

"The ultimate value of life depends upon awareness and the power of contemplation rather than upon mere survival."

— Aristotle

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Contentious Reservation Policy
SINCE the birth of Meghalaya the State has followed the 40:40:5:15 reservation policy where the Khasi & Jaintia people are classed as one group who would enjoy 40% reservation in jobs and education, the Garos 40% although their population is lesser than the above two tribes combined. There is a reservation of 5% vacancies in favour of any other Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes as specified in the Fourth Schedule and the Second Schedule respectively of the said Act in so far as they relate to Meghalaya. The rest 15% is open for general candidates. However, with time there are now special job reservations for the disabled and for the economically weaker section (EWS). All these need to be fitted equitably and hence the State has to maintain a meticulous roster of how many vacancies have been filled with which category so that in case there was no qualified person to fill a vacancy at a particular time then that category does not lose out in the next recruitment drive.

The State Reservation Policy however, clearly mentions that beyond one year a vacancy lapses if it is not filled up. If sufficient numbers of suitable candidates for filling up the reserved vacancies are not available from the respective classes in any particular year, then such vacancies will be available to others. But the deficiency will be carried forward to the next recruitment year and made good in the recruitment of that year, provided that the reservation on account of the deficiency shall not be carried forward for more than one year. After the expiry of the second year, these reservations shall be treated as lapsed. It has also been decided that at no time shall the number of normal reserved vacancies and the "carry forward" vacancies together exceed 90% of the total number of vacancies in that year.

In March 2021, the Advocate General of Meghalaya told the Supreme Court that reservation beyond 50 per cent is justified in the State keeping in view its extraordinary circumstances, peculiar features and a tribal population of over 85 per cent. Arguing before a five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan, Meghalaya's advocate general said that the 1992 Indra Sawhney judgement (also called the Mandal verdict) which put a cap of 50 per cent on reservations, does not require re-consideration by a larger bench since the population of tribals in Meghalaya is 85.9 per cent as per the 2001 census. Needless to say only a scrupulous implementation of the Reservation Policy allocating the percentages in an equitable manner would have been beyond litigation but that did not happen. On June 14 last year the Meghalaya High Court responding to a Public Interest Litigation told the State Government to keep on hold recruitments until the roster system is in place. The Meghalaya High Court led the way by coming up with a 20-point roster system for entry level posts in High Court, District Courts, Sub-Divisional Courts and other institutions under the control of the High Court of Meghalaya. The Government of Meghalaya followed suit wide its Office Memorandum and notified the guidelines for the roster system. However, its inability to put in place that system delayed appointments in several departments including the Police Department. And now this issue has become a political hot potato!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Exit Reservation Policy

Editor,
There's much hullabaloo over the reservation-roster policy of the state government. Nobody bothered to examine closely the easiest solution to this burning issue. Nobody would question the choice of selection, the criteria of selection. I remember on many occasions the late PA Sangma would advise our tribal students and encourage them to shun the reservation umbrella. He himself had competed at the highest level. Our tribal students be they Khasi or Garo have excelled in open competition in mainland India. Many of them have occupied enviable positions in my office and in his office-bearing site directed me to appoint a lady teacher who was under qualified. I asked him if he would allow a bus load of children to go

Rehumanising work to herald a 5th Industrial Revolution: The great rethink

By Gideon Arulmani

At last, the masks are off, handwashing while singing the birthday song is not mandatory, we are free to travel wherever we want to or not, we can "check cash" either by the hand... why, we can even hug! Pandemic related lockdowns and restrictions have been lifted and it seems we are free to return to pre-pandemic ways of living and working.
But are we returning to pre-pandemic ways of living and working?
Here is some startling data published by the Workforce Institute (Texas, USA) of its survey conducted between September 15th and October 1st 2022, covering about 2,200 employees, high-ranking C-level executives and HR professionals from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, France, Germany, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, and the U.K.:

- 46% of employees within this sample said they would not recommend their company nor their profession to their children.
- 38% wouldn't wish their job even on their worst enemy!
- 57% of those in the high wage bracket (100 to 200 thousand dollars per annum) are saying: "I wish someone had warned me not to take my current job". "I don't want to work anymore." "I regret choosing my line of work."
- Barely 28% and 11% respectively felt they are in a career that is their calling, which fills them when they go to work to collect a pay check, "clock out," and go home.

A review of reports published over 2021 on attitudes to work indicate that large numbers of workers are expressing deep disillusionment with careers they had diligently and successfully pursued for many years. Millions of workers are using phrases such as "toxic", "being trapped and exploited", "exhausted" and "stressed" to describe their experiences of work. This has led to a massive and unprecedented employee turnover which management specialists describe as "Mechanical and automation brought about by the first and second Industrial Revolutions, perhaps triggered by the first departure from livelihood-orientation, which shifted from the "handmade" to the "machine made". The Protestant Reformation provided moral sanction to embed individualism and materialism into the motivation for work. The third Industrial Revolution, underpinned by the computer/digital revolution, has shifted the paradigm, shifted from the "handmade" to the "machine made". The Protestant Reformation provided moral sanction to embed individualism and materialism into the motivation for work. The third Industrial Revolution, underpinned by the computer/digital revolution, has shifted the paradigm, shifted from the "handmade" to the "machine made".

During the lockdowns people have had the opportunity to introspect about how the way they work affects their lives. In fact, we could say that The Great Resignation has been brought about by the opportunity for a "Great Rethink". A common thread running through these pandemic epiphanies seems to suggest that we don't actually like our jobs. How did this happen? Are these viscerally negative sentiments linked to specific jobs or toward work itself? Does this have something to do with the manner in which work, and career, have evolved?

Global Trends in the History of Work

Yours etc.,
Torisr Mark,
Via email

Quality child care the need of the hour

Editor,
The new report on Quality Child Care (SST March 29, 2023) referring to a consultation organised by North East Network (NEN) in collaboration with SHWA and other well-intentioned organisations has not come a day too late. The reality is that Angamwadi centres are not functioning well in our State and even in the city of Shillong, forget about rural areas. In fact, these centres have been created for the well-being of children whose mothers are forced to go to work to make ends meet. But even if they are not in dire straits if women need to work so that they are economically independent. It is true that there are a few centres run by local women's organisations but even there the care takers are not trained to deal with children and to engage

merely to automation but to the automation of work tools and processes (e.g. driverless cars) leading in turn to a further devaluation of human effort. Such shifts in human engagement with work could possibly explain the theme underlying the narratives of those who are disillusioned with their careers: a loss of connection, depletion of meaning and purpose in relation to their work tasks.
The question now is whether this phenomenon has been caused by the pandemic. Will these deep frustrations with work abate as the effects of the pandemic decline? A closer look indicates that while the pandemic might have been a trigger, unhappiness with work, not just the conditions of work, runs deeper. It is possible that the pandemic has unmasked not just an immediate, but a

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chronic unhappiness with careerist orientations to work. People are leaving their careers with the intention of re-training for other jobs. Many are preparing for new careers. But would fatigue and frustration be re-experienced once the honeymoon with their new career has passed? Is there more fundamental, and thus shift required of the careers?

It is time for a Fifth Industrial Revolution

Stress and fatigue could underlie both livelihood and careerist orientations. It seems however that a deep sense of disquiet has been well-being is reported more frequently amongst careerists. The common attitude toward livelihood is that it merely subsists, the needs and is practiced by humbler (usually rural) folk such as farmers, artisans and skilled workers. However, the needs and is practiced in surveys conducted by the author: careerists who have made shifts to a more livelihood-oriented practice today is said that the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) is upon us. The technological advances introduced by these revolutions are leading not

al engagement revealingly said: "It was all very exciting at first... pushing buttons to get machines to do things. But over time, I felt I was not using my actual skills. The algorithm was doing it. I've left that now... some friends and I have gotten together to start a label/dyeing. I'm happily sewing and selling buttons now... not tapping them!"
Against this background, could a fifth industrial revolution consider bidirectional collaborations between careerist orientations and "livelihood thinking". With this as a guiding principle, could we begin to describe a new world of work that:

- re-examines the dynamics of competition versus collaboration, independence versus interdependence, and duty to the in-group versus personal rights as factors that influence engagement with work.
- considers the Gandhian philosophy of Nal Tam (New Education) based upon the principle that pedagogy could be located around work.
- acknowledges the cultural reality that children are a part of the fabric of the family's ethos of work.
- considers how pedagogical systems might use livelihood thinking as an instrument for education across all future generations, engage with work with perseverance and discernment.
- explores what manual work could mean in an increasingly digitalized and virtualized world. Indeed, there are sound work principles to be learned from the crafts person and artisan who exist before the industrial revolution, working by hand, used simple tools with highly developed skill, to weave cloth, construct furniture, build pyramids, temples, cathedrals and ships!

Today human work occurs in the interface between financial capitalism and an annual technological evolution on the one hand and the forced abdication of human cognitive and cultural engagement with work on the other. The pandemic has instigated dramatic changes in attitudes toward work. Going forward, the challenge before us as educators, parents, and employers, HR Managers and all those who work for human development, is to acknowledge that an interplay can be fostered between the pre-industrial, the industrial and post-industrial, between the personal and the shared, the handicrafted and the machine-made. The time is coming for us to contribute to rehumanising work to herald a fifth revolution, a revolution that valorises human effort.

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ing to a child to be an important milestone in their lives. We Khasis are not used to talking to babies because we think they don't understand what we are telling them and cannot respond. We actually don't know what goes on in the child's mind.
I would request NEN and like-minded NGOs to hold some sessions for uneducated mothers and especially young mothers to explain to them that it is so important to have conversations with their kids and provide them a safe space at home. We truly need more creches - a need that has never been given much attention to by the government and other NGOs. There will be a sea change in the cognitive development of the child if such a supportive and educative environment is provided at this tender formative stages of its life.
Yours etc.,
Nolen Khangsait,
Via email

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The era of Privilege Motions

By Derek O'Brien

Privilege motions have been in the news recently. The Union Minister of Communications, Railways, and Electronics and Information Technology, opened himself to a breach of privilege motion when he divulged the details of what transpired in the Parliamentary Standing Committee meeting on the Personal Data Protection Bill. There has been the case where the Congress MP from Wayanad had a privilege motion moved against him by BJP's chief heckler in Lok Sabha, an MP from Jharkhand.
A Privilege motion was also sought against 12 MPs for supposedly disorderly conduct in the first leg of the Budget Session. A Raja Sabha MP was suspended and a privilege motion was moved against her because allegedly recorded proceedings on her smartphone inside the House. As per the Raja Sabha bulletin published in the public domain,

liament without being held accountable."
In the first leg of the Budget session in February, the entire Opposition were raising a demand to order an inquiry (some preferred a Joint Parliamentary Committee, a few others a Supreme Court monitored probe) into LIC-SBI funds being at risk because of their exposure to Adani companies. Perfectly legitimate Parliamentary tactic. How justified is it to now seek a privilege motion against the protesting MP?
As per earlier reports (2009 and 2014) of the Committee on Privileges, such "disruptions" do not fall under the purview of Parliamentary privileges. The Committee found that the intention of the members protesting was to present any other member from speaking or to question the authority of the Chair. It was, in fact, to express their

discontent over a particular issue in which their opinion was not being taken note of by the Union Government.
Now let me address the issue of an MP (Opposition or Treasury benches) submitting identical Notices on consecutive days. Goodness me, Re-submission of identical notices has been a common practice, a precedent, for decades in both Houses. This is done by a member for multiple reasons. Most notices lapse after a specific period of time and it is the right of a member to submit her/his notice. Or an MP may choose to repeatedly emphasise on a certain issue over a sustained period of time. Finally, let me mention that Members from the Opposition across the country are brazenly targeted every day by the Modi-Shah government through their agencies (like CRJ and ED). No one from the BJP ever. In the same manner, members of the BJP are never subjected to inquiries by the Committee on Privileges. Ministers in the Modi government are Teflon coated. If they weren't, why wasn't the Union IT Minister served a privilege notice for shouting his mouth off when he was addressing a forum and disclosing classified information. The Minister claimed that Parliament's Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology had examined the Bill and given it a 'big thumbs up'. Every Constitutional authority remained mum.

Even kindergarten Parliament knows that the Proceedings of a Committee shall be treated as confidential. Anyone who has access to its proceedings should not disclose any information regarding its report or any conclusions arrived at, before the report has been presented to the House.
For Parliamentary privileges and also in the report of the Committee on Privileges, there are two sets of rules. One set of rules for members of TMC, INC, SP, DMK, AAP, BRS, SS, BJP, JDU, NCP (CPM). And a different set of rules for the party run by the two most famous members of the Gujarat Gymkhana.
(The writer is Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, All India Triannual Congress India Triannual Congress Parliamentary Party (Raja Sabha). Additional research by Anika Dinkar.)

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DONALD TRUMP: Polling suggests criminal charges against him won't dent his support

Donald Trump's impending court case marks an historic moment in US politics. He will be the first former president of the United States to face criminal charges and trial by a jury. He and his supporters are already calling the case a political manoeuvre designed to reduce his chances in the 2024 presidential election.

The court case will affect his campaign but it will not exclude him for running for office next year. Early indications suggest that his political base will continue to rally around him. Within hours of the news, his followers were gathering outside his Mar-a-Lago home in Florida to express their support.

The indictment comes after a grand jury in New York agreed that there was enough evidence to charge the former president.

The investigation, led by Manhattan district attorney Alvin Bragg, looked into the legality of hush money payments to former adult film star Stormy Daniels.

The exact nature of the charges will not be known until Trump is arraigned next week. According to US reports, he is likely to be accused of more than one count of falsifying business records (classified as a misdemeanor, a lesser crime in the US legal system), after Trump allegedly recorded the payments as a business expense. If found guilty, he could face a fine.

He might also be charged with breaking election campaign laws, which is a more serious felony offence and carries a potential prison sentence. Trump has denied any wrongdoing.

Any criminal charges, or even a jail sentence, would not restrict Trump from running for office under the US constitution. He has previously stated that he would do so even if he was charged. Historically, there are instances of individuals running for president while facing charges or even from a prison cell.

PROBLEMS FOR CAMPAIGNS

What may affect his chances is the amount of time that he will need to commit to dealing with the charges laid against him. To date, his campaign has been relatively quiet, but it will need to gain momentum in the lead up to the Republican convention in July 2024.

On March 23 and 26, Trump held his first campaign rally for the 2024 election at Waco, Texas. Despite predicting that he would be arrested, thousands turned up to show their support.

Claiming that the 2024 election would be "the final battle", Trump criticised the prospects of potential challengers, such as Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis, and stated that the investigation was like something out of Stalinist Russia. He told his supporters "from the beginning it has been one which



hunt and phony investigation after another".

POPULARITY IN THE POLLS

Trump's immense popularity with Republicans is unlikely to be damaged by any indictment resulting from the New York investigation. One poll showed that most Republicans believe that the investigation is politically motivated, while another indicated that most Americans think that Trump will be acquitted of the charges.

The Harvard/Harris poll shows that popular support for the charges is split along party lines - 80% of Democrats believe he should be indicted, while 80% of Republicans believe he should not. And 57% of Republicans think a trial could help Trump in the election run.

Republicans lawmakers have already come out in support of Trump. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said that the indictment was an "unprecedented abuse of power". House Majority Leader Steve Scalise tweeted that the charges were "one of the clearest examples of extremist Democrats weaponizing government to attack their political opponents".

Even Trump's potential rivals for the 2024 nomination have come out in support of the former president. DeSantis said the charges were "un-American" and a "weaponization of the legal system", while Pence called the indictment "an outrage".

For many observers, the question remains: why does Trump still figure so highly in the Republican polls after everything that has happened?

A Harvard/Harris poll from mid March, shows that Trump has increased his favourability among Republican voters to 50%, giving him a 26-point lead over DeSantis, if the presidential nomination was decided now. Former vice president Mike Pence is a distant third with just 7%. A more recent Fox News poll makes the gap between Trump and DeSantis to be even greater at 30%.

Worryingly for Democrats, those polled of all political persuasions give Trump a four-point lead over Biden. There is a glimmer of hope for the Democrats, though, in that 14% of those polled were undecided on either Trump or Biden. It's a significant number, and those individuals will be key to deciding who wins the election in November next year.

Trump's immense popularity with Republicans is unlikely to be damaged by any indictment resulting from the New York investigation. This is because the Republican Party is still the party of Donald Trump. His base support has never fluctuated since 2016. Many of them feel he stands up for them when no-one else does.

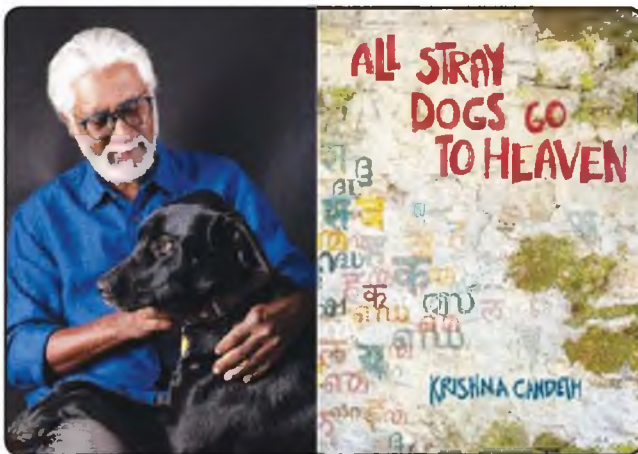
His Republican opponents, such as DeSantis, are trying to oust Trump as being Trump. But they are pale imitations, and Trump knows this.

Earlier this year, Trump told the crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference: "I am your warrior. I am your justice." And they believe that. His supporters believe that he is the only person capable of protecting their values and way of life.

In a supporting speech at Waco, Trump ally, Representative Marjorie Taylor-Greene said: "Trump is the man for the hour. He's the only man who can take on Washington in the times that we live in."

While the indictment might make some moderate Republicans rethink their loyalty to the former president, his base will back him to the bitter end. (The Conversation)

A debut novel and a tale of 'buried facts & feelings'



By Vishnu Makhijani

A book that explores the power of love, friendship, family, and the elusive idea of home, and compels us to revisit our own ideas of truth, the self and reality. *All Stray Dogs Go to Heaven* by Krishna Candeth is an astounding debut novel.

Told from multiple perspectives and weaving past and present, dreams and reality, the book revolves around relatable themes and emotions. A collection of stories that happened a long time ago and will most certainly happen again.

The book comes across as a string of stories that come together as one big story. How did he go about writing the book in the way that he has?

"You should never ask author how they go about writing their books because the simple answer

is They don't know," Candeth told *JANS* in an interview, adding: "Everything they write supposedly comes from their imagination but as writers they don't know how that imagination works."

"It's almost as though they were writing with a dripping brush, and leaving little dabs and stains as they went along! The real question has to do with how stories are told. Are 'good stories' good because of a certain succession of events or are they good because of the way those events are narrated," said Candeth, who's the nephew of Lt Gen KP Candeth (ret), who played a key role in the liberation of Goa and later served as Deputy Chief of Army Staff.

Candeth noted that South India has a very muscular tradition of telling stories or kathas and Indian storytelling, in general, is complex and hugely entertaining;

in fact, a distinctive feature of the "Kathasaritsagana", the great compilation of stories from the eleventh century by Somadeva, is the telling of the same story twice, once in its abbreviated form and once at length!

He pointed out that for a text written in the eleventh century, "that is amazingly inventive, and modern, if you want to call it that."

There are no chapters in the book, only subheadings: how's that?

Candeth said: "I was vaguely conscious of the fact that this was a structure used mostly in works of non-fiction but I went ahead with it anyway because that was how I had originally conceived the book."

"There may be more radical reasons for this particular decision but I am not fully aware of them. You might call the struc-

ture episodic. It allowed me the luxury of writing certain episodes ahead of others, and that was an advantage because I knew how they were going to link up in the end."

"Also, the episodic structure allowed the story to expand, to grow sideways rather than go shooting off towards some intended conclusion. I can't remember who it was who said that you don't write a book as the crow flies."

"On a more mundane level, the episodic structure allows the reader to skim through the pages of the novel with a firm thumb and forefinger, stop and explore what a subheading has to offer, and then move backwards or forward as the mood dictates!"

"A novel in its traditional form, offers a very particular linear pleasure but there is a more ambiguous delight in absorbing the information or random observations from episodes in no particular order," Candeth said.

As for the novel being a story about stories, he agreed, saying: "It's about all those thoughts and feelings that are forever knocking about in the great bazaar of our heads and hearts, and the stories big and small, half or fully formed that often appear without warning."

How does he hope to strike a chord with readers?

Candeth explained: "When writing *Stray Dogs*, I would think of it as some sort of an imagined report about something a friend and I had talked about a long time ago and then forgot, about buried facts and buried feelings, about things - cruel and unforgiving - that had happened in the past and might well happen again in the future."

"I don't really have a particular reader in mind. Readers have so many choices these days they can walk into a bookshop and

pick up books that cater to their every mood. There are all kinds of readers, and quite often the same incident or observation in a novel may draw quite unexpected responses from different readers."

"If there was something I would like the reader to be left with, it is the sense of how all the stories and events add up and accumulate in the course of the narrative, and leave us at the end with the madness and the marvels we are capable of as human beings, and how, in spite of everything, there is a mutual vulnerability that unites all of us."

"I suppose at one level we all write the books we like to read; there is a layer of sediment we kick loose and bring up to the surface when we write a novel, and sometimes the colour or density of that sediment may both attract and repel readers. Some may respond to the spiritual, others to the political, sexual or joyful aspects of it."

"The thing to remember is that you can't separate the various elements in a novel, put them in boxes and say, This is political, this is spiritual, sad, joyful etc. At the heart of a good novel there is a kind of emotional truth and that truth contains ALL those elements."

"I like to think of the novel (or any writing, for that matter) as a small device that, when it works well, ignites in us a sense of wonder. We try to discover or uncover something when we write. We may not be sure what it is but it often turns out to be some form of that same emotional truth. One hopes, of course, that the reader will come to detect it and, in the course of his or her reading, be affected by it."

The book weaves past and present, dreams and reality together, and in the process also brings in multiple perspectives through different characters. How did he go about sketching the characters in the book?

Talking about the influence of Milan Kundera on his work, he said: "In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, a book that

made a huge impression on me when I first read it many years ago, Milan Kundera talks of how characters are not born like people of a woman; they are born of a situation, a sentence, a metaphor containing in a nutshell a basic human possibility that the author thinks no one else has discovered."

He added: "By the way, I believe the Nobel Committee would do itself a big favour if, for one brief moment, they put all political considerations aside, and awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature to Milan Kundera who is 93 years old and, quite simply, one of the great or probably the greatest living novelists of our time."

Candeth continued: "Coming back to the characters in the novel, I had imagined most of them as vagabonds, as stray dogs who wander the streets of their own imaginations. Like a lot of us, they live simultaneously in the past and in the present, in day dreams and delusions, and you can call the resulting mixture 'reality' if you so desire."

"The reason why all these states of mind and place co-exist on the page without being too disruptive has to do really with the form of the novel. It is so wonderfully elastic; it absorbs everything; it accommodates, expands, it has room for everything. It can be in one place at one moment, and all over the place, the next."

He concluded by adding: "To complete the thought, I hope the novel is never in danger of being too moralistic or puritanical, because it is really the most generous and unpuritanical of forms."

From the very beginning, the idea was to benefit from a narration that alternates without breaks between the past and present of the characters, and juxtaposes what is happening in their minds with what is happening outside it. He don't particularly care for a God-like narrator who eats samosas and pretends to know everything, Candeth concluded. (JANS)

Reformed Multilateralism

By DC Pathak

It is an established principle that if you get the 'macro-picture' right you will be less troubled by 'details' even when some of them look unsettling at first sight. It is a sign of civilisational confidence of India that it has for its G20 Presidency adopted the motto - 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', which means 'the whole world is one family'.

Nothing can be more comprehensive and higher as the global mission for a world conference, than this thought embracing the entire humanity. A basic advantage here - from India's point of view - is that any 'small thinking' will show itself to all, producing if anything, a certain degree of embarrassment for the dissembler. It is in line with this approach that India favours reformed Multilateralism as a desirable idea to define international relations.

In one word this is multilateralism that produces a positive environment and no negative fall out at all. It goes to the credit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that his foreign policy as envisaged by a consistent adherence to these seminal ideas that added up to this kind of multilateralism.

First is India's belief in a multi-polar world. This helps to diffuse the danger of the re-emergence of the Cold War that was basically the product of a bipolar world order.

Multiplicity of major powers makes it more likely that they would make a competitive contribution for improving the world economy and global peace - in their keenness to project a good image for themselves, internationally.

It is India's independent foreign policy that made Prime Minister Modi the first world leader to reach out to both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and advise them upfront to stop the armed conflict in favour of negotiated peace.

Through the year long Ukraine-



Russia confrontation, India has retained its image as a world counsel for peace because it maintained that 'this is not an era of war', abstained from anti-Russian resolutions in the UN and did not endorse the supply of war equipment and arms to Ukraine by the US-led West in the proxy mode that has only prolonged the war like situation.

India maintains that concerns of both Russia and Ukraine need to be addressed for working out a peace pact between the two neighbours. Significantly, India has in this period maintained the best of relations with the US, the UK and Europe and with a strategic finesse checked the drift of the world towards another Cold War between US on one hand and the Russia-China combine, on the other.

The second point about India's foreign policy that paved the way for a reformed multilateralism is that the latter is a natural by-product of India's favoured option of going in for bilateral relations which were mutually beneficial to both sides in terms of economic

and security interests. This policy earnestly pursued by the Modi regime had ensured that bilateral relations were not at the cost of any other country.

The Sino-Pak axis on the other hand follows an opposite philosophy as it is geared to executing plans 'against' India. The unholy alliance between a Marxist dictatorship and a fundamentalist regime is driven by hostility towards this country and is a perpetual threat not only to the security of South Asia but to that of the entire democratic order.

For upholding the case of Pakistan in Afghanistan, China has in fact entered into a give-and-take arrangement with 'Pakistan on Taliban Emirate and even gone along with the Pak-sponsored faith-based terrorism that threatened global security.

Western democracies led by the US must realize that the motivation of faith that Islamic extremists and radicals brought to bear on the new global arena, has created a perpetual danger for the entire world. This threat had to be countered jointly by all

peace-loving countries through exchange of intelligence and coordinated action.

Extremism in the name of Islam can enforce an 'asymmetric' war because the motivation here was strong enough to produce 'suicide bombers' to take down the opponent. India with its transparent advocacy of 'all religions being given equal respect' provides a standing counter to the 'supremacist' outlook of a particular faith - in the process it is best placed to act as the anchor of world security against the new threat of radicalisation.

Even as the agenda of G20 is exclusively about economic growth and elimination of the crippling Gulf between the North and South, security concerns plaguing the world have also to be addressed during India's Presidency of the event.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that G20 outreach is designed to fulfill the task of shaping both the global economy as well as world security. To go about it in a mission mode carries the stamp of the Modi government - the

latter in fact was living up to the 'sajban sukhaie sajan hitaye' philosophy.

Finally, multilateralism is not 'alignment' - it is in fact a negation of the latter. An alignment is always 'against' somebody or some country. Reformed multilateralism does not create conflict and India goes for it with that mindset.

India is an active participant in Quad because this forum stands for 'maintenance of rules based order in the Indo-Pacific' - it is not against any particular country but against unwarranted aggressiveness wherever it came from. It needs to be mentioned that India's bilateral relations with the US, Japan and Australia are on an upswing independently of the geopolitical objective of Quad.

If India also sees in it a preemptive arrangement to counter any hostile encroachment in the Indian Ocean, there is nothing wrong with it. Since China seeks to 'win a' without fighting a 'battle' through the strategy of salami slicing, India has every right to expose and put down that hidden agenda of the adversary and do whatever it takes to counter it.

India is working for the return of sanity in international relations and is set to improve upon the traditional thinking of 'somehow preserving national interests even when that meant not caring for the global commons. India has an opportunity of playing this profound role at the world stage and it is a matter of pride that Prime Minister Modi had the political will to rally the international opinion in favour of maintaining global peace so that the cause of economic advancement of the world as a whole, could be served.

To sum up, India has come of age as a major power influencing geopolitical trends. It is an advocate of world peace but also a believer in a firm rebuttal of the attempts of a few to disturb for their own vested interests or hegemonist traits. It looks upon multilateralism as a constructive pathway to economic well-being that would keep the international community from armed combat and destruction.

Democracy ultimately is rule for the people and whether it is the regional setting that produced the Ukraine-Russia armed conflict or an alliance like Sino-Pak axis that was driven by malice against India, the vision set by that thought of universal good and human dignity would win the battle for the people.

India has set this higher mission and there is every hope that at the end of India's G20 Presidency it will make a difference to the world. The world can do with injecting some 'philosophy' of life in 'realpolitik'.

Some countries will always be richer than others but they all must work for a sustainable human existence in order to minimise conflict and violence that detracted from the idea of making the world a better place for everybody.

The good news is that the approach of India steers clear of ideological contradictions that had marred international and national politics so far and shows a new light to the world on the strength of its civilisational moorings.

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(The writer is a former Director of Intelligence Bureau. Views expressed are personal)

"Star - Gazing"

By Pt. Ajai Bhanji Sunday, APRIL 2, 2023

"Birthdate Forecast"
 Very soon the Jupiter on your solar return and it will give excellent results. Your time will be filled with wonderful and unforgettable moments. You will pay attention to your work. House renovation or makeover may be on your mind. This is an appropriate decision. You will get engaged for a particular job and will take the work towards success. You will perform well in your job/business. There will be new projects. All times you will get full results of your hard work. You will have wonderful bonding with your life partner. All good functions will have long life. You will be equipped with all the amenities. You will make plans to buy a new house/vehicle. You will be happy. You will get good news from friends. There is a positive and media will do well.

Aries (March 21 - April 20) There will be flurry of activities this week. You will respect and dignity will increase. You will also be a lot more confident. You will perform your task with ease. Even your colleagues will seek your advice and advice in doing so. There will be stability in your career and business. You will start all socialising more positively. This is a profitable success achieving week. Your government related activities will get momentum. Your best of get there. You will also get victory in legal matters. You will also explore additional sources of income. There will be peace and harmony in family relations. You will discharge your domestic responsibilities well. You may receive some monetary rewards and gifts as well.

Taurus (April 21 - May 21) You will be at the peak of your career this week. You will have a long time to push your career and your business offers will come by you. You will never be short of funds. You will also have the heart of your officials, partners and business hold problems. You will never lack patience and ability to cope pressure under most trying circumstances will be your plus point. You will perform your tasks well. There will be no arguments in your house. You will get well from everyone. You will also get some interesting tasks. The people will be impressed with your personality. It is a good time for people related with media, writing, fashion, students and professions.

Gemini (May 22 - June 21) There will be peace and happiness in your life. You will make a sound program. Your popularity will be on the rise. Your bosses and colleagues will support you a lot. Financial gains are indicated. Positive developments will take place at the work front. You will come up to a respectable one and all. You will also not expect any help from any of your relatives who on the contrary will expect a lot from you. It will be pleasant experiences that you will enjoy. You will be pleased to share company of your spouse. Love matters will understand each other well and enjoy blissful moments. Memories of the past will bring smile on your face. The decisions of one case that that an ending will be in your favour.

Cancer (June 22 - July 23) The time will be spent on a happy note. You will be monetary gains. Your business will also rise growth. You will be determined to carry out the tasks. After a lot of up and down you will be able to manage the work. You will be very patient and will remain committed to your partner. You will obtain a happy and pleasure. You will have happy days. You will work very hard and will get excellent results. You will have a pleasant degree and will be benefited if some thoughts occur to you which are difficult to take out. But these thoughts are a good thing. Manage all family members well. You will make progress in your respective fields. Manage all family members well. You will get good.

Leo (July 24 - August 23) There will be slight tension on business front. You will have some recent results and on your business front. Your personal life will be comfortable. You will have happy days. The small worries regarding house will disappear. Your angry nature will be neutral for you. Keep a control over you. You will pay attention to your health. Don't take investments with out thinking. Everything that gives a not good is the sign that should be kept in mind while buying things. Spend wisely and only as much as you need. Money will be spent on the rise of the house. After a lot of struggle you will finally succeed in getting a loan.

Virgo (August 24 - September 22) Your work and efforts will finally pay off. Whatever you will do, you will not regret after a while. The time is very favorable. You will see the best of the people around you. You will also come in contact with a distinguished person. You will receive money from your efforts. You never any setbacks will see a lot of admirers.

Libra (September 23 - October 23) A positive event will lift your morale and confidence. You will be making new ground. Confidence will increase. You will succeed in getting back your lost prestige. You will look for goodness in everyone. You will make more and more friends who will help you a lot. You will get a promotion you also disengage. You will help among your family and friends will increase. You will decorate your house and start to get engaged. You will buy some expensive items for your house. You will remain committed to your partner/love. Sources of income will increase.

Scorpio (October 24 - November 22) You will be able to achieve victory in your pursuit. Financial condition will be strong. You will feel relaxed and at peace. There are good days. All this time you will start into a partnership with someone to grow your business and this will give you good gains and your work area will also expand. In job you will be transferred to the place of your choice. You will rise in income and profession you will begin to work with a bang. You will focus on your work, identify your weaknesses and will be improve upon them. There may be some worries on domestic front but you will manage.

Sagittarius (November 23 - December 21) You will see the rise of a sudden about your children's progress will make your days. You will feel lifted and on a cloud nine. You will also keep working hard. You will be handed on the path of success. Your constructive attitude will remain on the lines which you will use for creativity. Some decisions will be taken and people you at heart will give you results in a workplace. You will find solution to your old problems. You will be charged with self confidence and courage. Business offers will come to you. Your business will give good profits. You will be restless to show your talent at the workplace. In order to prove your superiority you will be on pushing new projects into practice.

Capricorn (December 22 - January 20) You will earn a lot of money. You will also receive something from other hands. You will improve one and all. It is a good time to start your work. You will take care of your health. You may get to go to gym and also do some exercise. You will also start in your work. You will be devoted. People connected to research field will get important. You need to remain alert in financial dealings. You need to be careful in doing on loan transaction. You will also move forward in life. You will start in a double. You will be careful in family matters and will use your mind. The time will be normal. You will be self contained. You will feel confident and full of energy. There will be happiness and peace in family life.

Aquarius (January 21 - February 18) You will continue to do people to your network. Your work potential will also increase. Your efforts will be backed by the blessings of your bosses. You will perform well. You will continue to increase your knowledge and skills. You will be busy if you enjoy activities. Give some time to the family. You may have some thoughts. The success about the results of the transaction will be welcome. You will get back your blocked money. An auspicious event will take place. The economic side will remain strong. The time is favorable for positive results in hand-related activities. Your work plan will be successful.

Pisces (February 19 - March 20) You will get some auspicious news. It will give you a lot of mental peace. You will be busy in work related to children. There are no areas of your children's getting engaged. There is also the possibility of buying land and property. You will spend on the sources of interest. You will start money. The work that you are engaged will get done on time. Those connected to business will be the money. It will be blocked some money will get recovered. There will be peace at home. You will explore new business avenue. You will not be able to pay attention to your health because of other things. The time is better to be spent in solving problems. You will make a decision in contact with lot of cultural persons.

Why are restaurants including a plant-based menu portion?

By Sandeep Singh

Recently, India has witnessed exponential growth in the sphere of plant-based meat alternatives like Soy, Wheat, Pea protein, Mushroom, Lentil, and Jackfruit, which are used to make chicken, sausages, burgers, kebabs, biryani, vegetarian pulled pork, and vegetarian steaks. The increasing presence of such alternatives and their market for it has in turn led to a substantial rise in their availability on restaurant menus. Owing to this, a market of great satisfaction that G20 outreach is designed to fulfill the task of shaping both the global economy as well as world security. To go about it in a mission mode carries the stamp of the Modi government - the

Restaurants are beefing up plant-based meat options on the menus owing to the increased demand from guests. With soy and wheat-based mock meat a big hit amongst the urban population. The rise of such dishes on menus has also been driven by the growing availability of high-quality plant-based ingredients, the nation still has a long way to go in the development of innovative cooking techniques and flavour profiles that make plant-based dishes more appealing to a wider audience.

Restaurants are beefing up their own bit in terms of choosing to include premium-quality food ingredients like soy, pea protein and other that closely mimic the taste and texture of meat for an overall enhanced eating experience. The use of state-of-the-art technological practices such as 'extrusion' can help in completely replicating the texture of ground meat to plant-based meat products. Another innovative way in which restaurants are putting out plant-based meat products on menus is by devising new dishes that feature key vegan ingredients. An example of this could be restaurants teaming up with various plant-based meat companies to create exclusive dishes like burgers using a certain brand of mock meat.

To conclude, restaurants are finding newer and more creative ways to use plant-based meat on their menus to cater to the growing demand for vegetarian and vegan options. By offering plant-based meat dishes, restaurants can attract new customers, cater to existing ones, and appeal to those who are looking to reduce their meat consumption.

Furthermore, offering plant-based menu items can help to differentiate a restaurant from its competitors and create a more unique dining experience. (IANS/ijf) (The author is the Co-founder of Blue Tribe Foods)

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Furthermore, offering plant-based menu items can help to differentiate a restaurant from its competitors and create a more unique dining experience. (IANS/ijf) (The author is the Co-founder of Blue Tribe Foods)



The increasing popularity of plant-based meat products on restaurant menus is going out to restaurants to enjoy the cuisine of your choice is an experience quite unlike any other. You will perform well. You will continue to increase your knowledge and skills. You will be busy if you enjoy activities. Give some time to the family. You may have some thoughts. The success about the results of the transaction will be welcome. You will get back your blocked money. An auspicious event will take place. The economic side will remain strong. The time is favorable for positive results in hand-related activities. Your work plan will be successful.

"True happiness involves the full use of one's power and talents." —John W. Gardner

The Shillong Times
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Maturing of GST

THE Goods and Services Tax (GST) graph is also a barometer for the nation's overall economic well-being. It's a reflection of the state of the market and the purchasing power of the people. When people have less money, markets shrink. In areas where there's huge money flow, markets see hyper-activity. The good news at the start of the new fiscal is that the total gross GST collection for the last fiscal was over Rs 18 lakh crore; meaning an impressive 22 per cent year-on-year growth. This could also, or alternatively, mean the evil of tax evasion has reduced.

The new tax regime came into being in July, 2017, three years after the first Modi government took charge. There was a drag because the Opposition that had the upper hand in the Rajya Sabha — mainly the Congress and the Left as also TMC — put up a stiff resistance and attempted to scuttle it session after session without citing any special reason. Stonewalling was the name of the game and in an irresponsible manner. The government then adopted the unusual route of turning the legislation into a finance bill and got it through parliament. Finance bills need not get the nod of the upper house. The teething problems were only to be expected as the task was gargantuan; to effect uniformity in the taxation structure in markets across the country, which till then remained in a chaotic and tax-evasion was the order of the day. The 'one nation, one tax, one market' slogan was ambitiously conceived. GST meant a single tax on the supply of goods and services — all the way from manufacturer down to the consumer. It also ended double taxation by state and the Centre. The offer was that this would help the consumer pay less tax while it would increase the competitiveness of goods and boost exports. By the 2021-22 fiscal, the effects were majorly evident. The goods and services shipments touched an all-time high of \$676 billion; and it crossed the \$750 billion mark last month. India's trade policy aims at a \$2 trillion exports by 2030.

With huge collections year after year, claims are that the new tax regime has matured. It still requires a lot of fine-tuning; and tax-evasions have been checked up to a substantial level. Perfection is a long process; and patience pays. It must be admitted that though the Opposition had tried its best to avoid passage of the GST legislation, it was the UPA government that took the baby steps to introduce the new market taxation system. The vision of Dr Manmohan Singh formed the bedrock of this tax reform.

Letters to the Editor

A journey into the wilderness

Editor,
Not too long ago, we had many strange characters donning different symbols, affiliated with their respective political parties, making promises, after promises, of leading us to the modern day promised land. Being the gullible and naive citizens that we are who crave for milk and honey, we gave these strange characters the highest seats at the table — a table with the most scrumptious meats and fine wines for them to feast upon. His the feast ended? No, it has only just begun. See this feast will last for five years. Have we reached the promised land that they promised? Again it is imperative to mention that it is too soon to tell, since it's only been a month since these strange creatures got to catch their breath and to start cutting their meat and make no mistake it's a whole animal they've been served, so it looks like we're not getting there anytime soon. Fine, but have they at least started the journey to take us to the promised land? We'd like to hope so, but in the mean time they've simply eaten the well-lit banquet hall connected with modern day inventors and shut the door on our faces, whilst we are left outside in the cold and in the dark gnashing our teeth, grunting and waiting for these strange characters turned lords to open their windows for some reflection of light to come our way

while we fight for whatever leftovers they toss through the window.
Are we satisfied? I, for one, am not. We rue the day we gave these lords the seat at the table, and this arrogant display of character — some crooked individuals — promised us that promised land in the form of a smart city, but the endless cycle of power cuts, clogged drainage systems from a few hours of rainfall leading to floods resembling nasty ponds, daily horrendous traffic congestions seems to me like we have taken a detour through the wilderness in spite of, as reported, that rupees 280 crore out of rupees 349 crore sanctioned has been spent on the so-called smart city project. Their assurance to solve every problem we face is laughable, when they cannot solve a simple problem of power shortage. Is it too much to ask or expect? May we remind the lords that we are living in the 21st century and that our lives, be it from simple cooking to working to earn a living, relies on a not so complicated thing called electricity. We have complied with the load shedding times given to us via the news but must we also comply with the irresponsible and untimely power cuts through the day? Should we not eat, work, baffle, or simply enjoy ourselves with some entertainment via electronic machines, just because the lords can't seem to figure out a way to end this vicious cycle of power cuts? Do we also have to remind the lords that we

NEP Curriculum for the UG Issues and Challenges

By H. Srikanth

NEHU is bracing to introduce the new NEP 2020 Curriculum in the UG colleges. The UGC has come out with national curriculum guidelines only at the end of 2022. Premier central universities in the country are still deliberating on the guidelines and no one has implemented it so far. NEP Committee, constituted by NEHU, has recently come out with a draft, which was discussed in an emergent Acmec meeting. The draft has some interesting proposals. It suggests the introduction of three streams of degree — 1. Three Year Multidisciplinary UG program, 2. Three Year UG Degree with single Major, and 3. Four-Year Degree with/without Research. The draft talks about introducing multidisciplinary, skill/ vocational ability enhancement papers as part of the Degree curriculum. Number of core papers one has to study for Degree with Major increased to 15, and to 20 in case of a Four-Year degree. Presence of a minimum of two teachers with Ph.D. degree is specified as necessary for starting a Four-Year Degree course. The Exit and the Entry options are also specified. The draft talks about compulsory internship for a specified period for all students. Based on the feedback, the university is planning to come out with an ordinance and start the course from the academic year 2023-24.

No doubt, the draft curriculum of NEHU has certain positive points. Earlier, when NEHU dispensed with Pass Course and Honors degree compulsory in all degree colleges, the decision created problems for many suburban and city-based colleges which have limited infrastructure and resources. It compelled all UG colleges to offer Honors Degrees overlooking their capacities and resources. Introduction of the Three-Year Multi-disciplinary Degree will help to set right the earlier decision for a uniform PG degree. Multi-disciplinary degree will be good for those who wish to have a degree at hand and try for competitive exams for jobs. Further, although the degree that NEHU offered was called Honors degree, there were eight core papers in each discipline, much less than what the students study

in most UG colleges outside the northeast. No effort was made for over one decade to revise the syllabus. The new UG degree with one major compels the UG colleges to introduce more papers, and also gives the opportunity to revise and update the existing papers. Contrary to the earlier assumption, the draft curriculum prescribes the eligibility criteria and prevent the colleges which don't have eligibility from introducing the FYUP. The plans to introduce multidisciplinary, skill/ vocational and ability enhancement courses also help the students, provided they are taught professionally.

While admitting that some proposals are beneficial to the students in the long run, one should not be oblivious to the problems and challenges involved in introducing the curriculum without adequate preparations. It was informed that some college principals were consulted while preparing the draft. It is, however, not known whether the principals represent the wide range of colleges that exist in the state. Whether the principals are aware of the implications of introducing the new curriculum is not clear. The college management should realize that it is not possible to run the new UG curriculum with the existing number of teachers. The existing four or five teachers may be alright for handling a three year Multi-disciplinary Degree program, but that number is inadequate to teach a Three-Year Degree program with one major, or Four-Year Degree Program with Research. In the existing Honors degree program, only eight core papers are to be taught. But for the proposed Three-Year Degree with a Major program under NEP 2020, the number of core papers increased to 15 papers. Apart from the core papers, teachers will have to teach even minor papers. As the teaching load doubles, the UG colleges opting for a Three-Year UG program cannot do justice to the program unless they double the number of teachers in each department. For those seeking FYUP, there should be at least two teachers with Ph.D. qualifications to guide the students' projects. If the

state government and the college management are serious about implementing the NEP 2020 Curriculum they should acknowledge the need for increasing the number of teachers in the UG colleges. In the interest of the students and teachers, NEHU should not permit the UG colleges which are reluctant to increase the number of teachers to start the Three-Year Major Degree program and Four-Year Research degree program. As mentioned, the draft curriculum talks about offering different papers other than the core and minor papers. It is not yet clear which colleges would offer what papers under multidisciplinary. The existing UG syllabi are around 15 years old. There is a need for updating the existing syllabi and also coming out with appropriate syllabi for new courses that need to be introduced. The UG syllabi are to be framed in such a manner that have horizontal linkage with other UG departments in the colleges, and vertical link with postgraduate degrees. One should have a holistic approach to the syllabus making. Syllabus making is a serious business involving a horizontal and vertical link with experts from outside. It involves identifying the topics, study material and relevant teaching methods. Syllabus making should not be done in a hurried and ad-hoc manner. If the university insists on implementing the NEP curriculum from this

year, most likely the departments end up packaging the old syllabus in the new curriculum framework, as they did earlier. Serving old wine in new bottles, I suppose, is not the purpose of introducing the new curriculum.

Further, it is not clear whether those pinching for immediate implementation of the new UG curriculum have any idea about the changes that one should introduce in different ordinances and regulations of the university. It is not enough to bring an ordinance on the curriculum structure. NEHU has to amend existing university ordinances and regulations regarding the affiliation, exam pattern, number of teachers and other requirements. The UG colleges, depending on their infrastructure, human and other resources, should apply whether they go in for a multidisciplinary degree program, for Degree with Major program, or for Degree with Research Program. Any hurried decisions by the University or UG colleges will have adverse effects on the students.

Everyone acknowledges the need for educational reforms in the state. We need to introduce reform, not for appeasing any authorities, or for satisfying one's ego. Receiving more funds or seeking a better ranking should also not become the argument for changing the curriculum. The primary motivation in introducing the new curriculum should be to provide a better education for the students of Meghalaya. Although the new curriculum is reasonably good, there are quite a few loose ends which need to be tagged before one goes for execution. How-ever good the curriculum is, it is bound to falter if one ignores the ground situation and does not address the problems. It is not enough to talk to college principals. There should be a series of meetings and consultations with all stakeholders, including the teachers' association and the student bodies, to make them understand the implications of the changes and find solutions to plug the loopholes. It is necessary to take preemptive measures to ensure that implementing the new curriculum is smooth and beneficial to the students.

Trump won't be defeated in 2024 polls through indictments alone

Democrats need to offer strong alternatives to win

By Ben Beckett

On Thursday, Donald Trump was indicted in Manhattan. The charges related to the funding of a non-disclosure agreement he signed with the adult performer Stormy Daniels regarding an extramarital affair he had with her.

It would be great if the charges derailed Trump, but as the Nation argued convincingly, that's a very unlikely, in short, Trump has many ways to delay the proceedings and a fair number of strong legal defenses; the prosecution is probably reaching further than it can grasp on several legal questions, and even if Trump is found guilty and con-

certainly drain his time and resources from campaigning, and it may affect his popularity within the country's ever-diminishing number of swing voters. On the other hand, we're talking about a man who beat Hillary Clinton even after a tape of him essentially admitting to sexual assault was released shortly before the election. Chaos, nonsensical defiance, and a hint of criminality are so baked into Trump's public image that it is unclear whether his prosecution will change many minds either way.

Trump's prosecution, especially on the three out-



guilt is upheld over multiple standing cases, is important for the continued existence of some form of democracy in the United States. The three latter cases ask a fundamental question: Can the president simply decide he doesn't want to leave office, regardless of the outcome of his reelection? But they are also not a shortcut for keeping him out of power, and they won't alter the political situation that gave rise to him in the first place: the grinding stalemate between an aggressive Joe Biden's victory and two interrelated investigations conducted by the US Justice Department

regarding his alleged attempts to illegally remain in office after losing the 2020 election and his conduct on January 6, 2021. Little is known about whether Trump will be charged in any of those three cases, what he might be charged with, or when any potential indictments will be announced. If any further indictments do come, the legal proceedings will undoubtedly move slowly. Not only is Trump's defense strategy sure to be aggressive and obfuscatory, but judges and prosecutors involved in the unprecedented prosecution of both a former president and a major presidential candidate will move extremely cautiously.

regarding his alleged attempts to illegally remain in office after losing the 2020 election and his conduct on January 6, 2021. Little is known about whether Trump will be charged in any of those three cases, what he might be charged with, or when any potential indictments will be announced. If any further indictments do come, the legal proceedings will undoubtedly move slowly. Not only is Trump's defense strategy sure to be aggressive and obfuscatory, but judges and prosecutors involved in the unprecedented prosecution of both a former president and a major presidential candidate will move extremely cautiously.

In short, it is unlikely Trump will be convicted of anything before the 2024 election — except, maybe, minor and confusing crimes resulting from his hush-money payments in New York. Even if that is, it seems unlikely that if he is convicted, Trump will have exhausted all of his appeals by next November. Trump's prosecution will

often fails to acknowledge, let alone attempt to solve, counter, the situation is probably more so. Trump took hold of the GOP. With inflation and the termination of social payments like the expanded child tax credit and expanded Medicaid coverage under Biden, and small but real Republican advances among voters of colour, the situation is probably somewhat less favourable for Democrats than it was in 2020. Even if Trump fumbles, someone else will pick up the ball and run with it. Ron DeSantis is looking like the most likely challenger to Biden. I've said it before, but it bears repeating. Even though Trump deserves to be prosecuted, Trumpman will only be fully defeated by a political program that provides both an alternative explanation for voters' animosity toward Trump and a path for the better is still possible. So go ahead and shut the book at him. That give us something to vote for, too. (HPA Saive)

whole chase. Yours etc., Nikita Sawian (Shillong)

LDA written examination of District Court Nongpoh

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily, I want to draw attention to the recently held written examination conducted by the District Court of Nongpoh at Ri Jibu College. I was a candidate who appeared in that exam and want to show my appreciation for the well organised and properly managed method of exams. Everything was well planned and successfully executed. Kudos.
In the beginning, some of my friends informed me that they got call letters in their respective addresses but I was worried as I did not get any. However, after I checked the District Judge Court's website I saw that one duplicate call letter with their respective addresses is already there. Instructions are very clear for candidates like me who did not get the call letter by post to take print out of the call letter and simply put my passport photograph to show the ID proof at the time of examination.
Regularly I find that the website is uploaded with some information or the other for the benefit of candidates like the syllabus, cut off marks for written exams, the instructions about exams and

in fact surprisingly, and this deserves special mention, even the seating pattern in the college, floor numbers and room numbers are put up in advance before the exams. This is remarkable and when I reached the college, I saw arrows pointing towards directions were pasted with specific room numbers floor wise and roll number wise. The roll numbers and names of candidates were also pasted on the table for easy identification. Even the investigators were well trained and guided us properly.
The instructions on the question papers were simple and very clear. But the best part about the exams was when one invigilator announced that answers for multiple choice questions will be updated on the website after the exams. When the exams were over and after 1.30pm I checked the website and found the answer keys were already uploaded so that candidates could check if their answers were correct or wrong.
Hope all examinations are conducted in such a professional manner. It's a job well done.

Yours etc., Name withheld on request, Via email, Dominic Stadlin, Waitkhar, Via email

Infusing the spirit of nationalism
Editor,
Via the term "Ic la Ka Ri" or love for the

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.

"Illusion is the first of all pleasures."

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, APRIL 4, 2023

Will MDA.2 redeem the Power Corporation?

THE public of Meghalaya who pay their power bills regularly do not deserve the power cuts. The load shedding in Meghalaya today is reminiscent of those dark days when Manipur used to have frequent power shut-downs and people relied heavily on inverters imported from China via Myanmar. Ten years ago, Manipur brought in drastic power reforms where pre-paid meters were fitted to houses and after that the revenue generation was mended. Power leakage was the main cause for the power sector in Manipur to go into the red. The power reforms were needed and were pushed through and now power cuts in Manipur are a thing of the past.

In Meghalaya, the industrial sector, mainly the power guzzling cement companies and the iron and steel units have huge outstanding power bills which they are yet to pay. The Meghalaya Government is pussy-footing and not recovering these outstanding dues for reasons best known to it. When smart meters were supposed to be fitted to prevent power leakage what happened instead was a scam. First, Chinese made smart meters were fitted even when the Union Power Ministry had given clear instructions to steer clear of them. Second, the Company fitting these meters was paid in excess of the rates due as pointed out by the C&AG in its preliminary report.

Surprisingly, during the entire election campaign period there were no power cuts. But barely a week after the results were declared the power cuts have disrupted lives yet again. The latest C&AG report points to capital erosion of state run public sector enterprises. Topping that list is the Meghalaya Power Distribution Company Ltd (MePDCL) which is the problem vertical of the MeCEA as it is in transmission and distribution that the leakage happens. The latest finalised accounts of the MePDCL 2020-21 shows a total paid up capital of Rs 858-39 crore. The net loss suffered by the MePDCL thus far is Rs 425.28 crore. The accumulated loss of this single vertical is Rs 2838.34 and its net worth as of today is a negative balance of Rs 1979.95 crore. The amount pumped in by the State Government — in short its equity — is Rs 859.27. Over and above this equity the State Government has also infused more capital by way of loans to the tune of Rs 174.45 crore. As of today, even if the State were to decide to privatise its power corporation, with a negative balance of nearly Rs 2000 crore there would be few takers. But neither does the State have any rejuvenation plans. The Power Corporation is heavily reliant on the national grids for power and is defraying them from the dues collected from its consumers. When it comes to staff salaries and establishment costs the Power Corporation relies heavily on government bail-outs. How long can this carry on?

Letters to the Editor

India's G 20 Presidency

The Op-ed that appeared in your paper on Reformed Multilateralism by DC Pathak (ST Sunday, April 2, 2023), discussed India's current Presidency of G 20. I would like to draw attention to the G 20 Finance Ministers Meeting Bengaluru, February 24 - 25 and the G 20 Foreign Ministers Meeting at New Delhi, March 1-2. Multilateralism as the foundation for a global peace and prosperity formed part of the Chair's Summary & Outcome Documents of both the meetings. So there is nothing new in the Op-ed by Pathak who also dwelt on bilateralism by India as part of reformed multilateralism. The foot is India is already engaged in the latest 'ism' now called multilateralism, like the I2U2 (India - Israel, US and UAE), for good reasons, though it sounds confusing to lesser cerebrals day by day.

What is however conspicuous or even more important is what was not said in the document at the meetings of the Finance Ministers and Foreign Ministers. What came the G 20 Presidency of India do to end the Ukraine War - which has generated untold hardships and uncertainties the world over, especially the Global South for which India is today the leading protagonist. It is fine about propagating India's ancient 'sublime ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam or Prime Minister

Modi calling for One Earth, One Family, One Future. But is there one India today? One of the G 20 Forums is the G 20 Religious Forum which calls for healing, harmony and hope. Paradoxically, India today is afflicted with majoritarianism, fundamentalism and religious hatred. Besides, several international organizations have downgraded India's democracy as Electoral democracy and pointed to the declining press freedom in India. This is why India cannot act with the courage of moral conviction to assert itself as the G 20 President and propose how to end the Ukraine War because the G 20 members could see through the internal foibles of India.

Yours etc., Redi Warjit, Via email

English a Universal Language

Editor, 20th March 2023, the first day of the budget session of the newly elected Assembly marked the discomenent of the VPP MLAs over the Governor's Address in Hindi. VPP President Arundh M Basiaiwmoi was right to stage a protest in protest against the Governor speaking in Hindi. I believe that an insignificant percentage of members in the House can understand Hindi. A person who can speak or understand Shillong Hindi will not understand pure Sanskrit

Tourism a harbinger for controversies

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The book "Controversies in Tourism" (published by CABL, UK) starts with a compelling paragraph on 'how tourism is responsible for controversies far beyond the negatives that are usually talked about'. While providing a globalised perspective on controversies, it makes one wonder if tourism is in fact a boon or bane. Even in well-established tourism destinations such as the European Union and USA which possess adequate checks and balances on sustainability, economic impacts, etc for ensuring equitable distribution of benefits to stakeholders, there are still problems galore. This brings into focus controversies in Meghalaya tourism which is of a macro scale. Some of them are related to factors within the scope of tourism (endogenous) while others are external factors that influence upon tourism development (exogenous). This column highlights three of the many controversies.

Community-based Tourism (CBT)

CBT is basically a model where the tourism resources are owned and managed by the community. In most of the destinations of Meghalaya which claim to be CBT, the tourism resources are neither owned nor managed by the community. They belong to a few parties who hold all the bargaining power. Again, CBT is basically a model where the tourism activities are operated by the community and the returns from such activities are equitably shared amongst the households of the community. In most of the destinations, the activities are run by a handful of parties who do not share a dime towards community development. If a destination is not christened as CBT, then it is fine if parties function on the principle of every man for himself. If you like, function like a capitalist and pick up all the wealth. The problem arises when a community says that it is practicing CBT but in reality it is functioning contrary to the principles of CBT. In order to break the shackles of control by the knowledgeable mighty few, it is important that awareness and training is given to the community on the very foundations and premises

of CBT. It is important to educate the stakeholders that CBT is not a business development model, rather a community development model. In Meghalaya this realisation is largely absent. This is the reason why in CBT destinations there is no development of the community but only of a handful of parties. When poverty is added to the equation, young boys and girls can be found being actively engaged in the name of CBT even during school hours. For a small return of Rs. 100 per day their entire future and well-being is sacrificed. The cost-benefit analysis does not add up. Is



this sort of tourism development we seek in our community? This answer is endogenous in nature.

Land Banks

The Meghalaya Tourism Policy, 2023 is a welcome step in the right direction and more focussed than the 2011 version. While the policy is still skewed towards business development with little direction, land banking in tourism would lead to holistic development, it has touched upon critical areas such as training of the stakeholders and service quality. That being said, an increasing addition in the policy is 'land bank'. After careful study it is found that it is a catch 22 situation. Land banking basically a western concept made popular in the mid-20th century in USA when de-industrialization resulted in large areas with abandoned land properties. Gradually it started picking up in agriculture too. Contemporarily, land banks are synonymous with real estate sector where big developers are engaged in the aggregation of land

holdings from sellers (mainly poor farmers, etc) for the purpose of development into lavish properties or further selling to investors. Gurgaon and National Capital Region of India are good examples of land banks for real estate development. Land banks in Meghalaya should be properly studied. It is true that one of the challenges to tourism development in Meghalaya is private ownership of land. Private parties/clan own land. Now, tourism needs a sizeable chunk of land for development. It cannot be done in small plots. There have been cases where a



village has not been able to promote tourism as all the land parcels were not in agreement. For example, the development of a tourism spot requires passage through a stretch of land belonging to persons X, Y, Z. If X does not subscribe to the idea, the tourism spot becomes inaccessible and hence the idea fails. The entire village becomes the loser. In such situations, the land bank concept is advantageous. If plots of land are bought/owned by some authority (say Tourism Development Regulatory Authority), then it can be issued in bulk to investors/stakeholders for tourism development.

On the flip-side, land bank in tourism is fraught with concerns. With politicians and businessmen already acquiring huge chunks of land in rural areas, will the concept of land bank in tourism benefit only a few? These parties can conglomerate amongst themselves, start tourism activities and thereby eat up all the benefits. The rural folks in the

vicinity will be out of the tourism equation. Now, here lies the question. Is land bank truly meant for equitable development of tourism or is it just to benefit a few parties? When we look at land banks in terms of Meghalaya, it has the potential to continue towards even more landlessness of the majority. Or is the government going to walk the talk of community involvement, PPP, etc as outlined in the policy? This controversy is exogenous in nature.

Commodification

In its real sense, tourism is not a commodity. It is not something that one can just buy and consume. For example, 3. Good health & well being, 4. Quality education, 5. Gender equality, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 7. Affordable and clean energy, 8. Decent work and economic growth, 9. Industry, innovation & infrastructure, 10. Reduce inequality, 11. Sustainable cities & communities, 12. Responsible consumption & production, 13. Climate action, 14. Life below water, 15. Life on land, 16. Peace, justice & strong institutions and the last one Partnerships for the goals. The situation in UKraine, and other conflict zones, will hinder the prospects of achievement, besides, the new regime in Afghanistan that forbids girls and women from attending school and workplaces. Given this picture, our small state will somehow contribute something to this global agenda.

The fundamental truth is that these are not only goals established by the UN authority and ratified by member countries, but they are symmetrical with the desires and expectations of every person and family here on earth. The state government is absolutely right when it realises this essential aspect of humanity. But whether this is a well-thought out agenda or not will be proved during and after the implementation. From the beginning of this second term as Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has shown some quality as a Wharfo Business School alumnus, unlike in the previous term where he seemed to under concern especially from the coal lobby. Thus, in this budget, and as far as SDGs are concerned, it reflects that the Chief Minister this season has practically embarked on the concept 'think global-act local'.

Having mentioned that the implementation part will prove the sincerity of the intention, functionalities of the implementation programs include public services, government officials and employees, NGOs, individuals, etc., and the Chief Minister as the leader are part of this implementation program. The House has endorsed the budget, functionalities should ensure that it is rightly allocated and utilized, and at the grass roots level all the stakeholders should participate with enthusiasm and ownership alongside a sound monitoring system in place. This is a game changer for the whole community.

Basically, at the helm of all these goals, lies the significance of economic growth. Unless there is robust growth in the economy, these developmental goals will never be achieved. On the other hand, economic growth and employment depends on industrial growth which ultimately rely on the scale and type of affordable infrastructures available in the region. This land locked state has tremendous potential in many sectors no doubt. But the general psyche of the tribal people who are largely illiterate and uneducated government jobs but with less of an enterprising spirit, and subsequently the sceptical to tap the potentials is very limited. However, having said that, a new paradigm has emerged. Today there are

Partnership in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

The budget speech of Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has certain overarching dimensions and a global outlook. By allocating a substantial amount towards SDGs, it shows that our state too is one of the stakeholders in this global objective. By saying our state, I mean each and every citizen is an inalienable part of the process.

For the benefit of all, there are altogether 17 (seventeen) goals laid down by the UN Declaration in 2015 under the caption Agenda 2030. And these are: 1. No poverty, 2. Zero hunger, 3. Good health & well being, 4. Quality education, 5. Gender equality, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 7. Affordable and clean energy, 8. Decent work and economic growth, 9. Industry, innovation & infrastructure, 10. Reduce inequality, 11. Sustainable cities & communities, 12. Responsible consumption & production, 13. Climate action, 14. Life below water, 15. Life on land, 16. Peace, justice & strong institutions and the last one Partnerships for the goals. The situation in UKraine, and other conflict zones, will hinder the prospects of achievement, besides, the new regime in Afghanistan that forbids girls and women from attending school and workplaces. Given this picture, our small state will somehow contribute something to this global agenda.

In reality, the economic growth of the state is very poor due to non existence of large and medium industries that can generate employment except mining industries which include hydroelectricity factories. But the industry is being dominated and exploited by few lucky individuals whose idea about environment and social responsibility is zero. Additionally, the rampant mining over the decades has destroyed the environment both land and water. And it will take years to restore the damage done to the environment. The need of the hour now is green industrialization coupled with social enterprises.

Coming back to the budget speech in relation to goal 16 of the SDGs - peace, justice and strong institutions, the Chief Minister has also stressed on the idea of creating and building more administrative units in the state in order to bring governance closer to the people. It sounds good but along with governance, justice must complement good governance. Therefore, judicial reforms and judicial remedies should also be brought closer to the public. For instance, for an offence committed in a district or sub-division, a victim should not be penalised further by the length of time and distance to travel to get relief and justice. It is unfortunate however to see the budget speech silent on the important goal. Governance is not about maintaining law and order only; addressing people's needs is also a priority.

In conclusion, Conrad Sangma is one of the few lucky Chief Ministers who has retained power on the occasion of this Golden Jubilee year of Meghalaya. Budgetary allocations are also driven and connected to this jubilee event as it appears. But the state government seems to have forgotten the heroes of our statehood. Forgetting their movement which is our cause today is like forgetting our own parents after they are gone. There is no attempt or plan to acknowledge their contributions except by Binde Lanang in his book entitled 'The Golden Meghalaya' where the Meghalaya can easily refer to and obtain information on.

Hindi which the Governor was speaking in. I understand that Basiaiwmoi as a responsible MLA, attending the Assembly Session wishes to listen to the Governor's address in Hindi. It is good that he can take part in the discussions after the speech which is very important. One would expect that constructive and fruitful debates take place in the House so that meaningful decisions can be made for the betterment of the state and the people. Had the Governor's address been in English which everyone could understand, the House would have been lively and positive results would have emerged.

Learning Hindi is a great opportunity. English is a command usefulness in Literatures, Science, Engineering, etc. However, it is not Language that builds the Nation; it is understanding that builds the Nation. Yours etc., Namphrang Hnomtiava, Via email

Pakistan court throws out sedition law

Editor, India is the largest democracy in the world but as far as sec 124 A of Indian law is concerned it is being kept in abeyance. Interestingly, in Pakistan sec 124A had been annulled by a single judge of the Supreme Court. It is to be noted here that the same judge Shahid Kazem had delivered judgement against Parsar Mushtarrif. The order of the court came following a set of petitions filed by citizens challenging the sedition law on grounds that the government used it against its own citizens. It was argued in the petition that the sedition law was enacted in 1866 which makes it a colonial law. It added that this law was used for slaves under which a case can be registered on anyone's request. It was stated in the petition that the Constitution of Pakistan gives every citizen the right to freedom of expression but still, Section 124 A - Sedition is imposed for making speeches against the rulers. According to the petitioners, Section 124-A of sedition is being used for political purposes and should be struck down. Sedition is defined as 'whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Federal or Provincial Government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life to which fines may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine.' The expression disaffection includes disloyalty and enmity. Comments expressing disapproval of the measures of the Government with a view to obtain their alteration by lawful means, without in-

cluding or attempting to incite hatred, contempt or disaffection cannot constitute an offence under this section. In fact the sedition law was used to bound opponents and prevent criticism of the government during the British Raj when it found its oppressive apparatus insufficient to contain the rising tide of resistance. Sadly this continued after Partition and was used by successive governments as a means of control.

Its most recent use was to register FIRs against PTI leaders Shahbaz Gill and Azam Swaiti, who were booked and then for attempting to incite mutiny. The striking down of this law saves both of them from being tried for the offence of sedition, and prevents FIRs being registered against the PTI social media activists protesting against the previous material against the previous or current Chief of Army Staff (COAS). One reason the law was retained was that it provided an easy means of preventing criticism of the military. Freedom of speech was not allowed to override it, and the previous arrangement, whereby the judiciary could strike down any actions the military took, no matter how badly they violated the Constitution, kept it alive for 76 years. Now, however, it has been struck down.

However, this should not be regarded as a culmination, but should be seen merely as a beginning. There is the practice of registering multiple cases under section 124A, so that the accused (some opponent of the regime) either has to get

bailed in multiple cases, or else is paraded throughout the country, going from one court to answer the charges. As sedition is now committed on the electronic media, FIRs can be registered anywhere where someone could have seen the offending material.

Considering that a post in Tiktokhub in the depths of Africa, might be seen in the icy wastes of Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America, that law is made to be abused. It is had enough if only colonial-era laws were thus abused, but even post-Independence laws are used not to fight crime, but to curb dissent. The Anti-Terrorist Act is a case in point. While terrorism is rising, the ATA is being invoked against opponents so as to deny them bail. All laws need to be examined, and independence should mean freedom from tools of oppression inherited from a Raj frightened of another Mutiny.

Section 124 A is identical in India and Pakistan. Now in Pakistan it has been struck down but in India it is kept in abeyance. Now a stage is reached when it will be struck down in India too since a similar situation prevails in India.

Yash Pal Ralhan, Via email

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

"Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent." — Isaac Asimov

The Shillong Times

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Xi's dirty tricks

MISCHIEF is integral to Chinese foreign policy. The dragon nation acts with a complete lack of dignity in much of its engagements with its neighbours. Apart from the 1962 war with India, this is evident also in situations like the 'salami slicing' of others' border regions, including India's. By covert, calculated and minor actions, China ultimately seeks to make a big gain. This would require that nations in the neighbourhood keep a close watch on what the 'dragon' is doing in the darkness of the night. China's latest provocation on India is the renaming of 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh, an integral part of India in the North-East sector. Despite China's repeated attempts to usurp territory in Arunachal Pradesh and having been driven away by the brave Indian ground forces, it keeps calling Arunachal Pradesh as 'South Tibet' - this, when China's unlawful 'occupation' of Tibet since 1951 is still a matter of serious global concern.

China's dictator Xi Jinping has been trying several tricks along his nation's southern border in recent years. The PLA troops he sent in 2017 to grab Doklam - a Bhutanese territory that the red nation first designated as a 'disputed' land and where it set itself on construction activity - were confronted and halted by the Indian Army. With prompt alert from the US too, Xi's game went awry. Then Xi attempted a provocation directly against India in 2021-22, when he sent PLA troops into Galwan Valley to grab Indian land. There too, India managed to drive the Chinese out though both sides suffered unspecified numbers of casualties. The argument that the border regions between India and China are not well-demarcated and hence such skirmishes were natural runs counter to Xi's proclivities to give pin-pricks to China's neighbours on a regular basis. He has been doing this with Japan, Taiwan etc and even with the West and principally the United States in the oceans where too 'usurpation' is his principal agenda. These, in gross violation of the territorial rules governing the seas. Unscrupulousness too should have its limits, and Xi knows as much - a reason why he is not taking these confrontations to a higher level.

Unfortunately, Xi has not been able to govern China properly even as he employs crude methods to put down dissent also within the Chinese Communist Party. His notorious contribution to the world is, most remarkably, the Covid-19 pandemic that upset life and devastated the economies across nations. Even now, in fresh recurrences, China is battling with the pandemic and related economic problems in major ways. Understandable, as his eyes are set on the neighbours' backyards.

Letters to the Editor

Poor service at SBI Laitumkhrah

Editor, As a pensioner, I feel deeply aggrieved by the shabby treatment meted out by the SBI generally, and the Laitumkhrah Branch, in particular. We felt assured when RBI issued an official notification that "Banks are advised to provide a clearly identifiable dedicated counter or a counter which provides priority to senior citizens and people who are differently-abled, including visually-impaired persons." How ever, the counter has not been functioning in recent months and pensioners were made to wait with the general public in the first floor of the bank for transactions, which obviously has caused a lot of distress to us pensioners. Further, the first floor counters are always short of manpower which has resulted in further delay and unnecessary suffering. It is requested that authorities take necessary steps

to redress the issue and provide a suitable counter in the ground floor for pensioners' transactions and other banking formalities like verification of Life Certificates etc., Yours etc., J. Khamsaphlang Shillong-3

Unpleasant scenes at Golf Links

Editor, I am writing to draw your attention to the unpleasant sight and experience that occurred at Golf Links Shillong on the afternoon of Sunday, April 2, 2023. With several people around, a drunk man was spotted urinating in the open to the utter dismay of the people around. It may be noted that despite issuing entry tickets to the visitors, along with presence of security personnel at the entrance, no frisking is being undertaken. This encourages people to bring their booze and get drunk in the field. I would like to ask the Shillong Golf Course

Short-sightedness of predecessors impacts Khasi-Jaintia youth today

By Prof. Lakshon Kma

The State Reservation Policy (SRP), notified by the Government of Meghalaya, Personnel Department (No. PER. 22/72/13, Dated Shillong, the 12th January, 1972) and the Roster System notified through Office Memorandum, dated 10th May 2022 (OM) based on the judgment of Meghalaya High Court (Case No. WP(C) No. 394 of 2021; (Date of order: 05-04-2022) in Zener v. Marak & Ors. vs. State of Meghalaya & Ors.) is in the eye of the storm in the recent days. It is only expected to be intensified. While the Hon'ble High Court has rightly asked for a Roster System based on reservation quotas for different categories as it exists in all central Government establishments and other States, it never asked for a cut-off date or the like or how far back the roster system would be made applicable. Apparently, the State government last year has mischievously attempted to apply the Roster System retrospectively ignoring the provisions of Clause 2 of the State Reservation Policy which clearly states that "If sufficient number of suitable candidates for filling up the reserved vacancies are not available from the respective classes in any particular year, then such vacancies will be available to others".

Further, in the same clause it says "But the deficiency in the number of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes will be carried forward to the next recruitment year and made good in the recruitment of that year, provided that the reservation on account of deficiency shall not be carried forward for more than one year. After the expiry of the second year, these reservations shall be treated as lapsed". The OM dated 10th May 2022 which was published in the Gazette of Meghalaya on May 26, 2022 stated in 'Clause D-1-In order to prepare the Reservation Roster, names of all the candidates appearing for the post on the date of notification of this O.M. starting with the earliest appointment, since the time the Reservation Policy came into effect, subject to information being available, shall be filled up in the Reservation Roster against the point in the Roster'. Furthermore, 'Clause D-4 of the OM stated that "After every recruitment cycle, an account shall be noted in the Reservation Roster indicating the representation of Khasi and Jaintia, Garo, STs and SCs and details of backlog reserved vacancies, which will be carried forward to the next recruitment cycle". Clearly, the OM has been designed with malafide intent to benefit the Garo community retrospectively, ignoring the provisions of the Clause 2 of the aforesaid Reservation Policy while framing the Roster System which is

going to kill the job prospects of the Hiyntwep people (read as Khasi and Jaintia as per the SRP). I fail to fathom who our elected representatives (representing Khasi, Jaintia and Ri-Bhoi districts were doing when the OM was issued last year. That was the right time to denounce it and more so ask for the review of the State Reservation Policy in toto before the proposed retrospective implementation of the Roster System which is against all jurisprudence and established procedures.

The Meghalaya High Court has only directed the State government to prepare

Apparently, there are serious flaws in the State Reservation Policy and subsequent OMs on the same and mostly glaringly-the Roster System the OM dated 10th May 2022 (OM) and the Hon'ble High Court of Meghalaya has cleared stated in its judgment dated April 03, 2023 while rejecting the PIL of Girehth M. Sangma vs. The State of Meghalaya & ors. on the year of applicability of the Roster System without going into the merits of the case and left it to the legislature and the executive, particularly to the new Assembly for thorough discussion. There are several important aspects that require immediate redressal. Firstly, the OM dated 10th May 2022 requires immediate review by the State government. Unless Clause 2 of the State Reservation Policy is amended by the State Assembly, how can the roster be prepared because both contradict each other. While SRP allows filling up of the vacancies by other categories in case of non-availability of suitable candidates from the respective reserved classes in any particular year and deficiency can be carried forward only for a year, the Roster System enables the carry-forward of deficiencies for an infinite period. The question is-ear the OM dated 10th May 2022 upholds the basic tenet of the SRP-the reservation of vacancies for an indefinite period. As an addendum to SRP, the OM No. PER. 22/72/5, dated 18th Dec, 1972 Clause 2.2 allowed 'combined reservation of 40% of the post in favour of Garos and Khasi Jaintias instead of a separate reservation of 40% each for

Garos and Khasi-Jaintias, respectively at District level. Why not do the same at State level? Obviously, Roster System being implemented now needs to be rectified. Lastly, if all the reservation needs to be done let it be done tribe-wise in the State, keeping in mind the youth of Meghalaya of the 21st Century and their job prospects in the State Government. In that case let's do it uniformly by dividing the 80% based on population size and prepare the roster accordingly and retrospectively. This of course, is not realistic similar to the existing 40-40 ratio. There is a dominant State in the country where reservation is divided tribe-wise, be it 3 or 33 recognized tribes. Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram all have combined reservation of ST except for minor tribes. Even Manipur has 31% combined reservation for STs. I think all elected representatives cutting across party lines from Jaintia Hills, Ri-Bhoi and Khasi Hills have to demand the immediate modification of the OM dated 10th May 2022 and concurrent review of the SRP. Similarly, all the student bodies, NGOs, civil societies, social thinkers and the general public need to forget their differences and demand for the same in one voice because it concerns the jobs prospects of the entire Hiyntwep people.

The elections are over and we all took what was in the offerings. It's time to put our heads together specifically on State level to demand for the associated Roster System so that the right and fair share of the State's available jobs of our Khasi-Jaintia youths of today and future generations are protected. We have to be ready for hard and prolonged democratic and peaceful agitations across the State to force the government of the day to review its decisions and get ready for any consequences. With one voice, we must demand to convene a Special Assembly Session only to discuss and review the State Reservation Policy and associated Roster System. No matter which formula is adopted, any Reservation Policy and the associated Roster System cannot be made applicable to me. You want to hear my story guys? I'm innocent. I tell you, I'm innocent. I haven't done a crime in my life, except this one, and I don't think it was a crime. You guys want to hear what happened? Okay let me tell you.

Listen, I'm a normal sort of fellow, have a dog, a wife, yeah, yeah just like you guys, a normal person, and innocent, just like you guys, but this morning the doorbell rang. I walked to the door, swung it open and found a grinning face outside with folder hands. "Namaste sir," says the grinning face as it tries to shake my hand then tries to walk past me into my house. "May I come in?" "No!" I exclaim, "You may not! I don't know you!" "You do know me sir!" says the face with a wider grin and hands reaching out to embrace me. "No I don't." "You do sir?" "No I don't! Who are you?" "We met five years back sir," says the grinning face, with folded hands. "Where?" "I lette only sir?" "Here?" "Yes sir." "And why did we meet here?" "I came for your vote sir?" "Aha, you are!" "Your voice in Parliament sir! May I come in now?" "No!" say angrily. "Do you know how many times I came to meet you at your office after I gave you my vote?" "No sir?" "But you never had the time. You were always busy, too busy, your men sent away, thugs and goons who stood outside your office

to see me!" I tell him. "Then I will come and see you sir," said the politician as he stepped out of my house and reached the gate. "Where?" I shouted, ranting after him. "Before the 2029 election sir!" And then I hit him. "Yes guys, I hit him. I told the judge that even he would have done the same. I told my wife that she also would have done the same but I mean anybody would have. Oh but that judge would have nothing of my argument. He even fined me twenty-five thousand like that. What a judge. My wife too was very angry, she did not come to see me off! They looked at me as if I sir," says the grinning face as it tries to shake my hand then tries to walk past me into my house. "May I come in?" "No!" I exclaim, "You may not! I don't know you!" "You do know me sir!" says the face with a wider grin and hands reaching out to embrace me. "No I don't." "You do sir?" "No I don't! Who are you?" "We met five years back sir," says the grinning face, with folded hands. "Where?" "I lette only sir?" "Here?" "Yes sir." "And why did we meet here?" "I came for your vote sir?" "Aha, you are!" "Your voice in Parliament sir! May I come in now?" "No!" say angrily. "Do you know how many times I came to meet you at your office after I gave you my vote?" "No sir?" "But you never had the time. You were always busy, too busy, your men sent away, thugs and goons who stood outside your office

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Bob's Banter Before the 2029 Elections Sir..!

By Robert Clements

I'm not a person addicted to violence and frankly I have little idea how I've landed in jail. It's no place I've ever been before. I mean I have seen jails from the outside; huge gates and lofty walls and have even visited the old Bristle in France, which fascinated me, especially after reading The Tale of Two Cities by Dickens! Pretty horrible what you read, but then it's like a voyage our looking at things from outside and things you'll never be part of the horror, but today, seeing the inside of a jail, never did I think I'd be in this situation! Never in my wildest dreams would I have ever thought I'd land up in such a place. Never. But here I am!

Which decent man would? I'm not a criminal. Have paid all my taxes, never shirked at anyone except the occasional yell when I can't find my bathroom slippers or maybe find the dog's ball at go at my shoes of newspaper, but other than that, never.

But today I'm in jail. I look out of the window and see other fellows more ferocious than I've ever seen walking around and looking oh so rough. I have no idea what those guys will do to me. I've heard they are pretty rough on newcomers. I'm terrified, and I fear them. They are walking towards me, those big fellows and looks like a, a law abiding

door with smirks and sneers and knuckled up fists! They nearly laughed me up when I tried to insist on seeing you!"

"For what you came to meet me sir?"

"Roads in the city not repaired! Water during the monsoons, all over the ground, but never in our taps, law and order getting worse by the day! What are you doing?"

"Writing it down sir"

"Now?" I ask.

"If you state forme, I will do everything."

"Will we get water?"

"Did I sir? So say the same I thing last time?"

"Did I sir? So many people I have to speak to, don't remember all I say sir!"

"Will our roads be repaired?"

"Your vote is my guarantee."

"Will we get water?"

"My symbol is Nymphacae sir"

"Nymphacae? What's that?"

"Just like Lotus, but we are water lily sir! But all water plants bleed in same things sir! And here is your ballot number sir!"

"But have you written down all I have complained about?"

"Not everything sir. Up to standard four we write very slowly sir."

"Then how will you remember everything?"

"Come to my office after the elections sir!"

"But you won't have time

Today I'm in jail. I look out of the window and see other fellows more ferocious than I've ever seen walking around and looking oh so rough. I have no idea what those guys will do to me. I've heard they are pretty rough on newcomers. I'm terrified, and I fear them. They are walking towards me, those big fellows and looks like me, a law abiding fellow is now going to be made mince-meat by these ruffians.

Editor, The second wave of Covid 19 second in the country has caused havoc with thousands of active cases being reported every day. This is really an alarming sign of the spread of this pandemic. Our state too is no exception to this quick spread of Covid and already a case has been detected in East Khasi Hills. Instead of issuing guidelines or SOPs, the Health Department is still monitoring the situation. Will the Health Department take appropriate steps before the situation goes out of control as it is said that a "stitch in time saves nine". Yours etc., S. Singhania, Via email

Covid arrives in Meghalaya

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"Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." — Mother Teresa

The Shillong Times

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BJP as behemoth

WHILE the BJP celebrated its 44th foundation day on Thursday, the party's rank and file has reasons to cheer. The saffron party has grown by leaps and bounds over the past four decades, as is reflected in the growth in the BJP's representation in Parliament. Fact is also that at the ground level, the party has less organizational heft other than in its highly energetic election campaign blitz. In several states, it survives more by the strength of the well-organised RSS network. This 'lying low' might also be due to the fact that it has been in power for the past nine years at a stretch.

The BJP was a new political entity that emerged in 1980 out of the former Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the principal opposition party for most part since 1951, and both having been patronized by the RSS. In between came the Emergency and brief merger of the Jan Sangh with the Janata Party. The BJP, at its start, was led by two stalwarts, Atal Behari Vajpayee who later became prime minister and LK Advani. The RSS pulled the strings from behind. The transformation that has come about for the BJP since 2014 is that it has evolved into a party recognisable because of an individual -- Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister. Modi neither denies nor confirms this. The RSS too has reconciled to an extent to this scenario though the ideology that the BJP and the prime minister hold aloft is of the RSS itself. The RSS has itself changed over the years, tamed its own anti-Hindu stances and opted to adopt a more pro-nationalist posture. Hence the statement that it treats all those born in India, irrespective of their religious faiths, as Hindus. The ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) is a guiding philosophy of Hindu religion, as is recorded in Sanskrit texts of the past. Problems arose when Hindutva was turned into a political tool to win power.

Undeniably, Hindutva formed the core of the BJP's political philosophy, as was also reflected in the fact that the party raised its low political stance by eminently making use of the Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi issue since the late 1980s to eventually outwit the Congress and seize power. The stable and mature manner in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi ran the government for two terms and kept the party under his firm control has helped the BJP cement its hold on the nation. The party's strength is still the Hindi belt -- which, with its wide parliamentary compass, decides who should rule the nation -- unlike the Congress that has its roots everywhere.

Letters to the Editor

Why this need to whitewash the past?

Editor, The editorial "Keep education out of politics" (ST April 6, 2023) is timely and requires a nationwide discussion. How can important parts of our history be obliterated just to suit the political motives of a political party in power? Is there any other country with a similar penchant for erasing parts of the curriculum simply because the ruling party is party embarrassed by some parts of the history? Most Germans are embarrassed about that part of their history when Hitler kept his enemies in concentration camps and subjected them to the worst treatment. Also the Holocaust -- a systemic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million European Jews by Hitler's Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators, but the Germans have not erased this part of their history and have on the contrary learnt lessons on how not to repeat such instances which have defaced their past. In fact, every country has its share of in glorious past incidents. Cruelty and despotic acts by certain rulers marked their histories. From Australasia to Canada the aborigines were pushed into

The crucified and resurrected Jesus

By Albert Thyrnning

Christians are in the Holy Week. The most important week begins with Palm Sunday and culminates with Easter vigil. Who is this Jesus whom the crowd cheered for when He triumphantly arrived in a city of Jerusalem as 'king' riding on a young donkey? Who is this teacher who washed the feet of his disciples during a meal on Holy Thursday? Who is this prophet who had to face a shameful death at his prime on Good Friday? What led to the 'disgraceful' consequence of crucifixion? Who is this religious leader who through his resurrection on Easter Sunday, showed that death is not the end of everything?

An unconvincing Jesus Jesus was crucified because he stood by his convictions. He was always at odds with the Jews in general and the Pharisees in particular. Throughout his three years of ministry in Palestine he was constantly accused of breaking the Sabbath day. For the Jews Saturday was (is) a day of complete rest literally and strictly adhering to the statement in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, "God created the universe in six days and on the seventh day he rested." Even on today's secular Jews would not do any work on the holy day. Even cooking, lighting a fire, fetching water are forbidden as they constitute work. Jesus did not agree with this school of thought for the Ten Commandments merely gives a general instruction, "Keep the Sabbath holy." The Ten Commandments were multiplied into more than 600 prescriptions which had become a burden to the common and illiterate folk.

Jesus broke the seventh day by performing miracles on Sabbath. He extended his hands to heal the sick and touched the eyes of the blind with his fingers. For him Sabbath was a day to do good. The Pharisees, a separated class (from the ordinary Jews) who insisted on the exact observance of the law, questioned Jesus on his actions. Jesus was not to alter his position. He was adamant not to cease work because of opposition. He faced the consequence for it. At the trial by Caiaphas before Jesus was taken to Pontius Pilate, the allegation of violating the Sabbath was brought before the powerful cleric.

The next accusation was blasphemy. For the Jews Yahweh is their only God. Jesus declared himself as 'the son of God'. This was a sacrilege. Jesus, instead of being apologetic, re-affirmed that He came from God that He and God were one and that He did everything as commanded by His Father. Jesus was an unceasing thorn in the flesh of the Pharisees and therefore they looked for every opportunity to get rid of him. Finally they conspired with Judas, one of apostles, into betraying his master. He led the team of the Jews into the Garden of Gethsemane for Jesus to be taken into custody. No wonder Caiaphas found Him guilty of blasphemy. Unlike Jesus, many a Christian today, including leaders, compromise on their principles. The scandals in the Church are a result of the compromise on one's identity and vocation. Unprincipled politics is apparent before our eyes. Devoid of any ideology, pliable Christian politicians came together after a media-driven campaign accusing each of corruption and being anti-Christ. Yet, these 'netas' even publicly call on Jesus' name.

A Revolutionary Jesus Jesus' view on Sabbath was revolutionary. He challenged the prevailing practices. He did not go by the established conventions. It was not a surprise that the Pharisees did not tolerate Him. And He himself knew that if He continued to swim against the current He would suffer serious consequences. Besides Sabbath, Jesus befriended the tax collectors, sinners and the lowly. Jesus was not a religious fanatic. He wanted to break the social and religious barriers that kept a community apart. This was not taken kindly by the religious leaders who were not to part with Him. Jesus was not deemed even fit to mean an untimely end.

In mainstream religions Jesus is not a radical. In Christianity and Islam the Scriptures, beliefs, dogmas and established practices are not expected to be questioned. Individuals have been condemned because they dared to express reservations over certain religious matters. Hindutva is said to be the most tolerant religion. That tag is fast disappearing today. Groups claiming to represent the most ancient religion even use violence against their perceived enemies. A judgement of right or wrong is not pronounced here but probably Jesus would not

condemn anyone. An Offending Jesus Jesus offended the Pharisees. He criticised the anti-Hellenistic class. He called them hypocrites and whitewashed tombs. These were words most unkind. He called them out because their preaching and actions did not tally. They pretended to excel in the observance of religion but their hearts were unreligious. They prayed in public places to be seen by others. They fasted but they put up a dismal face to be noticed by others. They gave alms but announced it before all. Of course, the Pharisees, who were deadly against any Greek-Roman influence, were self-righteous and hence did not pay heed to Jesus' denunciation. They became all the more hardened hearted relentlessly in their pursuit of their detractor.

In our world too criticism and dissent is not taken kindly. Taking these 'sticks' to the public service, religious or civil are becoming rarer. A non-status Jesus Jesus rode on a donkey until he entered Jerusalem for the last time. The use of a donkey symbolised the arrival of the humble Jesus, the Prince of Peace who came to set at naught the king who usually came on a horse. He also washed the feet of his disciples, an act performed by servants for their masters.

Religious leaders today are attached to status symbols. We ride in expensive cars. Those in high office were not the least. They sit on 'throne'. Servant leadership is not always appreciated. Ironically our ministers and MLAs who saw before the media that they are to be guided by Jesus, possess vehicles like Toyota Camry (25 lakh), Grand Vitara (10 lakh), Ford Top Mahindra (10 lakh), Fortuner (20 lakh), Innova (20 lakh) not to mention the cash, residence and commercial buildings, jewellery and other assets. The favours which politicians are the different variants of Holero which costs over Rs10 lakh. These are beyond the reach of most people. More than 70% of the current MLAs are crocodists, a rise from the 71% in the last Assembly. Jesus never had any of these. He was poor and humble. Ministers and MLAs are also servants but behave like lords.

India. They also serve as venues for continuing adult education, state, central and panchayat election camps, emergency ration and relief centres and cyclone shelters during natural calamities. The rural schools also serve as make-shift police stations and security force camps under emergency situations. Furthermore, they also serve as village community centres, discussion platforms or meeting places for both government and non-government social workers, makeshift medical dispensaries and rural health camps as well as emergency relief and medical support centres. Although many of these services outside the educational sector have been severely criticized, yet in a highly populated nation with minimal infrastructure in remote locations schools serve as important locations for the needy and vulnerable. They are used for those broader social roles and responsibilities.

Whither waste management Editor, The other day a leading RJ of the city who champions the cause of cleanliness

the margins by colonisers but there are attempts to redress these past insensitivities, but not by rewriting history. I now feel as if we are conspiring to hide the facts of history from our young ones but while the NCERT can change the curriculum, they cannot pull down from the internet the entire history of this country nor matter how much the powers that be want that to happen. The young will be even more curious now to find out why the NCERT wants certain chapters to read out a few names of those pollutants and one can only hope that those people have been heavily fined by the Implying Dharab Shong. However, the RJ while asking people why they dumped their garbage in that place got the reply that the garbage collection truck never comes for months together. Often the people living within the Implying dharab got and throw their garbage into the trucks collecting garbage from residents of Nongmying. It's now nearly two weeks since the new RJ visited the temporary garbage dump but neither has the Dharab Shong taken any action nor have the residents stopped dumping garbage there. The Wahkhat river flows a little way from the garbage dump and a lot of its garbage flows down that river into the Wah Umkhrak. This is the state of all the rivers in Shillong. They have become garbage dumps, septic tanks and drains for kitchen wastes. Does all this not affect the

environment? Is this not part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? When will the Government take cognizance of this continued degradation of our river systems? The less said about the District Councils the better. They have lost their objectives completely and the reason for their existence. They just don't care what happens to the rivers, or forests. They watch without concern as people quarry wherever they want, cut all the trees they want to make charcoal and violate every rule in the book. Do such institutions need to continue when their existence makes no difference to our lives. Perhaps their only concern now is to issue trading licenses; collect tolls and exist on a shoestring budget without getting their books of accounts audited. They have no work in real situations! Who will save this State is the existential dilemma.

Yours etc., Charisdon Wahlang, Via email

Rural schools serve multiple functions Editor, Rural schools are not just centers of education in

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Meghalaya - People are also corrupt

By Rudi Warji

Lately astronomical space. Be it in the print media, electronic media, social media has been monopolized only by the subject of corruption of politicians of the popular metaphor 'High Level'. Mezzanine level of the civil servants of the Government. Church leaders have also been dragged into the corrompy because they brokered between politicians and God at exclusively arranged prayer meetings before the swearing in. Spare the politicians for a moment. Here I am writing about those among the corrupt public and the people of Meghalaya.

Take the last elections. Kudos to the exceptional few who have won largely because of crowd-funding. Otherwise, the money collected from legal mining, accans etc. have been well spent. Winners who benefited from this money pipeline were able to buy voters in droves. Why? Because voters have become easily purchasable. A farmer who worked on my farm boasted how he was given a blanket, agricultural tools and 5000 rupees. My return was that he himself had said that the cost of a calf was 20,000 but his price was 5000. In other words it was a cheap deal for the calf.

By succeeding to have Jesus killed, the Pharisees thought they had got rid of Him for good. But that was not to be. In three days He rose from the dead. The large stone that blocked the grave was removed. He appeared to His disciples and to other women. His disciples saw Him. Saint Thomas placed his finger on his wounds. The Pharisees heard about the coming of events and bribed the soldiers guarding the tomb to lie before the authorities saying that while they were asleep Jesus' disciples stole His body away. How can those who sleep walk on duty testify?

Soon the disciples became bold to proclaim that Jesus was alive. In Parul, the Pharisee and an avowed persecutor of Christians became Christ's Apostle. A community called Christians emerged. The name of Jesus spread far and wide. No persecution and oppression succeeded. Today Christ's believers are more than 2.2 billion worldwide.

The Pharisees did not succeed in banishing Jesus. He is the most popular name today. Presently Christians are persecuted in India through anti-conversion laws and other means. This could be a blessing in disguise.

My story is about the corrupt and ready to bribe public which concerns the Transport Department. It is, however, an illustration of the malaise, the vicious cycle and venality in the system. This also applies with some variation in public dealings with Government Departments like PWD, Urban Department, Excise, Food & Civil Supplies, Police, Mining, Power, etc.

Now my humble request to the churches of all denominations is to firstly, please stop being hierarchical to politicians in the church. The then US President Barack Obama and his family who would occupy any vacant seat irrespective of the means in a church. More importantly, do get out of the box for a change. Some data about the disconnect between the spiritual Christian faith and what today present Christian faith would help. Conduct a polling with secret ballots about bribery. I am ready to draft a brief questionnaire. An anti-bribe campaign is proactive by the Churches in this holy week. The Bible says that on day 2 after Jesus entered Jerusalem, he went to the Temple. The idea of the courts full of corrupt money changers. He began overturning their tables and clearing the Temple, saying "My temple will be a house of prayer, but you have turned it into a den of thieves." Luke 19:46.

A blessed Good Friday and a Happy Easter greetings to all

Science behind experience of unexplainable presence



If you've ever had the eerie sensation there's a presence in the room when you were sure you were alone, you may be reluctant to admit it. Perhaps it was a profound experience that you are happy to share with others. Or — more likely — it was something in between the two.

Unless you had an explanation to help you process the experience, most people will struggle to grasp what happened to them. But now research is showing this ethereal experience is something we can understand, using scientific models of the mind, the body, and the relationship between the two.

One of the longest studies on the topic was carried out as long ago as 1894. The Society for Psychical Research (SPR) published their Census of Hallucinations, a survey of more than 17,000 people in the UK, US and Europe. The survey

aimed to understand how common it was for people to have seemingly impossible visitations that foretold death. The SPR concluded that such experiences happened too often to be down to chance (one in every 43 people that were surveyed).

In 1886, the SPR (which numbered former UK prime minister William Gladstone and poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson among its patrons) published Phantasms of the Living. This collection included 701 cases of telepathy, premonitions and other unusual phenomena. For instance, the Reverend PH Newnham, of Devonport in Plymouth, told the story of a visit to New Zealand, where a night-time presence warned him away from joining a boat trip at dawn the next morning. He later learnt that all on the voyage had drowned.

At the time, phantasms was criticised for being unscientific.

The census was received with less scepticism, but it still suffered from response bias (who would bother responding to such a survey except those with something to say). But such experiences live on in homes across the world, and contemporary science offers ideas for understanding them.

Not such sweet dreams

Many of the accounts SPR collected sound like hypnagogia: hallucinatory experiences that happen on the boundaries of sleep. It has been suggested that several religious experiences recorded in the 19th century have a basis in hypnagogia. Presences have a particularly strong link with sleep paralysis, experienced by around 7% of adults at least once in their life. In sleep paralysis our muscles remain frozen as a hangover from REM sleep, but our mind is active and awake. Stud-

ies have suggested more than 50% of people with sleep paralysis report encountering a presence.

While the Victorian presences documented by the SPR were often benign or comforting, modern examples of presence triggered by sleep paralysis tend to exude malevolence. Societies around the world have their own stories about nighttime presences — from the Portuguese "little friar with the pierced hand" (Fradinho da Mao Furada) who could infiltrate people's dreams, to the Ogun Oru of the Yoruba people in Nigeria, which was believed to be a product of victims being bewitched.

But why would an experience such as paralysis create a feeling of presence? Some researchers have focused on the specific characteristics of waking up in such an unusual situation. Most people find sleep paralysis scary, even without hallucinations. In 2007, sleep researchers J Allen Cheyne and Todd Girard argued that if we wake paralysed and vulnerable, our instincts would make us feel threatened and our mind fills in the gap. If we are prey, there must be a predator.

Another approach is to look at the commonalities between visitations in sleep paralysis and other types of felt presence. Research over the past 25 years has shown presences are not only a regular part of the hypnagogic landscape, but also reported in Parkinson's disease, psychosis, near-death experiences and bereavement. This suggests that it's unlikely to be a sleep-specific phenomenon.

Mind-body connection

We know from neurological case studies and brain stimulation experiments that presences can be provoked by bodily cues. For example, in 2006 neurologist Shahar Arzy and colleagues were able to create a "shadow figure" that was experienced by a woman whose brain was being electrically stimulated in the left temporoparietal junction (TPJ). The figure seemed to mirror the woman's body position — and the TPJ combines information about our



senses and our bodies.

A series of experiments in 2014 also showed that disrupting people's sensory expectations seems to induce a feeling of presence in some healthy people. The way the procedure the researchers used works is to trick you into feeling as if you are touching your own back, by synchronising your movements with a robot directly behind you. Our brains make sense of the synchronisation by inferring that we are producing that sensation. Then, when that synchronisation is disrupted by making the robot touch slightly out of sync — people can suddenly feel like another person is present: a ghost in the machine. Changing the sensory expectations of the situation induces something like a hallucination.

That logic could also apply to a situation like sleep paralysis. All our usual information about our bodies and senses is disrupted in that context, so it's perhaps no surprise that we may feel like there is something "other" there with us. We might feel like it's another presence, but

really, it's us.

In a research in 2022, the researcher tried to trace the similarities in presences from clinical accounts, spiritual practice and endurance sports (which are well known for producing a range of hallucinatory phenomena, including presence). In all of these situations, many aspects of the feeling of a presence were very similar: for example, the subject felt that the presence was directly behind them. Sleep-related presences were described by all three groups, but so were presences driven by emotional factors, such as grief and bereavement.

Despite its century-old origins, the science of felt presence has really only just begun. In the end, scientific research may give us one over-arching explanation, or we may need several theories to account for all these examples of presence. But the encounters people described in Phantasms of the Living aren't phantoms of a bygone age. If you're yet to have this unsettling experience, you probably know someone who has. (*The Conversation*)

Treating long COVID with Ayurveda



Even as the world gets into recovery mode post-pandemic, many people are still grappling with the symptoms of long COVID. According to the WHO, if you have recovered from COVID-19 but some symptoms stay stubborn, such as shortness of breath, brain fog, and fatigue, the condition is known as long Covid. Long Covid symptoms also include palpitations, insomnia, gastric problems such as bloating, acidity, irritable bowel, muscle weakness, and mobility issues.

Any microbe that enters the body causes toxicity, resulting in the imbalance of Doshas or bio-energies of one's body. Our bodies are prone to infectious diseases when we have a weak immune system, and Panchakarma along with other curative Ayurveda treatments helps to strengthen the immune system. In Ayurveda,

the Panchakarma procedure is used as a prophylactic to prevent infectious diseases and incidentally can also help to prevent a relapse.

In the case of a COVID patient who has tested negative for the virus, the Vaidyas (doctors) at CGH Earth recommends the Panchakarma procedure to strengthen and fortify the body. However, such procedures cannot be administered soon after recovery, though other Ayurvedic treatments for insomnia, anxiety, stress-related disorders, and immune boosting can be done.

To do the Panchakarma cleansing procedures, it is recommended to allow the body to heal itself — for up to six to two months in order for the energy levels to get back to normal or near normal. This is the same recommendation that Ayurveda would give for a person

who has undergone surgery or some serious illness: a gap of two or three months before undergoing the Panchakarma.

Meanwhile, the degree of long COVID symptoms varies from patient to patient and therefore the treatment protocols vary as well. The doctor will need to watch and assess when the patient is ready to undergo only one or multiple karmas which are part of the Panchakarma procedure.

Long COVID patients suffer from respiratory problems and also issues related to the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, cardiac-related conditions, neurological conditions, and brain and kidney issues. COVID also affects the sense organs wherein some people lose their sense of smell, taste, hearing, and vision for an extended period

of time. Many post-COVID suffer from insomnia, brain fog, and anxiety.

Although Panchakarma has immense health benefits, it is critical that for post-COVID patients the energy level is checked prior to putting them on any treatments, as they are firing processes that do initially lower one's energy. Panchakarma procedures include detoxification of the body. This is a necessary stage of treatment as the disease-causing microbes bring a lot of toxins into the body and if they remain in the body, Ayurvedic treatments cannot address the conditions that have manifested internally.

For Kapha-related lung infections, chest pain, and infected pleural cavities the patient is treated with Herbal drug-induced vomiting or Vamana (one of the deep cleansing Panchakarma procedures). Likewise for gastric infection or if the liver or pancreas is affected purgation is advised. Meanwhile, the main procedure for problems related to sensory organs like loss of smell or taste is Nasya i.e. nasal treatment.

For those affected by arthritis, degenerating muscles, or skin lesions, Vasti or medicated enemas are prescribed. It is to be noted that this is not merely Colon cleansing but the administration of special medicines into the colon and rectum where the medications in them are easily absorbed internally.

Alongside the Panchakarma procedures, secondary treatments or "Upakarmas" are also administered to the patients. "Tharpanam" which is administered for the eyes and "Karnapurani" for the ears are treatments that Ayurveda prescribes for patients who have long COVID conditions related to these sensory organs. Treatments like "Njavankizhi" and "Pizhichil" also aid in correcting the Vata, Pitta, and Kapha imbalances and help rejuvenate and rebuild the body from the inside out.

Herbal medications are administered to improve the immune system. In particular, those with respiratory tract issues benefit from these prescribed herbal medicines by improving their lung capacity and removal of excess accumulation of phlegm or fibroids.

These medicines are beneficial for those with GI tract issues.

Regularly strengthening the body with herbal preparations after a course of Panchakarma, helps to keep COVID and other infectious diseases at bay. In Ayurveda, the course of medication can last from three to six months and in some cases where the patient is very weak, it is prescribed for a year. (*ANSLife*)

Discover the hidden gems of India

Want to make your long weekend activities more interesting? Why not explore off-the-beaten-path locations that are guaranteed to thrill you and find India's hidden gems? Many of us are reviewing our trip checklists, dusting off our bags, and exploring the uncharted regions as people are starting to warm up to travelling once more.

India is a diverse country with a fascinating past and culture that has long captivated visitors. There are numerous well-known tourist destinations in the nation, but there are also undiscovered treasures that are just ready to be discovered. These locations, which range from Assam's breathtaking Majuli island to Himachal Pradesh's 'Mini Switzerland of India', are sure to send your pulse racing.

In order to help you find India's lesser-known gems over the upcoming long weekend, IANSlife spoke with Yatra.com, one of the country's top travel agencies, and put together a list of 5 unique locations you simply must visit.

MAJULI, ASSAM

Majuli is a lovely island that can be found in Assam's Brahmaputra River. It is known for its culture and natural beauty and is the largest river island in the globe. There are

numerous indigenous communities on the island, and visitors can learn about their traditional way of living. Majuli is renowned for its distinctive design, with many of its homes being constructed on stilts and featuring elaborate carvings. On foot or by bicycle, visitors can tour the island and take in the breathtaking views of the river and the surrounding landscape.

Travellers today encounter the inconvenience of checking into a motel for a few hours but being charged for an entire day's stay while taking in the sights and sounds of a new location. Fortunately, Yatra saves the day with Flexi accommodations. Therefore, you only pay for the time spent at the hotel, regardless of whether you remain there for 4 hours or 3 days. Now, visitors can take advantage of their stays without having to spend extra time.

HAMPI, KARNATAKA

In the Indian state of Karnataka, there is an ancient settlement called Hampi. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and served as the capital of the Vijayanagara Empire, one of South India's most potent empires.

Hampi is well-known for its impressive ruins, which include 14th-century churches, palaces, and other buildings. The buildings'



elaborate carvings and sculptures can be admired as visitors tour the ruins on foot or by bicycle.

Hampi is a fantastic location to sample regional cuisine and South Indian custom.

KHAJJAR, HIMACHAL PRADESH

Khajjar is a small town located in the district of Chamba in Himachal Pradesh. It is often referred to as the 'Mini Switzerland of India' because of its scenic beauty and tranquil surroundings. The town is situated at an altitude of 6,500 feet and is surrounded by lush green meadows and dense forests. Visitors can enjoy trekking, horse riding, and other outdoor activities, or simply relax and soak up the natural beauty of the area. Khajjar is also home to many ancient temples and historical monuments that offer a glimpse into

the town's rich cultural heritage.

GOKARNA, KARNATAKA

Gokarna is a small town located on the coast of Karnataka. It is well-known for its immaculate beaches and laid-back atmosphere, making it a favourite spot for backpackers and tourists trying to get away from the hustle and commotion of city life. Many historic shrines, including the Lord Shiva-dedicated Mahabaleswar Temple, can be found in Gokarna. Visitors can unwind on one of the town's stunning beaches and enjoy sunbathing, yoga on the sand, and other activities.

DZUKOU VALLEY, NAGALAND

In the province of Nagaland, there is a hidden gem called Dzukou Valley. With its gently rolling hills, verdant woods, and clear streams,

it is renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty. The valley is a well-loved vacation spot for those who enjoy the outdoors and wildlife be-



cause it is home to numerous unique and endangered species of plants and animals. The Naga people, who have lived in the valley for generations, have a distinctive culture that visitors can experience while trekking and camping there.

Travellers occasionally plan and reserve their upcoming trip while fully aware that these plans could still be derailed by sickness or any other change in travel itinerary. Yatra steps in to save the day by giving their customers the option of "cancellation protection," which enables them to alter their flight plans or request a complete refund on domestic flights without incurring any cancellation fees.

India is a nation filled with surprises, to sum it up. What are you still holding out for? It's time to move past the commonplace and investigate the extraordinary! Experience India's hidden gems, and make experiences that will last a lifetime. These unusual locations are guaranteed to make you feel alive and renewed, whether you're looking for adventure, peace, or just a chance to get away from the city. Pack your bags and embark on an unforgettable trip to discover India's lesser-known gems. Your extended weekend has just become much more thrilling! (IANSlife)



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambal Sunday, APRIL 9, 2023

'Birthday Forecast'
Moon opposite Venus on your solar return chart and it will give exciting results. You will have a favorable chart for your career/business. You will receive good advice in charitable and social activities. You will have no dire signs of financial trouble. Your income will also grow. You will manage your work load well. Some vital works of yours will get done in a spectacular way or with a commission. You will come up to the expectations of one and all. You will be meeting some VIP of all of a chance. You will have loving relations with your partner. Your leadership skills will get highlighted in your specialty. You will look after your family well. You will manage well in a crisis. You will be able to fulfill your promises made to others. Students will get admission in an illustrious university of their choice. Any investment in the stock market may prove you a good market trader.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) This week your dignity, respect and fame will grow by leaps and bounds. You will be the focus of attention and talk-innupt of discussion. You will be highly respected and highly respected with you. Your colleagues will also perform every task in office after consulting you. You will also guide them well. There will be stability in your job/business. Your efforts will be rewarded. There will be success. The whole week period, during this week will be success achieving. You get an unrelated matter will get momentum. All your success will get their focus. You will be excelling in your work. You will get confidence with the high. You may receive the awards in the form of recognition/benefit of gift.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) This week will bring mixed results to you. You will have some things to deal with in your life. Your family problems will take time to get resolved. It is time for you to decide what is best for you. You could be asked to assume leadership role in your work or in your family. You will get support from your family. You will be a source of worry but you will manage the things well. You financial angle will get stronger. In your health, the atmosphere will remain congenial. In the matters, don't take any decision by being emotional. Your superiors will appreciate you for great achievement. You will move ahead with a positive outlook. Matters will drop in and you will remain busy in welcoming them.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) Things are again appearing bright. The planetary situation will once again become favorable. You will be busy in prayers and meditation. You will also receive the blessing of your elders. You will take some concrete decisions in your business. You might get into a new venture. There are chances of losses in business. Your social circle will expand. You will make new plans for making money. Whatever work you will do, it will get done with ease. You will be successful in all your responsibilities and your financial side will be strong. A lot of work will be done in making new things and interesting subjects. You will also get into a new project. You will be able to do your work with lot of dedication and sincerity.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) You will go on a business trip. Money gains are indicated. Your work will also get up. You will also perform well in your work and see the support of your colleagues. You will be in a two minds about a business/proposal. You will be a little doubtful about the whole thing. Just apply your common sense and take a decision based on facts. Your health will improve. You will have no money problems. You will also contact with someone who is a long time friend of yours. You will also get into an export and import business with number of orders of matter. You will make new investments after a lot of deliberation. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your male. Students will perform well in studies.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) Time is gold and we need to value it. You will be popular all around. You will consider you magnificent and will get the backing of your bosses. You will get happiness and best of family life. You will also bring new changes in your habits and behavior. Army of guests in the cards. Health of family members need to be taken care of. Property division matters will get resolved with someone's intervention. Love will be on your perfect bond. A family get together or party will take place. You will work more hard during the season of work. The more rewards and benefits will get to you. Joy will come in the family. Time will be favorable for you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) The graph of your career will go up. You will get the support of your partner. You will use your popularity to its best. Your contacts with big people will start giving you a lot of benefits. All potential skills will be completed knowledge and the graph of your financial side will also be stable. You will

fill all of your responsibilities and duties. You will enjoy good understanding with your spouse. You will also get good money and your income will rise. People will observe your capabilities and potential. Your money which had been stuck for a while in the past will return to you. You will also check your financial/business side. You will receive a pleasant news from someone.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) It will be a favorable time period for you. You will have monetary benefits. You will be humble, impulsive and emotional. Your angles will get completed. You will be a innovator and will implement new ideas and thoughts. You will make a mental print of work that need to be done and will focus on it. You need to avoid mental tension in your work and cooperate with your colleagues. You will come up to the expectations of your bosses. You will be having more strong bond. The lady luck will smile on you. Love matters will enjoy wonderful bonding and understand feelings of each other that your domestic life will be stable. You will get support of your family members.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23) Some thoughts will be going in your mind to make things better. You will also get ambitious and you will not accept any subordinate position. Your status will be high and you will establish your supremacy over others. You will be a hard task master and will not tolerate any indolence. You could get a promotion in your job or a new job offer. Your business too will flourish. Whatever fate you are in, you will rise as the top. You will be a very self respecting person and will not be bothered by others. You will love your independence, nature and great working under any one. You need to keep your egoism under control. The trouble between the spouse will be solved.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) In the end, the pressure will be to achieve the target. You will have to be a bit of a perfectionist. You will not rely on your subconscious and will be fairly your work single handedly. If you work in an ethical and planned way, you may achieve the desired success. Your fortune will be on the rise. Your business too will flourish. You will make new investments but with a lot of caution. Be very careful about giving your money as you may never get it back. The health of an elderly family member will be a cause of worry. You will share wonderful bonding with your partner. You will also start work on your new plans and projects. Students will continue doing well.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) You will complete your work with sincerity. You will also achieve name and fame and will have direct conversation with the people. You will have much more authority than before. You will also have a favorable time. Financially you will be a lot stronger. You will get a property from your family elders. All these auspicious functions will continue. You will have a well time. You will also spare time to sit with your parents, guardians or seniors. Your noble deeds may lead to an award or gift for you. If you sit with brothers and get resolved. Your items with bosses will remain perfect. You will enjoy a very progressive phase in your life. You may start a partnership business to enhance your business field which will prove quite fruitful in every way.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) You will continue to add people to your network. Your work potential will also increase. Your efforts will be backed with the blessing of your bosses. You will perform well. You will continue to increase your knowledge and skills. You will be busy in your everybody activities. One of the results of the expansion will overcome. You will get back your independence. Another event will take place. The economic side will remain strong. The team is favorable for positive results in fund-related activities.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) You will prove to be a good asset. A worry will be hanging you since a long time will come to an end. You will not compromise with you if it does not pay at any cost. Your income will increase. People will respect you more. You will have to be very careful regarding your work. You might be a victim of conspiracy in matters of money use, you will be intelligent and logic. If you have given a loan to someone, there is a little chance of recovery. You will be prepared to search for solutions. You need to meet someone who is an expert in the field of business or books. Goals will start at your home. There will be worries regarding your children or other family members. But you will manage well.

Young Kashmiri content creator on mission to revive language



In a world where many are forgetting the beauty of their mother tongue, one young content creator is on a mission to revive the Kashmiri language. Muneer Ahmad Dar, a native of Baramulla in central Kashmir's Budgam district, is determined to bring back the cultural richness of the valley through his content in pure Kashmiri language. Known by his social media handle "Muneer Speaks", this young visionary has captured the hearts of people of all ages, boasting over 3,00,000 followers on social media and over 3,00,000 subscribers on his YouTube channel, "Mr. Kashmir". According to Dar, his captivating content includes everything from extracting 'Nadur' (Lotus Stem) in Dal Lake to showcasing the seven-story house, 'Tilwin-e-Wan', and even making 'Pulhoor' (grass slippers). Muneer's unique approach of creating content solely in Kashmiri language has gained him a special

audience, he said. His videos get millions of views and engagement, making him the only content creator in Kashmir to produce content in his language. Muneer has become a household name, not just in the valley, but across the globe. During the 2021 lockdown, Muneer initiated the 'ReviveKashur' campaign, creating a series of 30 videos reciting 'Shalook (Shruk)' of Sheikh-Ul-Alam each day, with translations into Urdu to ensure wider understanding. The series, he said, garnered immense positive feedback from viewers on social media, inspiring Muneer to continue his mission. "With the help of his research team, Muneer explores unknown places in the valley, speaking about their cultural importance in the Kashmiri language," he said. His content is research-based, and he is grateful to his team for their contribution to his vision. Muneer admits that he initially

struggled to speak in Kashmiri language on camera, but with practice, he has honed his skills, becoming a prominent speaker. Muneer sees his content as his contribution to society, hoping that future generations will learn from his videos, preserving the cultural heritage of the valley. He emphasizes the importance of saving the language, culture, and traditions of the region and invites others to join him in his mission. Muneer's videos are all shot with a smartphone and are short in duration, recognizing the attention span of social media users. He believes that social media has created institutions in individuals globally, taking his message to every home across the globe. Muneer encourages young content creators in the valley to focus on their goals, work hard, and pursue their passions. His inspiring work is a testament to the power of determination and dedication in preserving cultural heritage. (IANS)

"Time flies over us, but leaves its shadow behind."
—Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Shillong Times

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Poaching as politics

IN the run-up to the parliament polls a year hence, the cup of woes for the Congress is near-full also as the BJP demonstrates a killer instinct to finish it off. Rajasthan, where elections are expected before this year-end, has sent out a fresh danger signal as senior Congressman Sachin Pilot has announced a fast against the Ashok Gehlot government's long "inaction" against the corruption of the previous BJP government. More than the BJP, this would embarrass the Congress party and the CM, reinforcing the huge gulf that exists between Gehlot and the 45-year-old leader who wants to be the next CM. The gathering of a fresh set of clouds over the Congress establishment started with the current predicament of Rahul Gandhi, who should have been the face of the party in the 2024 parliament polls. A two-year-jail term hanging like a Damocles' Sword over his head, Rahul can no more breathe easy despite the huge response he won during the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Question now is, who will knit the Congress party's wayward and aspiring leaders together into one cohesive whole – a prerequisite to effectively take the fight into the enemy territory even on a symbolic note.

The BJP keeps playing more tricks on the Congress with a new frenzy. Consider the ease with which it got Congress veteran AK Antony's son, Anil, into the BJP – shaming the Congress party to its bones. Clearly, Anil was never a leader anywhere. He lived on the reflected glory of his father and functioned from its sidelines to promote the Congress social media campaigns, mostly against PM Modi and the BJP. Now, he's in BJP's pocket, laughing out loud and singing praise of Modi. Or, consider the walkover of former AP chief minister Kiran Reddy to the BJP. He was feeling quite uneasy as he himself had presided over the burial of the Congress party in the Telugu landscape after acting as the last Congress chief minister in AP until 2014. He floated a party to contest that year's assembly polls there, failed to get even a single seat, vacillated for a while and worried his way back to the Congress in 2018. Now, his disillusionment is that Rahul Gandhi does not know how to run the party and was not taking 'advice' from elders like him. By hoisting a deadwood like Kiran Reddy as the poster boy for the BJP in the Telugu states, the salfinitors might perhaps be making a laughing stock out of themselves. Here's the brutal politics of expediency. Whether the BJP any longer has an ideology to uphold, is a serious question.

Letters to the Editor

An exercise in obfuscation

Editor,
This has reference to a letter written by Sahil Gevali on April 6, 2023 titled "Is humanity under threat" (sic) pertaining to the widespread violence across the country on Ram Navami, an auspicious Hindu religious occasion.

First, a few notes on Mr Gevali's mendacious perspective of the violence. In going through the first paragraph of his letter, an unscrupulous reader would be inclined to observe, how auspicious and innocuous Hindu festival goes were subjected to deliberate and terrorizing violence. The scene pelting was even perpetrated by women and children.

The gerrymandering of ground reports and numerous news agencies documented by both governmental and independent sources here is quite clear. Here is a brief of what actually transpired. In Delhi's Jangpitrudi, despite police denying permission to go through a minority locality, violent right wing Hindutva groups with flags, arms, speakers and makeshift temples, violated police permits and screamed in minority neighbourhoods threatening and terrorizing them with explosives and violence.

In Aurangabad in the wee hours of the morning, hundreds of right-wing Hindu

bikers screamed through a minority neighbourhood causing a terrifying sense of fear especially amongst women and children.

In Mathura, viral videos of saffron flags deliberately pulled down from Jama Masjid created tension and violence there. In Banda, in the Faizpur district, stones were thrown at mosques and homes of Muslims followed by explosive filled hate speeches against minorities by right wing thugs armed with swords, knives, sticks and guns. This pattern was repeated in Telengana, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and many other states in North and North West India.

Of all these rioting incidents and weaponizing the name of God, the common thread were ams, fear, terror, hate speeches, calls for genocide and humiliation of the minorities, be it the Masjid or the Church and of course violating police permitted routes. So much for an oblique reference to appealing a specific community narrative for fascist reasons. In 'The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich', William Shirer writes "... By 1931 Hitler had gathered around him a band of fanatical ruthless men who helped him in his final drive to power. The S.A. (Sturm-Abteilung) or the Brownshirt storm troopers was but a mob – good enough for street fighting... its purpose had now been served". The parallelism of this historic recurrence is fascinating.

And now last but not the least – Howrah West Bengal where which Mr. Gevali refers to Mamta Banerjee, who he says, "quickly rabbed" into the woods of the aggrieved people, "the incident took place in Kayapada, a Muslim locality where Hindus and Muslims have been living together in peace for decades, participating in each other's festivals for generations. Even the Times of India, a noted pro-government media house reported that 1000 rallies were carried out by violent and militant Hindutva groups carrying arms and flags with speakers blaring profanity-filled hate speeches against minorities. Ms. Banerjee condemned the incidents and pointed to an army of goons brought in from outside the state to create mayhem and terror in Howrah. This has been borne out by subsequent facts, arrests and disclosure by these saffron goons. Mr Gevali continues to accuse her of "appealing specific communities". This "appeasement" narrative in general, of course, is a familiar narrative of specific organizations for years.

As a disclosure and by any stretch of imagination, I am not a fan of TMF, neither of Ms. Banerjee, however, there is a critical aspect that Mr. Gevali failed to mention, perhaps with reason, and that is the impeccable credentials Ms. Banerjee in maintaining equidistance amongst followers of all religious practitioners in Bengal.

In light of the current climate crisis, hopes appear from an unlikely section of the world's population, that is the indigenous (people). People who were often called savages and lived in a place called undeveloped world seem to show the world how their way of life which is living close to nature is one of the answers for combating the climate crisis.

The guardians of lives on Earth

Even though millions of species are yet to be discovered, indigenous people who live in just a quarter of the world's land surface with a population of 370 million only, are the custodian of about 80% of the global biodiversity. With just a small population comprising less than 5% of the world's population, and living in just a quarter of the world's total land surface, the indigenous people had done commendable work in conserving the biodiversity in their regions. In India, the northeast region of the country is also known as a biodiversity hotspot.

The question that follows is why and how can this happen. How are the indigenous people able to protect the rich biodiversity in their respective regions? Thanks to the indigenous people and local communities who are the world's biggest conservationists, more than 30 percent of the earth's land and water are already conserved. The UN Environment Program, World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and the World Bank's Living Planet Index (LPI) estimates suggest that indigenous peoples and local communities oversee at least a fifth of all land on earth. UN sources state that there are currently about 476 million indigenous people in the world in 90 countries. They live and occupy approximately a quarter of the world's land and water. The area holds about 85 percent of the world's biodiversity.

The indigenous people can therefore be called the keepers of the biodiversity. "The future is the indigenous way of life."

"The future of our planet lies in indigenous ways of living on the Earth," says Jonathan Newman, Indigenous Peoples Scholar at the Oregon Health and Science University and a National Geographic Education Fellow Emeritus and Explorer. Waterhouse also says "As a global community, we have lost our way; we forget what it means to have a relationship

Indigenous People's gift to the World

By H.H. Mohrman
The relationship with the land "It is however not easy to understand the complex relationship that the indigenous people have with nature. The indigenous relationship is much deeper than just conservation. The indigenous way of life is not only living in partnership with nature but it has to do with the holistic relationship that people have with nature. Importance of the traditional knowledge system Indigenous communities the world over lived in isolation. Often, it was because they live far from the crowd that they are able to protect their biodiversity. They protect their biodiversity because for them living in balance with nature is crucial for their survival. Hence a closer look at their way of life vis a vis the environment, it is found that they possess knowledge that connects them with the nature around them. Their traditional knowledge about changes in the weather pattern and other elements which influence the ecosystem they live in is appreciated by many.

In villages, people still have traditional knowledge which helps them predict the weather and decide on the time they should sow their seeds or plant their crops. They also know how to read the signs in nature by reading the changes in the plants or even in the way birds sing and insects make their sounds. These biological indicators have held them in good stead and recently during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional knowledge of indigenous wild edibles helped them survive the pandemic.

The living nature
The first one people shared another common value that animals, plants, and the spirit of nature are alive. Humans are not seen as separate from nature but as part of the earth; humans are as important as animals, and plants and they share a very close relationship with their fellow beings. Hunting or fishing is done in calculated ways taking into consideration their breeding and eating habits. In Jainite hills, people would not go fishing when the fish were breeding and in the past when people hunt, they perform rituals that go with it, and abstinence was paid when the animal was caught. It was the indigenous con-

cept, humans are not seen as superior to nature, or rather nature does not exist to serve humans. Humans are supposed to live in peaceful co-existence with fellow beings. The idea that nature exists to serve humans is foreign to the indigenous people. They believe everything in nature exists to support one another and not to serve the other. The world is co-existing not service as service is a capitalist idea that sees everything in terms of money terms or everything can be monetised. In a traditional context, the human relationship with nature is both profound and complex.

Indigenous people are their enemy
In the global scenario, indigenous people find themselves on the front line of the attack by industrial agriculture and logging. Their ancestral lands were seized for industrial purposes and in the process destroyed the biodiversity in these areas. Their mountains and rivers which they considered sacred were exploited often leaving hills barren and rivers polluted. While in many cases, the environmental terrorism against the indigenous people was executed by outside forces, in some cases like in Meghalaya, it was carried out by the indigenous people themselves. No law or no amount of enforcement can succeed in preventing the destruction of the environment when the people themselves are hell-bent on destroying nature.

Our relationship

In the case of Meghalaya the question is when we have chosen to detach ourselves from our relationship with nature, can we still call ourselves the indigenous people? When we only see natural resources as something to exploit, the question is what kind of relationship do we have with nature. Can we still call ourselves indigenous people when the relationship with nature and nature has broken?

The Sixth schedule which is supposed to protect us is in the process of being dismantled for the benefit of the few. The Autonomous District Councils which are empowered to protect our culture, traditions, rivers and land are more often than not misused to serve the few. ADs are now seen as just another government agency and not insti-

tutions that were empowered to protect the rights and the way of life of the indigenous people of the state. The need of the hour is to go back to our rich culture which includes living a morally upright life and living close to nature.

Traditional values of the people comprise living a morally upright life, a caring and sharing community, and having a close relationship with nature. This value system is intricately woven into people's way of life and it encompasses the three cardinal principles of 'ka tip brieu tip blei, ka kamai ia ka bok, had ka tip kur tip kha', which literally translates to 'know man, know god, live righteously, and respect one's relations both on the father's and mother's side'. The general purpose of a ritual way of life is also caring and sharing 'ka bhalang uba but balang' or 'ka bhalang ka inlang', which translates to 'communion good or well-being of all'. The other important value are 'ban bat ia ka bunam ka akor (to hold on to property and honour), Ban bat ia ka mia ka jutang, ka shokpitri ka bok (word of honour) and u thlyiey kiar, u thlyiey rapa (upholding the honour of the spoken word).

The tribals consider nature or the earth their mother (nei ramew) and it is also the dwelling place of 'ki rynglaw ki bang' or the deities of nature. They consider rivers and mountains their gods; hence have a very profound relationship with nature. The question is why have people not only lost their culture, but have sadly distanced them from their roots.

The indigenous peoples still have a way of how they manage their natural resources and it is now for the government to recognise the practice and make use of the wisdom.

Urgent need for an NRM policy

The state government needs to think outside the box and come up with a Natural Resources Management policy, which is based on the indigenous people's way of life. When the indigenous people are looking at the lessons they can learn from the indigenous way of life, the government has to look at the indigenous way of life and learn various capacities. However, with the close proximity in the dates of both the exams, this may cause a conflict for many candidates who are taking both exams and have given the UPSC exam centre outside the state.

Therefore, I request the MPSC and concerned authorities in the Government of Meghalaya to kindly look into the matter and reschedule the preliminary exams of MPSC so that the bonafide aspiring candidates from the State are not deprived of sitting for either of the exams.

I understand that changing the date of the exam may cause some inconvenience, but I believe that the long-term benefits for the State and the people will far outweigh the short-term inconvenience. I am confident that the MPSC and the Government of Meghalaya will find a solution for the welfare and benefit of all the candidates who are appearing for both these exams.

Yours etc,
Kalsang Tripathy,
Via email

Reschedule MCA exam
Editor,
Through your esteemed newspaper, I would like to highlight a crucial matter pertaining to the Meghalaya Civil Service Examination (February 2023). The aforementioned exami-

nation has been scheduled on 27 May 2023. This was announced by the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) on 6 April 2023.

It was also noted that the exam centre for the exam is located outside the state of Meghalaya. Given that the time difference between the last paper of the MPSC preliminary exam on 27 May and the opening of the UPSC preliminary exam on 28 May is only around sixteen hours, it would be next to impossible for candidates taking the MPSC examination in Shillong to travel outside the state and make it for the UPSC-CSE examination on 28 May 2023.

Both the MPSC and UPSC Civil Service Examinations are highly sought-after exams and both are equally important for candidates who are interested in serving the State and the nation in various capacities. However, with the close proximity in the dates of both the exams, this may cause a conflict for many candidates who are taking both exams and have given the UPSC exam centre outside the state.

Therefore, I request the MPSC and concerned authorities in the Government of Meghalaya to kindly look into the matter and reschedule the preliminary exams of MPSC so that the bonafide aspiring candidates from the State are not deprived of sitting for either of the exams.

I understand that changing the date of the exam may cause some inconvenience, but I believe that the long-term benefits for the State and the people will far outweigh the short-term inconvenience. I am confident that the MPSC and the Government of Meghalaya will find a solution for the welfare and benefit of all the candidates who are appearing for both these exams.

Yours etc,
A concerned candidate
Name withheld on request

Let us 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

Anil Antony is no prize catch for BJP in Kerala

Sangh Parivar's tinkering won't fetch Christian votes

By P. Sreekumaran

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) thinks it has made a prize catch by getting the elder son of senior Congress leader A.K. Antony, Anil Antony, to join the party. But the ground reality being what it is, the party will realize sooner than later that such tinkering won't fetch the support of his claim. Anil Antony to join the party. But the ground reality being what it is, the party will realize sooner than later that such tinkering won't fetch the support of his claim. Anil Antony to join the party. But the ground reality being what it is, the party will realize sooner than later that such tinkering won't fetch the support of his claim.

The party may have won the perception battle for the present. The real battle on the ground is however, tougher. Party leaders are trumpeting that Anil's entry will trigger an exodus, especially of young leaders, from the Congress camp to the BJP bandwagon. That is highly unlikely.

True, the BJP is pulling out all the stops to ensure the support of minorities in

that the Congress has been taken by surprise by Anil's joining the BJP. His father's, as of course deeply hurt by the son's 'political perfidy' as some Congress leaders put it. But he has said that it was a wrong decision which has paved him beyond mention. But he will remain with the Congress and die a Congressman, the Congress stalwart asserted.

Meanwhile, Antony's youngsters, Anil Antony, has frowned upon his brother's action. Anil said Anil will become a victim of BJP's use-and-discard policy, in support of his claim. Anil referred to the fate which has befallen metro man E. Sreedharan. The BJP has turned its back on the metro man after he lost the elec-



Kerala to win at least few seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has had meetings with Christian leaders. The Christian-worshipping stems from the realization that without the support of minorities, the BJP won't be able to make its presence felt in Kerala in the parliamentary polls in 2024. Anil Antony's entry, the party believes, will mark the beginning of a rethink on the part of the Christian community, which has been backing the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) and the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) until now.

But Anil is not even a political lightweight in Kerala politics. He began his association with the Congress only in 2019 by working with the party's Digital Media Cell. Later he became chairman and then AIC's media cell coordinator. But it is a fact that even Congress leaders were not happy with his performance. Being the son of A.K. Antony was the sole USP of Anil. He has no independent political base in the State. This being the case, the BJP's hopes that Anil will be able to attract a big slice of young Congress voters to the BJP won't fructify.

Despite the BJP leaders' vigorous wooing of the Christian community in Kerala continues to wallow in its ideological ambivalence, then greater and faster gerrymandering of Muslims into the CPIM-led LDF the best bet. The LDF alone has the political will and organizational strength to halt the vigorous wooing of the Christian community in Kerala. If the Congress continues to wallow in its ideological ambivalence, then greater and faster gerrymandering of Muslims into the CPIM-led LDF the best bet. The LDF alone has the political will and organizational strength to halt the vigorous wooing of the Christian community in Kerala. If the Congress continues to wallow in its ideological ambivalence, then greater and faster gerrymandering of Muslims into the CPIM-led LDF the best bet.

This being the harsh reality, the Congress has no option but to regain its ideological vigour and organizational strength. The sooner the party bends its energies in pursuit of this goal, the better. Failure to do so would surely hasten the party's political irrelevance. And that can only result in the BJP gaining traction and help in a State steeped in the secular ethos. A consummation secular forces cannot afford at this crucial political juncture. (IPA Service)

tion to the Lok Sabha. Anil pointed out. He also alluded to the plight of other Congress leaders like Tom Vaidakkan who crossed over to the BJP. Even Alfonso Kannanmathan is in limbo these days. The best course for Anil, therefore, is to return to the Congress camp, Anil opined.

As it may be, the Congress must undertake serious introspection in the wake of Anil's exit from the party. The main reason for the Congress's vulnerability to poaching by BJP is the ideological dilution of the party. The party is a sad fact that in its anxiety to outsmart the BJP, the Congress has embraced soft Hindutva with disastrous results. It has resulted in the minorities, both Christians and Muslims, leaving the Congress-led UDF. Consequently, the party led by Anil paid a heavy price by losing the 2021 assembly elections. The perception that the Congress lacks the stomach for a full-fledged fight against the forces of communalism growing. It has also caused a rethink at least in a section of Muslims that when it comes to battling the BJP, the CPIM-led LDF the best bet. The LDF alone has the political will and organizational strength to halt the vigorous wooing of the Christian community in Kerala. If the Congress continues to wallow in its ideological ambivalence, then greater and faster gerrymandering of Muslims into the CPIM-led LDF the best bet.

"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."
— Aristotle

The Shillong Times

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Railway as bogeyman

ALL the state capitals of the North East will soon be connected or are already connected by railways because of the advantages that this mode of communication affords to the ordinary citizen who cannot afford to take a flight to different destinations. The fact is also that transportation of goods will be that much cheaper and less damaging to the environment than is happening today with trucks lining up all along the Jorabat to Shillong stretch. Governments in the past have shown no spine in implementing what is in the greater good of the people on the fragile plea that the railways will encourage influx. Influx has been the bogeyman that has stalled the rail project for half a century. A government is elected by the people to govern judiciously and to take decisions that are in the public good. No pressure group can hold a government to ransom if the advantages for the common citizen far outweigh the fear-psychosis. The issue of whether or not the railroad can come as far as Bynriah and even beyond should not be hijacked by one or other group. The State has many stakeholders, including business persons who need to be consulted and whose views also have to prevail when the Government decides to turn down what is seen as a viable public service.

Rail transport is cheaper than air transport as far as passenger travel is concerned. While several trucks are needed to transport goods, railways can carry huge quantities of goods from one destination to the other and with lesser use of fuel and therefore would reduce transportation costs. The railways cannot charge arbitrary costs. If there is an increase in the traffic or frequency of the railway, then it is immediately followed by a considerable decrease in fare or cost. It is highly economical in terms of use of labour too. It takes only one person each as a driver and guard. This is sufficient to transport more load when compared to any other transport sector.

The carrying capacity both in terms of passengers and freight, of the railways, is quite large. One even better thing is that the capacity of railways is elastic because the capacity can be increased easily, as per requirement, by adding more carriages or wagons. In Meghalaya the cost of transportation for goods produced in the state works out quite high and adds to the cost of the agricultural and horticultural products that the State produces in plenty. Farmers will be the direct beneficiaries once they are able to transport their goods at a cheaper cost. Alternatively, when the carrying cost for food products such as rice, wheat etc., from outside to the state becomes cheaper it is the common citizen that benefits. Railways therefore are a win-win situation for everyone. So why the resistance?

Letters to the Editor

Retrospective Implementation of Roster System

Editor,
The implementation of the Roster System in the State Reservation Policy with retrospective effect has deeply affected the unemployed youth of one region of the state with a gain for the other region of the same state. Here I fully support the stand of the political party Voice of the People's Party (VPP) together with the voice of other NGOs like the KSJU, JYC for putting on hold the job recruit process through the MPSC until the matter of the Reservation Policy is discussed in the State Legislative Assembly. But the MPSC's Notification dated April 6, 2023 has fixed the tentative dates for conducting written exams for many posts, right from the Meghalaya Civil Service (MCS) to the LDA exams for various departments of the State Government. Hence as a concerned citizen I am deeply pained to see that many written exams will be conducted in the coming month without rectifying the ill effects of the implementation of the roster system. Here, as a concerned parent, I request the Government and the MPSC to tempo-

orarily halt the recruitment process until the concerned matter has been cleared. I also request all the political parties to come on board on this issue in the interest of the state and its people.
Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Arbitrary parking fees

Editor,
I recently went to Umroi Airport to pick up my relatives who had landed there. In less than 10 mins of my arrival their flight had landed and we were proceeding out of the airport by then. What surprised us was the exorbitant parking fee. We were asked to pay Rs. 50 per vehicle. That amount was not the problem. The problem is that we were given a receipt after paying the amount demanded. This is a matter of concern as it involves transparency and accountability. When I demanded a receipt, the person collecting the money replied in a harsh tone that they do not issue any receipts.
I would like to know from the Airport authorities if they have entrusted anyone to collect that amount. If so, why don't they instruct the parking fee collector to issue a proper receipt for the amount paid?

Also why don't the Airport authorities have proper signages regarding the amount of payment required to be made for parking depending on the length of time a vehicle is parked. If fees are collected, why aren't the toilets, approach roads etc. properly maintained? Why aren't these persons collecting the parking fees net in proper uniforms? Are they really people entrusted by the Airport Authority of India (AAI) to collect such fees?
The airport authority should look into these matters as early as possible so that it makes the visit to the state's development, but in India which has the world's largest democracy, this section still exists even though it is presently kept in abeyance.
There is also the wrong interpretation of the word "custody," which has been there for a very long time. On account of that misinterpretation the liberty of many had been curbed due largely to lack of knowledge of persons in the Police department as well as of the judiciary. There is a need for correction when the word custody is mentioned it is ambiguous and has been left to the whims of concerned officials. Recently the Supreme Court has ruled that the lower courts to avoid unnecessary arrests. However, we also know that bureaucratic habits dic-

Time to recalibrate the State Planning Board

By Manas Chaudhuri

The Board has seldom come into public gaze. Unlike in the formative years, when the press would be welcome to witness the proceedings, over the decades, the scrutiny of the output of the Board has gone out of the window. Complete opacity seems to have engulfed it. After two decades of silence, in December 2021, the Board was in the news for all the wrong reasons. A ruling coalition MLA (Saleng Sangma) made a frontal attack on the Board for its utter failure to perform. In a hard-hitting letter to Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, the legislator, who was then holding the post of Deputy Chairman of the Board, wanted dissolved on account of its absolute failure. The CM responded promptly by removing the chairman (Lambor Ma Igniang) and appointing one of his party men (Abdus Saleh). The point one is trying to make is that in the process, the Planning Board has become a revolving door for politicians

Every district would have its own planning exercise done under the chairmanship of the Deputy Commissioner with all MLAs belonging to the district as members. The decentralized and district-specific focus immensely helped in coming out with a flurry of recommendations for the state body to incorporate.

Chinese example
The value of good planning can be quite astonishing. The critically acclaimed Chinese long-term planning is a case in point. China's Yunan Province, lying in the remote south-west corner adjoining Myanmar, is a metropolis bedecked with high-rise buildings, flyovers, six-lane roads, expressways, public facilities of international standards et al—the kind of which is unthinkably anywhere in the Northeast.

"It's a pity that the Planning Board has been converted into a political rehabilitation centre. The pattern of appointment of chairpersons of the Board over the past few decades will buttress this conjecture."

and thereby hindering planning in the first assault.

The only exception is perhaps the period under B.B. Lyngdoh and P.A. Sangma when things were wisely lapsing and everybody took the Board with due seriousness. By a fair degree, P.A. Sangma's stewardship of the Board will be remembered for the unflinching attention to details while defining the thrust areas and making sure that the decisions were based on ground realities. The elder statesman, who was a hard task master, undertook tours of the districts, held meetings both with public and the serving officers and saw to it that the decisions were incorporated in the state plan. P.A. Sangma made sure that the Press team accompanied him during his tours of the districts. This ensured that the public was kept informed about the new initiatives of the Board. This is how the subsequent Planning Boards should have functioned. Also gone are the District Planning Boards that existed during the 70's and 80's

The PM and his degrees of knowledge

By Jagdish Ranani

It was not very long ago that spam messages and forwards used to be not about the veracity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's university degrees but about the plethora of academic degrees and honours showered on his predecessor Dr. Manmohan Singh, who remains by those terms the most educated Prime Minister India has had. Those messages asked us to take due national pride in the fact that Dr. Singh had more to show in terms of formal qualifications than probably any other leader in the world at that time. Yet today, it would be difficult to say that Dr. Singh's leadership gave us good governance, or that he himself stood up or even spoke up when he was required to. It was the message emanating from him that in good parallel to the Congress ceding power to the BJP under Narendra Modi.

Today, social media messages are about the suspected lack of education of the current Prime Minister, and the question being posed is whether the Prime Minister of India needs to be formally educated or not. This would be the wrong pill for the ills the nation is faced with today. It is of course proper to ask if the degrees shown by the Prime Minister are in his team genuine. If they are not, then the charges of dishonesty, fraud and worse will stick, and political as well as regulatory consequences must follow. But that is a very different issue from the one sought to be made that the Prime Minister ought to be necessarily formally educated.

As the rule book stands today, a university degree is not a prerequisite to be the Prime Minister of India. This is as it should be. Knowledge, of the formal and expert variety in particular, is closely linked to power, and the interlock can disenfranchise the majority while enfranchising a minority of "experts" who begin to control, command and get away unquestioned. Thus, development "experts" deliver the worst of development with their ideas, power and reach. The environmental crisis is after all the result of development experts running a scam. The so-called economic "experts" did not predict the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, and may have had a hand in the making of that crisis. Queen Elizabeth II of the UK was moved to ask at the London School of Economics, which inaugurating a GBP 71 million new academic building: "It's awful... Why did no one see it coming?" There were no answers. There is no dearth of money either for the Rostker academic institutions.

We are dealing with a privileged class of people here. Their knowledge is important but it is not the only knowledge there is. Knowledge also resides in indigenous cultures, customs, the ways and means of understanding developed over the centuries outside the university systems. Anemo-rhion from the Executive Office of US President Joe Biden in Nov. 2021 recognised "Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK)—a form of Indigenous Knowledge—as one of the many important bodies of knowledge that contributes to the scientific, technical, social, and economic advancement of

the nation. It is not the only knowledge there is. Knowledge also resides in indigenous cultures, customs, the ways and means of understanding developed over the centuries outside the university systems. Anemo-rhion from the Executive Office of US President Joe Biden in Nov. 2021 recognised "Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK)—a form of Indigenous Knowledge—as one of the many important bodies of knowledge that contributes to the scientific, technical, social, and economic advancement of

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(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIM, UoA. He is personally syndicated. The Billon Press (e-mail: editor@thebillonpress.org)

CrPC, IPC & Evidence Act need changes

Editor,
After the judgment delivered by Surat court against Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case with two years imprisonment being imposed, there are tremors across the nation. As a result of the judgment Rahul Gandhi's Lok Sabha seat has been declared vacant. Here it is worth noting that under Section 499-500 maximum punishment is for two years and

hard. The apex court has also clarified that Section 170 CrPC merely connotes the presence of the accused in court and the investigating officer has to ensure that. This points to a real need for better training and refresher courses for judicial officers and an effective method of circulating important Supreme Court judgments and statutory changes to the lower judiciary and police. Our police force is unaware of the simple truth that letter of law when Information Technology is so developed it is shocking how important judgments from the apex court and high courts do not reach the trial courts and the police.

Citizens expect the State to treat their freedom and allow greater freedom of expression. Moreover a distinction must be made between existence of the power to arrest and justification for exercising it. If arrest is made routinely it can cause incalculable harm to the reputation and self-esteem of a person. If the investigating officer has no consent to believe that the accused will abscond or disobey summons and has throughout cooperated with the investigation, we fail to appreciate why there should be a lower court to refer the officer to arrest the accused. Trial courts are staid to be insisting on the arrest of an

accused as a prerequisite formally to take the charge sheet on record in view of the provisions of section 170 of the CrPC. And moreover trial courts seem to be labouring under a misconception that in every non-bailable, cognisable offence police are required to arrest a person even if it is not essential for investigation purposes. Such a course of action should be considered misplaced and contrary to the very intent of this section. Combined efforts should be made by the judiciary and police to take care of the common citizen of India.

It is good to know therefore that the central government is actively considering amendments to criminal laws. Some of these amendments have to do with sentencing. For instance, in March 2020, the Union Home Ministry constituted a national-level committee for reforms in criminal laws, headed by the Vice-Chancellor of the National Law University, Delhi, to undertake a review of the IPC, CrPC and the Evidence Act.
Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Sarkar,
Via email

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

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIM, UoA. He is personally syndicated. The Billon Press (e-mail: editor@thebillonpress.org)

"Indifference and neglect often do much more damage than outright dislike." — J. K. Rowling

The Shillong Times

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'National' ambitions

DEMOCRACY cannot, and should not, be a free-for-all. Unfortunately, periodic chaos marks the styles of functioning of democracy even in the West. This is evident in both the US and UK, the leading lights of the democratic system apart from India. Consider the manner in which the Election Commission of India delayed a decision on the review of recognition of the national and regional states of political parties for four years by citing the excuse of the Covid-19 uncertainties. Fact is that Covid-19 had nothing to do with this, and it was simply a drag. The election commission failed to discharge one of its principal duties by citing this excuse. This is the way every governmental system in this country functions today. Coming to the crux of the present discussion, the CPI, the Trinamool Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party have lost their 'national party' status while the AAP of Arvind Kejriwal has gained national status as per the classification announced by the EC on Monday. The CPI deserves this knock on its head, a grand fall from it being the principal opposition in the 1950s. Overall, this scenario could change in future, depending on the rise and fall of political parties after every general election, the next being in 2024.

For one, the Trinamool Congress of Mamata Banerjee and NCP of Sharad Pawar are parties formed and run on individual whims and sans any specific ideological commitment. These parties are principally prominent in just one state each - West Bengal and Maharashtra respectively. Nor do Pawar and Banerjee have the right to claim a fan following of any significant level in any other state as is amply proven in recent elections. Attempts by these parties to spend money and buy support for them in some other states did not help much, other than for their marginal presence there. Former AP chief minister Chandrababu Naidu, for another, went and started a branch of his party in the Andaman Nicobar Islands Union Territory some years ago to claim a national status for his party. His aim then was reportedly the PM's post, but he fell by the wayside and is licking the wounds inflicted on him by a charismatic YS Jagan Mohan Reddy in his native turf. NCP in Kerala at the sweet will and help of the CPI-M by way of a quid pro quo for the help the left party gets from Pawar in Maharashtra. Like in every sector, the need for reforms in politics and governmental functioning is a matter of urgency. Any tiny regional party aspiring to rule the nation is by itself an unacceptable proposition.

Letters to the Editor

Who's to blame for our daily woes?

Editor, The dust of decades has barely settled and government formation is a done deal but all said and done, it's the public who is now at the receiving end of load shedding, water woes and the never-ending traffic snarls saga. Who will do something about this sorry state of affairs? Those in authority continue with the blame game and push everything onto the previous government but here we're seeing the same people in power, so what is the strategy now?

The dry months have barely started and we're already facing power cuts at odd hours. There are no specific timings given by the power corporation except a notice that there would be power cuts because of some power grid which stopped supplying to our state because of non-payment of dues. As a citizen I pay my bills on time as am sure all of us do, so who's not paying their bills on time?

The JIM was one of the many election promises but alas, where is the 'Jal'?

PWD and shoddy road repair work

Editor, We always need to raise our voices against any likely pitfalls. So, I totally agree with what has been brought out through a news item in 'Citizen Express' about shoddy road repair work in city (ST, 6th April). There are many cases where the quality of the work is compo-

Modi's Easter optics for votes

By Albert Thyriang

The video of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, being welcomed by Archbishop Anil Coote of Delhi and other prelates including CBCI representatives at the Sacred Heart Cathedral Church in New Delhi on Easter Sunday (9 April 2023); his moments with the selected worshippers inside the 1936 built Roman Catholic church; his planning a sapling, his holding the memento of the resurrection among others have gone viral not only in India but abroad as well. The rare visit is quite astonishing leaving many stumped. Of course, many enthusiastic Christians shared the official video feeling proud that the Prime Minister has visited a Cathedral in the national capital. They have never seen a prime minister doing so.

Modi is seen as anti-Christian and anti-Muslim. During his regime Muslims were even called to be massacred. The tiny Christian minority too has been targeted more frequently by the majoritarian mob who are keen to establish a theocratic Hindu state installing Modi as the chief priest. So the images of New Delhi Easter Sunday prayer are a surprise to say the least. But many may be sceptics as well.

Modi has not changed like cohorts, the Sangh Parivar and Hinduva hardliners who spit venom liberally have not decided to treat Christians with respect. Just recently the Karnataka BJP minister, Munirathna warned, "If anyone comes in drive them (Christians) around and thrash. I will take care of the rest. They should be thrashed in such a way that they should not look back."

The minister's statement is only an echo of the Hinduva groups who were responsible for the numerous attacks on churches in the Southern states including physical and sexual assaults against women targeting especially the Dalit and Adivasi communities. Persecution of Christians culminated in the passage of the anti-conversion bill in September 2021 in that state.

Right wing organisations' perpetration of violence against Christians was in full display also in other states like Chhattisgarh, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat etc, recording a sharp rise from 279 cases in 2020 to 505 in 2021 and 511 in 2022.

A perception is created by a false narrative as if there is mass conversion to Christianity while reality reveals otherwise. The Christian statistics have been static at around 2.3 per cent of the population since the 1951

census. The 80 per cent population is made to be alarmed that Christians 'indulge in forcible conversions'. This has justified the enactments of anti-conversion laws in several states in India in spite of the fact that the Constitution guarantees free practice and propagation of any religion. Individuals are arrested under the draconian laws.

The state has witnessed over by the present regime, it seen to be anti-minority. An additional judge of Madras High Court was appointed though she was alleged to



have made false speeches against minority communities. The Jesuit priest Stanislaus Lourduwamy was arrested, imprisoned and eventually died in custody for no reason except for championing the cause of the Adivasis.

The optics of the Prime Minister's visit to the Cathedral is purely political. It is a wooing tactic for Christian votes. It is not a love for Christians. The Prime Minister has started ringing the 2024 Parliamentary election bells. He has begun the campaign. The BJP has a special eye for Kerala. The saffron party has not succeeded in making inroads into God's own country. The 'communal force' has failed to open an account in both Assembly and Parliament in Kerala so far. It has been drawing a blank since Independence. This time it thinks the situation has changed. The Christian population has traditionally backed the Congress. In the last Lok Sabha elections the Congress almost swept the state winning 14 out of 20 seats. However, in the 2021 Assembly election the population moved to the Left Democratic Front (LDF) which also enjoyed the support of Muslim voters. Christians are disillusioned because the Left is allegedly pro-Muslim. Islamophobia has gripped the state. Preachers are hyper active highlighting alleged 'love jihad' by Muslim groups. The right wing is an aiding agent in this dubious activity. The BJP, with its social engineer-

ing experiences, sees this as a perfect opportunity not to be missed. So it is making all efforts to flatter Christians to its fold. The calculation of the RSS and other similar minds is that if their political wing's number is reduced in the Hindu belt and this falls short of majority, Kerala will make up for it.

RSS and BJP leaders have been meeting widely in Kerala to execute the 'plot'. The central government might have assured the Pope's visit in exchange for a 'good' rapport. This



firmly tell them of the current sorry state of affairs where minorities are not treated as equal citizens. They need to emulate Archbishop Moras, the Archbishop Emeritus of Bangalore.

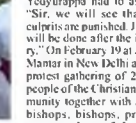
In September 2008 the then Karnataka Chief Minister H.S. Yedyurappa visited the Archbishop's House in the presence of the media. Attacks and desecration of the churches was going on in the state. Mincing no words Bernard Blasius Moras literally yelled at the CM: "Sir Thank you for coming to the Bishop's House, but the whole church in Karnataka is hurt. I am telling you publicly that we are very hurt. Tell me, will you keep quiet if the garba gudi (Sanctum Sanctorum) of a temple is destroyed." The shocked Yedyurappa had to assure, "Sir, we will see that the culprits are punished. Justice will be done after the inquiry." On February 19 at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi a huge protest gathering of 20,000 people of the Christian community together with Archbishops, bishops, pastors and nuns, led up with the continued attacks from the Sangh Parivar elements emphatically stated at the heart of the national Capital, "Enough is enough!"

Today, not only in Delhi and Kerala but in other parts prelates are seen in the company of preparators of violence against their faithful without doing a bit of what bishop Moras did and repeating what the Jantar Mantar crowd demanded.

The Prime Minister's and the BJP's optics were in public view in the North East recently. In Meghalaya and Nagaland the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Amib Shah and BJP leaders made it a point to grace the swearing-in ceremony of the Chief Ministers in these two states where Christians are a majority. The BJP wants to remove the anti-Christian tag. In Nagaland, a 'Christian' function was organised for the Prime Minister and other guests. This too was for votes. The BJP wants to win the Christian majority states on their own. For this they are willing to go to any extent including campaigning for beef consumption and participating in 'gospel' oath taking ceremonies. For 'mission Kerala' visits to cathedrals and churches are made but churches elsewhere in the country are destroyed, vandalised and desecrated. In the North East the Meghalaya and Nagaland models are followed but in the rest of India the BJP cow protection and anti-conversion activities are part of their manifestos. We must be wary of the BJP!

On the day Modi prayed in the New Delhi Cathedral, Cardinal Mar George Alencherry, head of the Syro-Malabar Church was all praise for the prime minister for his visit to the cathedral. The Church officials are under him Christians in the country are not insecure. Last month, another BJP influenced official, Joseph Pamplany, a Catholic Syro-Malabar Archbishop promised in Kannur that Christians would vote for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Lok Sabha elections if the NDA government at the centre upped the price of rubber to Rs. 300 a kg.

The Church officials are self-centred. They do not see the sufferings of their brothers and sisters in other parts of India. They do not grasp the reasons for the bid of the BJP to befriended them in the western coast. The BJP offering is simply to get votes in 2024 onwards and nothing else. While in Kerala the BJP embraces church leaders in its churches and residences but prelates need to



sure that this is not the way you are supposed to behave with your guests. The worst part was when we registered a complaint against him at the hotel's feedback page. We were having our breakfast and he cavewalked on our conversation and started arguing with us. He even used the words like 'KYA KAREGA' - we asked to call the owner and he said 'SHAMAM KO AAVEGA'.

He even raised his voice against us. Post this we could not eat anything and it was time for checkout. Even the front desk staff did not interfere to leave alone apologise.

As travellers we explore places and take away some part of their culture along with us. But due to this experience we have brought back a negative perception of Shillong and its natives with us.

I have my letter finds its true place. Yours etc., Sneha Gupta, Via email

Where lies the fulcrum of the Meghalaya State Reservation Policy?

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

The new roster system enforced in the State by the last dispensation of the MDA coalition has created severe discontentment among the educated and qualified youth of the Khasi-Jaintia region. Besides, there is also a growing furor in some sections of the political squads of this region. The VPP has demanded a special session of the House on this issue or else they will take the matter to the streets. Many feel there is a bias and discriminatory tactics being used in order to seize the extravagant advantage from the current roster system that benefits a particular community so far things are not right and justified in the current system.

The reason that led to this development originated from the lapses that various governments in the past had failed to recruit vacancies in various departments citing fund constraints. But the truth is that over the years there has been a systematic manipulation to the recruitment process and regularisation of temporary appointments were the common options to retain the favourites.



This unethical practice prompted the High Court of Meghalaya to issue certain directives on the recruitment process of the state.

Involving public support on the other hand on this issue by a political party may lead to law and order breakdown in the state. The situation is unwarranted for such calamity. It is a legislative matter and the government should stick to that. If there is any attempt to forcefully suppress the call from the Voice of the People Party, things might escalate to an unfavourable situation that may affect the stability of the MDA 2.0. It is of course a challenging task for the government where wisdom will undergo a struggle test on how to handle the manifold outcomes from this.

Secondly, if indeed, the session of the state legislature convened, what will be the nature and direction of the debate inside the House? Can the MDA 2.0 led government rely on its allies when it comes to this particular issue related with the 40-40 percent share of job quota to Khasi-Jaintia and the Garo ST community? There is possibility of withdrawal of support from within the ruling and the opposition parties too. Thirdly, what will happen if the government and the NPP in particular fail to uphold the Office Memorandum of 10th May, 2022? It is absolutely certain that the NPP leadership will not compromise to risk and disappoint the sentiments of the voters from Garo Hills who have given them absolute mandate.

But what is important for both the communities is the history and logic behind the creation of the reservation policy 1972 that emerged out of the Hill State Movement. Had there been no hill state movement or if statehood had arrived late, probably after 1972, the idea about 40-40 percent would not have arisen. Even then, there was a time when Meghalaya was carved out of Assam because these two tribal communities, the Khasi-Jaintia and the Garo wanted to avoid the imposition of Assamese language by the then Assam government and decided to create a new state for themselves.

On achieving full statehood, the immediate need at that moment was the administration and decision making process for the people of the state. Subsequently, the management and utilization of manpower and the state's resources were then left to the Khasi-Jaintia and the Garo people. The thought on how to equally share the responsibilities and distribute the same to its own citizens was an indispensable and intended task at that time. Therefore, based on this simple logic, the 80% reservation for recruitment in government service was a deliberate and appropriate formula for the communities of the two Autonomous District Councils leaving the remaining 20% to others. In this regard, the founding leaders of the state have done no wrong to any community. Para 2 of the resolution dated 12th January 1972 clearly specifies that if there is any deficiency of suitable candidates in the reserved category, the carry-over of vacancies cannot exceed one year post the recruitment year. Furthermore,



after the expiry of the second year these reservations shall be treated as lapses. This is the correct legal mechanism or the fulcrum of the original policy. Excessive extension of reservation beyond numbers of recruitment years, undue bias and favouritism towards a particular community.

However, considering the population growth and the bifurcation of Khasi-Jaintia AIC, the 40-40 reservation seems to be irrelevant today. But to question the vision and wisdom of the makers of the state reservation policy 1972 is inappropriate. And the perception about their short-sightedness is overstated. The question is short-sightedness in whose eyes? Is it for a particular tribe or community or to some intellectual thinkers?

The Office Memorandum Dated 10th May 2022 has outlined the status quo of the policy according to the resolution No. PR-223-71/138 Dated 12th January, 1972. As long as this resolution is in place, there should not be any reason for disgruntlement by members of the community. Contrary to this, the Office Memo of 10th May 2022 has cleverly replaced the wording 'recruitment year' with the nomenclature 'recruitment cycle' without specifying the end of the cycle because the cycle has not ended. And all the backlogs of every cycle will be carried over to the next recruitment cycle without indicating the lapses due to deficiency. This shows that the OM Dated 10th May 2022 is one-sided and favours excessive consideration to one category.

The only solution to this impasse is to honour and respect the clauses and content of the original policy as it is without making any modifications to it. The term 'recruitment cycle' should be rectified. And specifying the validity of the reservation is a pre-requisite condition to adjust with the shortage and deficiency of suitable candidates for the reserved vacancies. This will bring a balance in the recruitment system of the state especially for the two prominent communities of the state (Hill State and the Achiks).

Sad experience as tourists

Editor, I am not a writer of any sort but wanted to express my disappointment and agony during my recent stay at the Loft Executive Inn, Shillong. I posted my comments on the hotel's and restaurant's Instagram and Facebook pages as well but the hotel management has stealthily deleted them, leave alone apologising for their deeds. Hence I thought of writing to you. I may not have any proof of what I am writing but this is the maximum I can do to make people aware of what's happening at the hotel.

We were a group of 9 (including 3 kids below 5 years) who stayed at the Loft Executive Inn from 7-10 April, 2023. We booked the rooms with complimentary breakfast, but there were hardly any options to eat, hence we requested for some additional options even if we had to bear the expenses because the kids would not eat what was available at the buffet, but the staff bluntly refused. He even refused to provide water to my son when he asked for the same and the staff asked him to take it himself (my son is 4 years old).

My husband was unwell the next day and I asked them to provide some warm murti chira so he can eat and the staff again denied despite telling them repeatedly that my husband is unwell. We spoke to the front desk and then only he agreed to provide the food even after paying for it. I placed an order for roti for my son and asked to provide butter by the side and the first word he uttered was we do not have butter. Of course I know you would be charging us for everything we ask for but is this the way to behave with your guests? Are we beggars asking them for butter for free. I have not attended any hotel management classes but I know for

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"There is only one success - to be able to spend your life in your own way." - Christopher Morley

The Shillong Times

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A Farce of a Ban on Coal Mining

EACH time a coal truck turns outle the State Government and its administrative functionaries, particularly the police become the laughing stock. The public is well aware that coal mining carries on unabated. The only people who pretend to be in the dark about this illegal trade are those in the government. That's because they are helpless and are not in a position to stop the mining and transportation of coal because it is carried on by the High Level who have been elected to the Assembly and are now well-placed ministers or by their cohorts. This is a well-oiled business and coal mine owning sharks are in no mood to listen to any authority - not even the judiciary. This is the stark reality. In fact, it is rather embarrassing that the Chief Secretary has to be called to answer for what is seen by the Meghalaya High Court to be an administrative lapse. This is unfortunate because the hands of the bureaucracy are tied. There is little they can do when the people involved in the illegalities are their political bosses. Considering that the coal carrying trucks have their owners and some FIRs have been filed against a few, the question is why the owners of these trucks are not called to answer before the court as to who owns the coal that is being transported. Isn't that a better way of identifying the mine owners who have cocked a snook at the NGT, the Supreme Court and the Meghalaya High Court orders? The fact of the matter is that the rule of law does not operate in Meghalaya. Those at the top rungs of the political ladder may not be saying it in so many words but what they are doing implies that, "it's my way or the highway," attitude that is prevailing in Meghalaya. Even the High Court appears to have hit a stone wall with the CISF standing in no uncertain terms that it would be unable to send its force to check illegal mining.

The very fact that the Meghalaya High Court should express the imperative to bring in the CISF to put a complete halt to illegal coal mining, is a strong indictment of the State Police Force and its inaction. Why have a police force that cannot enforce the rule of law? And the illegality perpetrated by people in elite political circles sends a message to the citizenry that the law is only for the weak and those with no political clout. It's a dangerous message as it can provoke retaliation against an unjust system where the affluent get away with all manner of crime, simply because they are close to the political who's who or because the coal mines belong to the families of the elected elite. If there is a law it must apply to all without discrimination.

Letters to the Editor

Temporary halt to recruitments

Editor, The implementation of the Roster System with regards to the post advertised before the Officer Memorandum on the Roster came out, has deeply affected aspirants for government jobs from one part of the State. The Roster for some posts came out after the exam was conducted. Similarly, for the exam that will be held on April 15, 2023 the number of posts for each community has not yet been specified. Same is the case with the tentative programs of screening tests that will be held in the later part of April and in the month of May. Therefore, I request the Government to temporarily halt the recruitment exams until the matter has been resolved and also to specify the number of posts for each category before conducting the exam.

Vote of thanks to the PWD

Editor, Despite the fact that hands of the PWD are tied in terms of maneuvering the road

beautification project (thanks to non-availability of space, the PWD Shillong Central Division had performed a commendable job as far as the Shilling beautification is concerned. And JIVA has thanked the efforts of the PWD with a lighting "I love Shillong". The Police Bazar road with the Rotary stretch is a thing of beauty. So too the Bank (GIP) point. With the traffic intensity on the rise the well-performed job would make the stretch last longer. Safety factor has also improved simultaneously. There's only one suggestion and that is to install speed radars, as the better the road the more is the temptation to speed. With so many government offices around these areas the speed radar is a must however, the Transport Department must also ensure that the number place registration in the front and rear are eminently readable.

The Polo to Golf Links road too has got a new look. But since the Golf Links is also a tourist spot with lots of children moving around here too a speed radar is a must. The Sanker stretch of road leading towards M/S Stanley Roy Construction and to MEHU is praiseworthy. Let us forget the VIP road is a joint project between the Central and State PWD. This stretch has reduced the traffic congestion in and around

Shillong (from Umiam to the city) by leaps and bounds. Blessed with GPS mapping, experienced drivers have a great role to play in reducing this incurable traffic snarl in the city. Last but not least, the traffic signs with white paint on Shillong city roads are appreciated. If only the drivers could cultivate some civic sense - and not to downplay the efforts made by the traffic police day in and day out - driving on new Shillong City roads would become more enjoyable than before.

Yours etc, N. Pashek, Nongkrem.

When politics meets religion

By Binay Adhikari

In 2004, when I was in my 6th grade I remember singing aloud the NCC song - the lyrics of which has hit me hard in the recent days of communal chaos and political upheaval in the country. "Mandir Gurnubare bhil hai yahan Aur Masjid bhi hai yahan Girdja ka hai gharinai kahan Mulah ki kaban hai gharinai".

The past few months have been quite unprecedented when the country is experiencing a sequence of events unfolding with the intention to change the course of history. I can only imagine telling my son some other name of a "Hindu" temple when showing Qutub Minar. The discovery of Shivlings and praus depictions in the form of art and Swastika in a few mosques have been making headlines since last year bringing two major religious communities against each other.

Now that most of the renowned mosques are being renamed into Hindu temples and places known by Urdu/Persian Islamic names are baptized with the names of our freedom fighters who belonged to the Hindu religion. I wonder about the fate of the NCC song in the coming generations. By the way, just in case you were wondering about that NCC song mentioned above, the last verse of that song reads as follows: "EK hi upna Room hai EK hi Allah tala hai EK hi Allah tala hai Rang ha range Deupak hai humi Lekin jag mag ek hai Ah hu hi...EK hai...ch ho ho...EK hai Hum sab Bharatya hai".

Such was the spirit of brotherhood, unity and integrity tied with the respect for distinct diversities in our nation that were nurtured into us to uphold and observe those ideals in our lives. I was fascinated and overwhelmed by the magnificent togetherness of cultures, religions and regions across ages and genders after every 100 km of our sub-continent and 20 years later, I can tell a different story altogether.

My generation and the first batch of millennials grew up in India which celebrated and fostered a spirit of unity, brotherhood and integrity. We never saw a day of a communal clash or religious-based propaganda becoming the agenda of the nation's debate being shown in all the newsrooms of media houses. Journalism in our days was precise, abstract and according to the time, place circumstances, objective of the family-club includes property, wealth, etc. particularly the children, nephews, nieces, sisters and brothers. If the youngest daughter is a minor or does not bother, it is the duty of the next closest aunt to look after them. Such customary laws occur strictly only amongst the Khasi-Pnar. Modernization or to compromise with the other cultures of the present-day lifestyle is a driving force to do away with the Khasi culture and customs.

Codification and documentation with alterations/modifications of the basic structure of Khasi-Pnar culture and customs and also Aekhi customary laws is a very sensitive and a delicate subject matter which tantamount to tampering the basic pillar of the traditional laws of the tribal people of the State. Such a proposed Clan Bill of the Khasi-Pnar Autonomous District Council requires detailed re-examination by the Advocate General of Meghalaya in consultation with the State Law & Social Justice Department and the Constitutional Experts of the Apex Court in the country specialized in Traditional Customary Laws & Culture. Distribution of wealth, property, etc. (Khasi inheritance of Property Bill, 2021) is an affair of individual families and such 'well-to-do' families amongst the tribals of the State are largely 0.5 to 1% of the population. The

distribution of wealth, property, etc. of the Khasi-Jaintia differ from one subtribe to another like the War-Shella, War-Jaintia etc., therefore no law is required to disturb the smooth practice of the inheritance of property of the beautiful and marvelous customary laws of the tribals of the State. K. Cantlie MA, IC's in his book "Notes on Khasi Law" in the year 1934 wrote that the laws framed in the late 1700s and early 1800s by the Systems of Hima (chieftainship), Systems of Jaintia (Judith Wahabdar of Shella) are safeguard and protect the well-established Khasi-Jaintia culture and traditional customs which pre-empt multiplication of court cases (letting lying prevail).

K. Cantlie stated that the customary practice of giving respect to paternal and maternal uncles (like a Konyi Aunts (knic nah knic, snic kha kha nah) is exemplary. They are the family judges of the affairs of any family-club despite particularly inheritance of property which is a family affair. If any problems arise, it is referred to the Headman of the Village Dohbar. Rabon Singh, another Khasi, in his book "Khasi Law" in chapter XXVII section 2 published in 1896 wrote, "The Headmen can settle the disputes as the System of the Village Dohbar and impose a fine of Rs 53 (fifty three rupees). As the fine of the present day, the

text is in the form of 5 or 6 one-liner close-ended questions of yes or no in which all the answers are default check-marked with a tick asserting positive response to the whole question of the government taking the charge and control of religious institutions. The message manipulates the reader to be convinced that the government should have all the powers to deal with all affairs and monetary and non-monetary transactional management of the holy places in the country including the power to sell, transfer, levy tax on its donation and utilize its funds for any other purpose as deemed fit and necessary. You read that right!

Once upon a time in school, you certainly must have read the tussle between the Holy Church and the King far away in Europe, that emphasized on the notion of separation of religion from power. And perhaps it was one of the most epoch-making events in history that reshaped the dynamics of power which allowed and paved the way for progressive development of King over the religious faith, practices and rights of his kingdom allowed a citizen to profess and practice his faith in peace without being disrupted or obstructed in his duty and profession by the soldiers of King.

As an educated youth of the Modi-led Digital India I feel sorry for TV journalists who pretend to be neutral to both the sides in a debate over their statements clearly give voice to their own political party's agenda and party's position or stand on the debate. In the coming days, it will be interesting to see the political turmoil in the country as the hitherto silence of the privileged, socially backward and Dalit classes have found voice in one Dalit leader who is breaking the unconvincing stereotypes associated with reservation for the socio-economically backward classes. The question of the hour is to take the mess in his own hand.

Similarly, preaching and advocating the basic Hinduva ideology which remains core to the BJP, a message is being circulated and shared on social media platform WhatsApp where the contents of the message asks the reader to consent to the control, power, jurisdiction, authority and diversity of government in the administration, management, and operation of religious places of worship including the power to deal with its assets, revenue and properties in the country. The content of the

will not be less than Rs 3,000. In Chapter XXVIII, Rabon Singh wrote that as per Khasi Customs, the person who self-thrown to the ground. He screamed, and his mother who he was speaking to on the other end, shouted his name, but her words went unheard as his phone fell on the ground and was trampled on roughly by the two. "Never go after our women!" they cried as they beat him up and left him in a trampled mess. "What's that?" asked the villager. "That's the airport!" said the city person proudly, feeling clever because so much more than the villager. "Here planes carrying money, sophisticated people from one city to another!" "Sophisticated people?" asked the villager as he pointed to people yelling and shouting. "Don't see much sophistication around!" They both ran to the aircraft and were just in time to see a man coming out with his pants wet. "It's a passenger and looks like he's peed in the plane!" cried the villager, "he seems to be turning your so called sophisticated air-travel into a circus!"

"You villagers don't have to become civilized!" shouted the city dweller. "We city dwellers are becoming uncivilized!" "Once lets go in and do what that passenger just did!" cried the other two and the

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Bob's Banter Beef Ban, Beer, and Bullying..!

By Robert Clements

As beef gets banned and beer prohibited in some parts of India, bullying seems to be replacing the culinary delights of eating and drinking in those places. In my very vivid imagination, I see that the ban has become a people a bit unruly: "We were worried when beef was banned," remarked a villager. "Added to that, our chief minister decided to make beer scarce, so the only pastime left was bullying!"

"And what a wonderful recreation it is!" agreed a city resident. "If I'd known it was such fun, I'd have given up beer and beef a long time ago!" They both watched as their leader, a local ruffian swaggered over. "Today is Sunday!" he said. "So, bullying today?" they both asked looking mournful. "We don't want any holidays from bullying, that's the only way, I can handle the craving in my belly and the cries of my liver!"

"I never said it's a holiday," smiled their local leader. "Today we scarce church goes in their churches!" "Hurry!" cried the other and gathering a gang rushed into a local church, tore their religious books and looked for saris and housecoats. They found a lady doctor in a cammer and rushed at her. She ran out screaming but before they had reached her and death her few blows. There were other doctors and interns and the two had a field time in the hospital, also breaking a cardio-machine, an X-ray

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smashed a few sacred icons and then ran out triumphant. "That was good fun!" shouted the villager. "I didn't even feel the need for a cup of beer!" "Or me, beef!" said the villager, "they look like they're standing alone!" They both looked at a young lad talking on his phone, standing in the shade while he spoke. "When by stands alone, he is an eve teaser or he's up to love-jihad!" shouted the resident.

"I've lessens are a menace to society that's what the chief minister said!" The bar speaking on the phone suddenly found himself thrown to the ground. He screamed, and his mother who he was speaking to on the other end, shouted his name, but her words went unheard as his phone fell on the ground and was trampled on roughly by the two. "Never go after our women!" they cried as they beat him up and left him in a trampled mess. "What's that?" asked the villager. "That's the airport!" said the city person proudly, feeling clever because so much more than the villager. "Here planes carrying money, sophisticated people from one city to another!" "Sophisticated people?" asked the villager as he pointed to people yelling and shouting. "Don't see much sophistication around!" They both ran to the aircraft and were just in time to see a man coming out with his pants wet. "It's a passenger and looks like he's peed in the plane!" cried the villager, "he seems to be turning your so called sophisticated air-travel into a circus!"

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"Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one." — Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

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Young India, old leaders

AGE, it is said, is just a number. Age by itself does not define the level of one's performance. Yet, ageing means a loss of vim, vigour and vitality for most individuals - the reason why a retirement age is imposed on jobs in both government and private sectors. It is the energy of the youth that powers nations and institutions. Today, that energy powers India, China and much of the oriental world with the exception of Japan, where marriage as an institution is dying and procreation is no longer seen as an imperative. So too with the developed West, be it Europe or the Americas. When it comes to India, some 65 per cent of the population comprises those under age 35; and some 60 crore Indians are the youth between the ages of 15 and 35. Yet, what looks ludicrous is that the leadership of most parties comprises ageing men. More so with anarchisms like the two Communist parties, wherein the old leaders remain firmly perched on their seats without giving the next generation a chance to perform. This sentiment found expression at the CPI-M leadership meeting in West Bengal this week, with leaders of its student and youth wings complaining bitterly that the elders saps any energy as virtually killing the party.

As for the CPI-M, which held a firm grip over governance in West Bengal for seven terms or 34 years, the party lost its support not just in Bengal but almost elsewhere. The CPI has lost its national party status and the CPI-M might face the same fate after the 2024 polls. The CPI-M is led by Sitaram Yechury, 70, while the Bengal party secretary Md Salim is 65; both being much "younger" than the whole lot of elders inhabiting the party's leadership structures for many years. As for the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is nearing 73 and the party has put a bar on age for leadership at 75. No such bar exists in other parties. So many politicians in the higher ranks in the Congress party are 70-plus, having been in circulation for over half a century. Infusion of fresh blood is important for every political establishment as also for other entities. Private entities rise to the occasion as companies are eminently guided by a survival instinct and the yardstick for continuation in a job is their competence. Not so for the political parties, which are a rule unto themselves. Those who enjoying the limelight like celluloid heroes are not willing to vacate their space even when they have started greying and shrinking.

Letters to the Editor

Congress is down but not out

Editor, I don't agree with the views expressed by Sali Geogwal in his letter dated March 21, 2023 (Rahul Gandhi Scripts the Congress Downfall). While at no point has Rahul Gandhi himself or any other politician explicitly portrayed the former as a future Prime Minister of India, it is also true that Rahul Gandhi is the only politician from Opposition ranks that can challenge the aura of invincibility of Narendra Modi. Mr Gandhi's one face whose popularity and reach far outstrips that of a Pilot or a Tharoor. "Harari Jodo Varca" may not be the magic wand to revive the Congress but did it not galvanize the party workers and ordinary citizens of this country that still values secularism and co-existence by respecting the cultures, languages and customs of various communities? We all know how the small states in the North East vote. Betteff of any significant natural resources and with natural constraints such as topography that limits economic development, we tend to vote for the party which is in power at the centre. BJP gradually got a stranglehold in the North East as the Congress went out of power at Centre. I don't think the Indians are ashamed of being Indians. In another instance, he said that Indians ask themselves what they did in their past lives to be punished with a life in India now. Who will ask Modi to

Shad Suk Mynsiem: Going beyond the festivities

By Patricia Mukhim

Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem held annually around this time of year is marked by solemnity and splendour blended with subtlety. It is especially delightful to watch young men in their shiny dhoti-shirts, really joyful and expressive dance steps that keeps in tune with the kring and bon (percussion instruments) even while the maidens concentrate on their footwork. Both men and women dance with their bare feet touching mother earth. It must mean something to the dancers. They must feel elated and connected with the divine. For those who watch this dance with a grateful heart and with a sense of worship but also with a curious mind to understand the essence of the dance itself and why dancers need the accoutrements (gold and silver ornaments), that unwittingly excludes those who cannot afford those accessories, there are many unanswered questions.

Before the advent of Christianity all Khasis and Jaintias believed in a creator (Ullienongbungthangh). At that point in our history we were all more or less on the same economic footing. No family was so rich as to need a gate to protect itself and its earthly possession from thieves. I would like to believe that we lived a frugal lifestyle but that we had a deep sense of community. Of course, a few who were gifted with the business acumen learnt to trade, made great strides and became more wealthy than their neighbours. That's when our ancestors had to invent the "lock" because there was no way to explain how some people came into so much wealth. I am reminded of Yuval Noah Harari's book "21 Lessons for the 21st Century" where he explains how all religion is fiction and how people have been brainwashed to believe that fiction and how they could be misled to either be positive or negative force. I have always wondered whether as a Christian and a Khasi, I would give precedence to my Christian beliefs over those lessons passed on by my ancestors. This is a troubling thought. It was just a year old when my non-Christian mother took me to a church to be baptised. My mother never became a

Christian until 1974. I wish I had asked her why and under what compulsions did she get me baptised? It's an answer that will always be "blowin' in the wind". Perhaps I never asked out of respect and because I thought it was a way of giving me a name without the trappings of a "ceremony" since she did not know better. Whatever her compulsions, I respect my mother's decisions that for she must have done what she knew best. My question today is whether she would have been a Christian makes me less of a Khasi? I think this question troubles many who believe they can straddle both worlds without compromising either.

To be Khasi is to believe in the value systems of this community - value systems that have stood the test of time and are a directive to the good life. The good life here does not, by any stretch of imagination, mean a life of affluence. Far from it. The good life as understood by the Khasis of yore exemplified a healthy respect for what is considered today as the public good meaning the good of the largest number of people. Khasi society was once a caring community where members rallied to help anyone in need. We never had very poor people as we have today. Nor did we have a landless Khasi for anyone considered a community asset. So how did land become private property? True, the British who needed and for their administrative infrastructure needed to ensure that there were adequate means for land acquisition, so that such land became their "property". I guess the British in 1826 never knew they would see the day when 1847 would arrive and they would have to pack their bags and leave. They never thought they would see the end of Empire. But that is what happened. However, the British legacy of creating land owners who could then sell off their plots to whoever they chose too has stuck. In this aspect religion has nothing to offer. All are on the same boat. Those from the Khasi indigenous faith - the Niam Khasi, Niamre should have been the vanguards of this greatest community asset and prevented it from

becoming privately owned property which subsequently excludes poorer members of the community from owning even a tiny plot for a roof over their heads. I have seen no effort on the part of the members of the Seng Khasi-Niam Khasi-Niamre trying to bring about any reforms in this most crucial area which has the potential to turn large numbers of Khasi-Jaintia people landless. Needless to say the churches have yet to address the issues of inequality in the society and other reasons. The affluent turn a large chunk of their paying members. My point here is not to lay the blame for the stark inequalities in the indigenous Khasi-Jaintia society on the Seng Khasi-Niam Khasi-Niamre. However, since the indigenous faith laid great stress on "kamai ia ka Hok," (earn through the life of righteousness) Tip Brici (in serving fellow humans, we serve God), Kamai da ka umseyep (In effect this means when I take what does not belong to you. See that you can every penny through the sweat of your brow). In fact, the book Ki Jingsang Tynmen (Khasi ethics and etiquette) by Raubon Sing Khawman translated by Bijoya Sawian encapsulates these eternal Khasi values. But Khasi ethics and etiquette and Niam Khasi-Niamre still practise those values is a big question mark. Christianity does not preclude the practice of Khasi values which are equitable and which form the core of good human behaviour. A Khasi or Jaintia of any faith still practices the maternal tradition and all that it encompasses. I don't believe that being a Christian should then preclude a Khasi-Jaintia from being part of the Khasi indigenous traditions of morality and ethics. Granted that a Christian may or may not participate in the externalities such as the religious rites but that does not make him/her a non-Khasi or a non-Jaintia. At the end of the day whether one is a Christian or a Niam Khasi/Niamre the defining characteristic is one's behaviour and whether one still follows those time-

Latest deletions in history textbooks by NCERT go against secular India

Mughal period's contribution cannot be ignored

By Krishna Jha

This year, the Independence Day celebrations and the prime minister's speech from the ramparts of Red Fort would not make us proud of our architectural achievements, its aesthetics, since Red Fort stands bereft of its history. Taj Mahal, one of the seven wonders of the world, would turn into virtual reality. Like our great Rabinadrathn Tagore had called Taj Mahal, "a drop of tear on the eternal folds of time" (Kalka pot to look kindusharaj, Taj Mahal). But it is also a fact that no one can tear away the entire medieval period from the weave of time. There is the issue of consistency, and the running chronology of culture, creativity, progress and finally the civilisational truth.

The very first war of independence against the colonial rulers was fought under the leadership of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor. Ours was one of these countries where the vast masses from all regions, communities and political affiliation joined the freedom struggle with one single aim, freedom from the British colonialism.

Let me conclude with a quote from Yuval Noah Harari's "21 Lessons for the 21st Century", from the Chapter "Despair and Hope" - "Though the challenges are unprecedented, and though the disagreements are intense, humankind can rise to the occasion if we keep our fears under control and be a bit more humble about our views."

No time in our history has become imperative to work unitedly as the Khasi-Jaintia community with a more sagacious understanding of what it is to be a "community". If we as a community we do not discriminate between blue-blooded Khasi and khun-shiereg (half blood), as if it is left uncorrected, it is a right which a former can do no wrong. A friend recently said, "Who says Khasi society does not have a caste system? Of course it does. A Khasi born of a Khasi mother and a non-Khasi father is considered an outcast. These discriminations are toxic but we seem to shy away from addressing them. Why?"

As the struggle concluded, it was an easy shift towards democracy, with modern ideals and values. The Constitution was prepared during the years of 1947-49, taking care of its democratic profile. It was adopted in 1950 with a preamble that promised us a sovereign, secular, democratic republic. Any shift in these premises would be against the spirit of our Constitution. We, the people, who have survived partition, its blood-soaked days, had still voted for secularism and democracy in the first general election itself, which showed that the values are sacred like our lives itself.

Yet there are challenges. Several passages from the periods of Delhi Sultanate and Mughal empire have been deleted. There are missing sections in textbooks released by NCERT in early April covering several hundred years of the Mughal Empire. There are also missing sections from the independence period like assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, Gujarat riots among others. There are also the issues like caste, class and religion and their relationship with power that have been deleted. NCERT has tried to justify taking these steps as not to overload the students in COVID days. They also said it was part of the normal process of rationalisation only.

The result is students would be deprived of the chapters handling the period between fifteen hundred AD to the middle of seventeen hundred AD, that is, the entire Mughal period. NCERT books are studied by large number of students all over the country. The recommendations have come on the pretext that these deletions would not affect the students' pursuit of knowledge. The fact is that our country, India form eighty percent of total population, while Muslims have a share of fourteen percent.

According to historians, there is an attempt to belittle or totally delete the Muslim contributions in the nation building process of the country. Similar attempts were made during the reign of Atal Bihari Vajpayee from 1999 to 2004, when history books published by the NCERT and written by several renowned historians, including RS Sharma and Bipan Chandra, were taken away from circulation. It is not deletion alone, there are also attempts to distort certain valuable parts of history with suppression of facts. In class twelve history textbooks, there are passages on Gandhi that have been asked like, "Gandhi's pursuit of Hindu-Muslim unity provoked Hindu extremists...RSS was born...". Then, "He was particularly disliked by those who wanted Hindus to take revenge or who wanted India to become a country of Hindus like Pakistan. Gandhiji thought that these people were misguided. He was convinced that any attempt to make India into a country only for the Hindus would destroy India." Then also "...His steadfast pursuit of Hindu-Muslim unity provoked Hindu extremists so much that

they made several attempts to assassinate Gandhiji. He refused to take armed protection." The rest of the passage that was not deleted, says, "Early on January 30, 1948, one such extremist Nathuram Vinayak Godse walked up to Gandhiji during his evening prayers and fired five bullets at him, and killed him."

That was not all. The passage that spoke about the communal situation in the country in Gandhiji's post-assassination days was also among those deleted: "Gandhiji's death had a logical effect on the communal situation in the country. Post Partition related anger and violence suddenly subsided. The government of India cracked down on organisations that were spreading communal hatred. Organisations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh were banned for some time. Communal politics began to lose its appeal."

In fact it has become a regular practice for the NCERT to view textbooks and it is the third one since 2014. In 2017, there were 134 changes and also data updates, additional made in 182 books. Then again in 2019, on the pretext of reducing the burden on students, deletions were made (IIPA Service).

would not get more than 2 seats in Meghalaya Assembly Elections 2023. Congress may be weak but it is not dead. BJP came to power in Manipur in 2017 after coercing other parties to an alliance even though it was the Congress under O. Boboi Singh which won the maximum seats. In Nagaland, the BJP is playing second fiddle to NDFP. So, is not that the Congress support base has vanished overnight. BJP lost Himachal Pradesh. Yet they keep on claiming that it is Rahul Gandhi who is losing elections. People know how the MVA government in Maharashtra was brought down through unpolitical moves. Recently, the BJP lost by-elections in Maharashtra in areas it considered its stronghold.

Instead of dismissing Rahul Gandhi's statement in England as thoughtless and detrimental to the image of the nation, one would be better off by pondering as to why he made those remarks. Gandhi was not speaking ill of his parents or ancestors. Rather he was speaking his mind on what ails the country. The mere fact of speaking one's mind is being interpreted as being anti-national cannot be a justification for asking Rahul Gandhi to apologise and for holding the Parliament to ransom. PM Modi himself has spoken ill of the country in foreign shores on numerous occasions. He claimed that the Indians are ashamed of being Indians. In another instance, he said that Indians ask themselves what they did in their past lives to be punished with a life in India now. Who will ask Modi to apologise?

Since 2014 the country may have built more airports, better roads, and constructed more medical and engineering colleges, but the country has also seen a rise in attacks on the very fabric of this secular and democratic country. Countless instances of vigilante groups thrashing people carrying cattle which is nothing but intolerance towards the culture of other religions. Beef ban was not successful at least in the Christian dominated NE states. Who will counter Mohan Bhagwat's claim that all Khasis are Hindus? What are Mr Grewal's thoughts on the IT raids that befell BBC soon after it had released a documentary on Modi? It is known that the then PM, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was convinced by LK Advani not to sack Modi who was then CM of Gujarat. Instead of targeting Rahul Gandhi for raising some anti-national points in a foreign land, one must ask why ICC is being planned to be implemented in a country as diverse as ours, forgetting that our country is not only a union of states but also an amalgamation of different religions, cultures, customs and that diversity is unity. Economic development at the cost of social disharmony is no development at all. Patricia Mukhim Mukhim, "Analysing the Congress and its revival prospects" on the other hand is insightful and that diversity is unity of the words lends more to worry concern, that is the party's once dominated India's politics on the wane and to be punished with a life in India now. Who will ask Modi to

and give us a vibrant democracy which is impossible without a strong opposition party. Mukhim is not dismissive of the Congress and no one should be either.

Yours etc., Khomdran Lal Singh, Shillong-1

Kudos for prompt action to prevent sand mining

Editor, I am writing to express my heartfelt appreciation for the Meghalaya Government's swift and resolute action in detecting and addressing the illegal sand mining activities in the Manda River, North Garo Hills. The recent revelation that a road construction company was involved in this illegal activity is deeply concerning and highlights the need for urgent action to prevent ecological imbalance and potential disasters in our hilly areas. As a mature lover and responsible citizen, I am grateful to the Meghalaya Government of its for their unwavering commitment to environmental protection. Your tireless efforts in upholding the laws and regulations related to illegal sand mining are commendable. Your vigilance and dedication in safeguarding the delicate balance of our ecosystem in hilly regions are truly inspiring. I want to express my sincere appreciation for your prompt and decisive action in holding those responsible accountable. Your efforts in

detecting and addressing illegal sand mining are crucial in preserving the natural beauty and resources of Meghalaya for future generations. Your commitment to protecting our hilly areas at any cost is commendable and deserving of praise. Once again, I extend my deepest gratitude to the Meghalaya Government for your relentless efforts in safeguarding the interests of our state and its people. Your dedication to environmental protection serves as an exemplary model for others to follow. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to preserving the ecological balance and preventing disasters in Meghalaya. Yours etc., Dr. Sadananda Hegadall, Bhangaluru

'Railway as Bogeyman'

Editor, The editorial piece mentioned above drew my attention towards the necessity of extension of railway line to the state of Meghalaya, particularly in the Kamrup, Shillong. In fact, I would like to point out the few advantages of having the railways in our state. That region is a public transport system besides cargo will help reduce the traffic congestion in Shillong to a huge extent. Why would I drive my vehicle to Shillong adding to the daily traffic chaos if I can avail cheap and efficient transport systems like the railways and arrive at my intended destination on

time. This will be the same for other people who plan to visit the state capital for work or leisure and this in turn will help reduce traffic congestion in the city. Besides, it's a cheaper transport alternative for passengers and goods which ultimately helps the common citizen. The state government is really serious about improving the economy of the poor then introduction of railways to the capital city is imperative. Availability of rail connectivity to different district headquarters of the state will definitely improve the livelihoods and economy of the common citizens of the state. Besides it will help ease the traffic congestion caused by overloaded trucks as well as reduce the carbon footprint due to the burning of fossil fuels, not to mention the reduced environmental pollution. Rail connectivity will help address the issue of unemployment of the local youth, as mentioned in your editorial it will also greatly benefit the farmers in transportation of their goods at cheaper rates. That the arrival of the railways will definitely have direct and indirect benefit to the common citizens is a foregone conclusion. Yours etc., Stanley LK Diegdoth, Unistung, Ri Bhoi District

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"In order to succeed, we must first believe that we can."

Nikos Kazantzakis

The Shillong Times

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Solid Waste Management challenge

MEGHALAYA'S capital Shillong is facing a monumental problem with three of its major rivers being assaulted from several quarters. They have not only been reduced in size on account of encroachments but have also become a convenient place to dump garbage...

There is a tendency to blame the Government for everything including the poor garbage management when in fact there are a multiplicity of institutions looking after this aspect and the citizen's own responsibility to ensure that he/she disposes garbage where it is supposed to be which is in the garbage collection trucks...

The Government's role is that of providing a system of waste collection and management. The District Councils which are the custodians of all rivers have to ascertain themselves to ensure that rivers continue to remain clean and pristine and they should work in conjunction with the government to do so.

Letters In the Editor

The Teachings of Elders: A search for modern relevance

The article, "Shad Suk Mynsiem: Going beyond the festivities," in the Shillong Times, Apr 14, 2023, by Patricia Mukhin is of exceptional consequence to the Khasi community. These issues need to be reflected upon and discussed at length...

The article makes a reference to the book Ki Jingsweng Tynmen the teachings of elders, by Radhon Sing Kharwiantang, ably translated into English by Bijoya Sarvam. Written in two-line verses, the book has 109 stanzas in 629 couplets.

The time for the 'politician journalist' has come

By Derek O'Brien

Week 1 of Parliament: Opposition MPs from Trinamool Congress wear black masks around their mouths to signify how their voices are being muzzled in Parliament.



Week 2 of Parliament: Opposition MPs from Congress, DMK, SP and others put up a giant red banner on the facade of Parliament building, demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee.

Week 3 of Parliament: Opposition MPs from over a dozen parties wear all black to Parliament, as a sign of protest. Some wear black masks.

Week 4 of Parliament: Opposition MPs from over a dozen parties wear all black to Parliament, as a sign of protest. Some wear black masks.

Week 5 of Parliament: Opposition MPs from over a dozen parties wear all black to Parliament, as a sign of protest. Some wear black masks.



Week 6 of Parliament: Opposition MPs from over a dozen parties wear all black to Parliament, as a sign of protest. Some wear black masks.

Week 7 of Parliament: Opposition MPs from over a dozen parties wear all black to Parliament, as a sign of protest. Some wear black masks.

Week 8 of Parliament: Opposition MPs from over a dozen parties wear all black to Parliament, as a sign of protest. Some wear black masks.

Attacks against Churches anger Christians in North Eastern States Congress & regional parties blame BJP led state govts

By Ashis Biswas

In northeast Indian states, upset Christians feel they must protest more vigorously against the recent demolition of a few churches in Manipur and Assam, for which they hold the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accountable.

The Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) according to local regional media reports, a few days ago, went beyond merely criticising the ruling parties of the region for what it felt was an attack against the Church. In a statement it simultaneously deplored the apparent indifference on part of Christian legislators in the region over such sensitive matters affecting the community.



Reports from some areas suggested that local government authorities had launched a crackdown against illegal constructions/encroachments without permission, violating existing rules. Churches were not spared. According to one Dimapur-based account, the churches destroyed were the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church, the Evangelical Lutheran church in Manipur and the Catholic Holy Spirit Church, in addition to another in Assam.

Reports from some areas suggested that local government authorities had launched a crackdown against illegal constructions/encroachments without permission, violating existing rules. Churches were not spared.

The NPCC statement flayed Christian lawmakers in the NE states as well as those elected to the Indian Parliament for their failure to raise the issue at any level. The ruling BJP, it was alleged had correctly assessed the numerical and other weaknesses that Christians suffered from, exploiting them to its own advantage. Not too many churches in the tribal areas had proper construction permits, it was explained.

Clearly this was a time for Christians to come together to protect their faith and identity. In India, the North and West regions generally voted for Hindu nationalism while in other areas people voted for their

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those who have a flaw, or the unborn child will surely be affected" (Verse 31). Certain categories of people, such as barren widows and handicapped persons are excluded from religious rites and government.

Such prohibitions are hard to accept, and are often re-evaluated and set back in the driving seat of the 'bus'. As prophesied, it's a jam-packed 'bus' with some of its associates standing in the footboard and some clinging on its top. A newbie creates a sensational debut - hurls the night notes, the right tune (pun intended) and raises the decibel levels in the aftermath of the state's democratic setup. The opposition are opposing each other. The debutant, also in the opposition, thunders to take matters back to the streets after its President claimed that the government is not giving the Assembly a chance to discuss the Roster System issue. If issues can be resolved and won in the

streets, what is the need to have elected representatives in the State Assembly?

The State Reservation Policy and the current Roster System are issues that need to be deliberated and must take priority in the political discourse of the state. But looking at the demography of our state and the extent of the reservation affecting the political opinions of an individual party, it'll take much of Solomons to come out with a pragmatic solution to the issue.

We need to establish a 'fair' and a 'just' society which privileges equal opportunity to all and sundry. As some political parties and individuals are drooling on how to milk the issue in their best interests, why not also explore the idea of the creamy layer (when the annual income exceeds a certain amount) of our society forshoring reservation and thereby provide a level playing field for the less fortunate. As in the case of OBCs, the creamy layer of the OBC's cannot stake claim to any reservation.

support young entrepreneurs and to open up new avenues for the educated unemployed youths. Issues like the current Roster System should take center stage but we cannot be blinded by it and allow other opportunities slip past us.

Yours etc, Hanphing Lang Hsiaoimoi, Nongkshik, Upper-Shillong

Reservation Policy - Quota & Roster system

Editor, Apropos of the news report "GSU deprecates call for change in quota system" (ST April 11, 2023), I would like to point out that the Reservation Policy which was notified on January 12, 1972 before the creation of the state of Meghalaya on 21st January 1972 which we celebrate every year was the wisdom of the founding fathers of Meghalaya and cannot be diluted or deviated from. Of course, as a young first-time voter I am a bit confused how the Reservation Policy was notified even before the state was created? However, I still admit that it was the wisdom of our forefathers though it seems like "putting the cart before the horse".

Our respected founding fathers earmarked a Reservation Policy that provided 40% reservation in employment/education for the Garos

and 40% for the Khasi-Jaintia communities, which was published before the state was born. The Policy specifically, explicitly and unequivocally stipulated that amongst others, "The reservation on account of deficiency shall not be carried forward for more than a year. After the expiry of the second year, the reservation shall be treated as lapsed (ST, April 5, 2023) Article by Prof. Lakshon Khatu. In other words, the shortage of Garo candidates who qualify for a certain post in a particular year cannot be carried forward beyond one year. It implies therefore after the lapse it falls outside the purview of the Roster System. Therefore, going deep into this condition as propounded by our founding fathers, mathematically the year to be prepared for the Roster System ought to be commenced with prospective effect from the second year. As opined by the GSU any attempt to dilute, or alter deviate the Policy 1972 of its rules and conditions should not be allowed till the legislature reviews the new Reservation Policy to be known as Meghalaya Reservation Policy Act.

Yours etc, Ssetiana Wankar (Shillong-1)

Rahul Gandhi's defamation trial highlights drift away from democracy under Narendra Modi

Rahul Gandhi, India's most prominent opposition leader and the principal adversary of the country's prime minister, Narendra Modi, was recently disqualified as a member of parliament. This came after Gandhi was found guilty of defamation for comments he made about Modi's surname at a rally in 2019.

Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party had also run a furious campaign demanding "Rahul Gandhi maaf kange" (Rahul Gandhi, apologise) after comments Gandhi made during his recent visit to the UK. The scion of India's most prominent political dynasty made several remarks alleging that India's democratic institutions were being deliberately undermined by the current government.

This, BJP members said, amounted to "defaming" India itself. Their reasoning was that criticising the state of India's postcolonial democracy in the halls of the former colonising country crossed the line. But this hypersensitivity equates to evading scrutiny if it means that democratically elected leaders cannot voice their opinions freely in any forum.



Modi and the BJP's brand of politics has thrived on the sustained use of deliberately contradictory speech and policies as part of what I have termed his "postcolonial neoliberal nationalism". This political project has been divisive for its weaponisation of colonial history, its failure to act on crony capitalism, and for claiming a monopoly on what it means to be nationalistic.

The space for raising these concerns within India is shrinking rapidly, as shown by the decline in civil and political liberties that has led to India being ranked as only "partly free" in the latest Freedom House index.

Gandhi, along with other opposition leaders and scholars like ourselves and others, in and outside India, have been pointing toward this democratic backsliding or worse occurring in India. Such criticisms are routinely

met with political labelling of being "anti-national", "anti-India" and "foreign funded".

In various speeches and forums during his visit to the UK in March, Gandhi asserted — as he does regularly in India — that Modi and the BJP are pursuing an unprecedented campaign against political opposition, civil society, and dissent.

In this, they are doing the bidding of the far-right Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (National Volunteer Organisation). Gandhi has described the RSS as a "fundamentalist" and "fascist" movement that "has basically captured pretty much all of India's institutions".

Gandhi is not alone in his criticism of the RSS. Writer and activist Arundhati Roy has said the same of the movement, arguing that the century-old paramilitary movement was supported by much of India's corporate sector.

DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE.

The RSS is a nucleus of the "Sangh Parivar" umbrella movement of various right-wing organisations and an ideological parent to the BJP. It has been quite open about its desire to transform India into a strongly militarist nation based on extreme Hindu nationalism.

Institutional capture by the BJP is evident in its control of India's senior bureaucracy, the regular use of the Enforcement Directorate (a law enforcement agency under the Ministry of Finance) for political targeting of the opposition, and the installation of controversial leaders of academic and cultural institutions.

Thanks to longstanding pressure from Sangh Parivar, even school textbooks have been revised to present a selective and Hindu-centric view of history and science.

With the support of many in

the business sector and media, the BJP has built a cult around Modi based on the idea of one leader, one party, one (Hindu) nation. This resembles what many would see as bearing the hallmarks of modern fascism.

POLITICAL LABELLING.

The BJP's reaction to Gandhi's criticisms only backs this assessment. Rather than engage with the substance of Gandhi's arguments, the party and its supporters have instead focused on criticising him personally. They portray Gandhi and other critics as "anti-national" and as part of a "foreign conspiracy" to weaken India.

This contempt for opposition by no means stops at political figures such as Gandhi. In March, justice minister Kiren Rijiju referred to "some retired judges" being "part of the anti-India gang".

The BJP also has a poor record

when it comes to free speech in India. The international media monitor RSF said in its current report that:

The violence against journalists, the politically partisan media and the concentration of media ownership all demonstrate that press freedom is in crisis in "the world's largest democracy".

In recent times, this suppression and intimidation has extended to the international media. After the BBC aired a documentary critical of Modi's government, the authorities raided the BBC's Delhi office, purportedly for tax reasons.

The BBC documentary arguably said nothing that Indian scholars and activists have not been arguing since the riots in Gujarat 2002 when Modi was beginning his rise as the state's chief minister. Yet the Modi government punished students who tried to screen the docu-

mentary in their universities, and invoked emergency laws to ban the documentary.

Of course, the rise of authoritarian-style politics in electoral democracies is not confined to India. But given the sheer size of India, which is tipped to overtake China as the world's most populous country this year, and its reputation as an established non-western democracy, the significance of Gandhi's warnings and his ongoing treatment at the hands of the ruling party in India is of major concern.

Gandhi has appealed his conviction, but his warnings — and those of countless other politicians, activists and public intellectuals — deserve to be taken seriously by the rest of the world. How the world reacts may determine whether India will remain the world's largest democracy or become a bellwether for authoritarianism in the coming years. (The Conversation)

Picture books can help open doors to tough topics

One of the toughest jobs of parenting is talking to your kids about difficult subjects. Divorce, illness, death, sex, natural disasters, financial uncertainty. The list goes on. In these moments, parenting becomes blurry and confusing. A parent who has so much to say about everything from eating healthy to good grades is suddenly speechless.

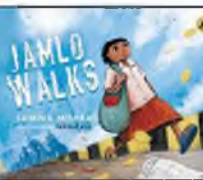
There's a temptation to avoid difficult topics or just sweep them under the rug, hoping the kids don't notice. But in the age of cell phone notifications, streaming video, and 24-hour news coverage — when even little kids are exposed to really serious stories — it's important to face this challenge head-on.

Learning about these differences and appreciating them takes a whole lifetime, so what better way to prepare the generation of the future than by reading children's books about diversity with them? We have several fantastic Indian authors making an effort to initiate tough conversations in an engaging way through powerful storytelling and illustrations.

Jamla Walks by documentary filmmaker and writer Samina Mishra is one of them. It tells the story of India's Covid-19 lockdown through the eyes of its children. On April 18, 2020, Jamalo Makdat, a 12-year-old, died while walking from the chilli fields of Telangana to her home in Chhattisgarh after a nationwide lockdown was announced due to Covid-19 outbreak. She was among a group

of migrant workers who, like many others across the country, decided to return home on foot. Her story touched Mishra so deeply that she made it into a book. *Jamla Walks* reflects on the socio-economic divides that exist across strata, but Mishra writes without judgment and with empathy.

Since parents often feel tongue-tied when it comes to the topic of unconventional families, journalist and author



Priitisha Borihakur's *Pahor and Niyor's Mural of Family Stories* is a powerful progressive book that aims to inspire curiosity, raise awareness, instill compassion, entertain, and show a unique glimpse of the diverse kinds of families found in any community. It shows twins Pahor and Niyor's family as being a nuclear family, with a mom and a dad. These twins demonstrate there are all sorts of families — children with two moms, two dads, a single mother; a multiracial family unit; foster and adopted children; pet parents; and more — none more important than another, and all of them are beautiful in their own unique

way. The book teaches about different types of people, and to not judge others based on their race, gender, sexual identity, disability, or anything else.

Author Adithi Rao's book *Chuchu Manthu's Jar of Toffees* is a wonderful book to introduce children to the concept of death. Chuchu Manthu is the most loving person Preet knows. After his death, little Preet wonders if his kindness has disappeared with him. Based on a true story about loss and grief, and compassion in everyday actions.

Another book that's searing and tender at the same time is *Puro Anand's Nomad's Land*. It talks about the effects of terrorism and displacement, and about the healing powers of hope, friendship, and reconciliation. The story revolves around two girls — Shanna and Pema — who belong to families that have been forced to migrate to escape persecution. One is a Kashmiri Pandit, and the other comes from a nomadic tribe. While the adults are caught up in the memory of a painful past, these children want to heal those wounds and move ahead with life.

There are great disparities in opportunity and recognition between men and women in sports. Author Menaka Ramani's book *Loki Takes Guard* focuses on these disparities at the local level. It's a coming-of-age story of an 11-year-old girl who wants to play cricket. But for Loki, playing cricket is not as easy as it may seem for an 11-year-old boy. Cricket is a means for Loki to realise her dreams, voice her opinion, and make her presence felt as an individual. Unfortunately, her parents seem to be too involved with her brother's studies to bother with Loki. So, she takes matters into her own hands and begins a petition to fight for her right to play cricket. Witty and fast-paced, *Loki Takes Guard* is as much a story about the joy of sports as it is about breaking outdated rules and standing up for oneself. (ANSIjif)

Swiping, love and algorithms: The shifting cultural terrain

Due to dating apps, the nature of modern relationships has undoubtedly changed. But are they solely accountable for the societal shifts? The answer has not yet been chosen. Despite the fact that dating apps can help people connect, the commitment, communication, and understanding between the parties involved still determine whether a relationship will succeed or fail. It's crucial to understand the issues tools don't define love; they merely assist people in finding it.

As the world becomes more complicated, people are being drawn to the digital world more and more. Everything has altered since the advent of digital technology, from our social networks to our purchasing practices. The dating scene has also changed as a result of this transition, for better or worse. Dating apps have facilitated a transformation in the way that individuals view relationships by allowing them to think about their options outside of the traditional constraints of monogamy. Do they, however, share any responsibility for the rise in adultery?

The elephant in the room

Cheating was widespread long before adulterous dating apps ever existed. The reasons have always been varied and very individualised: some people may just hunger for excitement and novelty, while others may feel overlooked in their existing relationship and seek fulfilment elsewhere. In order to comprehend how attitudes towards marriage, adultery, and other conventional socio-cultural norms are evolving in India, Gleeden, the most used discreet dating app in India with over 2 million Indian subscribers, undertook a thorough study in collaboration with IPSOS.

A sample of 1,503 married Indians between the ages of 25 and 50 who lived in 12 Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities made up the research's sample. According to the survey, 82 per cent of respondents believe it is possible to be true to one person for the rest of one's life, while 44 per cent believe it is feasible to be in love with two people at once. It's interesting to note that 53 per cent of respondents want to have sex with someone other than their spouse, but 37 per cent of individuals believe it is feasible to cheat on someone while still loving them.

The research claims that 67 per cent of respondents stated their relationships made them feel "emotionally very happy", and 78 per cent of them claimed to have sex with their partners at

least once a week. But even though 41 per cent of the respondents reported having frequent sex with their spouses, they were found to be dissatisfied.

A craving of instant gratification

Online dating is the most typical way for an extramarital affair to begin. They offer a way to surreptitiously meet new people without worrying about the social repercussions of going to a bar or club. Furthermore, a number of dating apps provide users the choice to keep their profiles invisible to their spouses, making it easier for them to hide their adulterous encounters. And given that more individuals are using dating apps every day, it's simple to see how they might be affecting the culture's propensity for adultery.

Overall, 57 per cent of respondents have already had an extramarital affair; the statistics for men and women are nearly similar (53 per cent men and 59 per cent women), demonstrating for all time that women commit extramarital affairs equally as frequently as men. Most of them cheated on partners who they had previously known from their social networks. Parties and other private gatherings are where infidelity occurs most frequently in real life, although hooking up also frequently takes place on social media and through dating apps.

According to the study's findings, over 60 per cent of Indians are bravely attempting unorthodox relationships, shattering the status quo in traditional dating. Surprisingly, they regard having a side ace and fantasising about other people as no less when it comes to fidelity. Indians are eager to experiment with open partnerships, regarding sugar babies/daddies, and getting kinky with some BDSM activity, despite the fact that threesome don't appear to capture their attention. Additionally, an unexpected 22 per cent of respondents have already gotten on the non-monogamous relationship bandwagon. It appears that India is spiking the dating scene!

Extramarital dating and dating apps have caused a cultural shift in relationships that has allowed people to consider options other than monogamy. These applications allow people a place to explore their needs and wants without worrying about being criticised, even though infidelity may still be widespread. They are ushering in a new era of changing relationships that will let people form more real and fulfilling bonds. (ANSIjif)

way. The book teaches about different types of people, and to not judge others based on their race, gender, sexual identity, disability, or anything else.

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Another book that's searing and tender at the same time is *Puro Anand's Nomad's Land*. It talks about the effects of terrorism and displacement, and about the healing powers of hope, friendship, and reconciliation. The story revolves around two girls — Shanna and Pema — who belong to families that have been forced to migrate to escape persecution. One is a Kashmiri Pandit, and the other comes from a nomadic tribe. While the adults are caught up in the memory of a painful past, these children want to heal those wounds and move ahead with life.

There are great disparities in opportunity and recognition between men and women in sports. Author Menaka Ramani's book *Loki Takes Guard* focuses on these disparities at the local level. It's a coming-of-age story of an 11-year-old girl who wants to play cricket. But for Loki, playing cricket is not as easy as it may seem for an 11-year-old boy. Cricket is a means for Loki to realise her dreams, voice her opinion, and make her presence felt as an individual. Unfortunately, her parents seem to be too involved with her brother's studies to bother with Loki. So, she takes matters into her own hands and begins a petition to fight for her right to play cricket. Witty and fast-paced, *Loki Takes Guard* is as much a story about the joy of sports as it is about breaking outdated rules and standing up for oneself. (ANSIjif)

Tips for a healthier relationship with your phone

By Paul Levy

How long do you spend staring at a screen every day? According to one report, the average person spends about seven hours a day on screens connected to the internet. And that figure is going to be even higher if your job is mainly done in front of a computer.

Most of us over-use digital devices, spending too long either working or enjoying being distracted on phones, tablets, laptops or even VR headsets. We are accused of being addicted to tech and warned of the dangers to our physical and mental health.

One significant paradox here is that we often retreat into the digital world to escape the stresses of the physical world, but can end up simply collecting other kinds of digital and physical stress along the way.

As a parent, I became concerned a few years ago about the effect my digital life was having on my work and family. I did some research of my own, changed the way I used my devices and even wrote a book about the dangers of what I call the "digital infirmo".

It's only in recent years that longer-term studies have been published on the issue. And taken together, these studies comprise a growing and significant body of knowledge, that is hard to dismiss or ignore; too much tech can cause issues for us humans.

To be clear, digital devices offer significant benefits - think connection, education, entertainment. The danger is when our overuse of them becomes toxic to our health.

From a personal perspective, eye strain, neck ache, poor sleep, stress, repetitive strain injuries of all kinds and impaired hand function are just a few of symptoms I've had over the years thanks to my overuse of screens and devices - and research shows I'm far from alone.



alone. If any of these symptoms describe you (or anyone you know), or you just feel too much of your life is taken up with staring at a screen, then you might find my advice on how to regain control of your tech helpful.

How to regain control

1. Practice putting down your digital devices consciously. Keep them out of sight and put them away when you aren't using them, especially at night. Banish them from the bedroom, get an alarm clock (so you aren't using your phone alarm) and you'll sleep better without the late-night scrolling. And get out of the habit of watching TV with your phone next to

you. Just focus on one task at a time without the distraction of another screen.

2. Set yourself screen time limits. Too much screen time can give you headaches. Be mindful of the way you use your tech and make use of features like voice notes, which allow you to stay up-to-date with communication without staring at a screen for a long time.

3. Stop allowing digital distractions. Constant interruption can induce physical and mental stress. Turn off notifications and alerts when you want to fully focus on a task. And keep your phone off your desk. Research shows that having your phone nearby, even if the power is off, can hurt your performance.

And also make sure the volume doesn't burst your ear drums.

4. Schedule proper digital-free time. Depression and anxiety is one result of digital overload. So getting away from your digital world for a while is important. Take a walk in nature, read a book, go for a bike ride - anything that takes you away from the screens for a while.

5. Make screens easier on the eyes. Screen overuse can strain our eyes and affect our eyesight. Don't squint at tiny screens to do work that would be better done on a larger-screen laptop. Reduce the blue light on devices and make use of all the other helpful accessibility features. Start with that screen glare.

6. Take control of the chaos of information overload. Organise your phone, computer and tablet so you can use them more efficiently. Some apps really do help you take charge of your life and work more calmly and effectively. Time-tracking apps measure how much time you're spending (wasting) on your screens - prepare to be horrified! We regain mastery over our digital devices when we become more proactive in their use.

7. Sit well when you are digitally engaged. Slouching over a phone or hunching over your laptop will harm your neck and your back. Sit upright, stretch regularly and exercise often - without your phone.

Be a digital decider

These seven tips should help you regain a sense of control over your digital life. For me, it's all about sleeping and waking better after leaving my phone downstairs. It's about having dedicated, planned digital time and specific times when the phone has no place in what I'm doing.

Yet it's also about enjoying these tech miracles in a more satisfying way and using them more consciously. I like to think of myself now as a digital decider and not just another digital casualty. (The Conversation)

(The author is a Senior Lecturer and Researcher in Innovation and Digital Leadership, University of Brighton)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi Sunday, APRIL 16, 2023

'Birthday Forecasts'
Moon conjunct Saturn on your solar return chart and will give good results. This time is great. You will make progress in your job/career. There will be compatibility between colleagues and bosses. You will work in team spirit and will take decisions collectively. Your experience will count a lot. Luck will favor you at every stage and you will be making good progress. You will be busy at multiple activities. You will also get sudden benefits. You will have monetary gains. You will give additional responses to feedback and will enjoy each other's company. There will be a realization for a long time and you will get married. You will make a use of your professional contacts. Doers of programs will open up for you on the subject. You will be able to help others. Students will make good progress in studies and pass the exams in good grades.

'This week for you'
Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It will be a beneficial week. You will work over and over but your work will get completed. You will have full confidence in your abilities. You will call update a grade and will do things expected of you. Luck is also favoring you. This is the ideal time to start a new business. You will be able to get a new partner and flourish. You will do well in your job. You will be in love with a person working in your office. The stressors at home will be peaceful. Your financial position will be well. You will not argue with anyone. People who are jealous of you will not be able to harm you. You will make enough progress in your life. Students will pass the exams.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You will face some challenges and hurdles in the beginning of the week. But everything will be straight as time progresses. You will start getting wonderful news by your efforts. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) The week will be good. You will have important news coming from somewhere. It will fill your spirits. There will be some memorable incidents taking place in your life. You will find that special person who will make you life different. No need to doubt about anything. Some person will give advice to you which will prove to be helpful. It will be a wonderful week. You will find close with your colleagues. Students will clear exams, complete tests and interviews. You will get full marks in your job. You will also get promoted in your job. You will have lot of money and time during the period. The works in your hand will be completed with ease. Everyone will cooperate with you.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is a wonderful week for you. When working with people you will get wonderful results. Everyone will give full cooperation to you. It is also time to do self-analysis and introspection about some of things taking place in your life. You can do new partnership in business which will prove beneficial for you. You will go on a picnic to some beautiful places and have fun with your family members. You will do some things for your children's future plans. You will foster some person with your own & arrange measures to help you succeed. You will be able to give a sudden turn of events. You will not allow anyone to take advantage of your emotions.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It will be a mixed week. You will go with increasing luck. It will be mixed in all your activities. Your boss may appear unhappy with you but you will make efforts to please him. Take a financial related decisions wisely. You will find some amount from lot of reaches. You will get involved in legal battles in court but it is appropriate to job for an out of court settlement. You will have plans to change your job. You will find some amount from lot of reaches. You will get involved in legal battles in court but it is appropriate to job for an out of court settlement. You will have plans to change your job. You will find some amount from lot of reaches. You will get involved in legal battles in court but it is appropriate to job for an out of court settlement.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 23) It will prove to be a beneficial week for you. There will be the right opportunity for growth in your life. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do.

Libra : (September 24 - October 23) It is a nice week. You will get continued success in your work. You will be able to take people about your career and future. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 23) You will not pick anyone to work with. It will get good. You will be able to take people about your career and future. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do.

Sagittarius : (November 24 - December 31) It will be a money giving week. You will have profits in your business. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do.

Capricorn : (December 31 - January 20) You will be involved in lot of fruitful activities this week. You will make progress in your job/career. You will get lot of mental satisfaction as a result. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) The week will be light on a positive note. You will get a good news related to your job or business. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) It is a time to stay positive and to be strong. Your mind will be stable. You will also find some management and you will have perfect bonding with your partner and you will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do. You will be able to do things which you have been wanting to do.

International road trips you can plan from India

By Olivia Sarkar

Traveling is an experience - it's about the journey as much as it is about the destination. Packing your bags may be prompted by the destination, but the journey itself may excite you. What if we told you that you could travel locally and reach China and London by road from India?

Here is a list of possible international road excursions

(in all senses of the term), but doable. The route to Thimpu from New Delhi will take you across the states of Uttar Pradesh and Assam, from Guwahati, you will be able to move to the Bhutanese village Phunsholing and then head to Thimpu and reach Bhutan in 3 days.

SRI LANKA
Take a drive to verdant Sri Lanka and take in the beaches, woods, and culture that have helped to shape the country into what it is today. Since locations are close to one another, you may squeeze

MALAYSIA
Skyscrapers and riverside homes coexist in Malaysia, which effectively expresses the region's cultural spirit. In addition to that, they serve some of the greatest meals in the area, which is a wonderful treat after travelling such a long distance. However, you could have to pass through Tibet, which will cause issues with autonomous vehicle movement. To arrive in Kuala Lumpur, you will have to travel across two other countries - Myanmar and Thailand, for which valid travel documents are required.



THAILAND
Even while it may be less expensive to fly, the recently opened motorway linking the two countries is nonetheless quite thrilling. Since Thailand has magnificent beaches, an unusual culture, and options for all types of travellers, it is well known as one of the easiest destinations to have a good time. The road to Bangkok, goes across the northeastern states of India and crosses Myanmar to arrive in Thailand. Many who have undertaken this route suggest the following journey: head from Delhi to Imphal, cross Morch, Kale, Bagan, Inle Lake, Yangon, Maeot, and arrive in Bangkok from Tak.

CHINA
Although it would take a very long time and effort, it is technically conceivable to drive to China. The independent travel pass is difficult to obtain and takes a long time to be authorised. But if you do, please let us know! For arriving in China from New Delhi, one may take a route through Nepal via the Kosi/Bharati/Changmu border and reach your destination in approximately 40 hours of journey.

NEPAL
At the end of your trek into Nepal, you'll find forests, some fairly nice alcohol, and some of the highest peaks in the world. Along the journey, you'll see some great sights, but if border patrols annoy you too much, just take the bus! A drive from New Delhi to Kathmandu will take you across two states in India through New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, and you enter Nepal through Sunauli Border and which will take approximately 2 days.

BHUTAN
Bhutan's rich legacy, culture, and peculiarly lively atmosphere will persuade you to go there even if it's the happiest nation in Asia isn't enough of a cause. This little nation in the Himalayas is remote

BANGLADESH
From some regions of India, you can practically see the border with Bangladesh. It has a rich history, magnificent waterways, and amiable citizens. To reach Dhaka, you will have to travel from New Delhi, across Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, and cross the border at Sonamajhi Sulka checkpoint or Petrapole-Benapole border to arrive in Bangladesh. Once you enter Bangladesh, it will take an approximatingly 8-hour drive to arrive in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. (HANSLife)

"Health is a precious gift. You realise more and more as you get older just how precious a gift it is." —Judith Durham

The Shillong Times

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Atiq and the law

GOVERNANCE is no child's play. It involves risks and timely decisions. Actions speak louder than words though many of those who occupy seats of power in democracies are vacillators of the first order, fearful of situations and demonstrating a deficit of action amid a surfeit of rhetoric. The series of events in Uttar Pradesh in recent days clearly follow a well-thought-out action plan on the part of chief minister Yogi Adityanath. The most-wanted mafia leader in the guise of a Samajwadi Party leader, Atiq Ahmad, his son and also Atiq's brother have been eliminated in two hits in quick succession — son Asad being shot down by the UP police in Jhansi; while Atiq and his brother being liquidated by three men posing as TV crew near a Prayag court in the immediate aftermath. These could as well be termed "extra-judicial killings," which are objectionable and against the spirit of natural justice. A judicial inquiry has been ordered into the murder of Atiq and ban orders have been clamped across UP to guard against retaliations.

The point to note is that the nation has a well-oiled law and order mechanism and all-encompassing judicial system, why should there be fake encounters by police in the first place. After Yogi took charge, scores of such police encounters had taken place in the past six years and many were done to death by the security forces. Why Yogi gets away with such acts is clear to all.

Uttar Pradesh has been the most lawless, gangster-run state for decades alongside Bihar. When it came to law and order, these two states were often seen as being worse than the wayward African states. An argument is, out-of-the-box solutions are needed to tackle grim situations. After all, one cannot negotiate with a wildfire. More importantly, feelings are strengthening that the justice-dispensation systems here are failing to measure up to people's expectations. Cases in courts are on a merry-go-round for decades. This starts with the investigation process itself — cops delaying it for years out of selfish interests, perhaps courts too, even to thwart the course of justice. Justice delayed is justice denied. With the result, India often projects itself as a rudderless entity. Even Atiq, caught in over 100 cases of a grave nature, moved around for many years without any let or hindrance; he even terrorized judges and witnesses. It's time to take stock of such lawlessness and things must change for the better. An elected leader should carry with him both courage and conviction to perform. Many who run democracies think half their job is done if salaries are paid to government employees on time. Incompetent leaders are a curse to any nation. Crime must be dealt with a strong hand but police taking the law in their hands is not the solution.

Letters to the Editor

Avoidable tragedy at Rynagain

It's really a huge tragedy for the family members who lost their beloved ones due to falling boulders at Rynagain near Pynursla. Other travelers who were also affected by this accident, for no fault of theirs, are being hospitalised and have to undergo a lot of trauma. But such accidents could have been avoided if the contractors responsible for implementing the road project had given priority to the safety of commuters who are using this busy road. The callous attitude of the contractor has led to the loss of precious lives as well as economic loss to the family of the departed souls, if those who lost their lives are breadwinners. The economic loss has impacted not just these families, but everyone who depends on this road for their livelihoods, not to mention hundreds of tourists who use this route to visit Damski and other tourist spots in the area. They had to cancel their schedule and this too has created an economic loss to these house owners and other locals who depend on tourism for employment. That a pressure group, as reported in the Shillong Times, had petitioned the SDO (Civil) Pynursla on April 6, regarding their concern for safety of commuters on this particular stretch of road but that their concern was ignored speaks of the callousness of government officials whose brief it is to

ensure that safety measures are in place. Had prompt action been taken by the concerned authority then this mishap could have been averted.

Yours etc,
Stanley LK Demigodhi
Lmsning, Ri Bhoi District

A disaster foretold

Once upon a time the entire ridge between Mawklab and Pynursla was full of greenery, captivating the first time visitor. Now the entire route is facing an environmental catastrophe leading to drop in water sources, landslides, caving of roads and dangerous driving conditions. The recent incident of an entire hillock with boulders coming down onto unsuspecting commuters was expected with all the road construction activities. The loss of precious human lives cannot be compensated with money. The headman of Wahlyngkhat was a friend of mine and we had interacted on several issues related to the local community. His sudden demise along with his friend is regrettable. However, it is ironic that the local administration has failed to keep a check on this unwanted excavation and did not do anything to control or regulate the way the extraction of boulders was being carried out by exporters. The statement of the local MLA about filing an FIR does not absolve the culprits who are fired by extreme greed. Now who will be accessible to the families and

VPP striking the right chord with the people

By H.H. Mohrmen

In Meghalaya, every election sees the rise of new political parties and the fall of others. It is no surprise that as the state sees the closing of the final chapter of one regional party, it also witnesses the rise of a new regional party in the state's political horizon. The newly formed party is now recognised by the Election Commission as a State party. It took the months-old party just one election to achieve the feat which the other regional parties have not been able to do for many years. Political pundits opined that the party led by Arden Miller Basaiawmnot would be unable to perform well had it begun its campaign a bit earlier. But the question that begs the answer is whether the State is witnessing the rise of a new regional force that could change the political landscape in Meghalaya. That only time will tell.

A party with a difference VPP is projecting itself as a party with a clean image. Except for the two leaders, the other candidates who contested on the party tickets are all fresh candidates and most at least have one university degree. The other factor that differentiates the VPP from the others is that it did not indulge in extravagant expenditure during the last election. All the party's candidates contested the last election after spending very little money to win votes. The party has been able to do well because Arden has at least given the people a new hope which they have been waiting for so long. It is also true that at least Arden Miller Basaiawmnot, the leader of the party, is consistent in his efforts to clean politics in the state. He had earlier started a clean politics campaign in Meghalaya. But for reasons best known only to him, he stopped the campaign midway. This time too, keeping his stand intact he fought against the corrupt backdrop with the biggest bank balance and when the election by spending little money during the election. Others are also saying that one may fall several times on one's journey but what is important is that one does not abandon the principle that one stands for. This is the same story which all the VPP candidates, irrespective of whether they

win or lose. The fact is that they spent very little or no money contesting the election. Is the VPP the change that people of Meghalaya have been waiting for? That's a million-dollar question.

Is the symbol or the party's election song? Can the party symbol be another factor that helps the VPP strike a chord with the common people? It is clear that the symbol chosen by the VPP also stands for the party's principle to clean politics in the state. U Prabh is not only a national apartus that people use regularly as a window but it is also relevant to the party's stand to clean corruption in the state. It is sheer coincidence

"The newly formed party is now recognized by the Election Commission as a State party. It took the months-old party just one election to achieve the feat which the other regional parties have not been able to do for many years. Political pundits opined that the party led by Arden Miller Basaiawmnot would be unable to perform well had it begun its campaign a bit earlier."

that the party's election song is also a hit with both young and old men and women. It is perhaps the most liked, most viewed, and most shared party election song today. But the Party's symbol and the election can contribute very little to the party's gaining popularity in the region. There are certainly other factors like striking the right chord with the people that helps the Party gain the support of the majority of people in the Khasi Jaintia region of the state.

Party striking the right chord The VPP entered the House in style and with a bang; the four members of the legislative assembly of the maiden appearance in the august house has even attracted national interest as the language issue is not only a Meghalaya-specific issue. The video of the four MLAs protesting against the governor addressing the house in Hindi has not only got the support of the local Meghalayans, but the video footage of the members' walkout of the House to protest the alleged imposition of a lan-

guage on the people went viral. Of course, the government may argue that a English version of the address was shared with the members beforehand, but the fact of the matter is that the speech in the House is not intended to address the members of the assembly only, but the public at large. The protest against the governor addressing the house in Hindi is symbolic because it resonates with the public large who can barely understand the language for no fault of theirs. The Chief Minister and a few of his cabinet colleagues may be fluent in Hindi and have a good command over the language, but the question is what percentage of the gen-

eral population in the state understands Hindi? The VPP's position on the state reservation policy and roster system also has the support of the general public, and many pressure groups have extended support to the Party on the issue. But the flip side of this is that the VPP's position on the issue is putting the Party at odds with the other section of the population in the State. Is this something that the VPP is willing to sacrifice, is another party question.

Challenges for the party The immediate challenge which could also turn out to be an opportunity for the VPP to showcase its strength is the ensuing MNC election to the district constituencies in the state. The first test is how the VPP will select candidates to contest on the party ticket. Is the basis of selecting the candidates going to be on the so-called "winability" of the candidate? What would "winability" mean? Is the bankability of the candidate going to be the criteria for selection? Maybe not, because the VPP MLAs have won the election with little or

no influence of money power. There will be a long queue of contenders for the VPP ticket in the coming election, so the other question is, on what basis is the Party going to allot tickets to candidates? What about veteran politicians who had contested or won on other party tickets? Will the VPP allot tickets to VPP MLAs will remain united in the State Assembly but it could be a different story at the District Councils. The anti-defection law is not operative in the ADKs. How can the party keep its flock together when the 10th Schedule of the Constitution 52nd amendment Act is inoperative in the ADKs? These are some of the immediate challenges that one can foresee that the VPP could encounter in the near future.

The Party for the 36 seats only

The VPP has been blamed to the pro-Khasi or pro-Hylnaks. Treen people. The question is whether the VPP can afford to be a Khasi-Jaintia party only? As of today it seems that the allegations against the party being pro-Khasi Jaintia region are not unfounded. If that is the case then the party is only repeating the same mistake that the other regional parties like the HSPDP, the PDE, KJINAM, and even the UDP have made of not being able to have any influence in the Garo Hills. In such a situation the VPP is going to face a challenge in the next MP election as it can only contest from the Shillong parliamentary seat and have to forfeit the Turu seat. The VPP can position itself as a Party that champions the interests of the people who live in the Khasi Jaintia hills only, but in such a situation what kind of future can the Party hope for?

The other troubling question is how can the VPP expect to rule the State if it is going to contest only in the 36 constituencies in the State Legislative Assembly? How can the VPP hope to be the major regional party in Meghalaya if its influence is restricted to two of the three regions of the State only?

At a time for introspection, not just celebration. Such times are needed to assess the role AAP sees for itself. If it is to be a part of the national opposition to the ruling party, it must realise the risk of being tainted by the bedlam amid it chooses. If it sees itself as an alternative to all existing national political parties, it must realise it needs far more traction than it presently has.

The AAP had already lost the tag of an alternative political party as in the recent bye-election for parliament constituencies the Party had chosen a candidate who one day before was in the Congress party. Kejriwal also has the habit of making false claims in many matters. At present Kejriwal has raised the issue of Modi's educational qualification which large sections of the public had not taken in good taste. But as far as the next assembly election in Punjab and Delhi are concerned the AAP party will definitely win the elections as victor's cushion margin is too much. In Punjab victory point is 92 seats whereas the Party has 92 seats and the same is the position in Delhi. In the present shape up the country, the AAP is the national party since 1951. The same thing has happened to NCP which has its presence only in Maharashtra.

Yours etc,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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

Latest surge in COVID virus poses fresh challenges

Maximum focus should now be on mutant arcturus identified by WHO

By Sushil Kutty

Ever since Covid happened to humans, the World Health Organization has appointed a lot of people. First it seemed to let off China with a light rap on the wrist. Then, it floundered in the number-crunching. So much so, I gave to our own high-flying Prime Minister Narendra Modi the thumbs up for the figure doled out by the Modi government's statisticians. Now, after the feeling settled the Covid wouldn't strike again, that the Omicron variant was the last of new coronavirus, the WHO says there is a new coronavirus kid on the block, christened "Arcturus" or XBB.1.16. The thrill to note for Indians is that Arcturus must be the variant behind the recent surge of Covid-19 cases in India with Mumbai Maharashtra leading the charge. The WHO says this variant is the "one to watch", adding, quite aptly, if that may be said, "everyone is tired

across and round the globe: from Singapore and Australia to the United Kingdom and Germany, and Denmark. From Japan to Israel, Canada, Malaysia and New Zealand. Also in South Korea and the Netherlands. Of course, China, too, the world, say those aware of its spread throughout the Isles of March.



India, of course, the large population in the world's premier health organization speak XBB.1.16 was "first spotted". Many US cities have been home to Arcturus, if that is any comfort to Indians. According to an Indian-origin professor in the New York Institute of Technology, Arkansas, Raj Rajnarayan, XBB.1.16 is picking up more mutations.

Apparently, Arcturus is steadily posting fresh cases throughout India. What's worrying is that XBB.1.16 has in it the potential to fuel hospitalizations and/or deaths. But nothing to fear for the immediate. Except that people who have a largely and willingly forgotten the Covid protocol should go back to it and thank the Lord that if they are still around to catch the infection it was because of the protocol.

Like somebody has said "currently, XBB.1.16 is the big dog" and big dog takes a bite bite. People remember that. And then don't blame the government if the big dog takes a big liking for you. According to the Arkansas professor, "In India, XBB.1.16 is displacing a 64% growth advantage."

The danger is of an overwhelmed and tired populace giving up. The variants keep coming. It's like the Pakistani soldiers on the Kargil heights in 1999 complaining, "No matter how many we neutralize, they keep coming, they keep attacking..." Maybe the Modi government believes India's vaccines will defeat Arcturus. That is one Orange Star to another Orange Star a virus. The one difference, between this variant and the previous ones, is that XBB.1.16 gives its victims an acute reduce, in medical terms conjunctivitis (IPA Service)

ing public opinion. While most national political parties contest and amount to money in advertisements on billboards and social media, they failed to have a significant impact on the minds of the people. This failure can be attributed to their inability to understand the people's moods and create content that resonated with them.

On the other hand, the newly-formed VPP effectively utilized social media to create a significant impact. They increased the outreach of the party's principles, vision, and speech of the Hon'ble MLA, Arden Basaiawmnot, projecting him as the messiah who will wipe out corruption and uplift the Khasi tribe. The song "Ila U Prabh" of the party has created a remarkable impact. It has gone viral on social media, effectively instilling the party's name in people's minds and especially in the minds of the youth.

Even today, the VPP maintains a strong presence on social media platforms such as YouTube. In contrast, regional parties such as the United Democratic Party (UDP) are conspicuously absent from these digital spaces, hindering their ability to generate the same level of excitement and engagement as the VPP.

Yours etc,
Kenneth Nongsiq,
Via email

For AAP it's time for celebrations and introspection

It is really a matter of celebration for the AAP to get the status of a national party. It has earned that status in its strength. Recognition as a national party entitles the AAP to several benefits, not the least of which is a reserved symbol, additional airtime during poll campaigns, entitlement of higher number of star campaigners, and allocation of fund from the government to build its headquarters. There are two achievements of the Party which has not even a single member in the Lok Sabha. The other is that Kejriwal has no portfolio with him and sometimes does not put his signature on files and due to this, the government had to return the files.

Yours etc,
Kenneth Nongsiq,
Via email

"Only a person who has passed through the gate of humility can ascend to the heights of the spirit."
— Rudolf Steiner

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, TRIPURA, APRIL 18, 2023

Climate Emergency Preparedness

TRIPURA, a state in India's North East, has had to shut down schools on account of the heat wave that has hit several states in the country. In Maharashtra, 11 people died of heat stroke on Sunday while attending an award function in an open field where Union Home Minister, Amit Shah was present. West Bengal has also shut down its schools much before the summer holidays starting every year in mid May. The weather in Meghalaya too has been uncharacteristically hot in the daytime. The day temperature in Shillong city on Monday was 29 degrees Celsius. The fluctuation between the day and night temperature in Meghalaya has seen many people falling ill. Climate change is here and it is real and being experienced by all. The dry spell with just a short spell of rains between the last week of March and the first week of April has created an unfavourable pattern for farmers who complain that there were no rains in December and none at all in March except for a very brief spell.

Climate Change which is being experienced by all should draw attention to a few issues. One of them being massive deforestation that has turned the forests into patches of barren ground with only the tree stumps left behind. Meghalaya has banned charcoal production but every day several pick-up vans drive from one locality to the other selling sacks of charcoal. So the ban by the Department of Environment and Forests actually remains only a paper tiger. The Nokrek biosphere in Garo Hills is being built to attract tourists without thinking of the larger consequences of such actions. Nokrek is an eco-sensitive zone that should be left alone but the craze for building tourism facilities has overridden ecological concerns. Water sources that used to supply water to residents in Shillong city are depleting at a rapid rate. Many localities are now dependent on water tanks. Meghalaya has power cuts due to the depletion of the water level in the Umiam Lake and other sources like the Leskha project which was initially intended to augment power during these dry spells.

The worst affected by the dry and hot spells are farmers whose summer crops have dried up due to the harsh winds exacerbated by the extreme day temperature which is predicted by the Meteorological Department to touch 30 degree Celsius on Wednesday in Shillong. This was unheard of in the past. People would complain of feeling very hot when the mercury touched 24-26 degree Celsius. Now they will have to deal with the new weather phenomena.

One reason for climate change is anthropogenic activities. In the case of Meghalaya, unregulated deforestation, quarrying and mining have taken a severe toll on the environment. Unfortunately, the State is yet to wake up and take a call on this matter of life and death. Meghalaya is unprepared to deal with the Climate Emergency.

The silent scream

By Br Solomon Morris

This writing was dormant in me for quite some time. A recent article on suicide, spurred me to write this. **Fools, said I you do not know** **Silence like a cancer grows** **Hear my words that I might teach you** **Take my arms that I might reach out to you** **But words like violent rain drops fell** **And echoed in the wells of silence.**

(Paul Simon's The Sound of Silence)
There's a kind of hush, all over quite a number of our children, which is loud enough. But we don't seem to hear. We are not able to sense it. Perhaps, some of us do feel its vibrations, but we dismiss it with indifference. There is a serious dis-ease among our students. They are screaming for help. We, adults are unaware of the deafening call. It reminds me of the picture The Scream, by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch. The second most famous image in art history, after Leonardo's Mona Lisa.

What is this scream about? The effects of the two years of the pandemic are slowly emerging. I have personally witnessed a ripple in the academic grades. A lot of our children are distracted very easily. They are fidgety, restless and get irritated quite easily. In a reflection exercise given to the senior students of a school, it was found that a number of our students had various issues affecting their mental states. Some of these issues are:

- a) Anger management
- b) Aggressive behaviour
- c) Stress
- d) Addiction to internet
- e) Addiction to pornography
- f) Addiction to smoking and drinking
- g) Wasting of time
- h) Poor time management
- i) Procrastination
- j) Lack of friends and loneliness
- k) Getting distracted easily
- l) Peer pressure
- m) Falling into bad habits
- n) Lack of focus
- o) Lack of aim in life

Mind you, all these issues are affecting our children who are wonderfully created. They are truly gifted, talented and decent human beings. But most are unable to handle pressures. They lack resilience. They succumb to pressures and tend to give up easily. They need help. They need role models.

What can we adults do in order to help these fragile, vulnerable young people? First of all, we aware our children are going through serious crisis? Are parents in touch with what is going on in their children's lives? Are they being monitored? Do we have time to sit with them and have an honest chat? Can we hear their silent screams for help?

Screen addiction can have several negative psychological effects on teens, including:

- 1. **Academic Stress:** From grades to test scores to applying to college, teens experience high levels of school-related stress. Many teens worry about meeting academic demands, pleasing teachers and parents, and keeping up with their classmates. Poor time management skills or feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work can play into academic stress as well.
- 2. **Social Issues:** Teens place a high value on their social lives. They spend the majority of their waking hour, among their peers, and finding and keeping their tribes can include stress at times. Bullying and subtle instances of relational aggression are clear sources of stress on teens, but learning to manage healthy conflict and work through romantic relationships are no easy tasks for the developing teen. Peer pressure is an additional stress during the teen years. In an effort to establish and maintain friendships, teens can engage

in behaviour outside of their comfort zones to appease their family.

3. **Family Discord:** Stress trickles down, and anything that impacts the family can affect the teen. Unrealistic expectations, marital problems, strained sibling relationships (including sibling bullying), illness in the family, and financial stress on the family can all trigger a spike in teen stress.

4. **World Events:** School shootings, acts of terrorism, and natural disasters worry parents, but they also trigger stress for teens. Teens are often privy to the 24-hour news cycle, and hearing bits and pieces of scary news, both domestic and abroad, can leave teens wondering about their safety and the safety of their loved ones.

5. **Traumatic Events:** Death of a family member or friend, accidents, sickness, or enduring emotional or physical abuse can have a lasting impact on teen stress levels.

6. **Significant Life Changes:** Like adults, teens experience stress due to significant life changes. Moving, starting a new school, and changes in the makeup of the family (including divorce and blended families) can trigger stress for teens. Not knowing how to cope with big changes is overwhelming and can be confusing for the developing teen.

Excessive screen time can have several negative effects on students, including:

Physical Health Problems: Spending too much time in front of screens can cause physical health problems such as headaches, neck and back pain, eyestrain, and obesity.

Poor Sleep: Exposure to screens before bedtime can disrupt the sleep cycle and lead to insomnia, which negatively impact students' mental and physical health.

Decreased Physical Activity: Spending excessive time on screens can lead to decreased physical activity and sedentary behavior, which can have a negative impact on students' health and well-being.

Reduced Social Skills: Students who spend too much time on screens may have fewer opportunities to practice social skills and interact with others in real life, which can hinder their ability to form meaningful relationships and develop social competence.

Lower Academic Performance: Excessive screen time can distract students from their schoolwork and reduce their ability to concentrate in class, leading to lower academic performance.

Mental Health Issues: Too much screen time can have a negative impact on students' mental health and well-being. It can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

Attention Problems: Screen addiction can make it difficult for teens to focus and pay attention to tasks outside of technology, leading to changes in the makeup of the family (including divorce and blended families) can trigger stress for teens. Not knowing how to cope with big changes is overwhelming and can be confusing for the developing teen.

Irritability and Aggression: Spending too much time on screens may become irritable and exhibit aggressive behaviors due to the lack of social and emotional skills development.

Addiction: Screen addiction can become a serious addiction leading to a compulsive need to use technology, difficulty in controlling usage, and withdrawal symptoms when not using technology.

It is important for parents to monitor and limit their teens' screen time to minimize the negative psychological effects of screen addiction. Encouraging alternative activities, such as sports or hobbies, can also help kids develop a healthier relationship with technology and improve their psychological well-being.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE COMMON TRIGGERS OF TEEN STRESS?
(Source: Kathleen South, PhD, LICSW)
Teens face different and stress can be triggered by a number of factors. The results of the Stress in America Survey show that there are some common sources of stress in the teen population. I wonder if some of these triggers apply to our teens in Shillong as well.

Consider these potential sources of stress for teens:

1. **Academic Stress:** From grades to test scores to applying to college, teens experience high levels of school-related stress. Many teens worry about meeting academic demands, pleasing teachers and parents, and keeping up with their classmates. Poor time management skills or feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work can play into academic stress as well.

2. **Social Issues:** Teens place a high value on their social lives. They spend the majority of their waking hour, among their peers, and finding and keeping their tribes can include stress at times. Bullying and subtle instances of relational aggression are clear sources of stress on teens, but learning to manage healthy conflict and work through romantic relationships are no easy tasks for the developing teen. Peer pressure is an additional stress during the teen years. In an effort to establish and maintain friendships, teens can engage

separately for any "common" or "backward class of citizens," wherever they may be found among the populace. It is not fair for a particular community who have remained where they were for more than half a century to be enjoying 40% reservation to still claim that the percentage should remain untouched and be made available to them forever. It appears that they desire to carry their backwardness with them till their last days. Good educational institutions, late functioning of Engineering

Medical Colleges are the failures of the government which is not willing to uplift the "more backward class" to "backward class" and to "less backward class". Therefore, Article 46 of the Constitution has been violated. Citizens cannot be treated to be socially and educationally backward to perpetuity. The state must give preference to the weakest of the lot in a pragmatic manner based on statistical data. The State population must take note of the fact that certain communities were suffering from extreme

social, educational, and economic backwardness arising out of primitive agricultural practices, lack of infrastructure facilities and geographical isolation, and who need special considerations for safeguarding their interests and for their accelerated socio-economic development, special provisions to Parsons with Disabilities as provided in the Constitution and related Acts. To lump segments of communities and for their accelerated socio-economic development, special provisions to Parsons with Disabilities as provided in the Constitution and related Acts. To lump segments of communities and for their accelerated socio-economic development, special provisions to Parsons with Disabilities as provided in the Constitution and related Acts.

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In the E.V. Chinniah vs State of Andhra Pradesh and Ors, 2004, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India categorically held that any reservation to a community to specific communities within the Scheduled

Set Limits: Establish clear limits on the amount of time children spend on social media and social networking sites. Parents can set specific times for social media use or establish "no phone zones" in the house, such as during meals or family time.

Set Goals and Priorities: Help teens set goals and priorities for their screen time. Encourage them to prioritize their time and focus on activities that are important to them.

Monitor Usage: Parents should monitor children's social media usage and be aware of the content they are accessing. It's essential to have open and honest conversations with children about the risks and negative effects of excessive social media use.

Encourage Alternative Activities: Encourage children to engage in alternative activities that do not involve screens, such as reading, sports, or hobbies.

Encourage Creative Activities: Encourage teens to engage in creative activities such as art, music, or writing. Creative activities can provide a healthy outlet for self-expression and help teens develop new skills and interests.

Be a Role Model: Parents should model healthy behaviour by limiting their own screen time and engaging in alternative activities.

Seek Professional Help: If a child's social media addiction is severe, it may be necessary to seek professional help. A therapist or counsellor can help children develop coping skills and strategies for managing their social media use.

It's essential to approach social media addiction with empathy, understanding, and support. Children who are struggling with underlying emotional or mental health issues that need to be addressed. By providing a safe, supportive environment, parents can help their children overcome social media addiction and develop healthy habits around technology use.

I earnestly appeal to the parents and elders of the family to kindly be aware of how your young children are engaging themselves in their free time. Organize them inform you of their whereabouts when they are out. When they do go out to celebrate their birthdays, please challenge them to be responsible and accountable. Be firm with them especially in their use of mobile phones and computers. You saying "No" to them is not a sign of being authoritarian but rather being authoritative. Talk to your children and be there for them. Make efforts to have regular family meals and get together. Organize family outings and gatherings. Lastly, please look for help if you feel your child is manifesting odd or strange behaviours.

Parents, Teachers, Counsellors and Principals, all need to work together to address the silent scream of internet addiction and its devastating effects to which our children have fallen prey. Their silent screams for help need not go unattended. We need to reach out to these fragile individuals who are clutching at weak straws to stop themselves sinking into a quagmire of self-destruction.

I feel depressed, it wasn't the silence of silence it was my own silence (Sylvia Plath)

OUR CHILDREN WHO ARE ADDICTED TO SCREEN TIME?

Castes and Scheduled Tribes were unconstitutional. In 2020 a five-judge bench decided to refer the E.V. Chinniah judgment to a larger bench. So, where do we stand now? Leave it to the experts to debate.

D.Pakynin
Via email

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

Remembering the 'Grammar of Anarchy' Speech

By Ajit Ranade

Last week we celebrated the birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar, an occasion to discover and rediscover a giant of modern India. His incredible life itself was his message. With the passage of time, his words ring true. One of his most prophetic speeches was the last one he delivered to the Constituent Assembly, when the final draft of the Constitution was adopted. He delivered that speech on 25 November 1949 exactly two months before India became a Republic. This is a speech which must be read by every school child. It is a also commonly known as the "Grammar of Anarchy" speech. If India got freedom on 15 August 1947, then it can be said that we got "responsibility" on January 26, 1950. Freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin of nationhood.

As Dr. Ambedkar says in the concluding part of the speech, "let us not forget that this independence has been won by our great responsibility. By independence, we have lost the excuse of blaming the British for anything going wrong. If hereafter things go wrong, we will have nobody to blame. Except ourselves." In the same speech he envisaged three potent dangers to India's nascent democracy. The first is the tendency to hero worship or build personality cults in politics. He said, "in India, Bhakti or what may be called the bhakti of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship, is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship."

The second danger he warned about, was the incompatibility of political equality with rising social and economic inequality. He advocated a social democracy, which "means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the basic principles". The danger he warned that if something wasn't done to address rising inequality, then those very people who were depressed and oppressed would blow up the magnificent edifice of democracy which the founders had so painstakingly built. His warning came almost twenty years before the first instance of Naxal violence. It has taken another two decades for the State to recognise it as a major threat to law-and-order problem. "An of one of lack of equitable socio-economic development as well. The third danger that Dr. Ambedkar spoke of was the need to protect the sanctity of constitutional methods. We must abandon the methods of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagrah. This is nothing but the rejection of law and order. It might as well have added extra-constitutional methods like mob lynching and vigilante justice. These methods are nothing but the "Grammar of Anarchy". If people adopt these methods, then it would be a failure of not just the Constitution, but the State as well. The

working of the Constitution needs the working of the organs of the State, i.e. the judiciary, the legislature and the executive. But how those organs will work will in turn depend on the people and political parties.

Four years ago, on December 6, 2019, the death anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar, there was the extra judicial killing of four men accused in a horrific gang rape and murder of a 26-year-old veterinarian in Hyderabad. The encounter killings earned the cheers of many people across the nation, including union ministers, leaders of the opposition, celebrities, and even sports stars. The police were showered with peals of gratitude for having done "justice" to the victim. They became instant heroes in the eyes of a general nation. Apparently, the police fired in self-defense. The public jubilation and thirst for instant justice points to a complete loss of faith in the process of law and judiciary. Three years later, a Commission appointed by the Supreme Court headed by Justice V.S. Sirpurkar found that the encounter was a fake one. The Commission held that the police claim of firing in self-defense, was "bizarre" and "unbelievable". The Commission also found that two of those killed were juveniles at the time of their arrest and death, a fact that had been concealed by the police. This is surely not the first, or the last of the fake encounters in our country. Are people, including the police, losing faith in the constitution's methods so earnestly championed by Dr. Ambedkar? What would he have said, had he been alive today?

This past week too, around Ambedkar Jayanti, there were two killings in Uttar Pradesh, and here into the police said they fired in self-defense. Two days later the gangster-turned politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf while in custody, and a stepping handcuffed, out of a police vehicle, were killed by assailants, thirsty for instant justice. The killers were among the reporters and people gathering around the vehicle. Since the killing was on live television in the presence of reporters it is a new benchmark in impunity and disdain for due process. Asking for constitutional methods would be child as naive, if not anti-national. After all a gangster was killed, what if handcuffed anyway. "Murder of law and order" said the editorial of a national daily. "An of elimination..." questioned another. Atiq Ahmad had recently petitioned the Supreme Court fearing for his life. His police custody. There were more than a hundred criminal cases pending against Ahmad, ranging from kidnaping, extortion, attempt to murder and murder. He was also elected to Parliament once and the State assembly five times. Having been an elected people's representative did not save him from vigilante justice.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted economist) (Syndicate: The Billion Press (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Old Resolution needs revision

Editor,
It is high time, that a Resolution issued vide No. P.E.R. 222/71 (138 Dated Shillong, the January 12, 1972 is revisited as it was (a) hurriedly issued without proper procedure and method of identifying of backward classes, (b) it was issued 9 (nine) days before the State of Meghalaya was officially formed on the midnight of January 20-21, 1972, less

than 2 (two) months before the first election which was held on March 9, 1972. It would be prudent for the State Government to have a Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) strategy to draft a tenable and adequate Resolution and a balanced one, to replace an old Resolution issued 50 (fifty) years ago, keeping in mind our present experience and considering what would be good and accepted by all and may be placed before the House for debate, since multiple articles, clauses, sub-articles, one class viz. "backward class of citizens" i.e. SC-ST. It does not speak

combined with related Acts and Honorable Courts' judgments.

The general public wants to watch how our elected representatives debate this contentious Roster System in the Legislative Assembly, when for weeks we patiently watched and listened to speeches from all candidates from election platforms and decorated pandals. It is expected to be the most interesting debate of all time. Article 164(d) recognizes only one class viz. "backward class of citizens" i.e. SC-ST. It does not speak

separately for any "common" or "backward class of citizens," wherever they may be found among the populace. It is not fair for a particular community who have remained where they were for more than half a century to be enjoying 40% reservation to still claim that the percentage should remain untouched and be made available to them forever. It appears that they desire to carry their backwardness with them till their last days. Good educational institutions, late functioning of Engineering

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Castes and Scheduled Tribes were unconstitutional. In 2020 a five-judge bench decided to refer the E.V. Chinniah judgment to a larger bench. So, where do we stand now? Leave it to the experts to debate.

D.Pakynin
Via email

"Courage is grace under pressure." — Ernest Hemingway

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 2023

Queer couples

SOCIETIES change, but slowly in situations of revolutions. Customs in societies are shaped and nurtured over long periods and through generations. Hence, they have their inbuilt strengths. At the base of these are concerns for social security and well-being of individuals. Societies and customs change and evolve over time, these having been impacted upon by winds of change from across regions and continents and even by mechanisms within. The growing push relating to laws on sex and marriage should also be seen in this context.

The Supreme Court is hearing a case filed by a Delhi-based woman couple, who worked together, are living together and sharing a bed for several years. Things are fine with them other than in the dealings with the establishment, as in the opening of a joint banking account or in matters of legal inheritance. A five-judge panel is hearing the case while the BJP-led NDA government has predictably expressed its strong opposition to same-sex marriage. It assented in an affidavit, "A valid marriage is only between a biological male and a biological female" and expressed the fear that a legal sanction being accorded to same-sex marriages would compromise with religious and social mores. The government's argument is also that such matters should, if need be, be discussed and decided by parliament, not courts. That the Supreme Court has expressed its willingness to consider the case is by itself a sign of the times. Recent years have shown that the apex court, as an entity, has shown more zeal for life than the old-world, starched-white bundles straddling the representative and law-making houses like Parliament. In 2018, the Supreme Court struck down a law criminalizing homosexuality. In a 2014 order, it recognised transgender as a third gender and accorded them dignity. As a result, transgender persons have begun getting jobs and basic facilities in public places. India, for them, is no more a gas chamber.

When the world changes, the society cannot remain aloof or remain insulated from newly emerging influences. Lawmakers should show the courage to squarely face situations. Rather, the leadership profile here is such that the attempt is more often to resist change and remain rooted in the old mores of life. Pride Marches are taking place in metropolitan cities, braving the concerns of stigma and open harassment. LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights are increasingly being discussed. Some queer couples are bravely coming out of closets. Chief Justice DY Chandrachud has stated that, in the present case, the issue is of "sermonal importance." A society that refuses to change and reinvent itself will be defeated by time.

Letters to the Editor

No Creamy Layer in Reservation Policy

I am not in favour of having a creamy layer in our Reservation Policy. This, to me, is depriving the intelligent students just because their parents have worked hard to make a good living, or just because their forefathers have judiciously invested their capital.

Depriving a member of our own community of a share in the reservation policy because of the economic status of his/her household, is to divide our community along economic lines. Our community has never had a class system even with the advent of the super wealthy elite. We should not advocate such division. A good mind is a good mind, whether he comes from a poor or wealthy household. What we need are more qualified and intelligent people, from among our community. If we implement the creamy layer system we will lose good, intelligent people, and the standards will be lowered.

What we need is simply an equal opportunity for all, hence I am in favour of 80% reservation for all native tribes of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills, whether they belong to any economic category.

Moreover, we already have social welfare schemes for the economically weaker sections, whether it be ration cards, medical social schemes, or reservations. These are examples of positive policies. The government should formulate an

education policy geared towards the economically weaker section and what is most important is to come up with a defined and measurable formula on how to improve readability and comprehension of the English language, in schools, so that our youth have access to key concepts of all subjects.

But a negative policy like demarcating a creamy layer division within our community, that will be deprived of equal opportunities to the detriment of not being beneficial to our youth.

Yours etc., John Saikhubid, Via email

A lawless state

The gunning down of Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf is not a new pattern of killing as the country had seen such types of killing which had shaken the soul of the country. Immediately after the Independence, Gods'killed Mahatma Gandhi which was an irreplaceable loss to the country. It is unfortunate that a few people praise Gods and one of them is a Member of Parliament from Bhopal - Pragna Thakur. Finally Modi had to intervene in the matter.

The second case is of Indira Gandhi whose bodyguard Santosh Singh killed her. Indira Gandhi was a deep-rooted nationalist leader and in her last speech in Orissa she had stated that every drop of blood in her body will be shed for the nation. When Indira Gandhi was told to remove the Sikh security personnel, she totally refused to act upon the advice. Ultimately, Santosh Singh, a Sikh, killed her. The third case is that of

Why is "Spatial" Special

By Maiphang Syiem

As you begin to read, trying to decipher the words "spatial" and "special" you may find them homophonic. But even though they supposedly sound the same, they have different meanings. At this juncture we would be more interested in the word "Spatial". In layman's terms, it literally relates to Space and in the mind of common individuals the visual of a rocket, Moon, perhaps Mars would pop-up or likely names of NASA, ISRO would supposedly be uttered. In this Space issues simply understanding is perfectly fine for the general public which can be augmented with more simple, effective and quality elaboration that Spatial or Space domain is more than just rockets etc. It would be difficult to elucidate here on the benefits of the Spatial or Space domain to mankind but let us briefly look at the major sectors.

Broadbanding and Telecommunication (Sat-Com), Earth Observation (Remote Sensing), Navigation (GPS, NavIC, Glonass Heidou), Meteorology, Disaster Management, Natural Resource Management (Forest, Water, Soil, Land Use), Environment (Climate Change, Carbon Sequestration, Ozone Layer Studies, Pollution, Wildlife), Homeland Security (Geo-Intelligence), Health (Disease surveillance), Utilities (Power, Roads, Water Supply, Sanitation), Urban and Rural Planning (Monitoring, Evaluation, Project Management and Land Records) are all examples of using Space/Spatial domain. As we say that sky has no limit so also the benefits that can be availed from the Spatial/Space domain is limitless. It all lies on our collective approach for the cause of nation-building and these benefits justify why "Spatial is Special".

In this context India has always been upfront and proactive for peaceful utilization of Space/Spatial technology. The trailblazing to the founding leadership of (L) Dr Vikram Sarabhai, (L) Satish Dhawan, (L) Prof. U.R. Rao, (L) Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and many more, the journey for the founding Indian Scientific leadership wasn't a cakewalk but they leapfrogged from developing sounding rockets to payloads

developing space launch vehicles to the recent trend in development and successful testing of reusable launch vehicles (RLV). This year the Spatial/Special connection is with India as it assumes the G20 Presidency and for the first time it is convening meetings across the country, with a theme "One Earth, One Family, One Future" which manifests "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or the world is one family. It is indeed a moment of pride for all of us. Much further Group of 20 (G20) is an intergovernmental forum consisting of 20 member countries with parallel working tracks, the Finance Track and Sherpa Track, steered by the G20 Presidency. This elucidation would lead us to continue to the Sherpa Track wherein Space/Spatial component is exclusively mentioned in the four Initiatives spearheaded by India's G20 Presidency. Further, it is a source of pride as the precursor meeting of the space component where delegates and heads of G20 Members met in Shillong of the world are meeting in Shillong Meghalaya. That's special indeed.

As we dive deeper, we might want to understand about the component that the Spatial to connect the dots, the component is called Space Economy Ledders Meeting (SELM), which is part of the initiative of the country holding the G20 Presidency. Going back to the SELM Initiatives, the first SELM was held in 2020 initiated by the Saudi Space Commission, the second SELM was organized by the (Italian Space Agency) in 2021, the third SELM was organized by National Research and Innovation Agency (IRI), Indonesia. This year, the SELM event is organized by ISRO where the main event will be held at Bengaluru on July 6th, 2023.

Looking at the theme of the 4th edition SELM Towards a New Space Era "Economy, Responsibility, Alliance" it is quite promising and motivating. In the context of the globalized world and deciphering the theme, what we can see is that Space/Spatial Technology is a happening domain

which is continuously evolving and as per Morgan Stanley the global space industry could generate revenue of more than 1 trillion by 2040. Earlier the race for space was just between the two superpowers but currently there are 90 nations that are engaged in Space/Spatial Economy. Basically "Space Economy" as OECD defines it is, "Any activity that involves exploring, researching, understanding, managing and utilizing space". Coming back to why Spatial is Special, the point is that the Space/Spatial economy is unique and supporting the growth of other sectors such as Defence, Energy, Telecommunications, Maritime and many more.

As we have briefly seen the potential of Space/Spatial especially for us and the precursor meeting of the 4th edition SELM held here in Shillong, this event should be an eye opener for us and especially for the state leaders to introspect and to take cognisance of the fact that Spatial is Special and to realize the potential that such technology can be a boon for the state. The fact that Space/Spatial domain is a booming sector one must realize that it is high time for our state leadership to start taking steps to educate, to be in-tune with, to formulate, implement policies to support the growth of the sector. Where many local young concerned trained minds can contribute collectively in solving issues, problems, and challenges for the good of the state, and this step has become much easier as the Indian Government has already liberalized the space spatial area and opened up opportunities for young minds to venture into spatial entrepreneurship, take spatial education into grassroots level, decentralizing minds for this booming sector and create employment opportunities for the upcoming youths of our state. Therefore, with the right political drive we can make Spatial even more Special.

(The writer is a Geospatial Expert @maiphang-syiem@gmail.com)

Bob's Banter Jails and WhatsApp Groups..!

By Robert Clements

The auditors of the country, who are very powerful people and oversee how public money is spent by the ones who govern in my imagination, pursued their lips while the government officials sat in front of them. "Sir," said the first auditor, "there has been some very unwise spending on your part in building the new parliament building".

"What are you saying?" screamed the government official jumping to his feet, then being told to sit down by his colleague, who gestured that auditors were very powerful people and could not be reasoned with threats or bullying, as he was used to doing. He sat down mollified, and asked in a whisper this time. "What are you saying?"

"Speak louder!" said the first auditor. "I did, and you didn't like it. What I said was, 'What are you saying?'". The second auditor explained to him even more clearly that he had just said about too much money being spent on the new parliament building.

"What are you saying?" asked the government official again, and then realizing he had already asked that question repeated it saying, "You are saying we have spent too much money on the parliament building?"

"No sir, we are saying there was no need to spend any money on a new parliament at all!" said both the auditors together. "Do you know who built the old building?" asked the government official. "The British! Do you want to sit in the same building where our previous rulers sat?"

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"Disappointment builds character and strength."
— Nafessa Williams

The Shillong Times

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Need to reschedule school calendar

THE April heat has been relentless with the mercury hitting 29-30 degrees Celsius these last few days. The dry spell exacerbated by strong winds is causing dust clouds all around. The climate has changed irreversibly and humans need to reset their programmes too. Educational institutions normally use the dry months of March-April for their school sports. This was fine when the weather was a lot kinder and the hottest that Shillong got was 24 degrees Celsius. But to make children practise their march past and drill or to make them run in the sweltering summer heat is insensitive. It is nice that organising sporting events is part of every school's calendar because sports have many physical, developmental, psychological and social benefits for children. Playing any sport helps children learn to control their emotions and channel negative feelings in a positive way. Playing sport helps children build resilience and feel better about themselves. Also, during sporting events children are able to express themselves freely on the field which is not possible in a classroom.

But the flip side is also true. Not every child has a strong constitution. Some are allergic to dust and some are inherently weak physically and therefore have a low tolerance for extreme heat or cold. While the objective of the school is to toughen the students and make them battle-ready to face adverse circumstances and that must be appreciated, there is a point at which children cannot be pushed beyond their limits. Being children they are diffident of taking a stand for themselves. This is not what is taught in schools. Unquestioning obedience is expected, not demanded and there can be no arguments once a teacher has said something. But these are not normal times. High temperature and high humidity are particularly dangerous. Sports coaches and teachers ought to be careful about making children play strenuous games in such conditions. Besides, children and teenagers are vulnerable to heat-related illnesses such as dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke because their bodies are less efficient at cooling. This calls for a revision of the school calendar. Perhaps schools should now reopen sooner and sporting events should be held by the month of February-March. There is no hard and fast rule that schools should stick to the school calendar they did twenty years ago because climate change dictates otherwise. Summer holidays are being rescheduled in many states. So why not Meghalaya?

The Education Department needs to take a call on this and reset the school calendar according to the weather conditions. With Climate Change, summers have become extremely hot while winters are extremely cold. This requires reformulating the school examination schedules, co-curricular activities and even school timings. In summers, schools could start early to beat the heat. Sports and games can happen in the morning. This is called climate adaptation.

Letters to the Editor

End goal of economic growth should be equitable distribution of income

Editor,
It was a proud moment for Meghalaya, Assam, Manipur and the entire North-eastern region that Gwalhati, Dibrugarh, Imphal and Shillong played host to numerous G20 meetings on a wide range of issues. So exultant were our leaders that the Prime Minister and the entire Central leadership deserves praise for putting the North-eastern region in the global spotlight. Representatives and diplomats from the 20 most powerful nations in the world were represented in most of these meetings and they were able to witness first-hand the vast economic potential of the North-eastern region as a whole.

The economy of many states in the country are now on a transition but sadly none of the economies of the North-eastern region are still agrarian based economies. A majority of the workforce in the region are still employed in Agriculture which is still

plagued by low yield, small size of land holding, disguised unemployment and lack of mechanization. The North-eastern region needs to follow in the footsteps of states that have made rapid progress in the secondary sector but industrialisation in the region should be based on industries that will prioritize the unique skill sets of the inhabitants of the region. Industrialisation in many of the capitalist economies of the west has led to high inequality in distribution of income. Take for example the USA, the torchbearer of capitalism and the most powerful country in the world. The size of the US economy is 26 trillion dollars in purchasing power parity terms; real median household income in 2021 was 70,784 dollars yet the official poverty rate of the USA for the same year was 11.6 percent which means that almost 38 million people live below the poverty line. A Gini coefficient of 41.5 means that the USA is one of the countries with the highest wealth inequality in the world. In a purely capitalist economy like the USA, the government must usually refrain from taking affirmative action to lift its vulnerable citizens out of poverty; the invisible hand

Who deserves reservation: Khasi-Jaintia or Garo?

On April 17, 2023, the Voice of the People Party (VPP) began their public rallies on the issue of the Roster System and the Reservation Policy. In the meeting held in Mawlat Arden Miller Basaiwamoi, the president of VPP reiterated that he was not against any community but wanted to correct the imbalance that he saw in the current system. Therefore, he suggested that an 'Expert Committee' be constituted to come up with suggestions on how to correct the imbalance that he saw in the current system. Therefore, he suggested that an 'Expert Committee' be constituted to come up with suggestions on how to correct the imbalance that he saw in the current system.

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

'Expert Committee' will not design indicators, prepare questionnaires, calculate the appropriate sample sizes, or collect primary data to measure backwardness. That is impossible because it requires a great deal of resources, which a cash-strapped state like Meghalaya cannot do spare. What they are going to do is use existing government statistics to come up with suggestions on how to correct the imbalance that he saw in the current system. Therefore, he suggested that an 'Expert Committee' be constituted to come up with suggestions on how to correct the imbalance that he saw in the current system.

Garo districts in ten SDGs, i.e., 66% of the total SDGs. The report reveals the clear gap in terms of development between the two regions. A look at the specific goals reveals a very interesting pattern. The five SDGs on which the Garo districts outperformed the Khasi-Jaintia districts are: GOAL 2: Zero Hunger; GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being; GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy; GOAL 13: Climate Action; and GOAL 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. GOAL 2 and GOAL 3 are very closely related to each other. So it stands to reason that a district does well in one, it is highly likely that they will do well in the other as well.

reduces the chance of hunger and leads to a better health outcome? This connection could be further explored. As for the remaining two SDGs in which the Garo districts have done better, GOAL 7 has only two variables: the percentage of villages electrified and the percentage of households using clean fuel for cooking. It is possible that if more variables are chosen, the rank achieved by the Garo districts could decline. Lastly, GOAL 16 is aimed at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. The fact that the Garo districts have done better compared to the Khasi-Jaintia districts despite being beset by law and order problems until recently is something to be applauded.

When "Kamai ia ka Hok" becomes "Kamai ia ka Burom"

Why some people's "Selfless" charity is actually a "Selfish" act

By Gloria Thabali

Charity is one of the most important tenets of many religions including the Niam Khasi. However, the definition of it can vary depending on religious beliefs. For some, charity is giving to those in need out of love and compassion. Others believe that it is helping others in order to receive favours from God. Still, many believe that it is doing good deeds in secret so that no one will know about them. No matter what the definition is, though, all religions agree that charity is a virtue that should be practiced. Some religious traditions also see it as an act of kindness and love and often emphasize the importance of helping those who are in need. It is also often seen as a way to improve one's soul and earn favour with God. While most religious traditions place a specific

commit suicide. Prior to this, the same doctor and his relatives were in the news for all the wrong reasons. This incident compelled me to ponder more on the subject. I think there is some validity to the idea that using activities that we would love to do anyway as a vehicle for fund-raising can be manipulative. Certainly, there are times when the participant portrays the event as something other than a personal achievement and dream fulfilled to encourage more giving. That's often somewhat less than fully honest. It is very rare for anyone to run a marathon against their will to benefit a hospital, orphanage, or homeless program. And if that did occur, none of us should be party to it. Like the poorly constructed argument that money spent on short

"As someone who works professionally with charities, I understand the topic well and have also written several articles about the good work of humankind. But in light of recent events, this time I am compelled to write this article about the dark side of charity too. A few days ago a suicide threat note from a girl from the city went viral on WhatsApp."

emphasis on giving to the poor, others see charity as encompassing a wider range of actions such as caring for the sick or providing support to the needy. It's been taught to generations that, it is more blessed to give than to receive. But how blessed is it when you give in order to receive? Let's face it! Charity is everywhere: From a donation-giving "fund" meant to help the poor, Experts will tell "selfish giving" — when givers are looking to get back more than just the joy of giving. But where do you draw the line? When givers are giving in order to sell more latex or enhance their resumes, it's a win-win — or is something

term international charitable imps would be better used by just giving it directly to the people in need. The injunctions, 'kamai ia ka Hok', which signify high living and practice based on right livelihood, is also a common moral exhortation of all religions not just the Niam Khasi. But it is evident now more than ever that "Kamai ia ka Hok" has in deed turned to "Kamai ia ka Burom" and some people's "Selfless" charity is actually a "Selfish" act. These kinds of arguments may generate heated internet comments and debates, but they do little to address reality. I truly feel we have lost a sense of morality for its own sake. We should just be generous. We should do what's right because it's right, not because of what you get back. I am troubled by what I see in this "Ri Tip-Bhew Tip-Blei" as a growing trend of "conspicuous compassion," where giving has turned into a new "must have" accessory. It brings social cachet to you. I also worry that that kids begin to think that giving is serving your needs and other peoples' needs. And they don't have an image in their head of another kind of giving, a more low-profile kind of altruism that is really just about the other person, and not about you. And I think we're in a really deep trouble as a society if that sense of morality for its own sake evaporates. (The writer is a social worker based in Taltala, Kokota. She is otherwise a resident of Jaiw Peking, Shillong)

The report was released by NITI Aayog to track the progress of the different states in the country in their progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals — 17 in all. These goals are an attempt to provide a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice are some of the challenges that these goals are trying to address. Although being aspirational, the goals can also reveal structural problems being faced by certain regions. In other words, if a region is lagging behind the goal, it means that the population in the region is marginalised, i.e., lacking access to the means that can help them achieve a prosperous and sustainable future. While it is a matter of great shame that Meghalaya is second from the bottom when it comes to SDGs, the district-wise comparison will give a good idea of which regions are most marginalised and therefore need extra support.

In the case of Meghalaya, the report has succeeded to rank the districts on 15 goals instead of 17 because SDG 14 (Life below Water) and SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals) are not applicable to the state. Taking into account the ethnic divisions in the state, the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo districts are being separated for analysis. The comparison of rankings shows that the Khasi-Jaintia districts have performed better than the

A possible answer for this discrepancy could be a difference in dietary patterns between the two regions, which could again be connected to GOAL 13. Under this particular SDG, an important variable used for measuring progress is the change in forest area. It is important to observe that it is the districts from the mountain region that have recorded a loss in area under forest. Traditionally, the forest has been an important source of food for the indigenous communities in the state, both plant and animal, many of which are highly nutritious. The nutritional content in some is even higher than those bought from the market. Could it be that the consumption of a higher amount of wild food (higher forest cover in Garo districts means higher availability of wild food)

child reared or occupied the parents use the TV or mobile as a new toy? And there it all begins. The child is entertained and when school work is not done at home the parents complain to the teacher or Principal saying the child doesn't listen and is constantly at the TV or mobile. They then request school to intervene! Can the school deal with home matters of recreational children? Parents are more caught up in their own lives and social media laments this that draws laughter/sic. Tik Tok have some classic videos on reels, home schooling, and the school today has too many frailties, shortcomings and weaknesses. Where is that excitement and liveliness of classroom learning and rote learning? Can we teaching process? Look at the student strength jammed into a classroom! How can a teacher cope with students' individuality and uniqueness? It's all about finances! Period.

Personally, I think this is all just posturing for political gains, and the people, especially the Khasi-Jaintia, are being taken for a ride. In the process, I fear the Khasi-Jaintia might lose whatever gains they are currently getting from the current Reservation Policy. But then, politicians are way smarter than any of us. So, time will tell.

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

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"The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter." — Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

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Population plus INDIA just about overtook China in population strength, as the UN has somewhat confirmed this week. In a technical sense, there could be some 'it's and but's, but we are definitely there. Arguments of late are that population growth is acceptable under certain situations — like, when the working-age population is more than the non-working-age and ageing mass. The demographic dividend should be to India's advantage in the context of its eminent youth power. Nearly one-fifth of the population is in the 15-24 age-group, nearly 65 per cent of the population (including children) is under age 35; and nearly 70 per cent of the population is in the working age of 15 and 54. The catch in this is that around half of India's population is non-working — comprising men without work and more women being engaged in household chores and child-rearing, and not directly contributing to the productive sectors of the economy.

At a time when China started its growth push under the commune system, kitchens were common for each hamlet and women mostly went into the fields or factories to work, leaving aside their children in baby-care facilities under a well-shaped new social order. China eventually banished poverty and today its economic might is five times that of India. Through governmental intervention, China created conditions for its people to work. It promoted exports with rare zeal and made the nation the world's main production line. India does not have a governance system that can match such energy, drive or vision. Lotus-eaters are one too many here and inaction as a tradition is more appreciated than action. Fact is also that the youth power as a demographic dividend for India at this time presages a time when all these youths would turn old and crave for support from the establishment for their sustenance; a scary scenario for the future.

Over the past few decades, China created substantial wealth for the country by making its people work. Its now-discarded one-child family planning policy halted population growth for decades. China has by now acquired the economic prowess to care for its old for long years. Beijing rightly responded to the present UN rating that put India above it, by saying quality of the people is more important than quantity. It has taught its people skills to remain productive. Here, the Skill India initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi aims precisely at that. Yet, for many in this country, by volition or otherwise, procreation is the main recreation. Some social/religious segments are defying calls for family planning. The establishment must wake up to such realities, first and foremost, and act.

Letters to the Editor

Ravaging the Earth: Devastating effects of illegal stone quarrying —

Editor, Meghalaya — a land blessed by Mother Nature, has been suffering under the hands of people who wish to utilize its natural resources for their own benefits and gains. Over the years, the citizens of the state have witnessed illegal mining taking place in Meghalaya even after the NEI called for its ban in the year 2014. However, illegal mining is not the only unlawful activity that is threatening and endangering Meghalaya's ecosystems. Rampant stone mining and quarries are now also on the list, contributing to the rapid decline of our forests and hills.

Illegal quarrying often occurs in areas where regulations are lax, and law enforcement is weak. In Meghalaya, just like illegal coal mining, illegal quarries too are operated or controlled by individuals or groups of people who seek to make quick profits without regard for long-term consequences. Readily noticeable are the hillsides that have disap-

peared and the threats to the community forests in areas where stone quarrying is prevalent.

A tragic incident that took place recently, on April 14, 2023, on the Shillong-Dawki Road where two people lost their lives leaving nine others gravely injured, when boulders came crashing down on them, is a tell-tale sign that rampant quarrying still exists in the highways of Meghalaya. Frequent sand mining and quarrying activities, including the blasting of rocks along the highways, have been an ongoing phenomenon for the past few years. It would not surprise that the government including the Deputy CM himself should pin the blame on the road construction company rather than naming the actual culprit, knowing fully well that illegal stone mining is prevalent without proper regulation and without following the existing norms. There are also reports of the politician-NGO nexus in the quarrying activities along the Shillong-Dawki highway. It goes without saying that such blatant destruction of the environment could not have taken place without the blessing of people in power.

Unfortunately, the environment too is suffering under the wrath of stone mining as was concluded in a report by the CAG. Serious air, water, and environmental

Importance of family conversations

Social media is disruptive in that it takes our minds off crucial issues we need to deal with. Often we push those issues to the back of our minds, and consciousness. Social media has turned us into garrulous commentators on every issue under the sun and I include myself in this category. By Solomon Morris's article, "The Silent Scream," made me introspect on the fragile foundations on which families are perched or, conversely, precariously. It took me back to my own childhood and growing up and I realised that most of us grew up in families where conversations were stilted and reduced to statistics of questions and answers. Our elders were judgmental and felt that their only duty in life as parents is to correct their children. Since I come from a Khasi society, that is my reference point. I was brought up by one parent — my mother. Perhaps because she had a hard life making ends meet, she too had a lot of her anxieties from me. Conversations were formal. I am sure she also wanted to protect me from the vagaries of circumstances that attend a single woman mother. On one odd occasion we would watch a movie together but even in our movie hall we were in our own little worlds experiencing our own emotions.

Khasi society is inherently hierarchical. We are told never to argue with elders; whatever they say is correct and incontrovertible. Now we know better. We know that age is not always right. Also the manner in which our boys and men are socialised, perhaps leaves a lot to be desired. It's my considered view that we should bring up our boys as we do our girls and instill in them the same value systems of respecting work; especially house work. Also, our boys must be told they are as precious as our girls are and that marriage does not make them strangers in their parental homes.

Today the situation among the educated lot has changed. I see young girls having a healthy banter with their fathers. Somehow girls seem easier to their fathers, although I may be wrong. Girls are able to share a lot with their fathers who seem to understand them better than the mother, especially if she is a home maker who's not too exposed to the world outside. But, alternatively, are boys closer to their mothers? Are they able to unburden

themselves to their mothers? I guess for a young girl or boy having a healthy conversation of strange issues they face in the world outside the comfort zones of their homes, requires that parents are in the same mental and intellectual zone. Most millennials or the Generation Z feel their parents are either outdated or not capable of grasping the tenacity of their problems. But that I suppose comes from the fact that from childhood this space was not created for a conversation that was easy, non-judgmental, non-hierarchical and where the children felt safe to confide even their most well-kept secrets.

Most of us grew up to be parents but largely mimicked our own parents and therefore we never had those moments of deep conversations with our children. They had to find someone outside of their family and perhaps someone in their friend circles to confide some of their dark deep secrets which haunt them in their sleep and were hindrances to their healthy mental development. School too was not a joyful place. It was all about competition and how they are faring in class as compared to their classmates. As students we were never introduced to games where there is no win or lose, right or wrong but just made us laugh and feel happy. Our parents never dared to engage in conversation with our teachers. They had to find someone other than the teacher to talk to their child. It is unthinkable for a parent at that time to ask a teacher, "How is my child learning? Is she eager and receptive when presented with new tasks or slow and shy? If a child is lagging behind in one or two subjects, do parents have the freedom to ask of the teacher's concern about this or whether it is normal and the child will slowly pick up the threads? Above all, at that in our time as parents, we very little to supplement what our kids learnt at school. We were struggling parents with very little time. I am not sure now whether my children found learning fun and looked forward to going to school. Most of us never bothered to ask of the kids are happy to go to school if something was bothering them. When I think back to these times, how I wish I knew better and had the experts that parents

family stay connected. This is a good use of technology. Video calls and facetime are good ways of keeping in touch. As elders we need to listen intently when a family member talks and not cut them off mid-sentence. If we don't listen actively how will we know what's going on in their minds? When a family member talks, don't cut them off mid-sentence. Listen to them actively and intently. Let them speak and articulate their thoughts verbally. Hear them out because the backbone of communication is this. If you don't listen, how will you know what's going on inside their minds? Let's also remind ourselves that being part of a family can also be lonely. When a child feels she/he is not accepted because she/he is in love with someone the family abhors, that is a difficult bend. It is such times that a child needs more understanding and acceptance. Social connectedness and unconditional acceptance by the family, a matter what is an integral aspect of the human drive for survival. Rejection causes a lot of pain which psychologists say is equivalent to a physical injury. The absence of a feeling of connectedness can lead to stress, mental health issues, and also physical health issues. Families need to recognise these signs in their young members.

When I see young people who prefer to stay outside the home until midnight or beyond it makes me wonder how home has become so unwelcoming. And if home is unwelcoming and a strange place where does a young person find solace? Where does a young man or woman find mental peace and acceptance? Let's think over this. Sometimes I hear boys to think of the loneliness that young people experience because their families have given up on them. Sometimes I wish there was a possibility for younger parents to be educated on how to revisit their parenting skills. We are in the 21st century but are still mired in the parenting that we were subjected to decades ago. Here I am talking especially about families in rural Meghalaya where parents still believe that the only way to correct their kids is by beating them up. Do we wonder then why children become rebellious and aggressive?

These days families are scattered all over the place. Kids are studying somewhere and parents are busy working elsewhere. It's good to have a family WhatsApp group if only to stay connected. The child should feel free to communicate anything at any time in that family group. Sometimes children can feel alone and also lonely. Family WhatsApp groups where someone or the other is posting something helps the

child feel connected. This is a good use of technology. Video calls and facetime are good ways of keeping in touch. As elders we need to listen intently when a family member talks and not cut them off mid-sentence. If we don't listen actively how will we know what's going on in their minds? When a family member talks, don't cut them off mid-sentence. Listen to them actively and intently. Let them speak and articulate their thoughts verbally. Hear them out because the backbone of communication is this. If you don't listen, how will you know what's going on inside their minds? Let's also remind ourselves that being part of a family can also be lonely. When a child feels she/he is not accepted because she/he is in love with someone the family abhors, that is a difficult bend. It is such times that a child needs more understanding and acceptance. Social connectedness and unconditional acceptance by the family, a matter what is an integral aspect of the human drive for survival. Rejection causes a lot of pain which psychologists say is equivalent to a physical injury. The absence of a feeling of connectedness can lead to stress, mental health issues, and also physical health issues. Families need to recognise these signs in their young members.

Secularism: Need to reaffirm it

By D.V. Kumar

Secularism as a normative ideal is clearly under enormous strain in the context of systematic and organised attempts to cause communal polarisation. The recent incidents of communal violence in different parts of the country or the occasion of religious festivals have put further strain on secularism as a great organizing principle in a multi-religious and multi-cultural society like ours. Such incidents raise a number of questions, one of which is whether secularism as an ethical and moral principle completely exhausted its possibilities.

The latest leaders of the freedom struggle, Gandhi and Nehru had tremendous faith in the viability of secularism. The second conception of secularism, which is essentially what Gandhi strongly believed in and which found its way in our Constitution, refers to equal respect for all religions. The state shall not promote or privilege one religion over the others and freedom to practise and follow any religion is a fundamental right. The state shall maintain equidistance from all religions. This conception of religion is eminently suitable in a context like India where religious diversity has been an organic feature of its social life. This conception of religion is eminently suitable in a context like India where religious diversity has been an organic feature of its social life. This conception of religion is eminently suitable in a context like India where religious diversity has been an organic feature of its social life.

"I want to argue that secularism can still become a potent force provided it is embraced and pushed hard by different religious communities themselves in India in their daily civic lives as a normative ideal. They should come forward and appropriate secularism with its imaginative possibilities for ensuring communal peace and harmony. The hope lies with civil society organisations of different religious groups in promoting and strengthening the principle of secularism as a counter to attempts to polarise the society along communal lines."

both as a principle and practice in backing communal tensions. But now it is argued by many that we can no longer count on secularism because it has become enormously weaker as a binding force which it was supposed to be in a multi-religious society like ours. I want to argue that secularism can still become a potent force provided it is embraced and pushed hard by different religious communities themselves in India in their daily civic lives as a normative ideal. They should come forward and appropriate secularism with its imaginative possibilities for ensuring communal peace and harmony. The hope lies with civil society organisations of different religious groups in promoting and strengthening the principle of secularism as a counter to attempts to polarise the society along communal lines.

Ashtosh Varshney, a noted political scientist argued long ago, on the basis of a well-known study of some cities in India that wherever there are strong pre-existing civic ties among religious communities, the possibilities of communal violence are drastically reduced and even if there are some scattered incidents of communal violence they can be controlled relatively easily. For this to happen, it is important that civil society organisations belonging to different religious groups adhere to secularism as a great ethical and normative principle. But what is secularism? Basically, there are two conceptions of secularism. The first one refers to the separation between the state and Church/religion, a conception which developed in Europe in a certain context. The context was one of religious homogenisation when the dominant Church religion persecuted and subjugated adherents of non-dominant religions it was of religion. It later on began to modulate in the affairs of the state which proved to be quite inescapable for the effective functioning of the state. The state was duty-bound to ensure freedom and equality for its citizens which was becoming difficult in the context of the interference of the dominant Church. This is when the idea of secularism i.e. separation between the state and Church began to be articulated and practised. This conception of secularism did not have to worry about engaging with religious diversity as there remained only one dominant Church/religion as other non-dominant religions were already liquidated in reli-

gious wars. The second conception of secularism, which is essentially what Gandhi strongly believed in and which found its way in our Constitution, refers to equal respect for all religions. The state shall not promote or privilege one religion over the others and freedom to practise and follow any religion is a fundamental right. The state shall maintain equidistance from all religions. This conception of religion is eminently suitable in a context like India where religious diversity has been an organic feature of its social life. This conception of religion is eminently suitable in a context like India where religious diversity has been an organic feature of its social life. This conception of religion is eminently suitable in a context like India where religious diversity has been an organic feature of its social life.

(D.V. Kumar is Professor, Dept of Sociology, NEHU, Shillong)

Coal-based thermal plants for Meghalaya?

Editor, Should the government set up a Thermal Power Plant that is powered by coal?

Meghalaya produces 5 lakh million to 8 lakh million tonnes of coal every year. A Thermal Power Plant can generate 1000 kilowatt hours of electricity on less than 400 kg of coal. There is 5000 tonnes of coal in the state. With the rich amount of coal in the state, the government should invest in a Thermal Power Plant and streamline its scientific and safe mining protocol.

Meghalaya consumes less than 400 million units of electricity per year. This is a huge deficit. 160000 tonnes of coal a year, for a state that produces 5 lakh million to 8 lakh million tonnes of coal every year, is no dearth of fuel for Thermal Power Plants.

For comparison, the cost of setting up a MW capacity Thermal Plant is around Rs. 4 crore while the cost of building 1 MW capacity Hydel Dam is around Rs. 7 crore. A 1 MW Thermal power plant would generate around 4000 units of electricity a day, which is around 1.46 million units per year. Yours etc., Pynsngm Lyndem, Shillong - 22

Political matrix

Editor, When I was for a brief pe-

riod with Satyam Computers a global corporate in Cybercity, Hyderabad before the Satyam scandal occurred, we learnt the sigma concept in theory that management graduates who are studying corporate business will understand. This requires a lot of critical benchmarks and a set of quality parameters that should be met and delivered to improve businesses across a wide spectrum. The present NPP led government which looks like a classic juggling busy juggling everything with caution and proactiveness is something which even political critics have taken note of and I would say the present CM has to a certain extent translated his visionary ideas into action. The application of the sigma concept in governance could help improve the delivery system via a robust monitoring mechanism that ensuring that the remotest hamlet is able to be reached out to in our authority. This effort would be amplified at the community level and at the government level as well.

Yours etc., Kidoir H. Blah, Shillong

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"Success is the sum of small efforts - repeated day in and day out."

— Robert Collier

The Shillong Times

Nothing permanent in politics

SHORN of all hyperbole and virtuosity, politics is nothing but the struggle for power. That power is increasingly being used, not to bring about any change in the lives of people but to feather personal nests while ensuring that a semblance of development also happens. It is a trial by fire for any political party to remain outside the power circuit for too long. The Congress has been out of circulation in the power corridors of Meghalaya for the last five years. In between 12 Congress MLAs left the Party and joined the Trinamool Congress (TMC). One among those who joined the BJP and contested the elections from the Party. It is ultimately the quest for power that fires peoples' ambitions to be in politics. It is ironic that while different parties profess different ideologies and interests and tear at each other during the elections, they have no qualms of changing uniforms once the elections are over and sometimes even before elections begin.

The nature of politics is such that MLAs belonging to the Opposition parties are starved of development funds although that should not be the case. It is also true that a Constituency that elects a Chief Minister is the largest beneficiary. It happened when Dr Mukul Sangma was Chief Minister and representing Ampati. Most development funds went to service that Constituency much to the chagrin of other MLAs. It is the same now with South Tura which has got a huge facelift. At the end of the day, ideology and all the virtues associated with that ideology have limited appeal once elections are over and people begin to demand the fruits of development. It is for this reason that in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh there have been occasions when the entire Opposition has switched over to the ruling side. They actually know which side of the bread is buttered.

Hence the speculations that the TMC MLAs might eventually merge with the BJP may not be entirely wrong. Mukul Sangma is a factor to reckon with in the Garo Hills and if he and his team were to join the BJP, it might benefit the saffron party and raise its stature in a State where it has been struggling for a toehold for a very long time. Again the assumptions that NPP Chief Conrad Sangma would petition the NFDA Chief, Himanta Biswa Sarma to short-circuit Mukul Sangma's plans might ultimately not work. The BJP would look at the larger interests of the Party and if Mukul Sangma can take a few notches higher especially in the Garo Hills, the national leadership would not brook dissent to the game-plan. For now it's a wait and watch game.

Letters to the Editor

Lights Out: How load-shedding is disrupting everyday lives

Editor, In today's day and age, our lives depend on electricity for every minor thing. It is a vital component, powering our homes, businesses, schools, hospitals, and so on. Every one of us needs electricity to make use of our phones, laptops, cooking appliances, and even our Wi-Fi.

However, recently, just like in the past years, we are again suffering the brunt of load-shedding which has been going on for the last few weeks. The disruption caused by load-shedding is significantly affecting us especially now that the scorching summer heat is making it unbearable to survive without utilizing fans and ACs. Many of us who come from middle-class families, unfortunately, do not have the financial ability and capacity to afford inverters in our homes. But, with the current scenario of Meghalaya, and the ongoing load-shedding crisis that has been plaguing our state for the last few years, it seems like investing in inverters is going to be the next thing that will turn a hole in our pockets.

Another thing to note is the unpredictable load-shedding timings that have been allotted. Power shutdown during the day makes it difficult for us to go about performing our daily activities as without electricity we can neither work in the comfort of our own homes nor

in the comfort of our cabins in the offices and not in the classrooms in schools that are now using digital modes of teaching. The scorching heat of summer becomes unbearable during the day as it could be windy outside, but humid indoors, and without electricity the usage of fans becomes an impossibility. Load shedding has the greatest impact at night - which is when most unfortunate events take place. The power shutdown from midnight to 5 AM every morning gives a great window for thieves and robbers to take place with very minimal chance of being caught, as people would have mostly gone to bed, and CCTVs would not be functional. Coming from a place known to have areas with a large population of young people involved in illicit activities like taking drugs, it would not be surprising if this too sees an increase, as areas without reliable electricity have become hideouts for such young people.

The places of load-shedding is severely affecting us businesses, schools, offices, and homes, and it is an irony that up to today, there is no proper, long-term solution that has been thought of to tackle this crisis. Past governments have gone, the present government in Meghalaya is draining its accounts to buy electricity but is there really nothing else that the Power Department can do other than draining all its resources (accounts) and taking loans and grants to clear out the debts that are still due to today. Those who sit well enough in the comforts of their homes and offices with ACs, and inverters and without having to worry much about the problems that load-shedding brings

along with it, would probably not know or understand the plight that we, the common people have to go through on a daily basis. Yours etc., Casandra Ganhph, Shillong - 14

Atiq Ahmad Killing: Rule of Law not religion matters

By Rajdeep Sardesai

In Uttar Pradesh's notorious gang wars, even crime is seen through the prism of caste and community. Which is why the sharply polarized reactions to the killing of criminal-politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf police custody and in the full glare of live TV cameras by 'Jai Shri Ram' chanting assassins should come as no surprise. While senior BJP ministers in UP have defended the cold-blooded murder as 'karmic' retribution, opposition leaders have been just as zealous in their denunciation of the Yogi Adityanath government. AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi even went as far as likening the case to the gruesome murder of Ehsan Jafri during the 2002 Gujarat riots. The celebratory note struck by right-wing internet Hindu groups on social media is deeply troubling.

Atiq's murder in brazen violation of the rule of law is justified because he is a mafia leader who happens to also be a Muslim? Atiq's projection as a 'Muslim' gangster is not an exception. In 2020, when gangster Vikas Dubey was killed in an 'encounter' with the UP police, social media narratives revolved around an element of Brahmin pride and victimhood. The Yogi government then was attacked for killing a 'Brahmin Babuhali' (strongman). The Yogi government, in fact, has been routinely accused of being partial to Thakur gang leaders, with the Samajwadi party media cell even coming up with a list of alleged criminals who are reportedly flourishing only because they belong to the same caste as the chief minister.

The Brahmin versus Thakur gang rivalries are not new in Purvanchal or eastern Uttar Pradesh. Nor are the Muslim versus Hindu gang battles. In the 1980s, Gorakhpur was the epicentre of an infamous gang war between 'Brahmin' don Hari Shankar Tiwari and Thakur 'don' Virendra Prasad Shahi. While Shahi was murdered in 1997, Tiwari - probably the first politician to win an election from jail - went on to become a key minister in several UP governments

cutting across party lines. Likewise the war in the Varanasi-Ghaziabad belt between Mukhar Ansari and Brijesh Singh gangs, both again led by criminals turned politicians, has assumed a distinctive Muslim versus Hindu character. Singh's supporters even branding him as a 'deh-bhakt' (non-devotee). What explains this unique caste, community, crime and politics nexus in UP? Rewind to the late 1980s as the Congress began to decline in UP in the face of the Mandal-Mamata two challenge. Between 1993 and 2017, UP only threw up one single party majority government - the Mayawati led Bahujan Samaj Party in 2007 - for almost a quarter of a

"A caste badge was more important than a character or education certificate. For example, when Bandit Queen 'Phoolan Devi' was given a Lok Sabha ticket from the Samajwadi party (SP) in 1996, her Mallah or fisherfolk caste identity was a crucial factor in her selection: the SP was looking to widen its Yadav base to include other backward castes."

century, unstable coalitions were the norm. Every seat mattered and 'winability' mattered above all else. The criminal dons had the clout and resources to win seats in their areas of influence, often even when contesting as independents. Where once the criminals were dependent on patrons for patronage, rickety coalitions ensured a role reversal: round a third of UP's MLAs had criminal cases against them in the 1990s. Six years after the aggressive 'Mandalisation' of politics where caste identities determined voting preferences meant that political parties were constantly searching for masses of voters across groups. A caste badge was more important than a character or education certificate. For example, when Bandit Queen Phoolan Devi was given a Lok Sabha ticket from the Samajwadi party (SP) in 1996, her Mallah or fisherfolk caste identity

was a crucial factor in her selection: the SP was looking to widen its Yadav base to include other backward castes. Phoolan, who was later assassinated, went on to win her first election by more than 30,000 votes. Thirdly, post the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, religion became deeply entwined with UP's contested vote bank politics. Where once UP's gangs were seen as 'secular' in their composition, the religious divide was more acute. Each gang leader, through an agreement with him the guarantee of their community's vote. Mulayam Singh Yadav-Muslim vote bank meant that the likes of Atiq, found refuge in the Samajwadi party, con-

testing and winning on an SP ticket in 1996 from Alhabad West, having won twice previously as an independent. A Mayawati, also a Muslim, was made another criminal strongman in Mukhar Ansari her postbody, calling him a 'messiah of the poor'. The BJP, in turn, provided space for the likes of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, once accused of sheltering Dawood Ibrahim's aides. Ironically, Brijesh's gang and political party, made another criminal strongman in Mukhar Ansari her postbody, calling him a 'messiah of the poor'. The BJP, in turn, provided space for the likes of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, once accused of sheltering Dawood Ibrahim's aides. Ironically, Brijesh's gang and political party, made another criminal strongman in Mukhar Ansari her postbody, calling him a 'messiah of the poor'. The BJP, in turn, provided space for the likes of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, once accused of sheltering Dawood Ibrahim's aides. 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Adopt a giver's mindset: Lessons from biz coach

By Vishnu Makhijani

Author, business coach, and global strategist Manoj Gursahani, believes the only way forward in the modern world is to change your lens from a transactional mindset that looks for what others can do for you to one of generosity.

"Adopt a giver's mindset and this alone will change your life and open doors to unimaginable abundance and opportunities," Gursahani, author of 'The Human Connect', told *JANS* in an interview about his debut book that details the secrets of effective networking drawn from his vast and diverse experience across the global business landscape.

"This is not a laborious read but relevant to current times where less is more. It has easy-to-follow, relatable, practical tips and anecdotes that will resonate with you and offer guidance that I wish someone had extended to me when I was just starting out."

"I hope that it will help every reader who picks it up to have deeper personal and professional relationships, create the blueprint of a successful, inspired, enriched life and build a thriving business," added Gursahani, who also advises various corporates on mergers and acquisitions across the world.

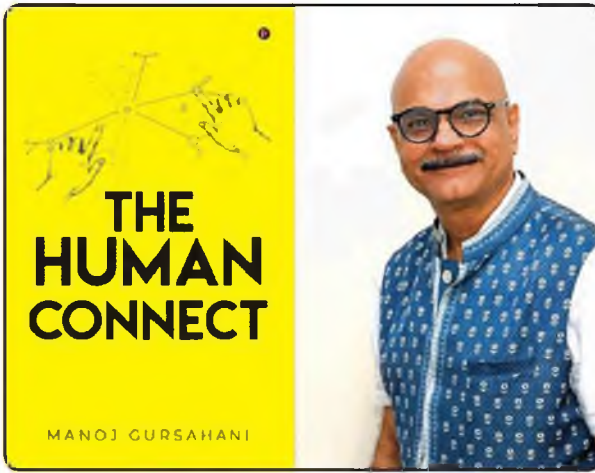
"The book is my way of reaching out to young Indians who are completely overwhelmed by technology and social media and have lost an organic connection with the world. I wanted to remind them of the beauty of synergy over competitiveness and was inspired to change the lens of transactional networking which is a western concept."

"This book expands on the idea of 'Giving', which is another form of receiving and can be more fulfilling than just doing something for someone with a vested interest," Gursahani explained.

That explains the inspiration behind writing the book.

"The quest to find the key to a happy life led me to understand the meaningful relationships, if nurtured and sustained over a period of time, can empower our personal and professional journey and help us to grow in unimaginably enriching ways. This is the thought that lies at the core of this book."

"When I started researching the subject of



networking, I figured that most of the books we have in fact approach networking from a transactional mindset of 'You scratch my back and I will scratch yours'. I wanted to change this narrative and approach it from a giver's mindset and the perspective of genuinely investing in relationships.

"I did not want this shift to be superficial, and instead argued for the genuine change our lens when we meet someone. The point is to have a genuine and sincere approach and the attitude of what we can do for someone rather than what they can do for us."

The book illustrates this point with several examples and stories. Trust me, this adherence

to these principles in our day-to-day life, will turn us into human magnets and open doors and opportunities beyond our wildest dreams," he maintained.

Why is a book like this important for young India?

"In the times we are living in, life is becoming increasingly dominated by technology-driven tools like Chat GPT and the youth are missing out on human connections due to their dependence upon social media and cell phones. We are all living in isolation in our respective silos and the young generation in particular has a shrunken attention span and an urgent need for instant

gratification.

"I have something important to say and my book is in a crisp, succinct way. It is a fast read and after each chapter, gives practical mantras that young readers can derive benefit from," he added.

"If readers apply even 20 per cent of the principles he has shared in the book, it will help them build more meaningful bonds. Strong relationships are crucial for their well-being and will help them to overcome bouts of depression, habits of overthinking, and anxiety and adopt positive attributes like gratitude, empathy, and social responsibility," Gursahani contended.

How can this book help readers recognize their flaws and skills, and how to work on them?

"A conscious awareness of our flaws and skills helps us to evolve and grow. Once we become cognizant of our weaknesses and strengths, we can then change or pivot our approach. Once we start radiating this energy of inner transformation, it will help us build better and long-lasting business and personal relationships."

"Changing for the better, also makes us happier as human beings. The book elaborates how by remembering names, cultivating the art of effective listening, improving our body language and staying in touch with people can help us to forge stronger bonds. I have also offered a list of do and don'ts which can serve as navigation guide and self-help tool kit," the author said.

To that extent, each chapter ends with a mantra. For instance, "It's in giving that we receive", "Develop sincerity in your giving nature without expecting in return" and "Listening is not a skill, it's a discipline".

Not surprisingly, his favourite chapter is the 19th, which elucidates his take on "an unimaginable return on investment (ROI)".

"This is actually the crux of the book and can help us to build relationships that are not based on networking and are incredibly fulfilling," Gursahani concluded.

So there you have it. Here's a book that takes the concept of Human Resource Development to a whole new level in a world driven by technology and social media.

(Vishnu Makhijani can be reached at vishnu.makhijani@iains.in)

Protecting the five elements to make India net zero by 2070!



By Pavan Kausik

In our Vedas, the Atharvaveda the three coverings of our surroundings are referred as Chandamsi. The Atharvaveda says, wisely utilize these elements on earth - water, air and plants or herbs. Not just earth, human life is also made of five elements - earth (prithvi), water (jala), fire (tejas), wind (vayu) and space (akash). Protecting these five-elements would protect our planet as well as human life, or else, the extension is evident.

To breathe or not to breathe, but the fact is, every breath that we inhale and exhale is now being counted as adding to global warming. Enough evidence supports that even the CO2 emission through breathing of 8 billion people around the world is now being accounted for. In one day, an average person breathes out around 500 litres of the greenhouse gas CO2 - which amounts to around 1kg in mass. The question is, what happens when the population reaches an estimated figure of 9.7 billion by 2050?

Currently, the Earth is already about 1.1 degree Celsius warmer than it was in the late 1800s, and emissions continue to rise. In November 2-21, at the 26th Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Prime Minister Narendra Modi also pledged that India would cut its emissions to net zero by 2070.

No surprises, the current global average concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere is 421 ppm as of mid-2022, which is an increase of 50 per cent since the industrial revolution began.

Experts believe that human activity is the primary cause of the increase of CO2 emission of such magnitude. Since the start of the industrial revolution, human emissions of carbon dioxide from fossil fuels, etc., have risen to more than 35 billion metric tons per year.

The majority of emissions is coming from transportation - 24 per cent of 2021 greenhouse gas emissions. The transportation sector generates the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions and it primarily comes from burning fossil fuel for our cars, trucks, ships, trains, and planes.

Between 1990 and 2021, the warming effect on our climate -- known as radiative forcing -- by long-lived greenhouse gases rose by nearly 50 per cent, with carbon dioxide accounting for about 80 per cent of this increase. Despite the decline in 2020, global energy-related CO2 emissions remained at 31.5 Gt, which contributed to CO2 reaching its highest ever average annual concentration in the atmosphere of 412.5 parts per million in 2020 - around 50 per cent higher than when the industrial revolution began.

The oceans absorb much of this increased heat, with the top 100 meters (about 328 feet) of ocean showing warming of more than 0.6 degrees Fahrenheit (0.33 degree Celsius) since 1969. Global sea level rose about 8 inches (20 centimetres) in the last 100 years, and the last two decades have been worse. For the record, our planet stores 90 per cent of the extra energy in the ocean.

There is much other evidence as well. Earth's average surface temperature has risen about 2

degrees Fahrenheit (1 degree Celsius) since the late 19th century, a change attributed to emission of carbon dioxide and human activities.

The glaciers are retreating almost everywhere around the world. Sprint snow cover in the Northern Hemisphere has decreased over the past 50 years and the snow continues to melt earlier.

You can blame any country that you want -- as of 2020, China is the largest emitter of carbon dioxide gas in the world, with 10,668 million metric tons, followed by the US as the second-largest emitter of CO2, with 4,713 million metric tons of total carbon dioxide emissions. India too is in the list of top three, with 2,442 million metric tons of total carbon dioxide emissions. Russia is the fourth-largest contributor, emitting 1,577 million metric tons, and Japan is the fifth-largest producer of CO2 emissions, with 1,577 million metric tons. No wonder, the years 2016 to 2020 are attributed as the warmest year on record.

While Earth's climate has changed throughout its history, the current warming is happening at a rate not seen in the past 10,000 years. If every problem has a solution, and the solution lies in the roots of the problems -- we all know what to do and what not to do.

We have no other planet to go to, no matter how many alien ships we see suggesting lives outside Earth. If we seriously want mother earth to protect all of us from extinction of our species, we better protect mother earth from extinction. (IANS)

Is agitation or moodiness a severe mental disorder?

By N. Lohunbeni Ilumsoe

Everybody experiences occasional restlessness, agitation, or moodiness. Nonetheless, some people take advantage of this, a more intense form of unease that results in less concentration.

Agitation can be exceedingly painful and upsetting. It also interferes with social connections and professional performance, and in some cases, it raises the likelihood that someone would damage himself or others.

"People who suffer from mood problems may be more likely to become agitated. Bipolar illness and depression are examples of mood disorders that can be treated medically and cause changes in cognition, energy, and behaviour. Anyone can be affected by them, regardless of age, ethnicity, or social standing," says Kanchan Rai, an emotional and mental well-being coach.

"A period of agitation is characterised by insignificant motions, such as trembling hands. Additional signs include hostility, a lack of self-control, stress, and aggressive or disruptive behaviour. Even though it frequently coexists with stress, clinicians typically designate the term 'moodiness' to identify serious mental activity that stems from emotional discomfort. These outward habits act as an expression of the person's emotions. Agitation is a sign of a medical ailment, such as a mood disorder or feeling nervous. When a person's treatment for depression or bipolar disorder isn't functioning as effectively as it should, they frequently become agitated. It can also be brought on by traumatic or extremely stressful circumstances. A person may at first come across as caustic. If the stress intensifies, they may begin to pace, lash out verbally, clench their fists, or even act in a threatening or confrontational manner." (IANS)I caught up with Kanchan, the founder of Let Us Talk. Here are the excerpts:

What are the signs of agitation or moodiness?

"Some of the symptoms of agitation or moodiness are irrational or impulsive behaviour, disruptive outbursts, excessive talking or moving other than usual days. Along with this, difficulty concentrating or continuing with the conversation, pacing or shuffling feet, stress, anxiety, impatience, wringing hands, or clenching fists."

What effect does agitation have?

"People with mood disorders may struggle to perform successfully at jobs, school, or at home due to the uncomfortable emotions of moodiness. This frequently causes severe disruptions to their everyday life and hinders their capacity to accomplish their objectives."

Relationships might suffer from stress. People who experience this may become intolerable with repetitive actions. Even close friends and family members could start to lose patience with someone who finds it difficult to hold a meaningful discussion. Being upset makes it challenging to focus on everything. Tasks relating to your career can frequently become almost unattainable. Conversations with colleagues or employers may result in rigidity.

Agitated people frequently struggle to fall asleep at night. Hence, lack of sleep could exacerbate the disease and cause other health issues. Furthermore, it may be challenging for them to appropriately describe patients' symptoms and medical background to their doctors, which makes treating their mood problems more challenging. Several studies indicate that agitation increases the probability of suicidal behaviour.

What treatment and preventative options are available?

"Accurately identifying and treating a person's health problems or other underlying diseases is the first step in preventing agitation. It usually goes away when depression, bipolar disorder, or other diseases are properly controlled."

In case you start to feel anxious at a serious level, get assistance. The best outcomes frequently come from early intervention, and being alert.

The intensely unpleasant feelings can be reduced with appropriate treatment. An agitation crisis can be avoided by recognizing and dealing with its early warning signals before they intensify.

Mood swings are a common occurrence in life. They can, however, become a symptom of a mental health condition which should be guided by the specialist or as required.

Well, a medical expert can suggest techniques for curing such mental syndrome.

How to treat your close ones that are facing mental disorders?

"Remain close to the one who is going through an agitation phase. Avoid walking or running away from that individual if it is all feasible. Make sure you and others are safe. Remove harmful things from the surrounding. Reduce other kinds of stimulation, such as loud noises, vivid colours, and extreme temperatures, and remove all unwanted furniture from space if it is possible."

Listen. If the person is at ease enough to speak, pay close attention. Reiterating statements can aid in establishing a verbal connection while preventing agitation from rising.

Some lifestyle practices, such as a better sleep quality and giving yourself space from work, may be useful if agitation is mild to moderate and does not entail hostility. (IANS)I



"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak."
—Epictetus

The Shillong Times

Vol No LXXV, No. 25 SHILLONG, MONDAY, APRIL 24, 2023

Amritpal arrested

AMRITPAL Singh has finally been arrested and incarcerated. The Sikh preacher is known among his followers as Bhindranwale 2.0 and supported allegedly by the notorious Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) of the Pakistan military with arms and ammunition. Curiously, despite all these, he kept raising the dust in Punjab without any hindrance. A bigger question is, how and why the security services could not track down or arrest him for a full 35 days after a ban was effected on his outfit Waris Punjab De on March 18. He was very much in Punjab. This lack of seriousness on the part of the government is unacceptable when it comes to handling sensitive situations.

These are the days of CCTV cameras in street after street and at almost every spot in the public sphere. Yet, when a requirement arises, many of these are found to be not in "operational mode." Properly used, these devices help governments to keep a close eye on the happenings and movements in public places round the clock. The ban on the outfit was effected after weeks of discussions. Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann and Union Home Minister Amit Shah discussed the matter on March 2. This, after Amritpal and his gun-wielding gang stormed a police station and clashed with the police in February. Logically, from then on, he should have been on the radar of the cops. Had they done so, his arrest immediately after the ban was possible. The security agencies were caught napping, resulting in a shameful situation. Admittedly, the Punjab police could not have been fully depended upon.

The all-powerful central security forces should have tracked Amritpal's movement for weeks before the ban. For, by any chance, if Amritpal had got a chance to cross over to Pakistan, India would have had a huge problem at hand. An escape from Punjab to Pakistan through the border region was possible.

Amritpal could have kept calling the shots from Pakistani soil, just as Dawood Ibrahim targeted India from Karachi or other hideouts elsewhere for many years. Had it happened, not only Amit Shah but the super sleuth, NSA Ajit Doval, too would have cut a very sorry figure. Even granted that the pro-Kashmir terrorists have majorly been neutralized through sustained efforts from India's part -- or due to failure of the Pakistani establishment to keep up its tempo against India -- it is important that India continues its vigil without let or hindrance. Installation of CCTV cameras alone will not do; they must be made full use of by the security agencies and kept in operational mode.

Letters to the Editor

BJP Meghalaya - Trust but Take Care Who We Trust

Editor,
Is the BJP Meghalaya remotely controlled from Assam? Once upon a time in a remote corner of this country a glittering region and its people shone bright and were the envy of the ruling coterie as its inhabitants were wise and withstood the attempts of the rulers to oppress their ways upon them. The rulers resorted to irredentism to keep the region under their control but the people rose up, fought too hard and succeeded in forming a region of their own and the people broke into uncontrolled rapture and merriment and lived happily.

This is not a fable, because at this point in time I can no longer avoid giving a first provisional statement of my own hypothesis concerning the "Central Asian circus" Mukul's bid to join the BJP? report in the Shillong Times on the 21st April 2023 and that the Chief Minister of the erstwhile State that we were a part of then is calling the shots in the present situation. It may sound rather strange and needs to be pondered over, lived with and slept with for a long time if we are to understand the ramifications of this situation and still we may not be able to get our heads around it wholly. I regard this as a bad consequence, as a serious illness that the BJP Meghalaya has contracted under the stress of the most fundamental fact that it cannot make any headway on its own and in some mysterious way it remains me of the fate of the first sea creatures that left the sea to start a new life as land animals or perish billions of years ago.

It most certainly must have been a similar experience like what the BJP in Meghalaya is going through now...yet to find its voice and express itself. This reportedly unfindable trust that the Party has in The Chief Minister of Assam may become derailed and the obituary of a funeral experience for the BJP in Meghalaya from which it will take more than a Herculean effort to come back. Whereas those first creatures have now established themselves as land animals, the BJP Meghalaya may become derailed and defunct because politics has a strange way of turning the table upside down. I believe

The dry season in Meghalaya is now accompanied with load shedding, which is a new issue for the state's residents. In Meghalaya, load shedding has become a common occurrence that no longer surprises its residents, so much so they have learnt to live with the problem and believe it is inevitable. Some even think it their fault that they suffer load-shedding. What can the government do right away to solve the issue, is the question. Unfortunately, it is possible that the issue won't have a quick fix. Since the state's government does not appear to have any plans or policies in place to address it, hence citizens will continue to deal with it and bear the brunt of it.

Effects of load shedding
People who rely on electricity to run their enterprises have suffered significant losses as a result of load shedding across the state. It has cut off the customers' access to energy for their homes or businesses. The hardest-hit small businesses are bakeries, Xerox shops, motor repair shops, steel fabricators, carpenters, and others. Load shedding also gives crooks more confidence, and there have been cases of robberies at ATMs while load shedding was in effect in the town.

Water supply to several towns and cities has also been disrupted by load shedding, and even people's daily routines have gone haywire. People also complained that load shedding was unfair because it shut down for a longer period of time in rural areas than in metropolitan ones. In a nutshell, load shedding has had a tremendous impact on every resident of the state, and the unfortunate aspect is that there doesn't appear to be a resolution in the near future.

Is there a solution in place?

In such a situation, the question is what is the alternative for Meghalaya? Can non-conventional energy be the alternative? Meghalaya can look to? Before North East Low Food and Agrobiodiversity Society started working on non-conventional energy, we asked ourselves if we can study and learn and if using solar power is viable. We remembered that Maple Pine Farm, Bed and Breakfast is a business that runs off the grid and could be a model for us to emulate.

We decided to visit and discuss with the person who runs the business to understand how he could run his business relying on solar power only. After the discussions, we now know that we already have a working model which is reliable. The miserable feeling of those creatures then is in no way different from the terrible sense of discomfort and peril that many members of the BJP in Meghalaya are going through right now. All insights that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward and thus the BJP in Meghalaya has apparently reversed its evolutionary process and returned to its embryonic form, re-entering the womb from which it found life to once again be deprived of any shape, voice, and mind of its own. It would seem the BJP is bereft of the once bright and brilliant people of this region.

Yours etc,
Gregory F. Shullai,
Via email

2-state policy

The reservation mechanism has allowed political parties to set up and take deep interest, especially with the roster system now being thrown back into the legislative arena to decide the best outcome. Notwithstanding the fact that the Gano community has been side-lined to a certain extent in all these past 50 years by their very own representatives and the "conquest" that has been created that the Khasi

Solar Energy to Power the Abode of Clouds

By H H Mohrmen

discussion with James Perry encourages us to go ahead with the project and help provide lights through solar power to the un-electrified villages.

James Perry, a friend and owner of the Farm Bed and Breakfast in Lysaghten, Mawphlang, Hima Mawphlang said that they have been using only solar power to run their business and it has been twelve years since they set up their business. Perhaps, Maple Pine Farm Bed and Breakfast is the first and till date the only house or hotel in the state which is off the grid. The farm has since the



beginning relied only on non-conventional energy for all its power needs. And the best part is that it is viable and they have no complaints living off the grid as solar is completely viable.

Benefit water power installation and street lights.
It is also true that one can see many rows of solar panels installed at government offices in the state including Deputy Commissioners' offices which do not function. Even solar street lamps which were installed in different villages and towns in the state are not functioning. One may ask why these solar power units and street lamps were installed in different places, but the answer is that they were installed in a matter of few months. The reason for the failure of solar units is that companies and agencies that were installed these solar units were fly-by-night organizations that disappeared from the state the moment the installation was completed.

According to James Perry who has been using solar energy for more than a decade, and Jaintias has taken the cream of all development across all seven districts, the crux of all this is because our very own Khasi legislators have no courage to stand up for what is right because of the "fear" of antagonizing the other community. All they love is money, power and hence are self-centric. When it comes to the crux and our rights we need people who would stand up for what is right and wrong and not just gobble up what is dished out. The Ganos need their rights so let them get their due but so do the Khasis and Jaintias who are well within their constitutional boundaries. A section of the Ganos have now demanded a separate state in their overall interest. This is a democratic and constitutional right which they should take up to the highest echelons of the country. A separate Khasi and Jaintia state would be the only way forward towards ending the conflicting interests and both sides should resolve this in a positive spirit.

Yours etc,
Dmimic Stalin
Wangshi
Via email

Amritpal Singh finally arrested

It is worth mentioning here that the political alliance between Akali Dal and BJP was less political and

for high energy equipment. Then they wonder why their batteries don't last when the fault lies with them because the input and output did not match.

There is also a potential for households to shift their excess power to the grid if it is done properly and more importantly if the government can put a system in place for people to do so. The future of power in Meghalaya is on solar energy and even if they cannot use solar hundred percent, households can at least try a hybrid solar and power supply from the grid.

How can Meghalaya go solar?

Meghalaya can go for solar but people need to be educated on how the energy works and how to use it. People are used to electricity so mind-charge amongst the people of the state to adapt to new systems is a must. At the government level the MeECL not only needs to recalibrate its technology from conventional energy to solar, but the staff of the corporation also need to open their minds to the change. The importance of educating the users was also stressed by NES-FAS when they trained solar technicians in every village that were electrified by solar to cater to the needs of the people. To encourage people to shift to solar or at least hybridize it with electricity, the government can subsidize households willing to install solar power units in their houses. The state government needs to immediately conduct a feasibility study before it decides to shift to solar energy. Research and development on panels and battery technology help improve the system rapidly. It is therefore not surprising for Meghalaya to go for solar energy in the immediate future.

The state and SDG

Sustainable Development Goal number 7 (goal 7) calls on the countries of the world to ensure people access affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all. If the state government can help provide subsidies to people who are interested in migrating from conventional energy to solar, it will be a great step for households. The government would then not only support people who are interested in installing solar power in their respective houses but by doing so the state is also fulfilling its obligation to accomplish at least one of the SDGs. The government may soon insist that all new buildings should install solar panels on their rooftops. The MDA government would then do itself and the state a great service if it can shift from conventional to non-conventional energy.

Can solar be the future?

Anti-social elements will try to disturb the peace as we all have to remain united so that no one takes any chance to disturb the communal harmony which the Punjab state had shown during the anti-Sikh riots. In the Punjab there was not a single, repeat, not a single riot in the state during the Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984.

Such are the strong hindering factors among the diverse societies in the State that nobody could create division among the various communities.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Raihan,
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 printed.

Please support the Equitable Distribution of Property

By Michael N Syiem

On April 15, 2023, four organisations (HENYK KSU, FKJGP and Matsaphrang) held a meeting with some representatives of the sang Kur (Clan) to discuss the need to introduce some amendments to the Meghalaya Succession to Self-Acquired Property (Khasi and Jaintia Special Provision) Act 1986 and the following points were put forward for discussions.

The whole world revolves around the economy and the stronger the economy the stronger the country, citing examples like the USA, Germany, China, and quite a few more, even Israel which is not much bigger in size than Meghalaya and where 65% of its territory is desert, has a very strong economy and attempts by its far bigger neighbouring countries to 'bring it to heel' time and again had been countered successfully by Israel. Israel is now a major player not only in the Middle East but globally too.

If Meghalaya is to become a strong and a progressively State and able to protect its borders besides taking up other development activities, it has to develop its economy and the involvement and contribution of its indigenous population to strengthen this economic development is vital.

In the present situation where government jobs have reached a near saturation

point, the only viable alternatives for the young people of the state to go into economic activity in a big way and for those who have the capital, it will have a multiplier effect creating more employment opportunities.

For this to happen, economic empowerment of all the children in the family of the Hynienwrep community is a must to allow them to give collateral for availing of loans from the financial institution. Therefore the need to amend the above 1986 Act to include the word 'Equitable' in the 'Fair and Just' (not 'Equal' as some people mistakenly interpreted), and the word 'Ancestral' in the principal Act which will then read as the Meghalaya Equitable Succession to Self-Acquired Property (Khasi and Jaintia Special Provision) Act. Proposal to include the word 'Gift' was also made.

The word 'Equitable' gives the parents the flexibility to 'Will' out their property to their children, sons and daughters, to whom and how much, according to their wisdom. In certain cases, the parents in their wisdom feel that the youngest daughter deserves the bulk or the entire share, this Law will allow them to do so by Will. In a family where there are no daughters only sons, the Will which gives the sons the right to the family property will prevent the Kur (Clan) from snatching away the property from them when their parents expire, which is usually the

case because of the absence of this law. In the year 1982 a group of us, ex KSU members, discussed the need for a law to give all children of the family a share of the family property. Accordingly together with some concerned friends and members of the Tribal United Front led by (L) Bah Wicet Slong we drafted a bill which was to be presented to the KHADC. This bill was however taken up and passed by the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly and received the assent of the Governor on May 23, 1986 as The Meghalaya Succession to Self-Acquired Property (Khasi and Jaintia Special Provision) Act 1986 and published in the Gazette of Meghalaya, Extraordinary, dated 31st June 1986.

However, in this principal Act of 1986 mentions only the Self-Acquired Property of the parents that will be willed out to their children (sons and daughters). But this Self-Acquired Property of the parents in the next generation becomes Ancestral property to the children and it reverts back to the youngest daughter as per current system of inheritance. Therefore, we are demanding that only this part of the Ancestral property that is inherited from their parents, and grandparents be allowed to be willed out to anyone of their children

and successive generations and NOT the Ancestral property that belongs to the Kur (Clan). After more than 30 years of campaigning we are glad that more and more families are equitably distributing their properties to all their children, sons and daughters. But it must be emphasised here that there must be a law in place to strengthen and legalise this distribution of inheritance by way of a Will or by a Gift.

We are facing challenging times from challenging forces and unless we economically empower all our children, sons and daughters whenever possible, our matrilineal society will not be able to withstand the onslaught of influx by today and the years to come. The problem of influx which is mainly driven by availability of economic opportunities, will be checked to a great extent when more and more indigenous people of the state enter into economic activities encouraged by this new legislation.

With this vision in mind we appeal to the Hynienwrep people for their views and opinions, their cooperation and support in bringing about a legislation allow them to do so by Will. In a family where there are no daughters only sons, the Will which gives the sons the right to the family property will prevent the Kur (Clan) from snatching away the property from them when their parents expire, which is usually the

"If you're a true warrior, competition doesn't scare you. It makes you better." — Andrew Whitworth

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LV No. 253 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 2023

State as arbiter in personal matters

A person born to two Khasi tribal parents who wishes to adopt the clan name of the father will not be derecognised as a Scheduled Tribe. The Khasi Hills District Council has cited Sections 3 and 12 of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act, 1997 to buttress its case and to argue that in a matrilineal society all persons born of Khasi parents must necessarily adopt the clan name/surname of the mother of lose the Schedule Tribe status. In this contentious issue the clan heads are not consulted nor have their views been sought. These days in non-tribal societies, women continue to hold on to their maiden surname instead of affixing their husband's surname. No one has any problem with this and certainly not any state institution. These are personal matters that are best left to individuals. In the Khasi society if a person born of Khasi parents applies for a Scheduled Tribe certificate which grants certain rights and privileges to that person, it is enough to establish the parentage. Whether that person takes the mother or father's clan name should not be the concern of any state institution as that would mean that such institution is intruding into a personal space.

We have several instances of Khasi male civil servants and diplomats who have a problem explaining to people in foreign countries or even in states outside their own, why their wives and children carry a surname different to theirs. To get out of this predicament of having to explain themselves repeatedly they have decided to lend their own surnames to the wife and children. Those children cannot be deprived of the tribal status merely because they chose to take the father's surname. In Khasi society it is considered a taboo to marry within the clan. It is for this reason that Khasis believe they should preserve the sanctity of this custom and if children carry the father's instead of the mother's surname then at some point there might be a possibility that such taboo occurs and persons of the same clan intermarry. But this presupposes that such families are ignorant of their family tree. This never happens in the Khasi accounting of lineage. The elders remember the 'jai' or clan name of all their ancestors and intermarriage amongst members of the same clan through ignorance does not happen.

It is therefore time to put this topic to rest and move on with the times. Personal matters such as whose surname the children of a particular Khasi couple wish to adopt is not a matter for any institution of the state to decide.

Letters to the Editor

Of schools and their responsibilities

Editor, As a parent I thank the State Education Department for stepping in on an important matter that the school authorities have flagrantly neglected to consider and that is to involve students in school sports during the heat wave that swept through the country and did not leave Meghalaya unscathed. Thankfully the heat seems to have left us for now after the rains arrived on Saturday last. But one never knows with the frequently fluctuating weather conditions via a Climate Change which has affected the entire world.

Parents want our children to be physically active, more so because that is part of their growing up years and also because there are so few opportunities for children today to be involved in physical activities. Most of the time they are glued to the cellphone as if it brings them the greatest joy but it is possible that the mobile phone

is an escape from things that trouble them. That said, I would request the school authorities to kindly be sensitive to the changing weather conditions and not subject them to long hours in the burning heat of the sun, especially around midday. Even we adults could feel the burning heat when we are outside for a brief while without umbrellas. Think of the little children especially. I am all for toughening up kids but not at the cost of their health. Schools need to adjust their calendars in the light of Climate Change. I know some parents might think I am molly-coddling my daughter but as a mother I am the one who has to nurse her back to health should she be adversely affected by the heat wave.

Yours etc, Evelyn Lyngdoh Thaboh, Via email

Feeble Chief Minister!

Editor, Preceding the year 2018, when Dr Mukul Sangma was the Chief Minister, an

The problem with Meghalaya's roster discourse

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

A lot has been said and written on the Meghalaya Reservation Policy 1972 and the roster system notified in May 2022. The society is divided on the issue on tribal community lines. Depending upon which tribe one belongs to, it is apparent that society is already opinionated and has already made up its mind as to the conclusion. The vision is blurred and the mind is blocked from nuances related to the issue. It is like the saying, 'when the cup is already full it is impossible to fill it with'.

As the readers are already aware of the technicalities in the reservation and roster system, this column will refrain from touching upon them. On the contrary, an attempt is made to highlight matters which are related to the discourse. It is alright to love one's own tribe, but it is problematic when it becomes the only factor in deciding contentious issues. In the true sense of the discourse, the reservation and roster debate is not a Garo-Khasi issue. It is a debate for development of the state based upon logical and sound basis such as population size and socio-economic status. That way the reservation policy is to be relooked and reworked with a view that it would be re-evaluated 10 years hence.

By that time the demographics of Meghalaya would have changed again. Looking at a Garo-Khasi student one sees the same desire and spark to come up in life and be a change agent. If the roster conflict was not there, both would have got on with their lives and doing what they do best. The only thing that the roster conflict is doing is flaring up communal feelings and animosity. If this continues the collateral damage will be too much to bear. Meghalaya will sink in this hatred of the other community affecting the peace that prevails. It would be wise for all communities to come together and find out the differences and dish out a common path that can be worked on for the next five years. There is no one-shot immediate solution to the issue. Any solution, be it the

reworking of the reservation ratio or the roster system will have to be gradual. The role of political parties in the roster discourse is concerning. Almost all of them are playing safe. They are mostly explaining technicalities only to confuse society with the hope that the matter dies a natural death. For example, Paul Lyngdoh justifies non-interference with

the fight would be amongst the Khyntiam, Thar, Bhoi, War and you name what. Period! The understanding of reservation in Meghalaya is dichotomous. When it comes to the state government jobs, it divides the communities and in case of central government jobs, it unites these very communities. In fact, the basic premise of reservation

is to help communities come 'at par' with all others. It is a means to ensure adequate representation in jobs and education with the ultimate intention of helping a particular community scale up. This means it has to have a time frame. On the contrary, it has turned into

is to help communities come 'at par' with all others. It is a means to ensure adequate representation in jobs and education with the ultimate intention of helping a particular community scale up. This means it has to have a time frame. On the contrary, it has turned into

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right if they walk the talk by trying to solve the conflict. Till date, nothing is such is forthcoming. Now, when the legislature fails to do its duty, it then spills into the streets and the pressure groups come in. Then it would become a different ball game of laws and order. In particular, the claim by HSPDP that the only solution to the problem is separate statehood for the Garos and Khasis is shortsighted. Some Garo groups are harping on the same. It is opportunistic with the motive to remain relevant in politics. If all problems are to be solved by statehood then the mindset would continue to become narrower. For example, who are the guaranties that if the Khasis get a separate state that job/education reservation issues would never creep up again? Then

a political vote bank and no political parties have the guts and gumption to appropriately structure and redefine its framework. The hammer of reservation falls hardest on the students. Reservation seems to work in an inverted manner. The well cherished and valued words/thoughts like 'we need to study, work hard, sincerity, dedication, determination, etc.' are somehow lost in the wilderness of reservation and roster. Students seem to be planning and implementing their study and professional approaches by having reservation on the back of their minds. This is counter-productive as instead of motivating students to reach for the highest levels, the reservation cut-off seems to be the stimulus and deciding factor for the effort in studies and work culture. If

being soaked in a number of seams which allegedly took place in various sectors and departments. But there was one such alleged scam which had been meticulously kept under the carpet for the last couple of years which is the alleged land scam where in a huge chunk of land near the upcoming NPP office (head of Hivar Road) has been illegally converted into revenue land and subsequently transferred land. This illegal transfer of land has been allegedly done under the nose of the authorities and big businessmen hailing from Police Bazar area are said to have benefited from it as they have got the land transferred in their names for peanuts, as compared to the prevailing rates in the European lands. It is highly disappointing that this matter has been kept under wraps with absolutely nobody raising this issue and in all likelihood it will remain concealed as the same government and concerned ministers are in power again.

On Gender Equality, Individual Freedom & Khasi Status

By Ania Kharthami

I propose that Gender Equality is a myth or at least, just a vision. Governments are formulating policies, enacting laws and investing money to implement gender equality. But more than that, we have the media promoting and encouraging life choices that move society towards their goal of gender equality. And I believe it is a myth, not because women cannot compete with men in specific areas where they have the aptitude to compete and even excel better than men, such as medicine and pharmaceutical and healthcare. It is a myth because there will never be an organic gender equality. It has to be manufactured in a social laboratory. And such an inorganic social structure can only be achieved through government regulation of human interaction, choices and behaviours, i.e., via a totalitarian state.

When he biological man, and trans woman athlete, Lia Thomas, defeated the female swimmers, society cried foul. How could biological women compete with a biological man in sports? Or when Trans woman (biological man) MMA fighter Fallon Fox broke her female opponent Tamika Brents' skull, it was obvious that there is no such thing as gender equality. But how someone will do it and it will not develop Meghalaya. In one discussion, it was found that while the residents of Shillong do want to gradually move away from reservation, the only concern which is holding them back from coming out openly is the condition of schools in the rural areas. If we look at the UG CUET issue, the only reason for exemption for Meghalaya is the sad state of affairs in the rural educational infrastructure. This protective mind-set has to change. As a society we cannot continue like this forever. These are the type of issues that the political parties and the government are supposed to look at and work on. The real problem is not reservation and roster. The real problem is systemic in nature. For example, the time frame within which NEP 2020 is to be implemented is 2030. It is mid-2023, but we are yet to see a clear-cut road map from the government on its implementation strategy. We are all looking at the smoke and missing out on the fire!

In the end, the roster conflict has come as an opportunity to study and work towards this end. The idea that masculinity is not an inherent quality of manhood but that men can become women and even compete with women in areas where biological women are not naturally capable of competing with biological men. Such expectation from women is counter-productive to the development of their natural aptitude, traits and happiness. Thus, it is a social structure sustained by policy and regulation, and not an organic social structure shaped by normal human interaction, and the interplay of natural masculine and feminine traits between men and women.

But what about places like Meghalaya that have institutionalised feminism and matriarchy? Feminism is not just a tradition, and a trait, but a law of the land. If a woman marries a (dikhar) (outsider) or phrang (foreigner), the children will be identified as Khasi via the matrilineal system. But even if a Khasi man marries a fellow Khasi woman, and they do not follow the matrilineal nomenclature, their children will be identified as Khasi via the matrilineal system. According to their Khasi status, providing of their Khasi status, according to section 10(1)(c) of the existing Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) Act, 1997, even though both their parents are Khasi.

But when the KHADC, like by the former CEM, (L) U. S. Shylla, passed the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage (Amendment) Bill, 2018 to deprive the children of inter-racial marriages of their Khasi status, the intellectuals and the women folk cried foul "It is unjust," they

to deprive the children of Khasi mother of their Khasi status. And rightly so. I support the right of everyone to marry whomever they want. And it would be an unjust law to deprive the children of a Khasi mother, their Khasi status. That is common sense. BUT, the rejection of Shylla's Amendment Bill highlighted the double standards and true gender equality present in our community, where it is on the also a blind eye to equal as a just law for children of two Khasi parents to be deprived of their Khasi status, just because they fail to follow the matrilineal nomenclature.

And now, the KHADC under the present CEM has advanced the idea of depriving Scheduled Tribe children of Khasi parents if they do not follow the matrilineal nomenclature. As a basis on all of this institutionalised feminism, we are still increasingly fighting for the myth of Gender Equality by debating how could biological women compete with a biological man in sports? Or when Trans woman (biological man) MMA fighter Fallon Fox broke her female opponent Tamika Brents' skull, it was obvious that there is no such thing as gender equality. But how someone will do it and it will not develop Meghalaya. In one discussion, it was found that while the residents of Shillong do want to gradually move away from reservation, the only concern which is holding them back from coming out openly is the condition of schools in the rural areas. If we look at the UG CUET issue, the only reason for exemption for Meghalaya is the sad state of affairs in the rural educational infrastructure. This protective mind-set has to change. As a society we cannot continue like this forever. These are the type of issues that the political parties and the government are supposed to look at and work on. The real problem is not reservation and roster. The real problem is systemic in nature. For example, the time frame within which NEP 2020 is to be implemented is 2030. It is mid-2023, but we are yet to see a clear-cut road map from the government on its implementation strategy. We are all looking at the smoke and missing out on the fire!



only comfort for the short-comings in education is that at least there is reservation and roster as a saving grace. This thinking is flawed and it will not develop Meghalaya. In one discussion, it was found that while the residents of Shillong do want to gradually move away from reservation, the only concern which is holding them back from coming out openly is the condition of schools in the rural areas. If we look at the UG CUET issue, the only reason for exemption for Meghalaya is the sad state of affairs in the rural educational infrastructure. This protective mind-set has to change. As a society we cannot continue like this forever. These are the type of issues that the political parties and the government are supposed to look at and work on. The real problem is not reservation and roster. The real problem is systemic in nature. For example, the time frame within which NEP 2020 is to be implemented is 2030. It is mid-2023, but we are yet to see a clear-cut road map from the government on its implementation strategy. We are all looking at the smoke and missing out on the fire!

Land scam near NPP Office Editor, The MDA 01 government was unpopular for

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

"Wisdom is the power to put our time and our knowledge to the proper use."
—Thomas J. Watson

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Much ado about "property"

THE Khasi Hills District Council and a few other organisations seem overly concerned about how "Property" is divided among the sons and daughters of Khasi parents. The Khasi matrilineal society has not calculatedly vested the youngest girl with the "property" at the cost of her other siblings both boys and girls because at the time society was not upwardly mobile economically. Most families had just one humble dwelling and because the youngest daughter would be the last to marry it is expected that she would dwell in that parental home for all times to come with the unwritten condition that she would also look after her parents for as long as they are alive. The elder siblings had no option but to move out after marriage because there were not enough rooms or privacy in a small dwelling. For as long as the children were unmarried there was no need for them to move out of their parental home. The idea of property is one that came with the British because they believed in the notion of private property and the commodification of land started thereafter.

Councils are custodians of customary practices. What were the customary practices pertaining to property before the British arrived here. Was there a concept of "property" in Khasi society? How was it integrated into the system? If the District Councils are truly serious about equity in property ownership and the elite capture of land they should be bringing in land reforms now. Why are District Councils then shying away from conducting a cadastral survey so that it is established once and for all as to how many among Khasis actually own property and how many are landless. The issue of landlessness among the Khasi Jaintia community is a more serious and challenging one as it will determine whether the Khasi society is really a classless society that believes in inclusivity and shared property resources. The notion of common property which is low societies began their journey here in these hills has now given way to private ownership models.

The Councils should find out how many Khasi families actually own property? Are there records? If Councils are concerned with the real mandate of the 6th Schedule they should ask themselves what they are doing to address landlessness and extreme poverty among the people they are elected to serve. Councilors must be connected to the people and not be enticed by the VIP culture that defines the governed today. When JIM Nichols Roy asked for special protection for the tribes he did not imagine that a time would come when the very tribes he was trying to seek protection for would be so divided by class - the haves and have nots. This is an issue which if not addressed would have serious consequences for the society.

Letters to the Editor

Accidents on Meghalaya's two busiest highways

The article 'Accidents galore on state's two busiest highways' (ST April 23, 2023) was indeed a wake-up call for the Highway Authorities who maintain the national highways passing through the state. That the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) defended itself by ruling out any engineering fault on the said highways should be taken with a pinch of salt. The recent accident near Sumser on the Umiam-Jorhat highway in which a priest and three nuns were killed by a heavy loaded truck is not the only one which happened at the particular site. In fact, there were earlier instances in which heavy vehicles jumped over the road divider crashing on the other side and such incidents pose a great danger to other vehicles plying on the opposite lanes. In fact, a motorist who travels this particular stretch on a daily basis, I find that the road incline in this particular curve is not up to the prescribed standards.

Drivers of heavily-loaded trucks have to make a great effort to steer their vehicles in order to avoid jumping the divider. The absence of crash barriers along the road divider could further aggravate the situation in case of a road accident.

Yours etc,
Stanley I.K. Dngdoh
Lunsing, R. Bhoi District.

Two wheelers breaking traffic laws

Editor,
Not even 4 months into the year and 3 people I know have been knocked down by scooters/bikes in our very own town! While I appreciate the services provided by 2-wheelers as easy to maneuver vehicles needing smaller parking spaces, and as cash and delivery vehicles, I also cannot overlook how dangerously 2-wheelers are being ridden these days. There is little regard for zebra-crossings, lane-driving and one-way roads. A majority of 2-wheeler riders 'assume' these are meant only for 4-wheelers. Traffic cops

On April 16, this writer attended the episcopal ordination of Bishop Wilbert Marwein at Pyndengri, Nongstoin West Khasi Hills. It was a grand celebration graced by the Nuncio to India and Nepal, most bishops of North East India, hundreds of priests, nuns and joined by thousands of faithful, many of whom couldn't reach as roads were blocked for several kilometers to the venue. The next day's reception and thanksgiving Mass at Ranglang village (parish), his birth place was equally impressive. Nongstoin is initially his a shepherd after 7 years.

Much was spoken and written about the humble background of the newly installed prelate. This author is a neighbour, was a classmate and we grew up together in Ranglang - a village of Ranglang Subdividing in the 1970s and late 1980s. Separated by Dumbrihul hillock on which we used to play to our hearts' content, the young Wilbert unfortunately lost his mother at the tender age of 8 so he and his seven brothers and a sister were brought up by their father. The future looked bleak. Along with other young boys of the village, tending to cows and goats was natural. After attending morning classes in Ranglang LP school, he lost his mother at the tender age of 8 so he and his seven brothers and a sister were brought up by their father. The future looked bleak.

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In LP school (1978-1983) our teachers were late Raphael Lawpinwah, an excellent Mathematics teacher and Christina Lawpinwah (now retired), a dedicated lady affectionately called 'Meidiah Ri' by one and all. She was there during the ordination and thanksgiving Mass, overjoyed at seeing her student now in charge of Nongstoin diocese. From these first two teachers, bishop Wilbert and the rest of us picked up lasting values of life.

After primary school, fortunately the Ranglang High School, then administered from Nongstoin was handed over to the Salesian priests and nuns in the early 1980s. The two storeyed St. Mary's

Beyond the Episcopal Ordination

By Athert Thyrmiang

High school was built in record time, entered high school (adjacent to the LP School) in 1983. 'Bhabah Bel' followed suit the next year. Our first Headmistress was Sr. Odilia Kiarukhi. Her successor Sr. Linda Hume, a person with unlimited energy, gave a double promotion to Wilbert in class V along with two others. Wilbert and his friends, like me, learned to value education from the pioneering nuns and teachers like Eluis Lawpinwah (Babu Elias), Julius Thungim (Babu Jilias), Protasius (Babu Pro), Christopher Siemlich (Babu Kris) and others.

After school we would quickly get home to put away our uniform shoes, tie and belt, take our tools and work in the farm (pub kper, pub kich, langpal, pub phan,



thung riw hahem, the kymbait). Young Wilbert was one of the capable farmers. He had to do household chores too as the youngest and only sister was too little.

Like other boys in the village Wilbert loved football. His height and strong physique made him a formidable centre back. The attraction of football was a times irresistible. Every evening we would play the game at a temporary abandoned patch called 'Kper Panah Lo'. We would take our pots to fetch water but stay on to play football well after dark. Our parents and elder siblings would shout and beckon us home.

Wilbert's horse on orlocks the playground. His father, 'Nah Owar', would often call his son in a deep voice. "Lo het, lo het na cikan neh" (Wilbert come back home). In school during breaks Wilbert was always one of the first to reach the playground with the ball. Every Sunday, after church passing, he was in Madan Sohlylang (Sohlylang playground) along with his friends.

In Ranglang on April 17, I requested my old pal for a short interview of 10 minutes. My questions were: (1) What are the strengths of the diocese? (2) What are the weaknesses (challenges) in the diocese. Unfortunately, the jam packed programme made it impossible to squeeze in even the few minutes. Un-

cles might have grown but the condition of the roads have worsened. Long stretches of the Shillong-Tura highway pass through the area but other than the two-lane road, nothing is worth mentioning. The construction of the Mawnt-Nongstoin, Nongstoin-Walkaj, Nongstoin-Kyrbai and Sunaparbar-Boko roads are going on but other than these there is hardly any significant development. There are still many villages in the three districts unconnected by road. Many villages are cut off because there is no bridge across rivers. Also, vehicles might have come into many homes but houses in Lyngiem, Langrin and areas bordering Assam still have thatched roofs. Poverty persists in the midst of apparent economic improvement.

Tourism is still at a nascent stage due to poor connectivity and non-existent infrastructure. Other than the aforementioned tourist spots, the rest are obscure to the outside world. Recently a film-maker urged the government to convert the proposed inter-district road to Mawkyrat into a national highway for the sake of tourism in the area. People like him said nothing when the two-lane Nongstoin-Ranikor road was cancelled. Film-makers and pressure groups know very well the enchanting beauty of Myntoin, Umduhlin, Walkaj and Phianglang through which the highway would pass. Kyalalungsum, Lang-pait, Kubah and Kubut hills are equally breath-taking as they bring us into a national high way for the sake of tourism in the area. People like him said nothing when the two-lane Nongstoin-Ranikor road was cancelled. Film-makers and pressure groups know very well the enchanting beauty of Myntoin, Umduhlin, Walkaj and Phianglang through which the highway would pass. Kyalalungsum, Lang-pait, Kubah and Kubut hills are equally breath-taking as they bring us into a national high way for the sake of tourism in the area.

On the day of the ordination, I tried to upload a video but undue heavy traffic ensured that the internet service crashed. It took five hours to finally be able to upload that day might have been an exception but otherwise also the network in Pyndengri and Nongstoin is not great. Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma who was there from the previous evening might have noticed the sluggish internet service. It is a diet capital the internet connection is so poor what avenues is the government offering to the people?

Politicians and church officials felt the heat on that day. Yes, global climate change has affected the once cool Khasi Hills but the reason is also because the forest cover is fast depleting. Nongstoin diocese is the worst victim due to the unchecked and rampant deforestation for timber and charcoal.

There are many more challenges. Hope the relatively young bishop promises a more dynamic leadership.

Thank the authorities for this great initiative. That will doubtless, act as an effective deterrent. Their photos should also be posted along with "other criminals" in the police station and SP offices.

Installing CCTVs is another effective way to keep offenders at bay, as suggested by RS Marbanang, Rangbuh Shmang of Wahingdoh. Come what may, there should be zero tolerance against violators of all these regulations. In the meeting, the Chief Secretary ought to thank all support and cooperation of each citizen under the supervision of Rangbuh Shmangs. Of course, a mother alone cannot keep the house and surroundings neat and clean unless the children are cooperative. The Government may also consider honouring and awarding the best citizens and organizations working to raise awareness about the environment and cleanliness.

Yours etc,
Silita
Shillong

How to stop "encounter" killings

By Jagdish Raranani

A lot has been written on the normalisation of what have come to be called "encounter killings", the extrajudicial assassinations by men in uniform that are now taking on a new hue and colour in Uttar Pradesh. While the immediate cause of concern is the 183 "encounter" killings in Uttar Pradesh since 2017, the larger problem is the widespread use of the method across the nation and the public support that such an approach appears to enjoy. Extrajudicial killings make the bizarre claim to a quick delivery of justice by killing the system that is meant to deliver justice. The argument being sold by the authorities and bought by the public seems as simple as it is toxic: We must break the law to maintain the law.

There are a complex set of socio-political, economic and administrative issues that have brought us to this pass. "Encounters" have thrived in the absence of a police force that is unable and unwilling to shake off its colonial hangover, is steeped in corruption, unqualified for professional work and has become a handmaid of power structures within and from outside that make the force work for a select few. Extrajudicial killings, whether at the best of political masters or by a force too stretched to go through due process, are extraordinary excesses. They need extraordinary measures to be put to an end.

A Supreme Court bench of Justices Markandey Katju and Gyan Sudha Mishra on 13 May 2011 went to the extent of calling out fake encounters as the "rarest of rare" variety of crimes that fit the award of a death penalty. In their words, "We are of the view that in cases where a fake encounter is proved against a policeman in a trial, they must be given death sentence, treating it as the rarest of rare cases. Fake encounters are nothing but cold-blooded but brutal murder by persons who are supposed to uphold the law. In our opinion, if crimes are committed by ordinary people, ordinary punishment should be given but if the offence is committed by policemen, much harsher punishment should be given to them because they do an act totally contrary to their duties."

The Justices also warned police officers that they would not get away on the plea that they were carrying out orders from above. In language that was as strong as it could be, the bench recorded the following: "In the Nuremberg trials, the Nazis were criminals took the plea that 'orders are orders', nevertheless they were hanged. If a policeman is given an illegal order by any superior to do a 'fake encounter', it is his duty to refuse to carry out such illegal order otherwise he will be charged for murder, and if found guilty sentenced to death. The 'encounter' philosophy is an immoral philosophy, and all policemen must know this. Trigger happy policemen who think they can kill people in the name of 'encounter' and get away with it should know that the gallows await them."

These are words that ought to be framed and put up in every police post to remind everyone that they do not have to obey orders that are prima facie illegal and violate the law. In fact, this offers a good route to cleaning up a police force that is failing and is taking the Indian State down with it.

In accepting that fake encounters are and will be a way of maintaining law and order, India has collectively accepted that the nation has failed in its basic duties and must resort to extraordinary methods to keep a semblance of order. The implications of this are nothing short of horrific. On the one hand it is India seeing itself as the rising global power, the head of G20 today and with an economy that is the fifth largest in the world by GDP. On the other hand, India is the story of flourishing gangsters who when they get too big must be taken to a secluded spot and shot. Many journalists like this writer are aware of cases where criminals were done away in cold blood. Mumbai is the place where these so-called encounters were carried out at one time. But Mumbai is also an example of what went wrong with this "solution". The gangs that were sought to be eliminated in the wild were actually recreated and reproduced within the police force. Gang 'B' killed members of gang 'A' using the policemen of one unit as their henchmen; Gang 'B' did the same with another police unit to eliminate members of gang 'A'. Both police units involved in the game made money, earned the reputation of being "encounter specialists" and claimed that they were welcomed by the public. The police force became a breeding ground for a new crop of city gangs. We produced gangs in uniform, each trying to rival the other as killings peaked, insecurity rose and the administration had to bring in these methods to deal and initiate action against the fake policemen.

It is a plain fact that every encounter that is not a genuine exchange of fire between two sides, but an under attack of facing bullets from the other side necessarily involves a complete fabrication of multiple legal documents. It is not that inevitably be punctured by later day investigators. The policemen in the current cases in UP will also likely not get away soon from the Supreme Court. This is not petitioned in the matter.

Yet, the menace does not seem to get away; it is only getting worse. We can have the entire set of political leaders for allowing this dangerous slide in governance. But the Indian constitutional system must also throw up solutions that can put the country back on a path of progress that held the promise of reforms in ways not thought of before. Not doing this is to accept that the rule of law has collapsed, which is when we may ask how long will it take for it to be replaced by "the law of the jungle" to use the words of the Supreme Court. This is India regressing, sinking and frittering away all that has been built in the name of our democratic traditions that we think we hold dear.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR, Newes are published) (Syndicate: The Perilous Press) (e-mail: editor@theperilouspress.com)

Spreading of Nongstoin diocese the number of vehicles

Just near Karfikana, under Lunsiding PS, the residents unscrupulously dump piles of garbage, including hard furniture, tins, and wood, sacks full of waste products, into the big passing drain. Those unutilized people have been doing this for the past several decades, and nobody bothered to raise their voices against them. Even Municipal authorities kept quiet when we informed them. I believe similar is the case with hundreds of other drains in the town. Is it not a grave crime to pollute the drains-rivers when climate change is affecting the planet with hundreds of other drains in the town. Is it not a grave crime to pollute the drains-rivers when climate change is affecting the planet with hundreds of other drains in the town. Is it not a grave crime to pollute the drains-rivers when climate change is affecting the planet with hundreds of other drains in the town.

More than anything, the government has now decided to incorporate a provision for "penalizing" polluters. I believe, this is one of the most important measures. The respective Rangbuh Shmangs have been empowered for this. We need to deal with people with sickening habits. No one has the right to release their excrement into the rivers or streams and contaminate the town's environment. Dumping garbage into drains and rivers should not go unpunished any longer.

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Letting to the Editor

Accidents on Meghalaya's two busiest highways

The article 'Accidents galore on state's two busiest highways' (ST April 23, 2023) was indeed a wake-up call for the Highway Authorities who maintain the national highways passing through the state. That the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) defended itself by ruling out any engineering fault on the said highways should be taken with a pinch of salt. The recent accident near Sumser on the Umiam-Jorhat highway in which a priest and three nuns were killed by a heavy loaded truck is not the only one which happened at the particular site. In fact, there were earlier instances in which heavy vehicles jumped over the road divider crashing on the other side and such incidents pose a great danger to other vehicles plying on the opposite lanes. In fact, a motorist who travels this particular stretch on a daily basis, I find that the road incline in this particular curve is not up to the prescribed standards.

Drivers of heavily-loaded trucks have to make a great effort to steer their vehicles in order to avoid jumping the divider. The absence of crash barriers along the road divider could further aggravate the situation in case of a road accident.

Yours etc,
Stanley I.K. Dngdoh
Lunsing, R. Bhoi District.

Two wheelers breaking traffic laws

Editor,
Not even 4 months into the year and 3 people I know have been knocked down by scooters/bikes in our very own town! While I appreciate the services provided by 2-wheelers as easy to maneuver vehicles needing smaller parking spaces, and as cash and delivery vehicles, I also cannot overlook how dangerously 2-wheelers are being ridden these days. There is little regard for zebra-crossings, lane-driving and one-way roads. A majority of 2-wheeler riders 'assume' these are meant only for 4-wheelers. Traffic cops

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