected. The point is, if the regional parties continue to fight among themselves, the future that is in store for them is that they will be consigned to oblivion and will only find mention in the pages of history. The Congress will continue to hold to its vote shares and the two parties - the BJP or the NPP will replace the regional parties and in the future there will

be no more regional parties in the state.

If there is no regional party alliance it will be advantage NPP as it will make a big inroad into the different areas of the state and it will also play a major role in formation of the next government in Meghalaya. The current calculation is that the region-wise tussle for vote share in the ensuing election is somewhat like this: In Garo hills the dominant players are the Congress versus NPP; in the Khasi Jaintia hills it will be the Congress, the regional parties and the NPP to some extent. But after the regional parties have formed a grand alliance, it will be a different game altogether. The alliance will be a game changer, because a united regional group will be a major player now. The alliance will give the Congress a run for their money in the Khasi Jaintia hills, while the NPP which has failed to make inroads into Khasi Jaintia hills in its earlier incarnation (NCP), is hopeful that this time around it will be different.

Perhaps some will question the relevance of regional parties in the contemporary state politics and conclude that they no longer serve any purposes but of the leaders with vested interest. Some are of the opinion that the only place for the regional parties is in the annals of history, but we cannot deny the fact that till the last elections the regional parties still garnered a considerably vote share of the entire votes polled in the state. In fact if we add together the votes polled by all regional parties; it still constitutes the largest vote share in the last election.

There is still a large section of voters who strongly believe in the need to have a representation of the regional aspirations in the state and national politics. They believe that the people of the state are unique and have their own aspirations and perhaps it is this same desire which has

compelled the leaders of the regional parties to come together under one banner, to represent that aspiration. Now that the regional parties are able come together in an alliance the next job at hand is to decide on the candidates to contest as the alliance candidate in the many constituencies. Surely this is not going to be easy as there will be too many contenders for very few seats. There will be turncoats who will rebel because they were not allotted the alliance ticket to contest in the ensuing election and that is to be expected. Seat sharing will be tricky, but the very fact that the regional parties were able to come together under one umbrella is, in itself a great achievement for the regional parties.

After the alliance is worked out with the seat sharing, the next challenge is to come up with a manifesto or a common minimum program which will be a document that will guide the working of the alliance in the future.

The coming together of the regional parties in the state is for the survival of regional parties themselves because if they fail this time, then there will be no next time again. The situation will only provide leeway for the BJP and NPP to make inroads into the state's politics, and what is left for the leader to do is to write the obituary note of regional party politics in the state.

In conclusion, if the grand alliance of regional parties succeeds then the tussle in the ensuing election will be between the Congress and the grand alliance in the Khasi and Jaintia hills and the Congress versus the NPP in the Garo hills region of the state because the presence of regional parties in Garo Hills is negligible. With this new development Meghalaya's post election scenario will be interesting to watch.

Modi shine covers up mixed trends All power in one hand limits vision

By S Sethuraman

Undoubtedly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has dazzled India and other parts of the globe that he is tirelessly going round, with a brand image of a doer, but a look-back on his first three years in office has little to show on tangible outcomes to claim as major achievements for the ongoing frenzied trumpeting of BJP countrywide.

This is not to belittle a consuming focus lately on decisive steps against black money and corruption and tax evasion with enactment of required laws, all designed to ensure a cleaner economy for the future, as well as enhancing of empowerment of poorer sections, notably via universal access to banking services.

But the slide in the Indian economy could not be reversed over the three years -a stagnating, jobless growth - and the outlook for current fiscal may be a wee better, after a demonetisation-scarred year of misadventure but by no means, a take-off is likely in fiscal 2018.

Broadly, for the world economy itself and for emerging market economies, in particular, there are still risks and vulnerabilities arising out of varying degrees of growth in developed economies and a bigger question-mark over China's ability to overcome its surging debt economy-wide, which has led to its sovereign credit rating being down-graded.

India continues to parrot it is the fastest-growing economy at present which is so, not because of what we may have achieved at home, but more by a confluence of economic developments across the world of some 200 reporting nations. It is well to remember we are not alone among the more dynamic economies, looking at the South-East Asian region.

Nevertheless, that we are slightly ahead of China though after three decades may have induced some smugness. But what have we accomplished with this growth? Jobs no, greater productivity no, rise in savings and investment no.

The majoritarian Modi Government is more fixated on 2019 Lok Sabha elections and all reforms, especially structural such as ones related to land, labour, privatisation and the like, will remain on hold.

Meanwhile, BJP leadership decided, in the light of recent spectacular win in UP, and Modi image at its peak, it is time to celebrate the first three years in office at the Centre.

The political capital Mr Modi has built up on the strength of his personality and eloquence would be drawn for even bolder decisions than so far (like " p r o - p o o r Demonetisation") when time is ripe, maybe post-2019.

For the current year and near future, the Modi Government expects the one-nation one-tax (GST) to revolutionise the tax system, yielding more revenues to Government, at the Centre and in States, and that with rates determined at reasonable levels, GST would prove to be non-inflationary and indeed add significantly to GDP growth in the range of 8-10per cent.

Finance Minister Mr Arun Jaitley, with commendable effort to push GST for introduction from July one, has also cited the advantages of India becoming a common market along with reduced compliance burden for trade and industry and services at all levels. There may still be operational hazards to overcome as GST gets

going. If GST had languished for years, BJP must take the blame for its obstruction while in opposition.

Three years may be too short a period to make judgements on some policies that could only have lagged effects. In many areas, we seem to be still on learning curve. While laws against corruption and benami property transactions have been enacted, more basic issues like job drought, agricultural distress, and qualitative dimensions of human resource development are yet to be confronted. These affect the livelihood of vast majority of the population, rural and urban.

A general line of criticism of Modi Government is its failure to create jobs for the desperate younger people who had put their faith in him in 2014. The Prime Minister has not directly met such reservations on his three-year record while he has repeatedly spoken of "development" and schemes like "Make in India" and other infrastructural programmes which are assumed to generate substantial opportunities for job growth including by way of self-employment.

Notwithstanding the Government's tax and business-related enactments and continuing measures to facilitate easier doing of business so far, domestic investments have remained stalled over the last three years. With greater focus on liberalising foreign investment regime, Government may hope to gain for "Make in India" and in high-tech manufacturing areas including defence equipment.

What has been most distressing is a total disregard on the part of Modi Government for social harmony, tolerance and dissent that are associated with lively democracies. The country has been witnessing over these three years an orgy of extremist Hindutva outfits running riot, taking law into their own hands to safeguard cow protection or enforce moral codes, even committing lynchings of innocent persons.

The authorities have looked the other way. Hardly ever has Mr.Modi broken his enigmatic silence on sensitive issues while other BJP leaders merely say that law will take its own course. That the BJP/RSS leadership are committed to culture of Bharatiyata and envisaging a Hindu Rashtira ultimately has become clear.

The Prime Minister himself is least worried about criticisms of his government's "intolerance" and disturbingly allows impression to gain ground that his "nationalism" is far removed from what India's Constitution adumbrates. It is also clear from the saffronisation of academic and cultural institutions has gone on for the last three years.

Whatever the catalogue of achievements claimed in the report card, the Prime Minister has no doubt made India strong and stable and infused new confidence, even if his democratic credentials may not be taken at face value. He is too opinionated and seems to have solutions for everything under the sun. At no time had he shown himself to be a consensus-builder in this vast and diverse country with its array of opposition parties. In short, he is yet to do justice to the notion sedulously fostered of his being a 'vikas purush'. Instead we are reminded that whatever the Modi Government is doing or hoping to do, must be seen as 'Ho Raha Vikas Hai'.(IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

KPS Gill: Duty above all

Editor, KPS Gill who breathed his last 2 days ago and whose mortal remains will be consigned to flames at 4 PM on Sunday, was, by any reckoning, the tallest IPS officer of all times- not only in sheer physical stature that he carried but more so, in his extraordinary courage, exceptional leadership qualities, professionalism and in all his qualities of head and heart. Mr Gill was essentially an operations man who loved to be out there on the field facing a law and order situation or a violent mob or even leading an ambush party instead of sitting in the plush comforts of his office pushing files, answering phone calls and sipping endless cups of tea or coffee. He was a counter-terrorism expert of formidable reputation. He always remained calm and composed and remained unruffled even under the worst of crisis. His bosses and political masters, knowing their limitations, often left him to his own devices and he never looked up to them for instructions or guidance. When thrown into extraordinary situations, he often came up with unorthodox and unconventional methods. He always had his eyes focused on the objective that he sought to achieve and if he had to bend a rule or two in order to achieve the same, he was ok with it. He was a true nationalist and a patriot to the core. The objectives that he always had in mind was the larger national good. In his quest for the national good, if sometimes he had to adopt methods that ran foul of law,

he went ahead to achieve his objective.

Mr Gill also had a softer side to him. He was very humane, very supportive of and helpful to his subordinates. I personally owe him a huge debt of gratitude for help rendered by him early on in my career for which I can never thank him enough. He had a sharp intellect, a quick wit, had flair for Urdu and English poetry and wielded a facile pen. Even though he didn't write often enough, whenever he did, the articles that he wrote for leading national newspapers were eminently readable. He also authored a book on militancy in Punjab and edited a quarterly journal on conflict management which carried excellent articles on terrorism and insurgency.

Now that he is no more, the nation owes him a huge debt of gratitude for bringing back Punjab from the precipice of disaster. When the nation had all but written off Punjab with the Khalistani terrorists having a free run of its countryside, Mr Gill single- handedly brought back normalcy in the state. One can debate till the cows come home about the methods that he used to achieve this eminently laudable nationalistic objective but nobody can deny that Gill was instrumental in saving Punjab for which the grateful nation will always remember him. Now that this giant of a man, this towering personality-both literally as well as figuratively, is no more with us, let us all pray for eternal peace to the departed soul and for giving strength to the bereaved family to bear their tragic loss with fortitude.

Yours etc.,

Prem Singh, IPS(retd)
Former DGP and DG Prisons,
Meghalaya.

Arrogant traffic cop!

Editor,

Memories of the little incident of March 7,2017 in Motphran is etched in my memory and I had previously suppressed any urge to write something about it but a discussion inside a cab recently reactivated my desire to share my experience of that day.

A lady was about to board the cab that I was in, from Motphran but the driver was told by the traffic police to move so he had to stop a little further ahead. When the lady finally entered the cab she started a conversation and at the end of it, we all agreed that the passengers must at least be allowed to board the cab with dignity because in the first place that junction in Motphran is a pick up/drop off zone. Secondly if the traffic police pushes drivers to move in a hurry it may cause injury to passengers especially old people and children. The lady ended the conversation on a reflective note saying that one should write about this.

Finally, coming to the memorable incident, a traffic police was moving around that morning in Motphran like a roaring lion looking for its prey. He started banging on the taxis and his predatory stare was seeking for the first prey. The taxi drivers were operating like vulnerable prey and with such timidity hoping to avoid being the first victim. And lo and behold, a few minutes later the roaring lion had caught his first prey. A hapless driver had just

picked up a passenger when all of a sudden that traffic police jumped on the opportunity to catch the supposedly errant driver. It was a matter of split seconds and the driver was only doing his job when that happened. He initially asked the lone passenger to vacate the cab so that he can get in! When the driver refused to let that happen the policeman high-handedly tried to drag him out of the car. All the while I was watching this whole episode with utmost disgust. The audacity of the traffic official to display his arrogance was beyond belief, but what incensed me the most was when he tried to drag the driver out from the car. My feet just naturally led me to that place of action. I basically told him to let go of the driver. Taken aback and stunned at what I told him, he let the driver go. I'm not trying to paint the traffic officials with the same brush. Most of them in and around the city seem honest and amicable. He's one black sheep tarnishing the image of the whole Department. What I'm trying to say is that an educated and a vocal citizenry is the most essential ingredient of a vibrant democracy and responsible citizens everywhere must speak out against any injustice ,whether it is committed by those in power or members of the general public.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Viaemail

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

"A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for."

--- Cato the Elder

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 30, 2017

KSU back to their old tricks

THAT a students' body should be overly bothered about the coming of a railway station to a particular point in the State of Meghalaya when another region in the same State is benefitting from the railway services is absurd. Khasi Students' Union (KSU) consult the people of Meghalaya to solicit their views about the coming of the railways closer home? Has the KSU done a cost-benefit analysis which it can share with the public and from from which vantage point it can argue about the adverse effects of the project? To say that the railways will result in infiltration is a mere assumption not based on scientific analysis. How come the KSU was never concerned when a similar kind of infiltration happened in the coal belts of Jaintia Hills just because the locals are unwilling to mine coal in risky circumstances and take the risks that the outsiders are willing to on lower wages?

The sudden explosive outburst from the KSU coming close on the heels of the 2018 elections reminds us of similar agitations in the past when the students' body would be used by those with political aspirations to whip up public sentiments and create a fear psychosis among the voters. Ethnocentrism has a limited appeal today. Things have changed; the younger generation is looking out for job opportunities beyond the government. They have no time for futile agitations that are seasonal and have short term appeal. If one is to check out the list of office bearers of the KSU one would be better briefed as to how many of those are actually students. A students' body that is populated largely by non-students with a vested interest can no longer mislead the people of Meghalaya. While there is need for a civil society in a democracy so as to temper an oppressive state, violence as a mode of protest is uncalled for. It's good that the state has taken swift action and arrested the trouble-mongers. A strong message needs to be sent to all interest and pressure groups that arson and violence cannot be tolerated and have no place in a democracy, but that reasoned argument is the way forward.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

ACKSA threatens to intensify stir on central varsity

The All Cachar-Karimganj Students Association (ACKSA) has threatened to intensify its agitation if their demand for establishing a central university in the Cachar District of Assam was not honoured through a legislation within this month. Association President Mr Pradip Dutta Roy told newsmen here today that they were eagerly awaiting a Bill on this issue, expected to be brought in

Parliament this month. He said they had reasons to believe that the centre might not go ahead with the bill for establishing a central university in the Barak Valley following "severe political pressure", reportedly from the Assam Government. Mr Dutta Roy said they had earlier agitated on this issue and would not hesitate to launch "a bigger movement and face more sacrifices" if their long-standing demand was not met.

TO THE EDITOR

India should protect labour intensive sector

Editor, In his article, "Agricultural on reverse" (ST, May 25, 2017), Moin Qazi has zeroed in on the plight of the small farmers of our country. As a matter of fact, step - motherly attitude towards agriculture and small enterprises is largely responsible for dismal scenario in our employment generation. A paradigm shift in the strategy on jobs is indeed a crying need of the hour as India is fighting shy of job creation. According to recent Labour Bureau data, India has been losing 550 jobs per day. Instead of protecting labour intensive sectors like farming, unorganised retail, micro and small enterprises that mainly contribute to current livelihoods in our country, we are going gaga over capital intensive technology forgetting our basic needs. Yours etc.,

Sujit De, Kolkata

Women not safe at home too!

Editor, Nothing can be so shocking and condemnable as the news, 'Father-son duo molested daughter/sister', (ST, May 24, 2017) The news should prompt hundreds of questions but we usually keep quiet by merely cursing the perpetrators. Of course, in a rage, we may add that the 'sick-minded perverts' must be hanged immediately, and women are never safe even at home, blah, blah, blah. And thereafter, we just retreat from the realities. We hardly make any attempt to cast our gaze beyond the horizon of "capital punishment."

Frankly speaking, will harsher laws and "hanging" deter such sexual predators in future? Will our screaming and ranting solve the problem? I am doubtful. Yes, with every passing of a day,

If you can't dazzle them with brilliance battle them with bull. A truism which comes to mind as the Modi Sarkar rolls out its three-year report card need facts, figures, data and statistics, no matter statistics are unreliable facts from reliable figures.

Sure, Prime Minister can overwhelm with his speaking skills continuing to ride the wings of glory and fame for a new order of aache din. Certainly, he has saturated airwaves, social and digital media with his relentless onslaught of ushering in change asserting that "people have become active partners in governance as there is mutual trust between the Government and the people." Sic.

Unquestionably, everyone laps up every word bespoken by him. Yet when one draws up the balance-sheet of his Government, can the Prime Minister brush under the carpet the fact that the situation sadly continues to remain stagnant ---status quo ante? Has Modi walked his talk of Saath Hai, Vishwas Hai...Ho Raha Vikas Hai and delivered? Has he brought about inclusiveness, made minorities comfortable and won their confidence? And where are the jobs, the promised development, infrastructure, quality education even Swatch Bharat, the Aache Din? Or, should one believe his detractors who see Modi as a filibuster of a "fundamentalist Party"?

Undoubtedly, he has outsmarted the Opposition and it is in total shambles. A fragmented, leaderless and directionless anti-establishment in its elusive quest for a coherent narrative to take on the BJP defines Modi's three years in office.

A desperation that borders on a crisis post the Saffron's electoral sweep in UP and its expanding electoral footprint in the North-East has ensured that Modi is master of all he surveys. He continues to astride the tiger called India trampling all who come in his way as he takes giant strides

By adding a pro-people plank to his outreach a la demonisation he has further shrunk space for his rivals to manoeuvre and marginalized them. The UP win underscores that Modi has not been hurt by the antipathy of Muslim voters resulting in troubled times for rivals, all clueless

Three Years of NaMo Vishwash hai, vikas kab?

By Poonam I Kaushish

groping in the dark. Add to it the fact that they lack a mascot to match NaMo given Rahul's present leadership style and you have a disaster.

Moreover, the Sangh has laid a multi-level intricate trap for his enemies. One, through Hindu polarization, notwithstanding loud noises against gau rakshaks, street tactics of saffron stormtroopers, caste and communal violence, the Hindus are one.

Remember, his shamshan-kabristan, Diwali-Ramzan comments targeted base sentiments tapping into resentment against Muslim appeasement. Thereby, killing the appetite of the pseudo-secularists. Two, cutting across caste lines he successfully used notebandi to rid BJP of its Brahmin-Baniya image while the Opposition waits for a 'big idea'

Call him a narcissist, dictator or a Hindu zealot, yet NaMo's approval ratings continue to remain high. According to a recent survey he has got the thumbs up from over 70 per cent Indians, ranks among the top five world's greatest leaders, is in the top ten of Forbes most powerful people worldwide and is the 'most-followed' person on Twitter and Facebook.

Perhaps, that explains his perceived arrogance running a one-man rock band albeit concentrating power in the PMO. A one-way street full of staccato monologue, no dialogue and questions are a strict no-no. He uses Modisque 'direct marketing' format and delivers a speech every 1.9 days (45.6 hours) and counting.

Notwithstanding, the Opposition dubbing his three years as "disappointing", it has been a roller coaster ride, a bag of mixed fortunes for the Government. At one end of the spectrum, surgical strikes against Pakistan Occupied Kashmir marked a huge strategic and tactical shift, accentuating an-eye-for-an-eye, and tooth-for-a tooth plot. Ties with Pakistan and China are icy and relations with Russia, once India's time-tested friend too seem to be in the doldrums.

dormant sex-hormones of even tender children.

If we are seriously worried about the degradation of the society then why don't we look for a permanent remedy to fix all ills? Let's minutely examine what actually has been fanning the flame of sexuality in a certain breed of males including under-aged ones who have begun to venture to walk on the wrong path. One concerned US Christian organization had carried out a survey. Besides many other weird surprises, the NGO found that most of 10/11 year-olds know the nitty-gritty of carnal bestiality. Many teenage boys hold women only as objects of lust. Is it not a serious clarion call for us, and a matter of great humiliation? Should we still fiddle while the households around are burning in the fire of sinful lust? As guardians, is it not our foremost duty to see that our children are not affected by obscene stuff served by the media, or the filth readily available on the

The audacious notebandi was one of the boldest policy moves in Independent India. Alongside the passage of the GST bill, power and banking sector reforms have also been big economy drivers. Some 90 lakh new income tax payers, India's market capitalisation of \$2 trillion and record levels of foreign direct investment.

Further, the Government is going hammer and tongs against the corrupt. That Modi means business is obvious when leaders like Congress's Sonia-Rahul, ex-Finance Minister Chidambaram and son, RJD's Laloo and daughter, BSP Mayawati's brother have been charged for various acts of omission and commission.

True, Ujjwala to provide cooking gas connections to poor households, direct bank transfer, mobile banking, women empowerment, electrification and distribution of LED bulbs, Security Insurance Plan with over 10 crore people being enrolled and housing for all has blunted the Rahul jibe of 'suit boot ki sarkar'

Startlingly, for reasons best known to him, Modi has still to address key developmental issues that continue to exercise people: employment and housing before toilets! Enforcing basic state functions like law and order, preventing crime against women and children, inflation, illiteracy and ill-health are the touchstone of the much-hyped and illusionary deal of roti, kapada aur makan. Look at the irony. Cellphones go abegging, yet people continue to beg for food.

The most notable failure of the Government is that its catchy slogan of minimum government, maximum governance touted as a new power paradigm of providing baggage-free good governance to unshackle moribund laws and State has come to bite him and how! Today, alas, the Government has its fingers in all economic and social policies for change, down to deciding if people should eat meat and drink.

Economically, the State has not retreated from public sector disinvestment and no strategic sale has happened. Talk abounds of offloading Air India since 2015, but zilch. Does the NDA have the appetite for privatization? On

the ease of doing business front according to the World Bank India stood at 130, 155th at starting business, 185th in dealing with construction permits, 138th in registering property, 166th in enforcing contracts and 108th in trading across border.

His pet project of making Bharat Swatch by 2019 sans water and toilets seems a tall order. The corridors of Government offices stink to high heaven, forget the congested residential areas with garbage strewn all across roads. Less said the better of health care. Shamefully, 1 in 3 of the world's malnourished children live in India with 1,500 dying every day and risking the future of another 6 million.

Moreover, there is political disquiet over Modi's failure to curb his fringe rabid Hindutva brigands who espouse communal polarization. This has corroded inter-community relations, to an extent where discrimination against the minority community seems to be par for the course. Less said the better about allegations of Saffronisation of education.

What next? Politically, can Modi change India? Certainly, he is no magician who can cure India of its over 60 years ills expediently, despite his brand of politics. The next general election is due in 2019 and, to a large extent, the outcome will depend on Modi's management of the optics and his Government's ability to generate jobs to meet the growing aspirations of voters. Of course, he can enhance his Government's performance by addressing weak areas and can convert threats into opportunities. Saath and Vishwas alone about Vikas will not usher Aache Din. Will his naqaab of aache din encompassing roti, kapada, makaan and naukri be unmasked?

Certainly he has redefined politics and promises further change. Simultaneously he needs to invigorate the system and fortify democratic institutions. Importantly, can and will Modi be able to reconstruct the language of democracy. Remember, leaders don't build democracies; people do. ---- INFA

dispassionate philosophers and level-headed court judges who can go deeper to analyze all data provided by the above experts. And thus, based on empirical deliberation and brainstorming we must not hesitate to make the sternest laws and that will address issues that contribute towards corrupting the mindset of society. Value-based education for children should be made compulsory.

It's important that for the sake of our children we should not compromise anymore and remain mute. Full responsibility lies on our shoulders to save the society from falling. So, let's have one voice to condemn the sex-peddlers of any kind. No pervert should violate the modesty of womanhood, and no fire of incest burn the very sacred fabric of the household.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong-2

Placing China's OBOR in the economic narrative

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

In recent times few economic developments have brought in so much curiosity as the Chinese flagship OBOR initiative. OBOR or One Belt One Road initiative is China's plan to connect three continents that focuses on connectivity and trade across Eurasian countries. With China remaining the focus the OBOR initiative is an attempt to replicate the Silk Route which ran in medieval times coupled with Maritime Sea Road or MSR.

The basic infrastructure network covering almost sixty countries are structured along six corridors and one maritime route. The six corridors include: the New Eurasian Land Bridge, running from Western China to Western Russia; the China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor, running from Northern China to Eastern Russia; the China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor, running from Western China to Turkey; the China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor, running from Southern China to Singapore; the China-Pakistan Corridor, running from South-Western China to Pakistan and finally the Maritime Silk Road, running from the Chinese Coast over Singapore to the Mediterranean. The cumulative anticipated investment range between US\$4 trillion and US\$8 trillion. The OBOR initiative is expected to bridge the infrastructure gap that countries around the world

OBOR however has rightly brought focus on the kind of foreign aid that helps a nation. One school of economists believe that the right path to development is massive 'brick and mortar' push. A massive capital investment, in the form of roads, industries and others which would kick-start the local economy. There is another school of foreign aid and development that believes the first would only lead to emergence of cartelisation and contractors of local economy who would never let the potential bloom. Instead they advocate the development of long term solutions in terms of capacity building and human resources development. Instead of investing in buildings and roads alone countries must endeavour to train the people and develop the human potential. It would be interesting to see the direction which OBOR embraces. Indian investment in Africa in contrast however has been of the second type. India has consistently chosen to develop the human potential of partner countries in Africa through scientific partnerships, cross cultural students' exchange and massive scholarship programmes that run across Africa.

The initial signs from OBOR in the above regard however signal the direction towards the first school of thought. Most of

The danger of economic hegemony over a nation's fortunes is real and that's how the OBOR initiative is designed. At the same time it would be foolhardy to assume that nations would surrender their national sovereignty or pride at the altar of the Chinese diktat. The Sri Lankans effectively negotiated and eventually pushed the Chinese out of the Hanbantota port when the question was of Sri Lankan interests.

would need in the next few years.

The OBOR initiative has however opened up questions on economics, polity and international relations. At the outset there is no doubt that OBOR signals the emergence of a new world order, an order where China is firmly placed at the centre. Secondly there is a marked difference between the OBOR initiative and the Marshall plan which the US executed during the development of New Economics. In the Marshall plan the European nations were only provided money which would kickstart their own economies via massive government spending on creating capital goods. On the other hand via OBOR China promises not only to bring its own investments but to also decide how that form of investment would be while also ensuring a permanent benefit to the Chinese economy through the same. The danger of economic hegemony over a nation's fortunes is real and that's how the OBOR initiative is designed. At the same time it would be foolhardy to assume that nations would surrender their national sovereignty or pride at the altar of the Chinese diktat. The Sri Lankans effectively negotiated and eventually pushed the Chinese out of the Hanbantota port when the question was of Sri Lankan interests. Similarly Myanmar too had to renegotiate terms of treaty with the Chinese when local population protested against the same. Hence the sceptre of economic domination is often overplayed.

the loans that the countries would get would come attached with a number of stringent conditions such as sourcing input resources from China. A large number of labourers have to be imported from China as well. Most of the countries of the OBOR spectre run huge loan deficits with China and OBOR will only seek to enhance it. Often without proper savings rate, massive infrastructure rates would only lead to building of roads and bridges to nowhere. In the context of domestic economy of China itself, massive investments have led to building of ghost towns and roads to nowhere. Hence countries have to tread the OBOR route carefully.

The most important debate in India, however is how this country chooses to position itself within the OBOR framework. By missing the OBOR meet India has made its displeasure clear regarding the initiative itself. The problem and the resistance towards OBOR are twofold. First there is a threat that China would economically encircle India by partnering with all nations around it within the OBOR initiative. The second objection stems from Chinese presence in Pakistan which does not sit well with Indian security establishment. Hence the discomfort with OBOR initiative is understandable. Yet one cannot shy away from the fact that OBOR is a distinctive reality and India will have to adapt and adjust itself to this changing paradigm in the coming era.

(Views expressed by the author are personal)

"A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams."

--- Aristophanes

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Modi to Europe

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi is focused on external relations. In pursuance of his well-defined objectives, he is on a European odyssey visiting Germany, Spain, Russia and France. He is going at an opportune moment as US President Donald Trump has moved out of Europe causing hard feelings in NATO countries. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has rued the fact that Europe could no longer depend on others which is a reference to the US and the UK. The political panorama in Europe has changed following Brexit and Trump saying that EU member nations should shoulder greater responsibilities for their defence, especially against an expansionist Russia. It will be presumptuous to say that the situation is to India's advantage, that Delhi should move in as Washington moves out. But India should make the most of the opportunities that the change in Europe presents.

Brexit opens up the possibility of a mutually beneficial India- UK free trade bill. Brexit also puts pressure on EU to finalise its trade agreement with India. An understanding between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin will be India's interest and Modi will do well to prompt them to bring it about. Another major item on the agenda should be Climate Change. The Paris agreement was a landmark event. The US should provide leadership in this crucial area. It is unfortunate that President Trump has refused to commit to the 2015 Paris Accord at the recent G7 Summit and may take the US out of the pact. That may be a disaster as it will cause China to run the show. Modi's visit to Europe should also reduce tension over West Asia, following the reformist victory in Iran.

LOOKING BACK

April 14, 1989

Meghalaya Assembly Laloo denies allegations of malpractices in school constructions

Meghalaya Minister for Community and Rural Development Dr R C Laloo has rejected opposition criticism about the manner in which 1000 Primary Schools were being constructed by his department. In the Meghalaya Assembly on Tuesday he said that there were "no malpractices" in this regard. Replying to a motion tabled by Mr E K Mawlong (HSPDP), Mr Laloo countered the "constant criticism" by categorically stating that the CRDD had a "commendable" track record. The Minister categorically stated that there were "no malpractices" regarding the methods of purchase and allotment of work and defended the "centralized purchase" of certain items. He denied that the Department had dealings with any "benami" firm.

Touching upon the supplies of materials including MS rods, Mr Laloo said that penalties would be imposed on all suppliers who fail to meet their commitments on time to the tune of a deduction of five percent of the amount payable to them per week. This penalty would be imposed after examining the reasons for delay in the supply.

Rejecting the contention that the department was purchasing sub-standard material, he said that some of the quality available in the country. He said that the department had received no complaints from any of the BDOs about the substandard quality of buildings materials. The project was being closely monitored by the District Planning and Development Council, he said. Referring to the "praise" bestowed on the Meghalaya Government Construction Corporation (MGCC) by the members of the House on earlier occasions, Dr Laloo mentioned that the MGCC

functioning does not involve the community, and wondered why the members were finding fault with the CRDD Department, which required the maximum community participation in all its programmes. There was no question of taking away the dignity or insulting the Managing Committees of the rural schools in any manner.

Answering to an allegation by Mr Mawlong that the Block Development Officers had thrust the responsibility for the construction of the schools on the Managing Committees, and that adequate funds were not provided, Mr Laloo stated that responsibility for the completion of the work rests with the BDOs and not with the managing committee. The managing committees were expected to help in providing means to lift the materials to the site, and aid the workforce a part of the community involvement. In fact, the Department had received a lot of support from the various village communities. Mr D D Lapang, who is also the Education Minister supplemented Mr Laloo's reply by adding that the Govt of India had relaxed the date of completion of the school buildings scheme till September this year. A committee had been formed headed by the Director of Public Instruction to monitor and supervise the construction of school buildings.

Mr Lapang also said that the MGCC had expressed its inability to under take the building of more school since it lacked infrastructure. The CRD Department, when approached, magnanimously agreed to accept this additional workload. The Education Department had allotted some 806 units to the CRDD.

Is there a magic key to explain or counter terrorism?

By Munmun Majumdar

Recently two notable French theorists, Gilles Kepel and Oliver Roy engaged in a debate over different interpretations of contemporary extremism. While Oliver Roy highlighted the dysfunctional individual who enacts violence and finds an excuse for their internal rage, that ideology becomes a cover for violent individuals and therefore it is neither about society nor about Islam per se, for Gilles Kepel on the other hand and in the French context, holds the society responsible and coupled with a particular interpretation of Islam, associated with Wahabism that justifies terrorist violence against a hostile world.

The fact that these scholars disagree so fundamentally is indicative of the reality that there is no one answer. Perhaps different individuals are probably drawn to acts of terror, and militant organizations, for more than one reason. Structural reasons in society are certainly important, making extremist narratives credible; individual psychology is also a factor, as not every young immigrant becomes a killer; and, an ideology that legitimates violent actions.

The identified suicide bomber the 22-year-old, Salman Abedi, detonated a shrapnel laden improvised explosive device at Manchester Arena in Manchester, England, after a concert by American singer Ariana Grande, at the exit, as concertgoers were leaving. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the deadly explosion in which twenty-three adults and children, including the bomber, were killed and 116 were injured, some critically. Born to a refugee parent of Libyan decent living in Manchester Salman Abedi went to a UK university but dropped out. He even worked in a bakery and supported Manchester United football club. From the scant information available so far he had partially integrated but

found it difficult and attacked the country where he was born and had grown up.

In the case of St. Petersburg Metro Bombing that ripped through the metro line in St. Petersburg on April 3, 2017, had claimed 16 lives, including that of the suicide bomber, and seriously injured over 50 people. The bombing coincided with President Vladimir Putin's visit to the city, and was obviously a message threatening him and Russia for anti-terrorism policies.

The responsibility for the St. Petersburg Metro bombing was placed on Akbarzhon Jalilov, an ethnic Uzbek from Osh in south Kyrgyzstan holding a Russian passport. He had been identified through both CCTV coverage and DNA traces found on the bombs. Akbarzhon Jalilov was born in Osh in 1995 and moved to St. Petersburg with his father in early 2000, where he did his schooling. His school peers found him to be quiet and accommodating. While his parents returned to Osh in 2011, Akbarzhon Jalilov continued to live in Russia to study, and even procured Russian citizenship.

His VKontakte (the Facebook equivalent in Russia) has the usual feeds like any other of his age on pop music, martial arts, etc. Akbarzhon Jalilov, had held a number of jobs in St. Petersburg, that included working as a sushi chef, and had shown no overt signs of radicalization. In February 2017, Akbarzhon Jalilov had visited Osh, his hometown, which is in the Fergana Valley, a region that spans Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and is said to be the centre of radical Islam in the region. On his return, he rented an apartment in the centre of St. Petersburg. There was nothing in his background to raise red flags. Hence, the April 3

attack shocked the Russian Federal Security Bureau (FSB) that was on a state of heightened alert. The attack was certainly well planned, and seemed similar to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) inspired lone wolf attacks similar to those committed by Omar Mateen in the US at a night club in Orlando, and by Khaled Massoud in Westminster, London, etc.

The ISIS applauded the act but did not claim responsibility and its public statement on the incident merely supported all jihadi action against Russia, with no reference to the propaganda video, titled 'We will burn Russia', showing a fallen Kremlin and Putin with bullet holes in his head, that had been circulated through the 'Amaq' media channel used by the ISIS. Putin's reaction to this incident was fierce and unequivocal. His statement that said "To Forgive the terrorist is up to God. But to send them to him is up to me" after the attack went viral on the Internet.

Unfortunately, such trends appear to be having an impact on India as well. Unrest in Kashmir is one such example. Sponsored calls for Azadi in the valley is showing signs of shifting to refusing to live in a secular India, as well as, to set up an Islamic caliphate. Zakir Musa, became the Hizb ul-Mujahideen Commander, after the death of Burhan Wani boldly claimed that he was against nationalism and would only work for establishing the rule of Islam — Dar ul-Islam. The Hizbul Mujahideen leadership and the Hurriyat leaders have distanced themselves from Musa's views and expelled him from the party. However, the example of the Chechen agitation transforming from territorial insurgency into Islamic terrorism is before us to implore its deadly consequences if not acted upon before it is too late.

This brings us to the question of why some (generally young) people are

drawn into extremism and terrorism. Undoubtedly, in the wake of the Manchester bomb attack on 23 May 2017, it is likely that increased attention will be given to the question of why and how seemingly modern, young, people become radicalized. Many theories, often empirically based on profiles and interviews with former extremists already exist. Marc Sageman, the American counter-terrorism specialist, has spoken about the "bunch of guys" theory, like wise scholarship has shown that a disproportionate number of extremist militants have been engineers. While these studies have been empirically based, they are not adequate to explain the so-called lone wolf attackers, or provide a catchall profile.

The problem gets magnified when one looks for the factor, which leads to radicalization. All three factors i.e. psychology, society and ideology identified by Gilles Kepel and Oliver Roy have a role to play. Arguing that one of these is the most crucial would be akin to ignoring the complexity of individuals. While a single theory explaining every aspect of terrorism or radicalization is attractive, it may not be possible to find that magic key. The theories of Gilles Kepel, Oliver Roy, and Marc Sageman are important, but it cannot be concluded that they have provided a view of the entire picture more so because no single factor, or idealized profile, will fit all terrorists or potential terrorists. Moving forward therefore a holistic approach in developing a positive counter strategy while dealing with the complexity involved rather than in seeking that illusive magical key.

(The writer is Associate Prof, Dept of Political Science NEHU, Shillong.)

TO THE EDITOR

Dalit uprising!

Editor,
Dalit uprising is a natural reaction to caste hatred which is still raising its ugly head. On caste supremacy and separatism, Swami Vivekananda had said, "There is an old superstition in Bengal that if the cobra that bites, sucks out his own poison from the victim, the man will survive. Well then, the Brahmin must suck out his own poison." The onus is indeed on the higher castes to address the current issues.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Cruelty exposed

Editor,
The Khasi-Pnar community takes prides in being loving, kind, merciful and above all God-fearing. But the recent violent video clip of an incident that took place in Khliehriat which went viral on the social media network showing a young boy being beaten brutally for his 'fault' of asking for his due wages from his employer and later being falsely accused of stealing things is simply absurd, inhuman and deserves condemnation. I applaud Agnes Kharshiing of CSWO and Batesi a local media channel for having taken evidence and lodging an FIR. We are yet to hear more from so-called organisations that trumpet their "love" for the

community and their silence speaks volumes of their sincerity. The police at Khliehriat, as far as I know from a source who was working, and later resigned from the police force is that the police in Khliehriat are "highly" unqualified leave alone being professional or knowledgeable of laws when dealing with heinous crimes such as this one that was beamed on social media. Perhaps the DGP should initiate sensitization classes for the lower and middle rung personnel of the police department on human rights law and other sections of the law which will somehow improve their efficiency.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong:

Improving connectivity in the NorthEast

Editor,
With the construction of Dhola-Sadiya bridge in Assam, Govt. Of India has achieved yet another milestone in connecting its different fringe areas with mainland India. With a length of 9.15 Kms the bridge at best can be said to be an engineering marvel. Hope the Govt. of India Initiates many more projects like this to remove communication bottlenecks in different remote areas of India and particularly Northeast India.

Yours etc.,
Sadiq Hussain
Guwahati

Back-handed compliment for Shillong

Editor,
I want to congratulate Shillong and its inhabitants for working so hard to make Shillong proud by upgrading its rank of 276 from No 53 in the recent Swachh ranking conducted by the Ministry of Urban Development in January/February 2017. Meghalaya has only one city - Shillong but the Government cannot even keep it clean. This is a matter of shame and concern. Waste management in Shillong is almost non-existent. It is high time the Government thinks of outsourcing waste management to other private agencies to keep Shillong clean as the Municipal Board under the Urban Affairs Department of the State Government has failed on all fronts to maintain cleanliness. The employees of the Municipality should be given a golden handshake as the 4th grade employees working there are lazy, non-committal and do their job haphazardly. As can be seen while passing through Police Bazar/ Barabazar, the hawkers have hijacked the entire footpath and narrow lanes adjoining the main road hence pedestrians are forced to walk on the main road thereby risking their lives, all thanks to the NGOs and people in the higher echelons who work tirelessly for the hawkers! From what I could gather, some agents are collecting money from hawkers for payment to the

higher ups! Who are those higher ups? Only the CBI inquiry can unearth this.

It is also surprising to read in the local newspapers that some politicians blame the Central Government for Shillong's poor ranking and allege that is politically motivated. The Government which has absolutely no control over hawkers and is unable to maintain cleanliness has no right to be in power. My humble suggestion is that the dustbins which have been removed some years ago should be restored as it is observed that littering has increased after removal of public garbage bins. The bins should be constructed with separate compartments for biodegradable and non-biodegradable items (blue & green). Vehicles collecting the garbage should come in pairs to collect the segregated garbage. This will help to a great extent to keep Shillong clean.

With so many schools in the city why don't we take the help of the school authorities to send their wards (by turn) once a week to Police Bazar and Bara Bazar to enforce cleanliness and to impose fines on law breakers? Last but not least I would request the inhabitants of Meghalaya not to compare Shillong to Scotland as we are nowhere near Scotland in terms of cleanliness and waste management.

Yours etc.,
B.S. Blah
Shillong-2

Tobacco: The Silent Killer of Meghalaya

Jahnabi Hazarika, Sandra Albert

Tobacco use is one of the world's biggest public health threats as it is a leading cause of preventable disease and death. Every year, May 31 is observed as World No Tobacco Day globally. This is an initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Secretariat of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) to highlight the health risks associated with tobacco use. The FCTC encourages governments to adopt effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption. The WHO FCTC is a global public health treaty that has been signed and or ratified by 180 countries. India is a Party to the WHO FCTC since the Convention entered into force on February 27, 2005 and is legally bound to implement the provisions of this international treaty.

According to the WHO tobacco use accounts for more than 7 million deaths worldwide every year. In India nearly a million people die annually from causes related to tobacco use. Yet, India is the second largest consumer and third largest producer of tobacco. Apart from the smoked forms that include cigarettes, bidis and cigars, a plethora of smokeless forms of tobacco products are available in the country. To control tobacco use the Government of India enacted the Cigarettes and Other tobacco products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act-COTPA in 2003. It is the principle law governing tobacco control in India. It is comprehensive, covering many aspects including but not limited to: restrictions on smoking in public places; prohibition of advertising, promotion and sponsorship; prohibition of sales to minors (below 18 years of age) and within 100 metres of educational institutions; packaging and labelling as prescribed under the law with appropriate pictorial warning and penalties on violations of the law. The Government of India now mandates 85% pictorial warnings on both sides of the tobacco product packages.

In order to facilitate the effective implementation of the Tobacco Control Law, to bring about greater awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco as well as to fulfil the obligations under the WHO FCTC, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India launched the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP) in 2007-08. To curb the use of tobacco, warnings are also flashed on cinema and TV screens against its harmful effects across the country. Following a Supreme Court order of September 2016 on banning of chewing tobacco products, the Government of India had issued a complete nation-wide ban on sale of food products containing tobacco and nicotine as ingredients. These include Gutka, Paan Masala, Zarda and tobacco-based flavoured mouth fresheners. A dedicated national programme, legislations, enforcement of bans and sustained campaigns from time to time against tobacco use have shown its first sign of success. Data from National Family Health Survey 2015-16 (NFHS-4) shows a decline in the national figures for the use of all forms of tobacco from around 11% to 7% among women and from 57% to 45% among men, in the past decade.

But Meghalaya showed an alarming increase in the use of tobacco among men and women. NFHS-4 reveals that 32% of the women and 72% of the men use some form of tobacco in Meghalaya. The high prevalence of tobacco users in the North-east region was also evident in the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS-India 2010) which showed Meghalaya to have a prevalence of 55%.

Most people know by now that tobacco use has harmful effects on health but the extent and severity is still not adequately understood. Apart from cancers, tobacco use is a major risk factor for cardiovascular diseases (heart

attacks, strokes), diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases which are some of the leading causes of death worldwide. Any form of tobacco use, smoking or smokeless, can place a person at high risk for a wide range of cancers including cancers of the lung, larynx, mouth, oesophagus, pharynx, stomach, urinary bladder, kidney, liver, stomach, pancreas, colon, rectum, and uterus. Nicotine, one of the many harmful chemical substances in tobacco is the major cause of addiction. Non-smokers are exposed to second-hand smoke (passive smoking) which is the smoke a smoker breathes out or that comes from the tip of a burning cigarette. When this smoke is inhaled, it can directly affect the heart and blood circulation of the non-smoker and their health over time.

According to the latest National Cancer Registry Program, some of the highest incidence of cancer rates related to tobacco use in the country was observed in Meghalaya (male 65%, female 42%). In East Khasi hills district 70% cancers in men and 45% in women were attributable to tobacco use. Meghalaya also has the highest proportions of oesophageal (food pipe) cancers in the country. The East Khasi Hills district has highest rates of tongue cancer and hypopharynx cancers in the world.

In Meghalaya consumption of Kwai: areca nut consumed in the form of a quid wrapped in betel leaves with a touch of slaked lime is common among men and women. Prolonged use of areca nut can cause cancers of the mouth and oesophagus. The practice of smoking tobacco is rampant; frequently observed in market areas, public conveyances and even near educational institutes. It is important to understand that tobacco use is a threat to any person, irrespective of gender, age, race, cultural or educational background.

Apart from the health consequences, as stated by WHO tobacco hinders several aspects of sustainable development of a country. Therefore, this year's theme for World No Tobacco Day 2017 is "Tobacco – a threat to development." Tobacco use affects national economies through increased health-care costs and decreased productivity due to tobacco related diseases and premature mortality. Around 80% of premature deaths from tobacco occur in low- or middle-income countries. Premature death of a family member due to tobacco directly affects the emotional well-being of the family and also worsens their economic condition as treatment costs of tobacco related diseases are high. Tobacco growing, manufacturing and consumption has adverse environmental impacts. Health care costs from tobacco-related diseases by far outweigh the revenue generated through the sale of tobacco products.

Thus for a society free of tobacco related ailments there has to be concerted efforts by the Government and by civil society. Strengthening the existing laws along with effective implementation can help reduce tobacco use to a large extent. Awareness programmes and intensive campaigns on the health risks needs to be undertaken from time to time so as to reach all sections of society. Multi-sectoral action that results in a paradigm shift in the social acceptability of tobacco use is the need of the hour. While national programmes, awareness campaigns and laws can facilitate tobacco control, the ultimate decision rests on the individual. Behaviour change is not easy and people who are desirous of quitting smoking may need professional help (that goes beyond mere advice) to give up the habit.

As we observe World No Tobacco Day 2017, this is a good time for us to take stock of the health risks of tobacco at the individual level and our society as a whole. *(The writers are faculty at Indian Institute of Public Health-Shillong)*