

*"Do something every day that you don't want to do; this is the golden rule for acquiring the habit of doing your duty without pain."*

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

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### No bravado this

AMID continuing provocations of a grave nature from the Pakistani side on Thursday, there is little hope that peace will now be given a chance. In the usual undignified style, Pakistan is chanting peace while acting in a provocative manner even after it took a hit from India in Balakot this week. India should stand its course and carry the engagement forward to ensure that Pakistan effectively puts a stop to the anti-India terror engagements from its soil by rogue elements. This is time for India to make sure Pakistan understands that its policy of promoting terror will not pay anymore. This is not an advocacy for war; this is an advocacy for lasting peace on the subcontinent. Pakistan was given a long rope by successive governments in India, and it's high time that the Pakistani establishment as a whole understands the need to change its style. Balakot proved how India is capable of breaching its defence systems. There is no guarantee now that India will not reach even up to Islamabad or Rawalpindi in the same quiet manner the Americans reached up to Abbottabad and pulled out Osama bin Laden during the Obama years.

India shot down a Pakistani fighter jet, and India lost one jet to Pakistani fire as well. It goes to show Pakistan is well-prepared even as India has a superior fighting capacity up in the sky. India can afford to have a few hits, but Pakistan would do well to check whether it can afford a war at a time when its economic resources are at breaking point. Its close ally, China, has proven in these trying times that the red dragon can be depended on only to an extent. The Russia-India-China trilateral meet this week in which external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj participated in China is a pointer. It condemned terror in the strongest terms through a joint communiqué at this precise hour. The Islamic nations are maintaining a studied silence, or looking the other way when Pakistan is faced with its most troubled times after Balakot. The OIC meet in Abu Dhabi will have India as chief guest, despite threats from Islamabad of a boycott. Pakistan stands diplomatically isolated. What all these go to show is that Pakistan would be hurting itself if it failed to behave now. It's understandable that some "bravado" is being performed by the Pakistani military along the LoC to save face. There too, there's a limit. And, the sooner Wing Commander Abhinandan is returned safe, the better for Pakistan.

# The war on terror: A long haul

By Patricia Mukhim

Terrorists thrive on grievances about one or other issue. The army of terrorists across the world would be equal in number to the armies of several nations put together. Terrorism is a subversive form of warfare because those enlisted on its rolls are there for a cause. They are not army regulars who are looked after by the state. They are indoctrinated into an ideology which has morphed into a radical form of the religion they belong to. They are not there for the money but because of their belief that they are pursuing a holy war. It takes a lot to be a suicide bomber who when in the process of inflicting pain on the 'enemy' would also blow himself up into smithereens. India has seen two prime ministers die at the hands of terrorists. Indira Gandhi was killed by her own guards who were sure she had done incalculable harm to the cause of the Sikhs and their demand for Khalistan by ordering the storming of the Golden Temple. Rajiv Gandhi was the victim of a live bomb from a woman cadre of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who were fighting for a sovereign space within Sri Lanka. India should therefore have come up a counter-terrorism doctrine that has short, medium and long term strategies. This country can no longer become a sitting duck for terrorists striking from across the border or those nurtured on its own soil.

While there are distinguishing features between the Maoists of central, south and eastern India and their terror modules and the terror mongers in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and also large areas within Kashmir, the tactics employed are the same although the motivations are different. The Maoists see the state as their natural enemy; an enemy that has disempowered them, subjected them to gross neglect, confiscated their land and resources through use of coercive measures and taken away their agency to speak up and voice their genuine or perceived grievances. The seeds of terrorism are nurtured in the crucible of collective hurt that is converted to anger. That anger is channelized into a force that is constantly fed by an anti-state propaganda. The anger has to be sustained; so too the non-state forces. Money is a critical resource and it comes from extortion and from public support. Terrorism cannot sustain itself without the support of the local populace that is

conditioned to believe in state failure to address and redress their long-felt grievances and which therefore sees the needs for a counter, redemptive force to avenge those grievances.

In Kashmir, terrorism is sustained by a belief and justification that the Indian state is an occupation force and that the people of Kashmir are victims of an unfinished agenda of Partition. That was evident ever since Sheikh Abdullah refused to extend the rule of the Kashmir state beyond those areas that constituted a Muslim majority area after Maharajah Hari Singh had signed the Instrument of Accession into the Indian Union. This notion of an occupation force gains currency when the Indian armed forces are sent to Kashmir to counter terror. This is an egg and chicken game that has gone on for a long time. One of the grievances of the Kashmiris is also that the plebiscite sanctioned by the United Nations was never carried out.

The following excerpts from history bring out clearly the reasons why the plebiscite was never conducted. Maharajah Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession to India on 26 October 1947 in Srinagar. Before that he has sought help from India to tackle the Pakistan raiders. As soon as the IoA was signed India airlifted its forces to Srinagar on 27 October 1947. India then took the matter to the United Nations (UN). The UN Resolution clearly stated that Pakistan is the aggressor in this case and that the issue is between the independent State of Jammu & Kashmir and India. Pakistan was told to vacate all occupied territory in J&K and handover the vacated territory to India. On its part India had to remove all its forces leaving only enough to maintain law and order. Only when those conditions were fulfilled would a plebiscite be conducted in J&K where people would choose whether they wanted to be with Pakistan or India. Interestingly, Pakistan sought for time to vacate its occupation but it never complied with this UN Resolution.

It would be a good reading for all historians and young scholars trying to understand the real Pakistan to read Prof KK Aziz's deconstruction of history as taught to students in Pakistan. Prof Aziz, a Pakistani historian

studied at the Government College, Lahore, where his teachers included Ahmed Shah Bukhari Patras and Prof Sirajuddin. He went on to teach at Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, Toronto, Khartoum and Heidelberg. According to Prof Aziz who has scrutinized the history books taught in the schools of Pakistan, generations of Pakistani children have been taught lies and untruths. He has documented these misleading aspects of history in his book, "Murder of History." The real history of Pakistan from 1947 is not taught or discussed in Pakistan and is also ignored by Kashmiri separatists despite being aware of the facts.

The division of India into Muslim majority Pakistan and India under the India Independence Act was applicable to areas under British India and not to principalities. Jammu and Kashmir was a principality where the writ of the India Independence Act did not run. Jinnah, the Governor General of Pakistan signed a STANDSTILL agreement that recognised J&K as a sovereign and independent state. On October 22, 1947 Pakistan invaded J&K. This is recorded by the Prime Minister of Pakistan Liaqat Ali Khan in Feb 1948 before the UN fact finding mission when it visited Karachi. One of the clauses in the Indian Independence Act was that sovereign states such as Hyderabad, J&K amongst others had the right to decide whether to accede to India or Pakistan. However since Maharajah Hari Singh was a Hindu while the majority population of J&K was Muslim the Act provided for a plebiscite in the state. But since one third of J&K was occupied by Pakistan in complete violation of the UN Resolution, India could never conduct the plebiscite in J&K. Before the invasion of Pakistan on October 22, 1947 J&K included the present territory of POK, Gilgit, Baltistan, Jammu, Ladakh and Kashmir valley.

Cited below are some of the deconstructions of Pakistan's history books by Prof KK Aziz Citations from the Social Studies book - Mu'ashrati Ulum Prescribed myths: As soon as the partition of India took place "many Muslims began to migrate from the Hindu-majority areas to Pakistan (page 2). Facts: "Many" Muslims from the Hindu provinces did not migrate to Pakistan. A very small minority came over from Delhi, the United

Provinces and Bihar, a tiny trickle from Bombay and the Central provinces and a few hundred families from South India. Had "many" Muslims left India for Pakistan the India of today would not have a Muslim population exceeding that of Pakistan. In the same chapter wars with India are mentioned in patriotic not historical terms. It says, "In 1965, the Pakistan Army conquered several areas of India and when India was on the point of being defeated she requested the United nations to arrange a ceasefire."..... After the 1965 war, India with the help of the Hindus living in East Pakistan instigated the people there against the people of West Pakistan and at last in December 1971 herself invaded East Pakistan. The conspiracy resulted in the separation of East Pakistan from us. All of us should receive military training and be prepared to fight the enemy (page 93).

The real gem according to Prof Aziz appears on Page 139 in the chapter on India which says, "previously it was a part of our country." Aziz asks, Was Pakistan a part of India before 1947 or India a part of Pakistan, the author and the book alone can answer this question. The outer cover-cum-title page informs us that this book, though written in Urdu, is also prescribed for the English medium schools. The following credentials for the book leaves us with no doubt about Pakistan's indoctrination project of its young minds who will all grow up hating the enemy - India.

Mu'ashrati Ulum, West Pakistan Textbook Board, Lahore, 5th. ed., April 1969, pp. 160. Author : Muhammad Abdul Aziz, M.A. (Alig.), M.A. (London), Ph.D. (Indiana), West Pakistan Education Service (Senior), Director, West Pakistan Bureau of Education, Lahore. The title page says it is published for the Board by Qaumi Kutub Khana, Lahore; the outside front cover says it is published for the Board by Pakistan Book Store, Lahore. Print order: 73,000 copies. The present attacks on India are based on these wrong constructs of history which have now become embedded in religious ideology and therefore more difficult to tackle. Imagine several generations being brainwashed to construct an enemy that must be avenged. This makes the war on terror a difficult terrain that would require the best minds to strategise and find a way forward.

Enough is enough. The time has now come to teach Pakistan what is called terrorism in their words and the power of unity that our country has. Right from 1971, Pakistan has been playing with fire. Thousands of Indians including soldiers have lost their lives. We can't walk on the path of peace any longer. We need to show the world that our peace is our strength not our weakness. We should know with whom we are dealing. Even now if we go soft we will continue becoming soft targets of Pakistan. The loss of lives of terrorists is no big deal for them but the loss of lives of our brave jawans is valuable for us. How long will this game of hide and seek continue? Our Indian army is our precious jewel and we can't afford to lose anymore soldiers. Unless we act tough they won't change. India needs to put an end to all the terror outfits situated in their land permanently.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via-Email

Every terror attack an act of war against India

Editor  
The cowardly terrorist attack on our brave security forces in Pulwama, Jammu & Kashmir is condemnable by every citizen of India. India has never bowed before terrorism and will never do.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit  
Ahmedabad

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## India-Pak Airstrikes Dialogue offer is absurd

By Dr. D.K.Giri

India and Pakistan are at war. Pakistan started it by a proxy terrorist organisation JeM with a suicide bomber on our security personnel. In fact, they have been doing it for years. India has been restrained all these years while campaigning internationally against the unabated terrorism sponsored by Pakistani Military, and its intelligence agency ISI. Despite trees of evidence forwarded, Pakistan has been in continuous, duplicitous denial. India has to retaliate as it was an attack on its sovereignty and security as Pakistan again targeted its military. Islamabad reacts to our retaliation in deference to its audience that it can respond. Having done both the aggression on our forces and retaliation to our legitimate strike at the terrorist bases, it invites us to a dialogue. This is simply preposterous.

How low can Pakistan stoop? How shameless it can become and behave like an ostrich. The time has come, as the patience of all Indians has run out on Pakistan, to tell Islamabad that it has to mend its ways or face the disastrous consequences. The menace of terrorism that it harbours will consume Pakistan one day leading to its dismemberment. New Delhi has no choice, for the sake of its own security and in the interest of world peace, the terrorist state of Pakistan has to be made to realise its monstrous folly.

Pakistan ludicrously asks for evidence whenever it carries out a terrorist attack. Can it deny 26/11 attack in Mumbai carried out by LeT based in Pakistan? Ajmal Kasab one of the 10 terrorists caught and tried in India gave ample evidence of how he was indoctrinated and drafted into the attack. Can Pakistan deny the attack in Pathankot in January 2016 by United Jihad Council and JeM? Will Pakistan wash its hands off the attack in Uri in 2016? The entire world knows that Osama Bin Laden, the international terrorist was given safe haven in Pakistan, near the Pakistani military academy?

Can Pakistan deny that Dawood Ibrahim who carried out Mumbai Bomb blasts in 1993 is staying in Pakistan? He is not even hiding there as his daughter Mahrukh Ibrahim married Junaid Miandad, the son of a known Pakistani cricketer Javed Miandad in a normal social function. Why is Iran accusing Pakistan of sponsoring terrorism in Iranian territory? Is there any more evidence required that Pakistan is a terrorist state that survives by feeding on terrorism?

No, Mr. Imran Khan, the new Prime Minister of 'new Pakistan', you do not need evidence, you are a mouth piece of the army making platitudinous statements to cove the terrorist and the nefarious activities of your army. Pakistan army is above any civilian government. The Pakistani government stays in the office at the mercy of the army, which sustains itself on blood money for terrorism in India, Afghanistan and Iran, and unless stopped in its tracks. It might work as mercenaries for other countries too.

Mr. Khan, you issue an invitation in language of blackmail. You say that, "with the kind of weapons that we have, can we, India and Pakistan, afford any miscalculation? Should we not think about the consequences of an escalation at this point in time? If it escalates then it will neither be in my control nor Narendra Modi's. This is why I am inviting you again; we are ready to cooperate in Pulwama investigation, and to dialogue on terrorism. Better sense should prevail."

(The author is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

You had invoked God earlier to say that beginning a war is in the hands of humans but ending it is up to God. Now you are brandishing the nuclear weapons. Is that a posture for peace or trying to blackmail us into a cease fire? Anyone knows well that death and dialogue cannot go together; terrorism cannot be tackled by tokenism for peace.

If you are serious, then for God's sake incarcerate the terrorists moving scot free in your country. Assure the world that no terrorist activity would initiate from Pakistan territory. Declare that we want to resolve bilateral issues with India through dialogue and no violence from your side is resorted to. If one of these two steps is taken by you, New Delhi and Indians will respond favourably.

Since it is hard to trust Pakistani leadership and military, what are India's options at this critical juncture? Surely, New Delhi has to take it to the logical end what it has started in the form of retaliation. It is not just military but all out war against the terrorist state of Pakistan.

To start with New Delhi must realise that Pakistan will not give up its historic hope of tearing Kashmir valley off India unless it is, on this issue, completely subdued. Second, New Delhi should vigorously claim PoK back in order to complete the unification of India. Third, on the lines of apartheid South Africa, Pakistan should be treated as an international pariah. Immediately, India should pull out of the Cricket World Cup if Pakistan is allowed to play.

New Delhi should suspend all ties with Pakistan. It should expose and oppose any country that supports or is silent on Pakistan in its terrorist activities. Fourth, as a lay man, one would advocate the sporadic pounding of terrorist bases in Pakistan. Remember the Indian traditional wisdom, bhay bina na preet, which means there is no sensibility without fear.

Also what applies appropriately to Pakistan as it asks for dialogue, lathon ka bhoot baton se nahin manta meaning the devil only understands a body-wrenching kick not a gentle kiss. So the operation against terrorists sheltered in Pakistan should continue until their last vestige is wiped out. This would be a contribution to the international battle against terrorism.

At home, although there is a definite consensus in Indian politics on the operation of the army in particular and national security in general, the ruling party should be extremely cautious in politicising the current conflict with Pakistan. It should not add PR grist to the theory promoted by Pakistan that this is a military posturing by Modi in the election year. Already 21 Opposition parties have called upon the Prime Minister not to party politicise such a grave national issue.

Without going into the merit of their position, the onus is certainly on the ruling party in a democracy to carry the confidence of the entire political spectrum in times of war as it is the national responsibility of the Opposition to rally behind the government. Any political mis-step either by the ruling party or the Opposition, might affect the morale of the army. As such one of our pilots in Pakistani custody is causing heart burns to Indians. Let us not, at this stage, say or do anything that might affect our mission.

(The author is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### India's relative restraint

Editor  
I have been keeping up with the present skirmishes between India and Pakistan - two nuclear armed neighbors - even as the Korean peninsula changes before our eyes.

Different newspapers express varying views of India's strike against Pakistan. According to one, the international community hopes that India's surgical airstrikes across the "line of control" in Kashmir are more "posturing" than a "prelude" to "all-out war" - pointing out that Imran Khan is just beginning his tenure after winning power in 2018 and Narendra Modi is seeking a second chance in the national polls this spring. While the Valentine's Day terrorist act in Pulwama, Kashmir, and the resulting deaths of more than 40 Indian paramilitary personnel are horrific, some are questioning Mr. Modi's deepest intentions behind this strike. Was it a cynical

self-serving posture to win the elections, or genuine patriotism? Imran Khan's plea to give peace a chance may sound sage and calming. But is it sincere? As former RAW chief, A. S. Dulat suggested, "aggressive diplomacy" (not "coercive action") is the need of the hour.

India's relative restraint in this extraordinary historical moment is admirable. Rational, proportionate self-defense, even if violent, should be distinguished entirely from vengeance. Where the former complies with just war theories, the latter does not. The same Gandhi, who said, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind," yet endorsed violence in self-defense, if the alternative were "impotence" or weakness. India's relative restraint should be contrasted with America's two long lingering vengeful wars, prompted by the tragedy of Sept 11, 2001.

India's restraint is all the more remarkable in the light of two glorious facts in the

history of this ancient civilization. India has never ever conquered other nations. Most of her violence (caste system, patriarchy) has been inward. Instead, India has a long history of being conquered by foreign invaders, whom, as Swami Vivekananda pointed out, India has forgiven and assimilated. To stand up to bullies is the right of every nation. But India's actions would have been still greater if Mr. Modi had joined hands with Mr. Khan to locate and destroy terrorist cells in Pakistan. This, perhaps, is not yet feasible.

Our prayers are with the brave pilot captured by Pakistan - Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, whose dignity, courage, and self-control before his Pakistani interrogators leave us spell bound. His statement - that the Pakistani soldiers, who rescued him from a violent mob, are "thorough gentlemen" - is remarkable, provided he was not coerced. That they served him tea should make the

headlines in the western world.

Mr. Modi and Mr. Khan have the power to make history - by reconciling the two nuclear nations - through positive trade measures and cultural exchanges. At this extraordinary historical moment, led by the weak, who are flipping out in acts of violence - only the morally strong can prevail.

Yours, etc.,  
Deepa Majumdar,  
Viaemail

#### Govt-HNLC talks

Editor,  
Apropos the report, "State ready for unconditional talks with HNLC" (ST. 22 Feb, 2019) I wish to say that if the state government is really ready for the unconditional talks with HNLC as claimed by the Chief Minister, the I fail to understand what prevents it from going ahead. In fact this is the right time to immediately start the process because

*“Grief can take care of itself, but to get the full value of a joy you must have somebody to divide it with”*

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

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### The Hero Returns

The devil must be given his due. With the safe return of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, Pakistan has not only kept its promise but also shown its respect for provisions of the Geneva Convention. Even this much is a major concession from Pakistan, considering that it had no past record of adhering to such international rules when it came to dealings with India. The Kulbhushan Jadhav saga is an for instance and before that the treatment of Nachiketa. What Pakistan now touts as a generous gesture is, however, due to the strong position that the Indian government has taken vis-a-vis the immediate return of a captured fighter pilot. At the same time, apparently to shrug off part of the shame Islamabad and Rawalpindi suffered on September 26, Pakistan continues to indulge in provocations along the Line of Control. This could only further aggravate matters. Wing Commander Abhinandan deserves abhinandan and adulation from all Indians for the way he confronted the Pakistani air formations on February 26. He bravely chased an F16 out of the Indian skies even by daring to cross the Indian side of the skies and he shot it down. Unfortunately, his own MiG-21 Bison was hit by Pakistani fire and he parachuted down to a land which happened to be in the PoK. This is time to salute the bravery of a proud fighter pilot who has a unique family tradition of defending the country from the skies.

The precise manner in which India decimated a terror training headquarters and not inflicting any harm to the civilian population in the predawn strike at Balakot on February 26 earned India more respect. This is the reason why the Organisation of Islamic Countries ignored strong demands from Pakistan to exclude Indian presence at the Abu Dhabi meet of the OIC this week. Even a threat of boycott didn't help change the mind of host UAE or the OIC as a whole. Finally, Pakistan swallowed its threat. This shows which was the wind is blowing, and how Pakistan gets itself isolated. This is time for the Pakistani establishment to see reason and take meaningful steps to wipe out the terrorist bases there that have been working against India for decades. Pakistani's are Indians' blood brothers, estranged since the time of Partition. Prime Minister Modi had once called up on Pakistan to join hands to fight poverty in the subcontinent through positive steps, rather than promoting terror for mutual disadvantage and disaster. Time Pakistan takes note and acts in positive ways.

# Time to act, not pause

By Prem Chandran

Consider the speed with which Pakistan retaliated to the Indian bombing of terrorist camps in Pakistan's Balakot. In less than a full-day's time, its fighter jets crossed the Indian Line of Control and dropped two bombs before the enemy aircraft were chased away by jets of the Indian Air Force. Pakistan lost one fighter jet; and India lost one too, in the face-to-face over the skies. There are lessons from this for the generally weak-kneed Indian leadership which, season after season, fiercely proved their incompetence and a lack of the grit and determination to act. In the process, men unworthy of the posts they held had been taking the nation and its people for granted. The Balakot attack changed the script, boldly, effectively, and in impressive ways. India, for a change, put its best foot forward. This now is time to take matters forward, and not to pause.

Note the fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi showed the boldness to act only after he, his government, and Indians as a whole were pushed to the walls. Had he not acted this time, disaster awaited him at the Polls 2019. Modi had famously vacillated in the past, just as his predecessors Manmohan Singh and Atal Behari Vajpayee, and did little to put Pakistan in its place. He boasted about a surgical strike he did in September, 2016. It was done by some commandos crossing over the LoC in a mild-mannered offensive in the dead of the night. Some damage was inflicted on a terrorist camp there, but the surprise element gave Modi some credit. More importantly, it raised the bar for India's response mechanisms, but not in a very substantial measure.

Indian commandos went five km inside the Pakistani territory and staged the attack then. Now, fighter jets reached up to 80km deep inside the Pakistani territory, some 130km close to the national capital of Islamabad; and very close to the Pakistani military headquarters, and close to Abbottabad where Americans went in and took out Osama bin Laden. Yes, as Arun Jaitley made it clear in the aftermath of Balakot, India has proven now that it is capable of staging an Abbottabad. It must be with a shudder of disbelief that every Pakistani would now be facing the future: they are only at an arm's length from the nasty Indians.

Note the fact that despite Modi's first surgical strike, Pakistan continued to provoke India by sending terrorists through its rogue agencies nurtured by the notorious military intelligence, the ISI.

Pakistan also brazenly continued to violate ceasefire along the border and LoC, frequently, resulting in casualties by the hundreds, overall, but Modi squirmed in his chair and did not take strong action. Question is, if Modi could act now --after the Pulwama suicide bomb attack on CRPF convoy -- why didn't he act effectively all through his five-year-term which is ending in a short while from now? The Balakot attack by the IAF showed that India has had information about a central terror training camp operating there with full backing of the Pakistani establishment. The trainers who created terrorists out of poor Muslim youths there were mainly drawn from officials of the Pakistani military establishment, including retired officials. These trainers were getting hefty pays from what Masood Azher collected in the form of charity from Gulf nations

**The Islamic nations, including the Gulf, are silence personified. For Pakistan's all-weather-friend China, its main obsession now is to save the China Pakistan Economic Corridor project from turning into ashes under Indian bombardment in the event of a war. "Save CPEC, if at all this meant killing Pakistan," seem to be the hidden Chinese script. For, it has invested billions in the ambitious project that's part of Xi Jinping's more ambitious Belt and Road project.**

and beyond -- to educate poor kids, as he had claimed. That education though was also in terror training.

In other words, as we knew all along, Pakistan was engaging in a proxy war with India through the instrument of terror. Modi did not act the way he should have, to end this scourge once and for all. He followed the path of Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi, and of his idol in politics, Atal Behari Vajpayee. Modi has acted now, and fair enough. But, this time too, he took 14 days after Pulwama to send in the IAF Mirage200 aircraft to Balakot. It meant, he, unlike Imran Khan, had crafted no action plan in advance, and no counter-strike mechanism was in place for immediate retaliatory action. This is what the Indian leadership is all about. Modi is still head and shoulders above

his predecessors. By all accounts, he had virtually lost the coming polls even before the polls were called; but, Balakot gives him a fresh lease of political life.

Masood Azhar is a product not only of the Pakistani military ISI but also of Atal Behari Vajpayee. It was under Vajpayee's time that the 1999 hijack of Indian Airlines flight IC814 took place, done mainly by the family members of Masood Azhar, who heads the Jaish e Mohammed based out of Pakistan and targeting India in multiple ways. A weak-kneed Vajpayee released and returned to Pakistan this Masood Azhar who was then in Indian jail -- after his capture from Kashmir, as also release of a set of more terrorists. With this, Masood Azhar became a hero of sorts in Pakistan. Then, in 2001, came the terrorist attack on Indian Parliament. Vajpayee, as PM, blinked again, and did not act. Then came the Mumbai terror attacks, on 26 November, 2008, and the

the issue of nurturing terror in its soil. The US, Russia, the EU, and most importantly China expressed considerable comfort at the way India acted against terrorism -- and against Pakistan. The Islamic nations, including the Gulf, are silence personified. For Pakistan's all-weather-friend China, its main obsession now is to save the China Pakistan Economic Corridor project from turning into ashes under Indian bombardment in the event of a war. "Save CPEC, if at all this meant killing Pakistan," seem to be the hidden Chinese script. For, it has invested billions in the ambitious project that's part of Xi Jinping's more ambitious Belt and Road project. So, one can hazard a guess as to what promise external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj gave to the Chinese diplomat who called on her on Tuesday before her departure to China for the Russia-India-China trilateral meet. And, we heard what the joint communiqué there declared Wednesday: full backing from Moscow and Beijing to the fight against terrorism. This is the predicament that Imran Khan and Pakistan found themselves in; for a change. Coming to the crux, it finds itself with no friend around.

Certainly, this is not the time for India to stop, but time to act. This is time to prove a point. This is time to show Pakistan that India means business when it comes to restoring peace in the sub continent. Pakistan cannot afford a long war; nor can it think of the nuclear option as the entire nation would be finished off in a counter offensive by the Indian side. Big talks by the Pakistani military brass are just about bluff and bluster. India hit the terror training camp in Balakot. But, the Pakistani establishment and in specific the military that worked from behind the Jaish need be made answerable to their deeds of the past and the present.

The story does not end here. The Balakot air strike should just be the start and there are things to do even as the idea is not to go in for a full-scale war. To say that Modi has proven a point is true to an extent. But, he's still at the starting point. He's yet to save his face and restore dignity to India's defence systems. Nothing wrong, if Modi learns a lesson or two from the Pathan on the other side of the border; and vice versa. Peace, after all, is all our birthright.

**The writer is a media consultant, former Editor and campaigner with India Against Corruption. He can be contacted at [premece@gmail.com](mailto:premece@gmail.com)**

# Squeezing the size of maha rallies

By Justice (ret'd) B D Agarwal

Delhi Administration is in the process of enacting a law to limit the number of guests in functions like marriage, anniversaries, family occasions etc. This is with a view to save wastage of foodstuff, avoid ostentatious behavior of attendees of functions, to regulate traffic movements during wedding season etc. Similar laws already exist in some states, albeit in extinct state. However, it is nobody's case to control the so called mob that gathers in political meetings. Reason is simple as neither the bureaucracy has the courage to suggest any kind of curb on political gatherings nor any political party would accept any such suggestion.

India is the second largest populated country in the world after China. Possibly India has the highest number of political parties than any other country. Besides recognized national and regional political parties Independent candidates also wield powers, akin to political parties, in their respective constituencies. Elections are frequently held in India, sometime general Lok Sabha election, sometime State Legislature elections and sometime Panchayat elections et al.

conferencing of meetings etc.

These rallies, while serving the interest of political parties cause a multitude of inconveniences to the people and also affects the proper functioning of the administrative machinery. On the day of public meetings and maharallies transport system go haywire. Traffic is regulated and many busy routes are closed and traffic is diverted. Public roads and parking spaces are invaded by the supporters of meetings and events. Resultantly, school going children, office-goers and housewives have to trade the day with acute hardship.

The political leaders are not oblivious of this fact but choose to remain insensitive and passive to the chaos unleashed by their overtly ambitious rallies. Their lack of concern shows their ignorance about the principles of good governance and the political chiefs overshadow the expectation of people who attend their rallies.

Public complaints regarding this avoidable nuisance may have been muted in the past but now with the popularity of social media people have been

**The political rallies and the so called public events are organized at the cost of gross inconvenience of common people. First of all private vehicles are forcibly hired by the henchmen of political parties. Secondly, poor people are also coerced to attend public meetings alluring them of free conveyance and free food. Poor traders are also fleeced by way of donating substantial amount of money to the organizers of rallies and meetings. Maharallies also require erection of big 'pandals' and expensive set-ups.**

Besides political rallies during election period pseudo/camouflaged political rallies are also organized under the banner of different political parties for the purpose of inauguration of official buildings, bridges, roads and also for launching various government schemes. The inaugurations of buildings, bridges, roads etc are preceded by foundation laying ceremonies as well.

There is a tendency by every political party to demonstrate their strength by holding political rallies as big as possible, which are now being termed as 'Maharallies'. The political rallies and the so called public events are organized at the cost of gross inconvenience of common people. First of all private vehicles are forcibly hired by the henchmen of political parties. Secondly, poor people are also coerced to attend public meetings alluring them of free conveyance and free food. Poor traders are also fleeced by way of donating substantial amount of money to the organizers of rallies and meetings. Maharallies also require erection of big 'pandals' and expensive set-ups. In this digital age there is hardly any need of personal interface. Election manifesto, promises of the political parties, agenda of individual candidates and for that matter issues and concerns raised by any NGO can be easily communicated to the general public through electronic mode, TV channels, video

frequently airing their ire over the issue of unlimited number of invitees to such events. The extravaganza and the inconvenience that is caused to the common people during marriage season may have drawn the attention of the Delhi government. However, the same set of political leaders and bureaucrats are stoically silent about the nuisance that is created during public meetings. The central government should take a cue from this initiative of Delhi administration and think of passing a similar legislation to squeeze the size of political rallies.

Although the innovative idea to control gathering at private functions, with varied objectives, indicates something positive the outcome will be far reaching if political as well as public rallies are also brought within the ambit of a similar legislation by the central government or respective state governments. Limiting the number of attendees by way of squeezing the size of public meetings and public events would eradicate political vices, wastage of public money, eliminate traffic woes on the days of meetings and that would give succor to the common people. However, to achieve this goal the Election Commission of India, bureaucracy and political leadership as well as civil society should play a proactive role from their respective ends. The sooner this step is taken the better for the society.

**(The writer is Former Judge, Gauhati High Court)**

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Salute to our hero!

Editor,

It is a matter of great pride and joy and also a very important diplomatic scoring point that Wing Commander Abhinandan Vartaman the real hero of India has come back safely after fighting in the air to defend India's honour and glory. It is also heartening that we still have these live heroes as role models for our young ones to learn valour from. India unfortunately is a country where politicians make the loudest noise and speak with a pomposity that is so repulsive. The armed forces give their all for this country including flying on aircrafts that are outdated in order to put paid to the plans of enemy planes. Politicians across party lines have always quibbled about purchase of defence equipments. Will they at least agree to a joint meeting each time they have to do major

defence purchases. It is a shame that every defence deal should end up as a scam in this country. This should end once and for all!

As citizens we can do our bit by showing respect to the silent warriors that guard our borders and our skies. It makes me cringe to watch retired generals frothing at the mouth in TV studios and shouting down those with a different opinion from them. Why can't these former generals speak with the dignity expected of leaders of one of the world's largest armies? Incidentally we see only army generals on TV news channels. Admirals and Air Marshals are not regulars in TV studios. Hats off to them for maintaining that discreet distance!

We salute the Vartaman family for producing two generations of fighter pilots for the country. You deserve all our respect.

Yours etc.,  
KM Mishra,  
Via email

#### Walk the talk Mr CM

Editor,

Appropos to our Chief Minister who went on record to say that young people should start looking beyond government jobs sounds hollow. The question is where is the infrastructure and the atmosphere that can allow job creation? We must understand that there is a lot of nepotism, corruption and misinformation concerning vacancies related to government posts available in various departments from the state level down to the block level. There are post retirement benefits given to so-called loyal servants of politicians and such appointments block the future promotion of others deserving candidates. Secondly, how does the job scenario change when the land tenure holding system is itself flawed by not allowing investment to

come in that can provide jobs to many educated unemployed people of our state. We are sitting on a time bomb that would explode into chaos due to rising unemployment. Sometimes hard decisions need to be taken in a holistic manner in the overall interest of the future.

Yours etc...  
Dominic S. Wankhar  
Shillong-3

#### Scientific temper

Editor,  
National Science Day is celebrated across India every year to commemorate the discovery of the Raman Effect by Dr. CV Raman. He got the Nobel prize in Physics in 1930 for this discovery which happened on 28 February 1928. The basic objective of National Science Day is to propagate the message of the importance of

science and its application among the people. The objective of this day of making people aware of the importance of science is necessary to help us discharge our fundamental constitutional duty "to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;" as enshrined in Article 51A (h) of our Constitution.

Unfortunately, there is not enough effort to fight against regressive prejudices. It is an irony that Narendra Dabholkar had to give his life for his endeavour to rescue India from the narrow lane which is potholed with myths, superstitions and prejudices to the constitutional highway of scientific temper. Given that advertisements for vashikaran for taming a person go mushrooming day in, day out, they must have been doing a brisk trade. This means that the umpteenth number of our brothers and sisters are being slow poisoned in the name of vashikaran or

taming!

It is said that every cloud has a silver lining. It is really significant that amidst the hullabaloo over whether women from the age of ten to fifty can enter the Sabarimala temple; a documentary film ~ Period. End of Sentence ~ has got this year's Academy Award. The producer of this film is an Indian. This film reportedly is all about the fight of a group of women against the prejudices associated with menstruation in rural India. The film is a reflection of the real fight against prejudices which are fought every day by some people in our country. They have been trying to save us from having a Period. End of Scientific Temper.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

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# Who benefits from Pulwama?



In an interview with Scott Horton of *AntiWar.com*, South Asian Affairs Analyst Pieter Friedrich discusses the broader context of the latest chapter in the conflict in Kashmir. A partial transcript:

## The Pulwama attack & background on Kashmir

A suicide bomber drove an SUV into a convoy of buses of Indian security forces called the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) — they're a paramilitary that's deployed all over the country — and killed about 40.

Kashmir is in the northern tip of India. It borders on Pakistan. It's been a disputed territory between India and Pakistan since 1947, the same year that both countries were formed. It's a Muslim majority region, but India is a Hindu majority country and Pakistan is, of course, a Muslim majority country. In this conflict, religion is actually one of the main factors that is coloring the conflict. It's far more than just a territorial dispute. India and Pakistan have actually gone to war four times since 1947 over Kashmir. The last time was in 1999.

As far as the underlying reason for the dispute — you know, Kashmir is an interesting area. It doesn't have any real natural resources. It's a small area. It's got about 13 million population contrasted with Pakistan's 200 million people. India's got 1.3 billion. There's no real reason for either country to really want it as part of their territory. There's nothing wrong with the area, it's just they don't have oil, they don't have a lot natural resources, any minerals, or anything like that. The main contention for why they want it over the past 70 years of conflict is, basically, national pride, I would conjecture, and basically a religious conflict between the Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan.

If you look at the history of the region and the origin of the conflict, it began with religious dimensions.

Tracing back to 1947, the British were ruling India. Then, when India got independence from the British in 1947, the British agreed to partition the subcontinent to create Pakistan and create India — especially with a lot of pressure from the Muslim community who were uncomfortable with the idea living in a Hindu dominated country like India. So the British compromised and acceded to their pressure and created Pakistan as a Muslim majority.

That led to a mass migration — two-way migration — as Hindus and Sikhs in what became Pakistan fled to India and then Muslims in India fled to what became Pakistan because neither one wanted to be caught living in that country which was dominated by the opposite religion.

That was actually a little bit south of Kashmir, more along the Punjab region. But Kashmir was among several hundred of what were called "princely states," which were not technically part of the British Raj. They were kind of controlled by the British Empire, but they weren't actually owned by the British and they weren't directly occupied. They had their own autonomy and they were operating their domestic affairs independently.

Kashmir was a kingdom, and it had a Hindu king with a Muslim majority population. The king had the opportunity to decide to join Pakistan or to join India. He was kind of waffling on that and was leaning towards being independent.

Then some other factors began occurring in Kashmir. There was an armed rebellion that broke out in his kingdom of Muslims who wanted to join Pakistan. There was an invasion of tribal people, armed by Pakistan, who came into Kashmiri territory. Then that kind of cause him to lean towards India. He ended up signing an Instrument of Accession and ceding control of Kashmir to India. Then India sent in troops. But right before he did, a couple of weeks before he did that, the maharaja — the king — partnered with a Hindu nationalist organization called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which had been founded about 20 years before in a different area of India and had sprouted up all over India with branches throughout the region.

So the king partnered with the RSS and organized basically a state-sanctioned, state-sponsored pogrom of Muslims in a particular area — Jammu — of Jammu and Kashmir in this northern region. Between them, over a period of about a month — a couple weeks or a month — they massacred probably about 100,000 Muslims. Ethnically cleansed the region of Muslims.

Then, right around then, the king ceded control of the region to India. Around then, India and Pakistan went to war for their first war over Kashmir and all of that happened. But the roots of the conflict really trace back to this religious dimension and especially to involvement of these Hindu nationalist groups, particularly this RSS which is

a paramilitary organization which actually has extensive, extensive influence in India's government today.

Nothing has really happened as far as a resolution for the conflict.

But what did really change was in 1989. So India and Pakistan went to war in 1947, in 1965, in 1971, and in 1999. In 1989, an insurgency started in Kashmir.

The government was dissolved. The Indian Constitution allows the Indian Central Government to impose something called "President's Rule" where, if a state government is determined to not be "functional" then, even though it's democratically elected, the Central Government can go in and dissolve it, then implement direct rule from Delhi. So, in 1989, an insurgency breaks out. In 1990, this President's Rule is established.

In the same year, this new law is imposed called the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which has also been used in multiple other regions of the country. It's a holdover from colonial Britain. It's basically a direct replica of laws from colonial times, of a law that was designed to squash and suppress dissent. It allows impunity for security forces in the particular region where it's imposed. It allows them to shoot on suspicion, to search and seize without a warrant, to detain people indefinitely. But especially it allows impunity. A couple of years ago, in 2016, the Supreme Court overturned the impunity clause of that particular law, al-

paramilitary. He became what's called a pracharak, which is a full-time worker, for the organization. From 1971 to 1985, he was working with the organization. In 1985, the RSS deputed him (or assigned him) to work within the BJP.

From 1985 to 2001, he holds no political office until, in Gujarat in 2001, the state government is declared to be inefficient or unworkable, the Chief Minister is removed, and Modi is appointed in his stead. He's been elected since, and he was elected to that office since, but when he got into his first political office after getting his start with the RSS, he was appointed — not elected. Then, exactly four months after that, his administration was directly implicated in a pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat.

## Attacks on Kashmiris

What's happening right now in India — after the attack in Pulwama, in Kashmir, this suicide bombing — what's happening throughout India right now is actually kind of reminiscent, not in scale but in spirit, of what happened in Gujarat in that pogrom where Modi actually is implicated in orchestrating the pogrom. Which is that, throughout the country of India right now, Kashmiris are being attacked. They're being attacked by mobs. There have been several notable incidents.

In one area, in a city called Dehradun (which is close to Rishikesh which is a hippie hotspot that the Beatles are known for, they wrote a song about

issues in Kashmir that need to be addressed — in relation to the suicide bombing that had just occurred.

Widely throughout India there are these attacks on totally innocent Kashmiris who are being accused of being anti-patriotic, anti-national, or who are just being targeted because they raise issues of human rights in Kashmir.

## BJP campaigns on Pulwama

There are threats of war going back and forth.

India has hiked up tariffs on Pakistani goods by 200 percent. India stripped Pakistan of "most favored nation status." Just the past day, India announced that a treaty they have over water rights — that supposedly they've re-examined it, and based on the treaty they don't have any obligation to actually give any of the water that the treaty covers to Pakistan. So they're just going to cut all of it off now.

There are a lot of talks about war by mainstream Indian television personalities. Arnab Goswami is one of them in particular. There is nothing official yet, but there are talks about that.

According to one Wikileaks document that came out in 2007 from the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, the RSS — in their words — has traditionally been the foot-soldiers of the BJP. They're known for leading the on-the-ground campaigning of the BJP. The head of the RSS just came out saying that they are going to reorient their campaign strategy for the BJP to focus

the government today.

## Current Situation in Kashmir

What's especially important as far as the cooler heads prevailing — according to the official reports, which are acknowledged by India, the actual attacker was a Kashmiri man from the local area who had reportedly, according to his parents and other sources, become a militant after, a couple of years ago, he was in Kashmir, he was professed by Indian security forces. He was beaten. Supposedly he was stopped in the street and forced to actively rub his nose in the ground. That was the straw that broke the camel's back for him and he became militant. So, officially, the guy that actually did the bombing — who knows where he got the explosives from, but he was a Kashmiri.

What's happening right now is that India still has at least 500,000 troops in Kashmir, possibly up to 700,000. Kashmir is an area with 13 million people, so it's a massive, massive troop presence. It's under constant curfew. It's under constant curfew — the internet gets cut off there all the time, sometimes for months at a time. It has ongoing protests and ongoing protests for years.

The Kashmiris aren't happy. And I'm no apologist for Pakistan. Pakistan is a major violator of human rights in the world today, but India is the country with the half a million troops in Kashmir. Kashmiris are the ones who are being occupied by India right now. And

gentry in Punjab, to the south of Kashmir, where Sikhs were agitating for an independent state. They were also under de facto occupation by the Indian Army. Tens of thousands of them were also being disappeared.

This Kashmiri human rights lawyer who was murdered in 1996 — about six months before that, in Punjab, a Punjabi human rights activist named Jaswant Singh Khaira was reaching out to international communities. He'd actually just gotten back from Canada, where he'd been reaching out to the Canadian Parliament. Reaching out for them to pay attention to evidence that he'd uncovered, which has since been widely proven, that the Indian security forces were picking up Sikh youth, killing them in custody, and then cremating their bodies to dispose of the evidence.

This guy, Khaira, in Punjab, in September 1995 — six months before the Kashmiri guy is murdered — he's picked up by Indian police. He's disappeared for a couple of months. His case was actually widely talked about in U.S. Congress at the time. Then later it came out that he was tortured, and killed in custody, and his body was dumped, I think, in a canal. Since then, cases were filed. That was 1995. In 2011, sixteen years later, six police officers were convicted and sentenced to life for the crime.

So it's totally on record that this guy was murdered by the Indian security apparatus. He actually documented about 25,000 Sikhs in Punjab that, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, had been "disappeared" and murdered by Indian security forces. That's at the same time that this guy, this Kashmiri human rights attorney, Andrabi, is documenting 40,000 Kashmiris being "disappeared" and murdered by Indian security forces.

As far as cooler heads prevailing, there's bigger context as far as the 70 years of history of unrest and dispute in Kashmir. There's also bigger context as far as the decades of human rights abuses, of atrocities, of mass murder of tens and tens of thousands of people. Undisputed mass murder — of innocent civilians as well as insurgents.

## What role should the US play?

To really pinpoint the issue, it's much more than just a territorial dispute. There's so much as far as religious dimensions to this. But, why this conflict over Kashmir? Kashmir doesn't have natural resources. It doesn't have anything particularly worth claiming it as one country or the other demanding that they must have it. Really, what it strikes me as being about, is just about pride. Just about how they want that feather in their cap. They don't want to admit defeat — or compromise — or they view any compromise as admitting defeat.

If the U.S. has any role to play in this at all, then it should be in hosting peace talks. And it should be in advocating for peace and for freedom. And that's the beginning and end of it. The be all of it.

But what we have right now in the U.S. as far as its relationship with India is that there's been a major shift. The U.S. is pulling strings, and playing this Great Game, and trying to balance powers against powers in the world. It used to be rather pro-Pakistan, now it's shifted to be pro-India — I don't believe it should be either. But it has shifted to be pro-India at the moment, and it's seeing India as kind of a balance against China. It has drastically increased its strategic alliances, its military alliances, with India.

A lot of that is really, really, really strongly motivated by an India lobby in the U.S. "India" lobby is not necessarily the correct word because it's more a Hindu nationalist lobby. It's deeply affiliated with the BJP and deeply sympathetic to the BJP, and is primarily backed by U.S.-based affiliates of the RSS and other Hindu nationalist outfits. They have, for years, worked very hard and have a very strong incentive to prevent the U.S. from even mentioning that there might be human rights issues in India.

They have specifically worked against a couple of different resolutions in U.S. Congress — the last one was in 2013/14 — worked to kill them despite those resolutions being bi-partisan supported. They've protested any time the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, for instance, has had hearings. They've gone out of their way to protest that.

It's bizarre, because if you look at all the saber-rattling from the U.S. against Iran — and Iran, whether or not they should have nuclear weapons, they've actually signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) — India hasn't signed the NPT. In fact, they actually haven't signed a large number of other UN international treaties, including the Hague convention for the International Criminal Court. They've signed, but they've never ratified the convention against torture. Torture is basically legal in India, and it's widely practiced today.

(Pieter Friedrich is a South Asian Affairs Analyst)



Fear all around: Security personnel stand guard along a road during restrictions in Downtown Srinagar. PTI

low it remains in place in Kashmir as well as a couple of other regions of India, including Manipur. They stripped away that impunity clause, but the law still allows Indian security forces in the regions where it's imposed to do just about anything and get away with it.

## Who benefits from Pulwama attack?

Maybe the ISI is behind it. Maybe Jaish-e-Mohammed is behind it, which is the group specifically that is accused in this attack. Maybe Lashkar is behind it. One thing I do know is that the timing is very, very dubious. Nobody benefits from the attack that just happened, from the timing of it right now, except for potentially the current ruling party, the BJP — which is a Hindu nationalist party which is basically directed controlled by this paramilitary, the RSS, and which is working for re-election over the next few months. April-May is the General Elections for India. They've been in power since 2014. Their five years are up. Nobody benefits. The militants don't benefit. Pakistan doesn't benefit. The only people that benefit, and they are aware of it, is the BJP.

The day after the attack occurred, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the BJP was in the most populous state of India, Uttar Pradesh, and he was saying that people should vote for the BJP because it will bring a "strong government" at the Centre which will bring "glory for India on an international stage."

Modi is an RSS member. He's the Prime Minister of India, but he got his start in 1971 as a member of this RSS

Rishikesh). In this city of Dehradun, at this one university, there are a lot of Kashmiri students. And Kashmiri students have been posting on social media, and it's being widely reported on Indian mainstream media, about how they're being besieged in their dormitories by mobs of people who are apparently being fielded by these Hindu nationalist organizations who are coming and shouting things like "shoot the traitors." Then these students are saying that they're reaching out to police for help and the police are responding to them that, "Well, no, you should go out and apologize to the mob." That the Kashmiri students, in a totally different area of mainland India, should go out and apologize to these mobs of Hindu nationalist mobs for the suicide bombing that occurred hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of miles away in Kashmir.

There was a young man who was in his home. He had posted something on social media that was discovered and people were saying was "anti-national." A mob went to his home, went in, filmed the whole thing on Facebook Live, dragged him out of his home into the street, paraded him around the street half-naked, and then draped an Indian flag over his naked torso. Then filmed him while they made him say "Bharat Mata Ki Jai," which means "Hail Mother India," and filmed it.

There was a teacher that had a mob come to her at night in her home. They surrounded her home, filmed the whole thing on Facebook Live, and were berating her. In this case because she had posted things on Facebook talking about how there are human rights

on anti-terrorism in the wake of this Pulwama suicide bombing.

Previously, their primary campaign plank had been the building of a temple to the Hindu god Ram in a disputed religious site in the state of Uttar Pradesh. If you want to talk about Americans being ignorant of Indian politics, most Americans probably have no idea that a central aspect of campaign promises by this ruling political party in India right now, the BJP, is promising to build a temple for the Hindu god Ram on a site that actually used to be occupied by a mosque — then, in 1992, that mosque was torn down by a mob that was incited by the president of the BJP at the time.

It is a religious nationalist controlled government right now in India. Aside from the talks of war, aside from the threat of nuclear conflagration — aside from all that, there is the issue of yes, Pakistan is a Muslim State but India is de facto a Hindu State. It's even more so at the moment because it's controlled by an openly, blatantly Hindu nationalist political party which is controlled by this RSS paramilitary.

If you trace back to the founding of the RSS — why it was founded in 1925 and then what its founders were saying from the 1930s, 1940s, 1960s — it was saying that Muslims especially but also all non-Hindus in India are a threat to India and are, in so many words, "traitors." And, especially, that anyone who converts to a non-Hindu religion like Islam or Christianity is guilty of leaving Hinduism for the "enemy camp" and basically of being anti-national.

This RSS — it's no over-exaggeration to say that they virtually control

they are deeply, deeply unhappy. They are deeply, deeply oppressed. And tens of thousands of them have died.

## Bigger Context: Kashmir & Punjab

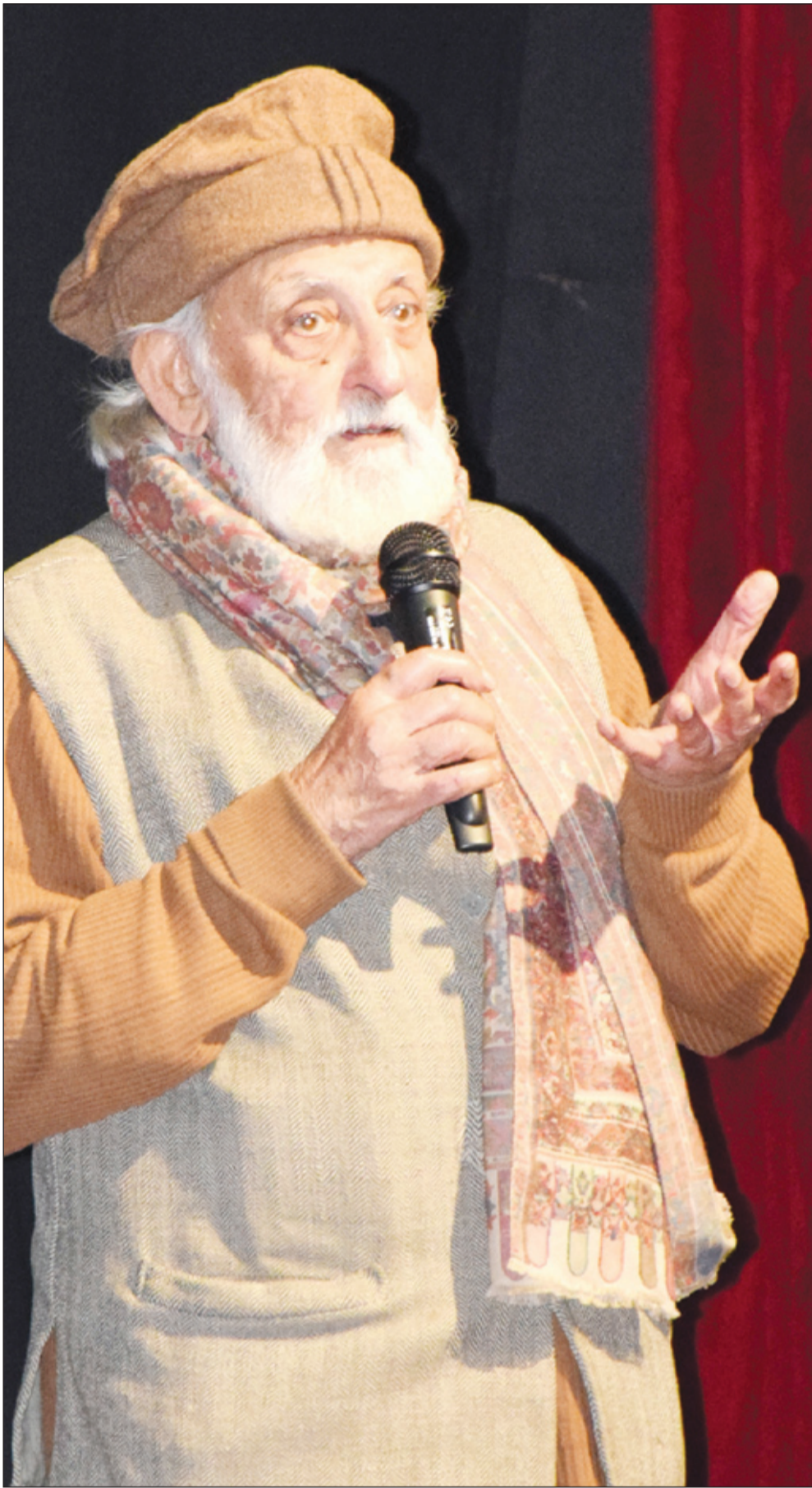
As far as cooler heads prevailing, one thing that I would hope the cooler heads would keep in mind is the bigger context of the Kashmir issue. That this is not an isolated incident — this latest suicide bombing — and that conflict has been going on there for decades and decades. And that tens and tens of thousands of Kashmiris have been killed by the Indian security forces, including human rights defenders.

One guy in particular was named Jilil Andrabi. He was a Kashmiri human rights lawyer. In 1996, just after he'd been reaching out to the UN and just before he was scheduled to go and visit the UN in Geneva, I believe for the second time, he was picked up, while he was with his wife, by Indian Army forces and "disappeared."

Then, for a couple weeks, the Indian Army denied that they had him in custody. They said his body washed up in a river, tied up in a sack, hands tied behind his back, eyes gouged out, facial bones broken, and with a gunshot to the back of his head.

He was saying, before he was murdered, that in 1996 — five, six years into this Kashmiri insurgency — that India had probably killed about 40,000 people, including men, women, and children.

Once again, as far as cooler heads prevailing and bigger context, that at the time wasn't even isolated to Kashmir. There was also an ongoing insur-



MS Sathyu speaks in Shillong after his troupe's performance at U Soso Tham Auditorium. Photo by Sanjib Bhattacharjee

# 'Language is a barrier but theatre can break it'

It is not surprising that many people in Shillong do not know MS Sathyu as it is difficult to find a courageous filmmaker and artiste as him in today's India that is battered and bruised by surgical strikes by bigots and rabble-rousers. The national award-winning filmmaker and thespian was in the city with his theatre group to participate in the ongoing Rashtriya Poorvottar Rang Utsav at U Soso Tham Auditorium.

From movies, theatre to politics, Sathyu can speak on anything with equal severity. But his conversation with *The Shillong Times* remained restricted only to the two art forms of which he is a master.

The poor fallout at the play, *Gul-e-Bakvali*, performed by MS Sathyu Productions and Amateur Dramatic Association did not dishearten the veteran artiste. In fact, at the end of the show, he said, "If we as theatre persons can connect even to one person sitting in the auditorium we think we are successful."

This is not the director's first time in the northeastern region and he had visited Assam, Manipur and Tripura in the past.

Talking about theatre in the North East, Sathyu said Manipur has a vibrant theatre scene with thespians like Heisnam Kanhailal, Ratan Thiyam and several groups. "In Guwahati there is little bit of activity but here (in Shillong) I don't know much but it seems it is devoid of theatre and I don't know why. It is sad. I hope this national festival makes people interested in theatre," he added.

Language, Sathyu pointed out, could be a factor for plays performed by groups from outside not attracting too many people. "The local language is Khasi and there is not a bit of Hindi. They know only English, besides the local language. But this is a multi-lingual festival. It is good for people to know and be exposed to what is happening outside their state, which ultimately will inspire people to start something indigenously. This festival is a good idea. In many plays, there are a lot of music and dance and not just words. So even without understanding the language one can connect to a play," he said.

Sathyu asserted that theatre, like films, has its own language and grammar and it can break any kind of barrier, including that of language, because "it has its own expression that will reach the audience".

"Some nuances may not reach but that does not matter," he added.

The play that Sathyu's troupe presented was in Kannada. It was based on an original popular fairy tale written in Persian. Many films in different Indian languages were also made based on the story that has originated from the banks of the Narmada.

Sathyu's production has a new script in musical format and has been performed across the country, the recent being in Nagaon and

Guwahati. Sudhir Attavar is the playwright.

Sathyu said he brought together the group of 22 young actors without on-stage experience only for this play. The actors were trained in theatre, dance and music for 40 days before they were presented on stage.

## Assamese films are thought-provoking

The conversation took a turn from stage to screen and focused on films made in northeastern states. Sathyu said he saw a Khasi film recently that was shot in Meghalaya and he liked it. "A lot of good movies are being made... The state has a tradition of making good films. However, the number of films in Assamese is not as high as in Bengali or Bhojpuri where many commercial films are made. Here (in Assam), more thought-provoking films are made," he said.

Talking about the reach of regional films, the Padma Shri awardee reiterated that language should not be a barrier. "Maybe you need 5 to 10 minutes to grasp the language but after that you can understand. All performing arts are like that."

## Theatre halls should be maintained and managed by someone who knows about it, a professional and not some officer who knows nothing about this art form. But the government does not think about it

### Need infrastructure

Sathyu said government help is necessary for regional films to survive the competition. According to him, fund should come from the government and the Department of Culture in every state should have a dedicated wing for this.

"There should be infrastructure building. Every state should create an equipment bank so that filmmakers can rent instead of going outside the state and spending more. And infrastructure should not only be for films but also for theatre. You need a theatre hall, proper stage, lighting facilities and not like here (in Shillong). We have been struggling since morning... it (the auditorium) is ill-equipped," the veteran artiste sounded annoyed.

He pointed out that while the stage is small with less wing space, a piano kept on one of the wing sides is blocking the actors' movement and there was no one to shift it. "Theatre halls should be maintained and managed by someone who knows about theatre, a professional and not some officer who knows nothing about this art form. But the government

does not think about it."

### Oscar for India

When asked about *Period. End of Sentence* winning the Oscar, Sathyu said he did not see the documentary "but it is a good thing that something like this is being shown".

"Winning is not important but that it has been selected is itself a big achievement. Getting award is unimportant but that a film has reached there (to so many people in another country) is a great honour," he asserted.

On regional films not making to the elite lists of awards, Sathyu again pointed out the role of government and the need for a cultural policy.

"The investment made in a film is very high and that much money will not come back through marketing. There are few cinemas to show these movies. There should be a cultural policy. Any government should not think in terms of earning profits but as propagation of culture. It is similar to encouraging research. It is not always that you gain profits from a research work. Instead of thinking about earning back the money all the time, one should take it as a cultural movement that you are giving to the people and enlightening them. That itself is your profit," he elaborated.

He also stressed the need for multiplexes making space for small-budget movies in local languages at a lesser entry fee.

"There should be some policy for this. You cannot just give licences to multiplexes to show some trash. Most of the time they screen trash to earn money. Government should encourage people to watch quality movies by controlling ticket rates," Sathyu aptly said.

### IPTA in today's India

Asked whether an IPTA-like movement is possible today, Sathyu emphasised that the Indian People's Theatre Association is flourishing even after 75 years. "There are a lot of people now involved. In Patna, we had a conference on the 75th anniversary and nearly 1,400 delegates from all over the country participated. There were seminars and discussions and other activities. It was possible because IPTA is a movement and not an individual's theatre," he said.

### Censor board & films

Sathyu said though the board claims that it does not have censorship and is only a certification body, censorship is "very much there".

"What does the term certification mean? It is a kind of a state control over freedom of expression. There is also super censorship. Some local or political organisations take objection to certain films without even watching them. But I think the government should not encourage such things. These local bodies vanish after being hefty paid. These things should stop. Instead of censoring films, the government should censor these people," said Sathyu, who still can be acerbic and critical about the drawbacks in and the hypocrisy of the system.

~ NM

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 3, 2019

Sun is forming an angle of 80 degrees with Jupiter on your solar return chart requires change of plans at regular intervals if you want to remain on the top of things. Just when you thought that things were moving smoothly there could be snags and delays and unforeseen obstacles - the best way would be to regroup your thoughts and change your direction or approach. While handling all this heed the advice of a mentor. Be ready to grab opportunities that come your way in the latter half. You are more expressive on the romantic front and time spent together is in store for you. Health should not be ignored as minor ailments could become long drawn if left unattended.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

The week begins on a positive note. The planetary configuration indicates that your efforts, confidence and courage bring success in monetary gains and your energy increases for work projects. Your job environment is lively. Your outlook on life has been a little more serious and responsible. In the past while, you might have reached out to others in an attempt to validate yourself, looking for ways to boost your confidence. Health is likely to prosper and medical procedures or programs, if necessary, are more likely to be successful.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

This week brings love, harmony and entertainment in professional and personal relations. Your physical body and mannerisms are a focus. There would be a newfound identity and a realistic understanding of your own limitations and your capabilities as well. In terms of career and projects, outward signs of progress would lay a foundation for future success and progress. Lifeless or outworn relationships may have been especially hard to bear for you. You could take up some form of physical program that completely changes the way you feel about yourself. The things that give you joy and positive feedback figure prominently and you feel renewed and regenerated.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

This phase brings success in professional and personal relations. You would feel particularly strong and personally powerful. There is no such thing as playing the victim, you're the victor and you feel it. You enjoy an increased ability to concentrate and focus on what really matters to you. It would be wise to make something of your hobbies—even if it doesn't bring an income, you might find that expressing yourself creatively really helps to define yourself and to understand yourself better. Health is likely to be balanced.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

This is favorable period for hobbies, sports and competitive exams. Your creative abilities are reflected in your outlook on life and love and romance are life experiences you strongly identify with. You display great skills in sports or physical activity that wins you appreciation and an opportunity to travel. Try to be just and fair when making decisions, as you do your best to see both sides of an issue. People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality. You are bolder in expressing your love, yet not aggressive either. Artistic self-expression is important, possibly through music, fashion and writing. A strong desire for companionship dominates at this time.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

The first phase of this week increases confidence and courage at work place. It's a great time to do something entirely new and pioneering. Discussions and ideas about finances and material security figure strongly. Although you like the good things of life and may spend quite a bit on clothes, furniture, and entertainment, your innate sense of security will not permit you to go overboard to the point of extravagance. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this planetary placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)**

An excellent week for money, career, and romance awaits you. Friends and loved ones take priority. You don't find yourself lacking in opportunities to socialize. You are likely to enjoy a strong feeling of happiness and solidarity in friendship, or with groups of like-minded individuals. You

are more peace loving than usual and slightly detached on a personal level as you feel drawn towards religion and spiritualism. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don't waste your energy.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

The planetary configuration brings success, responsibility and maturity. You have much energy for new moneymaking projects, or for stepping up existing ones. Matters of the heart touch you deeply. You may willingly play a supportive role to the family and offer compassion and selfless love. This is a rather happy, goal-oriented time on the professional front. Relationships take on a fun outlook and activities with children increase. You possess extra charm in your professional interactions. A new affair is in the offing for the unattached. More opportunities to socialize and network could present themselves now.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

This period is good for money, family, status and happiness. Money matters come into focus for you. You adopt a serious approach to business because you are in the spotlight. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is apparent. Being part of a community or circle of friends and building your social network is important to you at this time. Your love life is more attractive and charming. Public relations work, marketing, promotional activities and other such endeavors are favored now. You may face some minor ailments on the health front.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

Diplomacy, correctness in manner, finesse, and charm will be a big plus in aiding financial gains, especially in areas requiring public contact. You feel drawn to intellectuals with whom you can communicate well and exchange ideas. You know how to relate to others and you do so in a natural and warm manner. Your vision is practical right now, and you want to see tangible results for your efforts. Recognition is likely to come your way whether you ask for it or not along with the responsibility that comes right along with it. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are in the limelight during this phase.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

This is an excellent time to create a budget or financial plan, or to rid yourself of old habits that undermine your sense of personal power and self-mastery. Smoothing out your close personal relationships is what makes you happy. If single, you are more than willing to enter into a committed relationship. In general, you are adaptable when it comes to your affections. You pour more energy into self-promotion or business activities. Foreign places may particularly appeal now. You tend to be expansive and generous when it comes to love. Dealing with one situation at a time releases some tension and anxiety.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering at this time. On a more practical level, you may be dealing with joint finances and shared resources. Social life takes priority in your life. You would become serious about family relations and feel responsible towards them. Social interactions of a personal, one-on-one kind are emphasized. Conflicts with a partner over values or personal possessions are likely to occur. You are more willing than usual to explore life's secrets. Taking care of business is your main focus. A health routine started now is likely to be successful.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

This is a generous, pleasantly emotional, and creative phase. Striking a balance between your attention to your career and to your family life is necessary. Taking steps to improve your family and home life as well as your career and public life will be in order. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. It's important to include others rather than to go solo for the time being. However, bending too much to the will of another is not advised either.

# Compassion comes first

By Ranjan K Baruah

One may not imagine the pain which is undergone by patients or families of patient suffering from cancer. Though there are many cancer survivors, there are many who died due to cancer. A person not only becomes ill from health perspectives but s/he faces many other issues.

Any one visiting cancer hospital or meeting the families of cancer patient would understand the challenges and pains faced by them. Seeing many patients and their condition, I have been always wondering what best our young people may do to extend their support. I am discussing about a field where we need to work on and there are opportunities for students and young people to get involved and make some differences.

We are discussing about palliative care and how one may be associated with this sector and help many families in need of care and support.

Palliative care is an interdisciplinary approach to specialised medical and nursing care for people with life-limiting illnesses. It focuses on providing relief from the symptoms, pain, physical stress, and mental stress at any stage of illness. It is appropriate at any age.

Although it is an important part of end-of-life care, it is not limited to that stage. It can be provided across multiple settings including in hospitals, at home, as part of community palliative care programs, and in skilled nursing facilities.

Palliative care is a term derived from Latin palliare, "to cloak". It refers to specialised medical care for people with serious illnesses. A World Health Organisation statement describes palliative care as "an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families



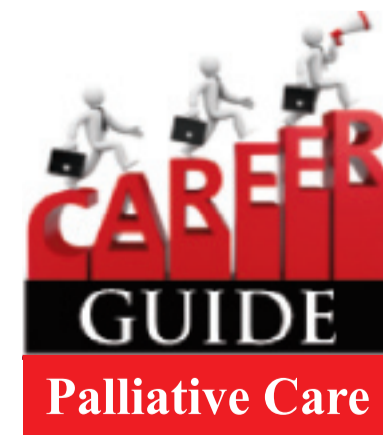
facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment

healthcare professionals who can also deal with issues apart from activities of physicians.

Students from social work or psychology may choose to be in this profession. It is not necessary to be academically sound for those who are passionate to work with the people who need care and support. Poor people coming to cities from rural areas or travelling to other metros for health care need many support, including logistics.

There are several renowned institutes which are now offering specialised courses for those interested in carving out a career in this sector. The Indian Association of Palliative Care conducts courses (certified and fellowship) for doctors, nurses and volunteers in several institutes across India. There are many societies working in this field where one may get involved as professionals or as volunteers. One must be passionate and ready to help people to be in this field as it needs lots of patience and helping attitude all the time.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at [bkranjan@gmail.com](mailto:bkranjan@gmail.com) or 8473943734 for any career related queries)



of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual."

Apart from being doctor who are expert on treating the diseases some other options include nursing support, outpatient palliative care social worker, clinical social worker, psychologists, etc. We have seen how cancer patient faces emotional and psychological problem, so we need

*“Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please.”*

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2019

### Council Poll Results

AS expected the election results to the two District Councils were a mixed bag. While the Congress did well in the KHADC, the NPP scored well in Jaintia Hills. Interestingly a video that has gone viral shows the NPP MLA and minister Sniawbhalang Dhar preventing non-NPP voters from casting their votes and literally telling them to get out of the queue. Both money and muscle power have played a dominant role in the Jaintia Hills this time too. The return of a few political stalwarts like Paul Lyngdoh, Ronnie Lyngdoh, Martle Mukhim and PN Syiem to the KHADC might help inject more pragmatism in the Council. Hopefully this time the Council will not threaten to exclude its own people merely because they exercise the right of choice in their personal lives. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was enacted to empower the tribes, who were, at the time of Independence, part of the larger state of Assam with a majority non-tribal population. Interestingly, it was not the Sixth Schedule that came up with a protective clause to prevent land alienation. The state legislature enacted the Meghalaya Transfer of Land Regulation Act 1978 which prohibits sale of land to non-tribals except if it is in tribal interest. There are records to show that the British brought all of Jaintia Hills under its revenue jurisdiction. The Jaintias were asked to pay land tax to the British, which they disagreed and for resisting which the freedom fighter Kiang Nangbah was hanged in the market square. Historians claim that in Jaintia Hills land is owned by the state unlike in Khasi Hills where land is owned by communities, clans and individuals with Government owning only some revenue plots.

The District Councils on their part seem to have lost control over many of their mandated duties of protecting forests, rivers and natural resources. Actually it is the Councils that should be the real custodians of the environment since it is directly linked to human health and sustainability. But a look at the mining activities (both coal and limestone) reveal that the Councils have simply washed their hands off the responsibility of preventing extractive mining without environmental protection laws in place. Protecting the rivers from pollution is also the brief of the Councils which they have disregarded all these years. The Umkhrah, the Myntdu, Lunar and Lukha which are defiled must receive the attention of the Councils. The Councils also have to take a call on pro-actively promoting the language and culture of the tribes and not leave this entirely to the State Government.

# ADC Election: A Second Division League

By HH Mohrmen

The Autonomous District Councils are sometimes called the springboard to the Assembly or ladder to the next political hierarchy but now it has also become a place to rehabilitate candidates who were defeated in the last MLA election or even former MLAs themselves. Many former MLAs are now returning to active politics albeit in the Autonomous District Council. The ADCs are therefore no longer just training ground for junior politicians, but even defeated politicians find refuge in the Councils. It has become a place to cool their heels and prepare themselves for the next Assembly election. In spite of that, the way the recent election to the Khasi and Jaintia ADC was conducted led much to desire for.

The results of both the Khasi and Jaintia hills ADC elections are now out and as expected the voters did not give a clear mandate to any party, in both the Councils. So as usual an Executive Committee of political alliances is the only alternative. And in the absence of the anti-defection law in the Council, horse trading is on the anvil and it will not be a surprise to see Members of both Councils switching sides at the first opportunity. The question on everybody's mind is how long this EC will last? Or how many ECs will we have during the tenure of the present House?

In the Khasi hills, it is interesting to see that this time around there is mixture of old hand and first timer MDCs elected by the people. Many former MLAs and even former Ministers both from the Indian National Congress and the regional parties were re-elected. This is a good sign that the Council is in good hands. In fact the Council is into an interesting term. Of course there are allegations of money being used to influence voters and in some cases like in the Pynthor Umkhrah constituency, it was reported in the media that supporters of PN Syiem were caught red-handed trying to influence voters by using unfair means. It is also ironic that the culprits were apprehended by the public and not by the enforcement agency. The question that we need to ask is "Where were the enforcement agencies?"

Compared to the last

election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, the elections to the two ADCs was quite different especially from the way the model code of conduct was enforced. It can be concluded that the Model Code of Conduct was not even seriously enforced in the two Jaintia hills districts. Unlike in the previous elections, there were no flying squads instituted, neither were there videographers to help the election officers or the respective returning officers conduct a free and fair poll. This is the reason that unlike in the last LA election, there is no report of police or the flying squad apprehending people who carries money beyond the permissible limit during the campaign and voting period.

Instead, in some cases it was the public themselves who apprehended people who

**The other question is if no person was captured carrying money beyond the permissible limit, can we then conclude that money did not exchange hands during this ADC election? Those who run the election need to ask this hard and difficult question, if their goal is to run a free and fair election and to help improve democratic process in the state.**

bribed voters, filed an FIR against the alleged culprit and shared the videos on social media platforms. A case in point is the incident which happened in Ummulong, in which it was alleged that even a former lawman was involved in the act. The other question is if no person was captured carrying money beyond the permissible limit, can we then conclude that money did not exchange hands during this ADC election? Those who run the election need to ask this hard and difficult question, if their goal is to run a free and fair election and to help improve democratic process in the state. Not only money power influenced the election this year, but people also profusely used muscle power during the election.

Use of muscle power began when leaders of the Shngong, the Raids and in some case even Elekas were found supporting a particular candidate. The respective Shngong, Raid or

Eleka once they were able to get the support of the majority of the leaders in their respective organisations came up with a resolution and made it public through media report that the Shngong, Raid or Eleka is unanimously supporting a certain candidate. Even if the organisation is unanimous in their decision which is of course impossible, the question is whether it is legal for institutions like the Dorbar Shngong, Dorbar Raid or the Eleka to involve in such activity? What does the Jaintia Hills Village Administration Act say about this?

The other question is also how the Dorbar Shngong, Dorbar Raid or Eleka enforce its decision even on those who are supporting candidates other than those supported by the Shngong or the Raid? Isn't this a case of violation of the very essence of the right of

activities in the future. The point is that until and unless we have clean elections, the election we have will also not be fair and the outcome of such election is that we will get the kind of leaders we deserve. Such a process will not usher in real democracy, but will only help bring a pseudo-democracy.

The people are expecting the outcome of the inquiry about the video which is doing the rounds in the different social media platforms which was also widely reported in the press, of a minister in the government who abused his power and position in the polling station in his village while the election process was still going on. The Deputy Commissioner West Jaintia hills has announced that an inquiry would be conducted on the video which shows the Minister of the NPP-led government in the state playing the role of a police personnel to ask the people to make a queue and instructed that only those who supported his candidate should stand in the queue. If the Minister has to direct the voters in the polling station to stand in a queue, then where are the security personnel appointed in that polling station?

A minister who had won the election several times cannot feign ignorance and claim that he is not aware of the rules that he cannot be within a few metres radius from the polling station. This is obviously a case of abuse of power and violation of the election rules and the government needs to act against such transgression. The people will wait and see what the CEO or the Returning Officer do and what action they take in this high profile case in which the minister was allegedly involved in violation of election rules? Will they just watch and see and in few months time forget about the inquiry and let go?

The pertinent question is what kind of message do we want to send to the public at large? If the goal is to conduct a free and fair election then the government must act, but if the government does not consider the ADC elections as serious as the LA or MP election, then it is also safe to conclude that the ADC elections are inferior as the ADC is but a second division league.

inhabitants become managers of their forest land. So, we need to immediately implement the 2006 Forest Rights Act in the remaining 97 per cent of the forest area.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

### Gender equality begins in the family

Editor  
The family is the best social platform through which any initiative for gender equality could be properly addressed. The first step is the acknowledgement of the fact that we need to accept the reality that men, women and people of third or alternative gender are all equal and should be treated and respected appropriately. At the family level, I would always emphasize the importance of equality for all particularly in front of the children so that the sense of equality for all is imprinted in them.

Within the family, both male and female members must be equally and respectfully treated at every opportunity available to emphasize the need and importance of gender equality among all members of the family. If we learn and accept to empower and respect women at our family level from a truly socio-cultural perspective; we could expect some positive, however small, changes impacting our society to accept and respect universal gender quality. This is a serious social movement in which we all need to participate sincerely to bring positive changes to our society first locally, and then regionally and globally to imbibe and accept gender equality at both macro and micro-society levels.

Yours etc.,  
Saikat Kumar Basu  
Lethbridge AB Canada

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

## Noise

By Dr Zareen A. Lynrah,

Noise is all around us. Noise is an inescapable by-product of the industrial environment, which is increasing with advances in industrialization and urbanization. Even in non-industrial areas, noise from such activities such as printing, auto-repair and construction work affects those living in the immediate surroundings. It has become an unavoidable part of our daily existence and is becoming a major burden on the quality of lives.

The most common definition of noise is "unwanted sound." A sound might be unwanted because it is either too loud or unpleasant and annoying or intrusive or distracting. The word "noise" is derived from the Latin word "nausea," meaning seasickness, or

of noise depends on the context of the sound and the subjective effect it has on the people hearing it. One person's idea of exultant, joyful music might be another person's pure torment.

There are many vulnerable groups of people who are most affected by noise pollution such as the young, elderly, and the hospitalized. Young children are unable to protect their hearing and rely on their parents to keep them from constant exposure. Similarly, the elderly may not have the capabilities to protect their hearing if they are disabled by mental or physical illness. Patients in the hospital are not safe from the effects of noise as well. Noise has numerous

Sound Loudness	(dB)
Whisper	30-40
Quiet Room	50
Conversation	60
Lawn mower	90
Stereo Headphones	110-120
Rock Concert	110-120
Jet	140
Gunshot	140-170

more generally, any similar sensation of disgust, annoyance, or discomfort.

Noise can be divided into four types. Continuous Noise is noise that is produced continuously by machinery that keeps running without interruption. This could come from factory equipment, heating or ventilation systems. Intermittent Noise is a noise that increases and decreases rapidly. This might be a goods train passing by, factory equipment that operates in cycles or aircraft overhead. Impulsive Noise is most commonly associated with the construction and demolition industry and in the armed forces. This sudden burst of noise can startle you by its fast and surprising nature.

health effects making noise pollution a public health concern which have not been well addressed. To name a few, these effects include elevated blood pressure, noise-induced hearing loss, sleep disorders, and irritability. In addition, noise pollution also creates a decrease in the performance at work and school.

Experts believe that continuous noise levels in excess of 90 decibels can cause loss of hearing and irreversible changes in nervous systems. The World Health Organization [WHO] has fixed 45 decibels as the safe noise level for a city. Unfortunately most Metropolitan areas in India usually register an average more than 90 decibel.

Noise is described in

**The natural environment contains many sources of noise - wind, volcanoes, oceans, and animal sounds are all familiar intrusions accepted at various levels. Man-made noises- such as those from machines, automobiles, trains, planes, explosives and firecrackers are more contentious. However, whatever maybe the source, both kinds of noise affect sleep, hearing and communication as well as mental and physical health.**

Impulsive noises are commonly created by explosions or construction equipment such as pile drivers. Lastly Low Frequency Noise makes up the low background humming from power plants or the roaring of large diesel engines, we are exposed to low frequency noise constantly. This is also the hardest type of noise to reduce at source, so it can easily spread for miles around.

It is now increasingly understood that pollution from noise is an important component of air pollution, which was previously understood as being limited to material pollution. Noise pollution is generally defined as regular exposure to elevated sound levels that may lead to adverse effects in humans or other living organisms. According to the World Health Organization, sound levels less than 70 dB are not damaging to living organisms, regardless of how long or consistent the exposure is. Exposure for more than 8 hours to constant noise beyond 85 dB may be hazardous. If you work for 8 hours daily in close proximity to a busy road or highway, you are very likely exposed to traffic noise pollution around 85dB.

However noise pollution is not easy to measure, because the very definition

terms of loudness (intensity) and pitch (frequency) and noise exposure is measured using a logarithmic decibel (dB) scale. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recommends hearing protection in the workplace if there is exposure to noise greater than 85 dB for eight hours or more because of the potential of permanent hearing loss. As a reference, below is a chart that lists some common sources of noise taken from an article published in the American Family Physician in 2001.

The natural environment contains many sources of noise - wind, volcanoes, oceans, and animal sounds are all familiar intrusions accepted at various levels. Man-made noises- such as those from machines, automobiles, trains, planes, explosives and firecrackers are more contentious. However, whatever maybe the source, both kinds of noise affect sleep, hearing and communication as well as mental and physical health. In fact, even quiet sounds can be unwanted, depending on your state of mind. Have you ever been kept awake by an insistent cricket that would not stop chirping, or by the relentless tick-tock-tick-tock of a clock?

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Dept of ENT, NEIGRIHMS)

### TO THE EDITOR

### Eviction of tribals from forests!

Editor,  
I breathed a sigh of relief when the Supreme Court of India stayed its February 13 order directing the eviction of over eleven lakh forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDST) and other traditional forest dwellers (OTFD) across sixteen states whose claims for forest land rights have been rejected under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006. The apex court has now given the States four months time to file affidavits. The government, represented by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said, "The eviction of the tribals may be withheld... the eviction of tribals.... would cause serious prejudice to them who have been residing in forests for generations... Many are poor and illiterate."

To this Justice Mishra said whether the Centre was in a "slumber for the past three years". He observed that the February 13 order was only a follow-up of the court's order

on January 29, 2016, which had directed the eviction of encroachers into forest lands. The Solicitor-General has rightly pointed out that the forests and tribals are to co-exist and the 2006 Forest Rights Act is a beneficial legislation which should be liberally construed in favour of the poor.

Indeed, India passed an excellent piece of legislation in the form of the 2006 Forest Rights Act. Previously, millions of forest dwellers had no legal rights whatsoever to their homes, lands or livelihoods. It was the government officials who enjoyed all the powers including legal privileges resulting in deaths and destructions of both forests and forest dwellers. We need to speedily implement the 2006 Forest Rights Act and do what China has done. China has given direct rights of over 100m hectares of forest area to its traditional inhabitants, which helped it reduce poverty and protect environment.

In our country, community rights have been recognised only in less than three per cent of the forest area. However, in those areas, it has been seen that making traditional inhabitants managers of their forest land not only improves their lives but betters the environment as well.

Moreover, if you actually possess something, you have a stronger legal claim to owning it than someone who says it belongs to him or her. The saying ~ "possession is the nine-tenths of the law" is not a law but a logical rule that has been recognised for ages. Even in the legal battle between the rightful owner of a property and the person who has been in the possession of the same for a long time, the latter is considered to have a better position.

Earlier it was said "possession is nine points of the law". It means that a possessor satisfies nine out of eleven factors that

constitute absolute ownership. However, "nine-tenths" came in common parlance to highlight that custody is ninety per cent of legal ownership. Indeed, the forest dwellers claim for the forest land must be more than the nine-tenths of the law as there exists no actual owner of forest land.

In the name of improving the quality of services, a large part of the education and health sectors have been dished out to the market players. As a result, education and health ~ the two legs on which the common people can stand ~ have largely been hijacked from them. Now, in the name of stopping deforestation if forest dwellers are banished and then the commercial sector is allowed to manage the forest land, then what will happen is not difficult to guess.

The environment and the lives of the forest dwellers got improved where traditional

“In many parts of the world, especially Pakistan and Afghanistan, terrorism, war and conflict stop children to go to their schools. We are really tired of these wars. Women and children are suffering.”

--- Malala Yousafzai

## The Shillong Times

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### Polls after Pulwama

WITH the sudden surfacing of a Pakistan element in the Indian discourses, the political scenario is in for a new spin. There is not enough of clarity about what India achieved in terms of the pre-dawn IAF attack on some installations in Balakot, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi has managed to sell the idea of India having achieved a major victory on February 26. There are the doubts, but overall India seems to have given full marks to PM Modi for the way a retaliatory strike was effected -14 days after the Pulwama suicide bombing of a CRPF convoy by Pakistan's ISI-backed Jaish terror network. Now, there is considerable curiosity as to how this will impact the Lok Sabha polls two months hence. The notification for the polls is expected any time now.

The desperation in the Opposition camps is all too palpable. Top leaders in the Opposition camp are struggling to come to terms with the new reality. They have suddenly lost their voice, even to the extent that it would appear Balakot happened right in their courtyard and that they were still enveloped in a smoke. This being a defence-related matter, too much of questioning of the government at this juncture is an unacceptable proposition though they have their own doubts as to what IAF really did in Balakot. Pakistan, on its part, denies anything has happened there other than the loss of some pine trees – and complains to UN about an Indian attack on its ecosystems. Pakistan also denies it lost an F16 fighter jet – something that it should not have deployed for an act of aggression as per its promise to the US that delivered them the jets to fight terror on its soil.

The accepted fact is that India lost one MiG20 in the fight over the skies above the LoC on September 27. What is generally surmised is also that India did not do enough to defend itself when faced with an army of F16s, which managed to drop two bombs on Indian soil. Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman saved the day for India by shooting down an F16, and found his fighter jet too was shot down. In reality, it was a mixed bag of some gains – of having reached up to a distance of 80km inside Pakistan, undetected – and some losses. Yet, the overall feeling is India has done a job after Pulwama. Whether this will help Modi and BJP win the next polls is still a big question. Another question is whether the defence of the country's territorial integrity should be used as political fodder.

# Hyper-Nationalism grips Indian TV channels Let hostilities end and diplomacy take over

By A J Philip

No one knows the war better than an Indian. His greatest epic is the Mahabharata, a quarter of which describes in vivid detail the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The war did not last long. It lasted just 18 days but it killed 80 per cent of the menfolk in the country.

In the end, no one was left to celebrate the victory. Hastinapur, which the Pandavas ruled for a few decades afterwards, was a land of widows and orphans.

Even the great military strategist, Lord Krishna, without whom the Pandavas would have been roundly defeated, had to leave Hastinapur with his clan and he eventually fell to the arrow of a hunter. Some may dismiss the Kurukshetra war as a myth that won't stand human scrutiny. So let's return to the real world in which you and I live.

Germany was responsible for starting two world wars. After the end of the First World War, the country was in ruins having to pay reparations making the defeat even more unbearable. Of course, it helped the National Socialists to come to power. The Second World War saw Adolf Hitler committing suicide before the country was split into two.

War creates only orphans and widows. We have seen it in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Lebanon. We have also fought our own wars with Pakistan and we also have a fair share of orphans and widows. Can we afford to wage another war?

The answer is clear that we cannot. But in television studios, news anchors were boisterously demanding punishment of Pakistan. No other country has as many television channels as India. There are over 400 of them, some with no viewership at all.

They are run on a shoe-string budget with no proper salary to the staff, let alone any remuneration to those who are invited to attend their discussions where the anchors shout more loudly than any discussant. Some do not even offer a cup of tea or coffee to the invited guests, because they do not have the necessary funds.

Yet, the anchors have been competitively demanding war against Pakistan, as if they are the custodians of public opinion in this nation of 1.3 billion people. As a journalist friend said, they are the ones who would not dare to go out of the house at night to check the source of a suspicious sound. However, they would cre-

ate a war hysteria because it suits those in power.

Anyone who is against war is portrayed as an anti-national. When I wrote that we are free to believe in anything in a WhatsApp group of journalists, one gentleman wrote that I could not. What he implied was that one must believe as the Gospel truth anything put out by the government.

In 1962, I was just aspiring to be a teen. In that

On the night when the Indian military aircraft flew across the Line of Control in Kashmir and the border in Punjab and dropped bombs in Pakistan, there was a clamour for war, created essentially by the media. There was suddenly claims that India was safe in the hands of a leader “who does what he promises”.

Karnataka BJP chief B.S. Yediyurappa earned opprobrium when he said

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year, I remember taking part in a procession in which we school children shouted slogans against China. Our slogans were sharp and they made fun of the “flat-nosed” Chou-en-Lai. We were inspired by the newspaper reports which carried fictitious stories of Indian troops giving the Chinese a bloody nose.

I still remember our neighbour Panicker, who enjoyed discussing the war with my grandfather, speculating about how long the Indian troops would take to reach Beijing, called Peking those days. It was many years later that I learnt the truth about the war when I read the book ‘Himalayan Blunder’. Whoever said that truth is the first casualty in war could not have put it better.

I also remember the day the AB Vajpayee government tested a nuclear weapon at Pokhran. Without any provocation, a BJP leader of Delhi challenged Pakistan for war at any time and date of its choosing. I dismissed him as a madcap, though he enjoyed a groundswell of support in the Capital.

He did not repeat the needless challenge when, a day after, Pakistan tested its own nuclear weapon at Ras Koh Hills in the Chagai district of Balochistan province. For once, the size of the military, the superiority of the weapons we hold and the nation's fighting prowess began to look inconsequential, as both claimed to have reached nuclear parity.

that the surgical strike would help the BJP sweep the polls in the state in May. On the other end was the Samajwadi Party leader and former minister Vinod Kumar claiming that India and Pakistan had a secret deal under which India would drop some bombs in deserted areas without causing any harm to either the military or the civilian population. He pooh-poohed the claim that hundreds of terrorists were killed in the strike.

The Prime Minister also did not conduct himself well, as he gave more importance to garnering votes than to holding an all-party meeting to tell the whole nation that India had no other option but to strike at those harbouring terrorists.

Modi could have gained the moral high ground if he had said that India was not against the common people of Pakistan and it only wanted to root out the scourge of terrorism. Instead, he let his party leaders and cheerleaders talk nonsense. For instance, one party MLA was heard in a video warning Pakistan that if it wanted to survive, it must fall at the feet of India.

He also threatened that India would build dams across the rivers and make power to be used for the development of the country. He said that if the Pakistanis did anything doubtful, then the dams would be opened to let the water wipe away the whole of Pakistan and deposit it in the Indian Ocean. He called it a “water bomb”.

One Union minister

with prime ministerial ambitions said that India would not give Pakistan its own share of water. India was within its rights to use the Indian share of the river water and nobody prevented it from using it. His statement was interpreted as a warning that India would divert the waters of the Punjab and deny Pakistan even drinking water. Uncontrolled jingoism serves no purpose.

Be that as it may, the situation in 2019 is not the same as in 1962. Technology has made it possible for everyone to cross-check what he or she hears. We live in times when the student instantly checks on his smartphone what the teacher says in the classroom.

This is all the more reason that the government should be truthful. The Indian government proved that its military had the capacity to make deep incursions into Pakistan and it should have ended the matter there.

On the day Indian aircraft returned unharmed, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan had to hear “shame, shame” from the Opposition MPs. He is also a politician like Narendra Modi and he, too, is conscious of his image. He had to prove Pakistan's capability to retaliate and that is what he did.

One very significant move was Khan's decision to release the Indian pilot, Abhinandan Varthaman, held captive by the Pakistanis. His announcement was greeted with thumping of desks by the Pakistani MPs. To say that Pakistan was not doing a favour but only complying with the Geneva protocol is to miss the woods for the trees. It should be seen as a gesture of de-escalation.

As I write this, what is trending on Twitter is #saynotowar that shot into the number one position. The Delhi School of Journalism students produced a short video that showed young men and women speaking in one voice against the war. In short, the mood of the nation is against the war.

But Modi is more interested in winning votes. He used even the inauguration of the War Memorial to attack the Opposition. It was a sacred function to honour the martyrs but he became banal. A Prime Minister should rise above petty politics when the nation faces a crisis. We need peace, not war. Let's remember that we can choose friends but a nation can't choose neighbours. Let the hostilities end and let the diplomats take over after the IAF has done its job. (IPA Service)

## Indo-pak hit new low Boli, no. Goli, yes

By Poonam I Kaushish

You reap what you sow. Last week Pakistan learnt this the hard way when India struck at terror camps in Balakot, Muzaffarabad and Chakoti (first aerial bombing inside Pak territory since the 1971 Indo-Pak war) and avenged Pulwama. Pakistan retaliated, shot down a MIG and captured a pilot. In turn India brought down an F16 fighter jet. Predictably, an unnerved Islamabad talked peace, New Delhi made plain: first walk your talk on cross border terror. Till then, there would be no boli, only goli!

In a ritual which is predictable, India and Pakistan are once again on the brink of war. The danger of escalation is obvious, even as low-level warfare continues at the border. As Prime Minister Modi said, “Recently a pilot project happened. Now the real one has to be done.”

He was referring to last week's air strikes in Balakot leaving the future hanging. Either which way, it does not hold out much hope for optimism or breakthrough in Indo-Pak ties.

Undoubtedly, the recent conflagrations underscores once again that Pakistan uses terror as the instrumentality of anti-India aggression with the Generals calling the shots. However, despite Pulwama and earlier Uri what is worrisome for Islamabad is that militancy and terrorist strikes are not providing any tangible results as India gives it back in double measure.

New Delhi is adamant about a categorical assurance from Islamabad on taking action against terror outfits specially Masood Azhar's Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Hafiz Sayeed's Lakshar-e-Toiba (LeT). Against the backdrop of JeM claiming responsibility for the Pulwama attack Pakistan's position is becoming increasingly untenable as it can no longer escape accountability of providing a safe haven for jihadis to operate. Pakistan Foreign Minister admitted that “Azhar is here and is unwell.”

More. As matters stand, there is nothing concrete to suggest that Islamabad is ready to address New Delhi's “core” concerns on terrorism when it is busy infiltrating and attacking Indian border posts. Nor is there any indication that Pakistan has changed its antagonistic approach to India and refuses to give up its confrontational mindset of waging a “thousand wars and bleeding India with a thousand cuts.” On the contrary, it has not only restarted the jihad factory across the border, but the Pakistan Army Chief, like his predecessors, has innumerable times declared that he considers India, and not Taliban, to be the enemy and existential threat to Pakistan. The recent violence in Kashmir bears this out.

Moreover, insecure Pakistan faces twin dilemmas of international marginalization due its economic distress and terror factories and India's political stability and growing economy. Perhaps Wing Commander Abhinandan's release by Islamabad was due to international pressure specially US, but if one hopes it will de-escalate the strained relations, it is a tall order.

For Pakistani fed on the belief, that “accepting the status quo with India is defeat”, has resulted in a perceived ideological perspective that it has to be at war to stand up and be counted. This is forcing the Pakistani army to take calculated military risks against the backdrop of its nuclear capability as a manifestation of its continued struggle which it must continue to provoke India.

Besides, due to it being a failed State a fundamentally dissatisfied Establishment seeks to increase its prestige through spread of its ideology and religion in pursuit of its revisionist policies.

Furthermore, India's suspension of the dialogue process has reduced Pakistan's incentive to keep the peace.

For the Pak Generals acquiescing to initiating a peace process with India would tantamount to not only defeating the purpose of the Army, but also, fundamentally eroding the legitimacy of the Pakistani State. For the ruling troika seeped in armed tradition along-with its jihadist proxies, the “core” issue of Kashmir is an article of faith.

Think. Peace with Pakistan has been given a shot by every single Prime Minister. But all attempts have failed. Primarily, not because they lacked conviction but because the Indo-Pak issue is far too complex. Most Indians are indifferent about peace (there is no groundswell within India in favour of peace). Ask anyone and they will tell you yes, peace is desirable with Pakistan but at what cost? The sad reality is that while Indians and Pakistanis can be friends, India and Pakistan can never be friends.

Remember, Pakistan has a history of living in denial and following a two-track policy - clandestine operations to weaken India while simultaneously appearing to seek a durable peace. Each time India is attacked and it is established beyond doubt that the perpetrators were either directly or indirectly linked to Pakistan, Islamabad exercises the clause of plausible deniability saying these are non-state actors and the Pakistani State does not “support” such acts.

Primarily, our neighbor suffers a big problem. Its army can start a war but cannot win it as 1965 and 1971 show. Hence it nurtures, supports, calibrates and deploys Islamic jihadist to perpetuate terror in Kashmir and elsewhere depending on its aim and uses its nuclear status to deter India's response along-with catalyzing the US to pressure India to de-escalate.

On its part, India's decision not to hold talks till it delivers on terror underlines its conviction that the military cost will soon become too high for Pakistan. Islamabad needs to understand that New Delhi's patience is wearing thin. It should realize its jihadi tactics will not take it far in its bid to be on a par with India. It also underestimates, as it has always done, India's ability to withstand such pressures and, if necessary, retaliate with greater force.

Modi has made plain: Cross the red line and pay for it. If Pakistan wants friendly relations with India, it should abandon its adventurism on the borders, come to senses and engage diplomatically with India. Blanket denials and offers to probe terror camps without taking tangible action will no longer do as the world is aware of Islamabad's diabolical agenda. Time for it to contain or, preferably, eliminate JeM.

There are no short cuts. India wants durable peace though alone it cannot guarantee non-escalation. So long as the hawkish Pakistan army continues to call the shots, peace with India would be a mirage. Modi realizes only too well that in today's geo-strategic political reality pragmatism dictate realpolitik. New Delhi needs an all-encompassing and multi-pronged strategy to deal with Islamabad. Happily, NaMo is implementing a “zero tolerance to provocations” policy.

The Government should not be fooled that Pakistan could attempt another escalation or provoke a conflagration between the two nuclear powers. New Delhi needs to be reassured on its terror concerns for the relationship to move to the next level. --- INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Poor traffic re-routing

Editor,  
The traffic regulation imposed on the people of the city especially pertaining to the movement of the Shillong Public Transport Service from Motphran to areas like Laitumkhrach, Nongthymmai, Nongrah, Rynjah, NEIGRIHMS etc., is mind boggling. As of now, the SPTS buses that go to these places are to pass through Jeep Stand, Garikhana, Lukier Road, Rilbong Point, Military Hospital, Rhino Point, Civil Hospital and then move towards their destination. If one is to bear witness to the plight of the people at Motphran especially in the evening hours one would surely understand their frustration and anger. First of all, people going to the above men-

tioned destinations are reluctant to board the SPTS buses as they do not want to go through a roundabout way to reach their destinations. Besides, we all know that traffic jams are a common feature in Shillong. No one has the patience nor the time to go through this long-winded route. People are left at the mercy of the taxis and maxi cabs to take them home. This means that the buses to the above areas go almost empty as they fail to meet the purpose for which they were pressed into service in the first place.

To ease the inconvenience and anxiety of the people, I suggest that buses that go to Mawlai, Mawroh, Mawiong may continue to go through Jeep Stand and Garikhana and then proceed towards their destination while buses that are bound for

Laitumkhrach, Nongthymmai, Nongrah, etc may be allowed to circle the Motphran monument and take the route via G.S Road to reach Police Bazar and proceed towards their respective destinations. This will enable passengers to use the SPTS buses to the maximum. Perhaps this will also help minimise the number of vehicles all along the highway.

I am sure the authorities concerned are trying hard to find out ways and means to ease traffic congestion but to achieve their objectives they also need to understand the ground realities by touching base with the passengers and consulting stakeholders such as the taxi and bus drivers. Therefore the involvement of experts along with members from the Taxi and Bus Association and discern-

ing passengers may bear much fruit.

Yours etc.,  
Jennifer Dkhar,  
Via email

#### GST and MRP

Editor,  
The concept of MRP is the Maximum Retail Price that an item or product can be sold. This price is indicated in the body of the product itself. However, after the introduction of GST it is seen that a number of sellers are charging the GST amount over and above the indicated MRP. Is this legal? For instance, the major pharmacies in Police Bazar actually give you cash memos which clearly indicate the percentage of GST added to the cost of the medicine which makes the item costlier than the MRP. Has MRP become

redundant in the new GST regime? Can the authorities concerned kindly provide clarity to the common man.

Yours etc.,  
Sanjeeb Kakoty  
Shillong 14.

#### Gold Rush

Editor,  
Your eye-opening report “Gold, silver slide on global cues, fall in demand” (March 3) gives a loud & clear message to Indians that in bad times, it is gold, hoarded and accumulated bit by bit over decades, which is the saviour. Investors all over the world do tend to consider gold a safe option and put their money in it. Every year, one-fifth of the world's gold is consumed in India. Today, most Indian women do not have much of a say in the in-

vestment the husband makes in stocks and shares, bank deposits or real estate. Gold grants social and financial security to women. It is said that next to the husband, a woman always loves her jewellery most, and, in some cases, it is dearer to her than her husband. Our traditions too have laid emphasis on gold as a symbol of prosperity. Experience shows that if one wishes to invest in gold, it is always better to buy gold or biscuits rather than jewellery.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit  
Ahmedabad

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.

*"Don't go around saying the world owes you a living. The world owes you nothing. It was here first."*

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

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### Politics trumps national interest

INDIA has just been through a near war situation when on February 26 it sent its aircraft to hit at selected targets inside Balakot, a town in the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkwa where training camps of the Laishkar-e-tayaba are located. Pakistan retaliated the next day sending in its F16 jets one of which was chased out by a MiG-21 Bison of the 1970's vintage. In that unequal fight of an aged fighter jet taking on a supersonic machine, IAF, Wing Commander Abhinandan Vartaman's aircraft was shot down and he had to eject. Later he was arrested and two days later released under the Geneva Convention although the two nuclear-powered nations were not in a conventional warfare. The Indian Air Force strike was a response to the Valentine's Day Pulwama attack that killed over 40 CRPF personnel. The nation was angry and grieving. Retaliation for that horrific act which the LeT led by Masood Azhar, India's long time enemy, claimed was its successful subversive attack on India's security personnel was justified.

The LeT has indoctrinated many youth in Kashmir who are fuelled by a sense of anger against the Indian military which they say have treated the state as a war zone and the Kashmiris as enemies of the nation. The indoctrination of young minds by LeT that India is the aggressor in Kashmir and that a jihad (holy war) is the only way to win back this territory, makes young people not only join the jihad but willingly give their lives to the cause. Suicide bombers are difficult to tackle for any country. The United States is still fighting the war on terror in Afghanistan, 18 years after 9/11. India's response to Pulwama was legitimate. The country cannot be bled to death and pretend it is unhurt. The Balakot air strike was a well thought out plan. What is objectionable is the propensity of the BJP to take credit for a military action. National security is the brief of the government. That the BJP and allies are today in power is incidental. That the Narendra Modi government gave the armed forces a free hand to hit back at Pakistan so as not to demoralise the forces was a welcome decision. Holding the military back at this juncture would have demotivated them to the point of defeat. But after the air strikes the claims and counter claims about what was actually hit and the number of those dead was unwarranted. The Prime Minister should have addressed the nation in sobriety and called for unity. He did not. On the contrary he continued to ride on the glory of the air strikes. As a result the opposition parties are at daggers drawn with the BJP. The security of the nation is paramount and should be used as political capital by any party.

The estimated military and civilian casualties in the First World War numbered about 40 million. The Triple Entente, of Allied Powers lost over 6 million military personnel while the Central Powers lost over 4 million making the four year global conflict one of the deadliest in the history of mankind. The Second World War was even worse. In fact it was the deadliest war in history. 70 to 85 million people perished in the conflict between the Axis Powers, consisting mainly of fascist countries of Germany, Italy and Japan and the Allied Powers led by the Soviet Union, United Kingdom and United States of America. Civilians deaths alone were estimated to be 50 to 55 million while military deaths were anywhere between 21 to 25 million.

One of the longest and bloodiest wars of the 20th century was the Iran-Iraq one. On 22 September 1980, Saddam Hussein invaded his neighbouring country. The leader of the Ba'athist regime thought it would be an easy victory against a country that was still chaotic under the Iran Revolution. However, after nearly eight years his "catastrophic miscalculation" left his country on the defensive. When the war ended on 20 August 1988 through a UN brokered ceasefire, the overall death toll was estimated at one million for Iran and 250,000-500,000 for Iraq.

Described by many as Europe's deadliest conflicts since World War II, the Yugoslav Wars from 1991 to 2001 that led to the collapse of former Yugoslavia resulted in the death of 140,000 people according to one estimate. War crimes, genocides, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and rape marked the conflicts in the ethnically and religiously diverse Balkan states. The brutal and hideous wars have a devastating social and economic impact on the constituent parties that no quantitative estimates can accurately account.

Besides the incalculable loss of human lives the above conflicts have striking similarities. Some are noted here. Those who started did not win. In the First World War the primary aggressor, Germany had to suffer the humiliation of accepting the agreement prepared by its number one enemies, Britain and France to end the war. The Allied Powers might consider

# In war humanity is the only loser

By Albert Thyrniang

themselves victors but Russia's total casualties were 9,150,000, British Empire 3,190,235 and France 6,160,800.

The Second World War is pretty much the same story. The dictator and Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler who initiated the war by invading Poland had to commit suicide as he couldn't bear to see Germany's military might collapse with the fall of Poland and the impending capture of Berlin by advancing Soviet forces. Soon after his country and people, whom he considered a superior race, and the Axis Powers had to surrender unconditionally to the Allies. Japan, the Asian imperialist had no choice but had to meekly surrender as atomic bombs wiped out 90 per cent of Hiroshima killing almost two-thirds of 330,000 of its residents and 80,000 of the 250,000 Nagasaki's residents. Meanwhile the Allied Powers might have celebrated 8 May 1945 as VE Day (Victory Day in Europe) and 15 August 1945 as VJ Day (Victory Day in Japan) but not before suffering up to 85,000,000 casualties accounting up to 3.7 per cent of the total population of the Allied countries in all the continents.

Human life is the immediate victim but wars leave a huge and devastating impact on the economy. World War I gravely damaged the economy of all countries involved. The toll on Russia was such that its economy almost collapsed. Though in the US the economy had a positive effect after World War II, the atomic bombs on Japan's twin cities had a grave impact on its economy. That a new Japan was rebuilt after the cruel disaster is another matter. But the destruction was Japan's worst in its history. Even the US lost enormously because it was forced to pay one million dollars per day till 1951 to help Japan recover.

In 2012 the estimated economic impact of war and violence was to the tune of eleven per cent of Gross World Product (GWP0 or 9.46 trillion dollars). The World Bank estimated that the more than 630,000 Syrian refugees cost Jordan over

USD 2.5 billion a year or 6 per cent of its GDP. It was estimated that by the year 2000, the government of Sri Lanka had spent \$US 274 million on its war against the LTTE.

This short essay does not permit to even threadbare discuss other adverse effects of wars but destruction of social infrastructure and services like education and health care system, displacement of people, shrinking of labour force, altered social life, increase of poverty, rape of women and girls, genocides, ethnic cleansing are some of the evils that we have seen with our own eyes.

Now, since Pulwama, there has been a craving for war by a section of the Indian population, particularly the far right wing and the politically backed media. With elections around the corner, the BJP has politicised the massacre of 44 CRPF jawans. The government supporters think that anti-Pakistan rhetoric and even a war against our neighbour will win them the 2019 general election. It is a vote for war scenario. The politically affiliated television anchors create a war hysteria to win TRP ratings. It's a shame really!

All those who clamour and cry for war better learn from history; if they refuse they are the greatest fools. In an armed conflict there will be deaths and bloodshed, destruction and devastation, grief and mourning on both sides - India and Pakistan. There will be no clear winner. This is amply clear from what has happened so far. What seems sure by now is that the air strike in Balakot did not hit any terrorist camp. The claim that 300 terrorists of the Jaish-e-Mohammed died or were injured is untrue. We are unable to provide proof for it. Pakistan stroked back and claimed to have shot down at least one Indian air craft leading to the capture of an IAF pilot, Abhinandan Vartaman. Pakistan was able to take the moral high ground by releasing Abhinandan. So those who think that Pakistan will be revenged and defeated are wrong. In a war, victory and defeat, successes and set back, gains and losses will take place on both sides.

Some infer that since India emerged victorious in

the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 and 1971 a third war will be the same. It might be true but the Indian army suffered 11,479 casualties in the 1965 war and Pakistan lost 5800. In 1971, though India helped to liberate Bangladesh thousands of soldiers were taken prisoners, many of whom are still in jails of both countries. India could not prevent the 'genocidal' rape of 200,000 and 400,000 Bangladeshi women and girls. Plus times have changed. Both are now nuclear powers. What if another Indo-Pak war leads to use of nuclear warheads? What will be the casualties? What will be the scale of destruction? Will bombs be dropped in Delhi and Lahore or Islamabad?

The behaviour of our Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, post Pulwama is not exemplary. He was insensitive to slain CRPF martyrs. He was out to please his right wing constituency. He was interested only in gaining political mileage for his party. It was all business as usual even when the country was on edge. He did not cancel any of his election campaigns. He was a one-man show. The Foreign and Defence Ministers were invisible. He did show respect to the Opposition. He did not even attend the all party meeting. He did not take people along. He did not address the nation. He did not display any statesmanship. He was a leader found wanting.

In comparison the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan has come out as a balanced and mature leader. He addressed the nation twice. He faced the joint parliament and made important speeches. His tone was reconciliatory. He appealed for peace. He extended an olive branch to India. He immediately declared the release of the captured pilot. At the same time he portrayed himself as a strong leader. He promised actions against terrorists if provided actionable proofs. He won many hearts in Pakistan and in India. He emerged a winner, perceptible and diplomatically.

With the safe return of the Indian pilot, de-escalation might take place. Temperatures might cool down. War has no solution. Dialogue is the way forward. No war is worth it. In a war there will be no outright victor. The only loser is humanity.

## Forest Rights Avoid tribal backlash

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The Supreme Court decision asking States to implement their own orders, rejecting 11.8 lakh claims over forest land by Scheduled Tribes and Other traditional forest dwellers (OTFDs) by reportedly describing these as baseless, triggered a massive stir in the country. In fact, the widespread criticism from tribal groups, civil society organisations and the Central government filing a petition, the Supreme Court had to temporarily stay its own order. Organisations are now gearing up to appeal against the order and build up pressure.

On February 13, 2019, the Supreme Court ordered that all households whose rights claims under Forest Rights Act (FRA) have been rejected should be evicted from forests by July 2019. Two weeks later, on February 28, it stayed its own order till July 10.

The 21 States will, however, need to explain how the FRA claims were rejected or accepted. These are: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal). This, after the petitioners i.e. the Wildlife First, Nature Conservation Society and Tiger Research and Conservation Trust, had argued that rejection of an FRA claim implies that the claimant is an encroacher and not a bona fide forest dweller.

The eviction order by the apex court was expected to have affected anything around 18-20 lakh forest dwellers and their families. The Forest Rights Alliance - Bhumi Adhikar Andolan, termed it as a continuation of historic injustices against the Adivasis and OFDC by pro-corporate and conservation lobby since enactment of the FRA in the name of public interest.

One may also recall that an earlier SC bench headed by Justice Madan B. Lokur had on April 18 last imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 each on Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Telengana for not filing affidavits regarding eviction carried out despite several opportunities.

After this, States filed affidavits of forest right claim by STs and OTFDs. Andhra said 1.14 lakh acres of land has been encroached upon and though it rejected claims and ordered eviction, not a single order has been complied with. Madhya Pradesh said it had rejected claims of 204,123 STs and 150,664 OTFDs, while West Bengal rejected claims of 50,288 STs and 35,858 OTFDs.

As per data of Ministry of Tribal Affairs on the implementation of FRA till November 30, 2018, there have been more claims rejected than those for which title deeds distributed. Of the approximately 42.24 lakh claims, both individual and community-filed so far, around 18.94 claims have been given title deeds, whereas around 19.39 claims rejected. What is of grave concern is that under the FRA's Section 12, only the Gram Sabha has the supreme power over a number of committees and their recommendations along with that of the Forest Rights Committees have precedence over technical 'rejections' by the district and other committees, which has been overlooked. In some States, including Jharkhand, it emerged that the claims were rejected at district and sub-divisional levels, though committees at these levels can only ask for a reviewing of these claims.

Meanwhile, the Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) announced a nationwide protest against the ruling party, specially in MP, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Odisha. CSD and other civil rights' organisations are appalled and aggrieved that during the past four hearings in the apex court, the government side remained silent and didn't utter a word. This says the CSD "is the last step in this government's consistent sabotage of this law from

May 2014 onwards."

The CSOs have urged political parties to oppose the eviction order and not fall victim to the malicious propaganda of the wild life groups and instead engage in implementation of the FRA. As General elections approach, there is need for an open political debate.

So far, the Chhattisgarh government has declared full support for the tribal communities and decided to present the State's view on the eviction row before the Court. Its Chief Minister assured his government stood by its tribal brothers and sisters in the fight for 'jal, jungle and zameen' (Water, forest and land). Congress President Rahul Gandhi too, with regard to implementation of the FRA, has observed that less than 45 per cent of individual forest rights and 50 per cent of the community forest rights' claims were approved as on April 2018 as the Ministry itself stated that forest staff were rejecting claims on frivolous objections.

Importantly, the latest apex court order has Odisha's Dongria Kondh tribals resolving to resist any attempt to force them out. Recall, this particular tribe shot into the limelight for their successful resistance against the Vedanta Group's plan to mine bauxite in the ecologically and mineral-rich Niyamgiri hill range.

Meanwhile, what surprises the CSOs is the fact that after giving a spate of pro-people and pro-society judgments in the recent past, the apex court has chosen to give a devastating order for the forest dwellers despite their rights having been emphasised repeatedly not only at various national but also international forums. The order is undoubtedly a big setback for the impoverished sections of society and is bound to have negative social repercussions.

Further, it appears that amnesia of sorts has developed among State government authorities when it comes to the implementation of the FRA, 2006 and the process which needs to be followed once a claim has been rejected. Today, forest communities are at great risk and the question of eviction must be dealt with utmost caution.

As is well known, eviction, be it in whatever form, without rehabilitation is unacceptable. As such, judging the entire matter from a broad perspective, the apex court's first order was not justified. Obviously, the States have to review the claims rejected, not in strictly legal but rather judicious manner, before taking any drastic action. Moreover, even if at some point of time, a number of forest dwellers need to be evicted, genuine rehabilitation must be arranged to ensure they have bare minimum access to some form of livelihood.

Social scientists are of the opinion that the crisis is indeed one of basic human rights and no one can be uprooted from his place of living and also livelihood. The whole issue has to be tackled from the standpoint of social justice.

It goes without saying that the government must safeguard the rights of the tribals, specially those guaranteed by the Constitution, and not set any precedent that would erode these rights. Only the claim of newer entrants may be rejected in order to protect forest from illegal encroachments. Perhaps, the Government or the SC may consider formation of a committee at the national level that would evolve a sound procedure to re-affirm the claims of genuine claimants and review those that have been rejected. At the same time, protecting forests and wildlife from fresh encroachers, who have commercial interests, can definitely be undertaken but not those who have been living in and around the forests for decades.

The State governments must show political will and make every attempt that the FRA is not diluted and that the law is not violated in the name of development and conservation. ---INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

## Public roads not for religious demonstrations

Editor,

It has been seen that whenever any religious group takes out a procession on the main roads of this city, there is massive traffic jam or traffic is re-routed. This is not how it should be in a secular country like India. Religion is not for demonstration. It is a private affair between God and humans. Bringing religion into the main road is nothing but a show of strength and arrogance by different religious groups. Shillong roads can no longer take this sort of public display of faith. The State Government has to take a call and stop all activities that curtail the smooth flow of life and traffic. Let's face one thing squarely. No amount of religious fervour can change anything. Humans are as corrupt as they were. Their being part of a church, temple, mosque or gurudwara cannot change their inner soul. It takes much more than religious membership to transform individuals and make them righteous.

Yours etc.,  
John M Kharbuki,  
Via email

## Save our trees

Editor,

Tree lovers and environmentalists in various parts of our country are deeply upset over the repercussions of cutting down trees to widen roads. Authorities don't think twice about cutting down beautiful trees that might even be a hundred years old. Trees can soften the effects of a nationwide urban explosion, but cities are getting rid of them in unprecedented numbers. Trees are precious gifts given by God. Directly and indirectly all living beings depend on trees for life. Tree cutting is prohibited in Hindu dharma sastras. Only cutting of branches is allowed after performing a simple puja or narrating a mantra. Trees are mercilessly cut for widening roads, making furniture and even for construction. But no one seems to understand that this will lead to the destruction of the earth. Now, for every

tree that is brought down, three saplings should be planted on the roadsides in the city. It is observed that the main problem in planting saplings to replace the trees that are cut is lack of space but when land is acquired for a project, why is this not taken into account. One of these symbols of prosperity, as it were, are the number of massive trees flanking the roads, providing much needed shade. Development of a new road results in rapid development on the stretch, right from the edge of the road. And, thus there is hardly any space to plant saplings. What will happen now? When all the tree parts including roots die completely, people will forget the fallen tree.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit  
Ahmedabad

## Religion not a public affair

Editor,  
Apropos the story, "Where history resides"(ST Feb 24, 2019), the writer Uma

Purkayastha has written a brief history of Jithoomi, Rilbong, from its past till date. However, the information is largely incorrect. Ms Purkayastha had written, "After his death, Manisha Devi stayed in the house with her children and continued with her music school. She disposed of the house in 1927(approx). It was actually April 1923. The weather was excessively hot in Bengal and Tagore, exhausted with the heat decided to come to Shillong to get some respite from the scorching heat..."

According to Purkayastha during his second visit to Shillong in 1923, Tagore stayed at Manisha Devi's house, "Jithoomi." But according to Tagore's biographer Prasanta Kumar Paul, Tagore stayed at 'Jithoomi' by paying a rent of Rs 200 in 1923 (Rabijeboni, Vol-9 by Prasanta Kumar Paul). During Tagore's visit to Shillong the owner of Jithoomi was not Manisha Devi. Poet Hem Chattopadhyay who met Tagore in Jithoomi twice in 1923 described in his letter that Jithoomi was

already delivered from one owner to another. That is, Manisha Devi/ Dr. Debendra Nath Chattopadhyay was not the owner of Jithoomi during 1923 and onwards. Moreover if Jithoomi was owned by Manisha Devi during 1923, Tagore would not have rented the house from his own niece, Manisha Devi.

The previous owner of Jithoomi, Bimal Chakraborty had informed this writer that his father Dr. Binod Chakraborty purchased Jithoomi from Nanibala Chakraborty. Jithoomi has a great history. First draft of 'Red Oleanders' or 'Rakta Karabi' was written here by Nobel laureate Tagore. He had named his first draft as 'Jokkho Puri'. Later he named it as Rakto Karabi in Kolkata. Jithoomi is the pride of Rilbong locality. It is a heritage house like 'Brookside' where the then Assam Government in 1961 during Tagore's birth centenary. During Tagore's 150th birth anniversary Ministry of Culture, New Delhi deputed

Dr K K Banerjee Director, Raja Rammohan Roy Library, Kolkata in February 2012 to inspect Brookside and Jithoomi .

In October 13, 2018, the Governor of Meghalaya, Tathagata Roy visited Jithoomi. Recently on 31st January 2019 the Department of Arts and Culture, Government of Meghalaya had organized the inspection of different heritage sites of Shillong. Jithoomi was revisited and inspected by Governor Tathagata Roy and the Minister for Arts and Culture, A.L Hek (ST February 1, 2019). Mr Bimal Chakraborty had recently sold Jithoomi. The owners may change but the glory of Jithoomi will continue to remain the same. We have already lost 'Solomon Villa' where Tagore stayed in 1927. We hope Jithoomi will be protected and preserved by all.

Yours etc.,  
Malabika Bisharad  
Shillong-4

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

“Fake news is a big thing in the field of Social Media Journalism. Fake news can be as simple as spreading misinformation or as dangerous as smearing hateful propaganda.”

--- Fabrizio Moreira

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.204

SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2019

### Peace a priority for Pakistan

THE dust has not settled on the Line of Control (LoC), but indications are that India might as well be opting for a pause in its offensive against Pakistan at the military level. The path to peace is paved with thorns, though. Pakistan has banned the Hafiz Saeed-led Jamaat-ud-Dawa and arrested some top leaders of the Jaish-e-Mohammed. But knowing the games that Pakistan is capable of playing, not much seriousness need be attached to these. We had been here before, with little effect to such actions from Islamabad. Likely, again, a veiled kind of patronage is being extended to the pro-Kashmiri terror outfits in the guise of stern action.

India is at the doorstep of the Lok Sabha poll and the Narendra Modi government's life is on oxygen. The IAF strike in Balakot gave him a breather for now, after his image started fading going downhill for a while, but whether this spirit can be sustained in the long run and up until the elections is a big question. For one, there are doubts about the effects of the IAF operation. It would be alright to state as part of political rhetoric that those who want to know about the number of those killed in the bombing should go to Pakistan and find out, as home minister Rajnath Singh has stated, but the Centre would do well to come up with more factual statements. Pakistan is inclined to hide such matters, but India needs to make a try and establish related facts. It is understandable that West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee is vocal about knowing as much, as PM Modi has taken the wind out of the sails of the Opposition by ordering the IAF strike.

China, which unexpectedly adopted a neutral stand on the India-Pakistan stand-off after Balakot, seems keen on playing midwife to usher in peace in the sub-continent. Its guarded approach to the issue is likely prompted also by its own worry over Islamic militancy in the eastern sector close to Pakistan and the other Isthans.

As India has called Pakistan's nuclear bluff - that it would use nukes if India tried its military hands on the Islamic nation - China remains its only hope now. Balakot, though, showed there's a limit to such bonhomie. The US help to it is limited as well. Under the circumstances, restoration of peace with India should be a matter of top priority for Pakistan.

## Media of both countries making wrong noises Borderline journalism propping up blatant lies

By Sushil Kutty

and let the world know that only "one IAF pilot" was in Pakistan's custody. But did he say anything about the pilot in "Central Command Hospital"? No, that he did not, and why not?

Neither did the Paki-

ejecting from his stricken F-16 landed in POK and was brutally beaten up by civilians, who mistook him for an IAF pilot.

Wing Commander Abhinandan escaped a similar fate because of his "gun" and because

*“A rival channel is not far behind in being establishment-friendly albeit it doesn't go to the extent of asking for proof of patriotism from panelists representing opposition parties. Intemperate statements by politicians feed the frenzy and it's a daily evening diet of hyper-nationalism fed to viewers.”*

stan media ask the question, call out their DGISPR's faux pas. The Pakistan Army and Pakistan media to date continue to say that "two IAF aircraft" were shot down by Pakistani jets on February 27. Pakistani

Pak Army soldiers reached him in time, but not Wing Commander Shahzaz-ud-Din.

What happened next? Wing Commander Shahzaz-ud-Din is taken to hospital and DGISPR Maj Gen. Ghafoor is told

*“That is the Indian media, which have also been charged with peddling "fake news." But it's their Pakistani counterparts, which are getting away with murder. For, lost in Pakistani obfuscation is the fate of the F-16 pilot who ejected from his fatally-hit aircraft and then has not been heard of since except on Social Media.”*

media also chose not to question Pakistan about the use of F-16s in the counter-strike against Indian military installations.

Sadly, Indian media, except for a recently launched weekly, also did not ask the question: "Who was the second IAF pilot?" The answer was provided in Social Media by Pakistanis. The "second IAF pilot" was in fact a "PAF pilot", Wing Commander Shahzaz-ud-Din, who on

that a "second IAF pilot" is in Pakistan Army's custody. The Maj. Gen. jumps the gun and proclaims to the Pakistani media that a "second captured IAF pilot is in hospital."

Wing Commander Shahzaz-ud-Din is an unsung casualty of war, whose misfortune is so great that he isn't even named by the Pakistan Armed Forces or his valour celebrated by his countrymen. Two Wing Commanders of rival air

forces! One is a "hero"; the other is not even recognized as a "martyr." Nothing extraordinary there, Pakistan has never shirked from accepting the deaths of its soldiers in wars if it suits Pakistan's narrative.

But it's the role of the Pakistani media in perpetuating the lie that has not been called out. Pakistani media, collectively and willingly, chose not to question the Pakistan Army. Pakistan television channels and print media alike whitewashed Wing Commander Shahzaz-ud-Din's martyrdom. None of the Indian media-bashing Pakistan media felt it incumbent to do justice to Wing Commander Shahzaz-ud-Din, one of their own.

That probably is the difference between Pakistan and Indian media. While most Indian media take seriously the "independent media" tag, their Pakistani counterparts steadfastly toe the Pakistani establishment line, and Pakistan's "national interest."

The few times, Pakistani journalists have exposed Pakistan's lies, they have been hounded and intimidated. It happened to Cyril Almeida of Dawn newspaper and Taha Siddiqui, who reported from Pakistan for WION. Siddiqui was almost "disappeared" by Pakistan's ISI and is now in exile in France. Almeida continues to be on Pakistan's passport watch list and is "guilty" of getting Nawaz Sharif to admit that Pakistan orchestrated 26/11.

But it's the international media, markedly Pakistan-friendly, which are being questioned; media like the New York Times and CNN, for asking probing questions on how many JeM terrorists were killed in the Balakote strikes and if terror targets were in fact hit even as Pakistani media called for the Nobel for Imran Khan and sections of Indian media sold Narendra Modi to the Indian voter. (IPA Service)

## Plight of local film makers

By Barnes Mawrie

Khasi movies are gradually becoming popular among the Khasi-Pnar people. Movies like Onaatah or Manik Raitong have even grabbed national and international attention. It is a pride for the Khasi community that such quality movies are being produced from time to time. Movies belong to the narrative culture which is very much part of tribal culture here. So many famous myths and legends of the ancient world like the Iliad and Odyssey, Mahabharata and Ramayana etc, have been made popular today through the celluloid world. These ancient stories have survived, nay they have become well known today, thanks to

money to the Bollywood team who had shot the movie Rock On 3 in the State. Sad to say, when local film producers approach the government, they get only empty promises. Bollywood film producers have tonnes of money and so why should our government fund their project. It is the local producers who really need financial support. If the government were to help them, film industry in the state would have thrived considerably.

Secondly, our state lacks good theatre halls where local movies could be screened. As of today, it looks like only one hall in Shillong is willing to screen Khasi movies and that too at a great price.

*“I would say that there are many local film producers who are willing to commit themselves to this cause and who are very talented as well, however what deters them from doing this is the lack of financial support. Making a movie as we all know, involves a lot of expense which our local producers are not able to shoulder. I am told that when a Khasi movie is produced, the producer has to look for halls to screen the movie.”*

the audio-visual culture. Our tribal communities have a lot of myths and legends, stories and folktales which could be lost or fade away from memory if they are not perpetuated through the audio-visual media. Therefore the art of making movies is so important today in order to preserve and popularize our rich narrative heritage. I wish that one day, our local film producers would be able to produce movies or even animated pictures of fine stories like Ka Iewluri Lura, U Adadak, Ka Rangli, etc.

I would say that there are many local film producers who are willing to commit themselves to this cause and who are very talented as well, however what deters them from doing this is the lack of financial support. Making a movie as we all know, involves a lot of expense which our local producers are not able to shoulder. I am told that when a Khasi movie is produced, the producer has to look for halls to screen the movie. The theatre halls owners usually charge a lot of money for rental. Sometimes 50% of the income generated has to be doled out to the theatre owners. Imagine if a good movie generates 20 lakh rupees, half of that goes to hall rental, another half of the amount would definitely go for payment of the artists. So actually what the producer gets back is a pittance. This is the reason why most local producers give up after one or two attempts. It is a very discouraging exercise where the movie director and producer run into debts. There are three reasons why local film producing faces problems:

First of all there is lack of government financial support. This has been the constant complaint of these producers from time to time. Just a few years ago, we knew that the Meghalaya Government doled out a huge sum of

Actually, every district headquarter in the state should have a good theatre hall to provide possibility for wider screening of local movies. As far as I know, the government is constructing a gigantic hall in Mawkasiang as part of a particular project related to arts and culture. I believe that it would also serve the purpose of screening local movies in the coming years. But more such halls are needed in rural areas where local movies are more appreciated.

Thirdly, it would be good for the promotion of local movies if the government's Department of Art and Culture could set up or help interested groups to initiate a full-fledged movie studio with all the hi-tech equipment for movie making. Local film makers could have access to these facilities on a rental basis. It would not be a bad idea if the government or some rich business magnates take up the construction of a film city on a limited scale so as to facilitate film production in the state. Considering the fact that the natural beauty of our state is already an attraction in itself, to have such a film city like the Ramoji Film City in Hyderabad, would make our state an enviable location for movie producers of the country. In this manner, tourism could further develop and the economy of the state would be enhanced.

All said and done, what I wish to emphasize in this article is that we need to act collectively to promote local cinema because it is a powerful way of preserving and promoting our rich cultural heritage. The local people need to appreciate their indigenous movies and find ways and means to promote them. The government is the best agent to carry this project forward so as to showcase the cultural richness of our state to the outside world.

### TO THE EDITOR

### Does God drink milk?

Editor,  
Millions of litres of milk was poured over Shiva Lingas on Maha Shivaratri and the milk as usual went down the drain. It is a shame that we fail 48.2 million hungry children of our country. According to the 2018 Global Hunger report, India, Djibouti and South Sudan are the countries where child wasting are most prevalent. Children under the age of five who become victims of acute under-nutrition with low weight for their height, are tagged in the group of child wasting. This happens because of poverty that creates a wall between hungry children and nutritious food.

Now, where is the concept of Daridranarayana ~ 'God in the form of the poor'? Where is the milk of human kindness? The milk of human kindness means compassion and sympathy. This phrase has its origin in Shakespeare's play ~ 'Macbeth' where Lady Macbeth complains that her husband is too full of 'the milk of human kindness' to kill his rivals. Could Lady Macbeth make such a complaint about us

if she happened to see such wastage of milk in front of our hungry, malnourished children?

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen rightly said, "Hunger is quiet violence." And such wastage amidst malnutrition among our children is nothing short of violence. The milk could have brought smiles to the faces of our malnourished children and their mothers. We have created God in our own shadows as though Lord Shiva wants to drink milk by depriving his children. However, when we look at the sky we feel that the whole universe must be Infinite and therefore it is the One. So, if the Divine is to exist then that must be in the form of what Chhandogya Upanishad said ~ "One indivisible that is pure existence."

We see that our world itself creates dark nights by obstructing the Sun. Similarly, the ego creates falsehoods by obstructing the Infinite. Indeed, the ego obstructs the light by building walls of inhuman rituals, myths, superstitions, prejudices thus creating shadows of falsehood that take us far from God who has aptly

been described as the "One indivisible that is pure existence" by Chhandogya Upanishad.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Viaemail

### Of acid attacks on women

Editor,

In India, acid has often been used as a weapon against women who have turned down advances by men. Acid attacks are seen as one of the most vicious crimes as they cause perpetual suffering to the victim. Perhaps the most dangerous thing about acid attacks is the fear that they create. With just a few rupees, anyone can buy a weapon that can ruin another person's life in just a few seconds. Part of the reason is that acid is cheap and widely available. Many Indians use concentrated acid to sterilize their kitchens and bathrooms, as Americans would use bleach. There is an immense need to come out with legal measures and medical reforms by our government to help these victims.

Men who commit these crimes are usually

spurned suitors who want to avenge their rejection. The men should be punished so badly that no one will ever think of attempting to ruin a girl's life ever again.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit  
Ahmedabad

### IWD and atrocities on women

Editor,

International Women's Day is celebrated across the world to acknowledge special respect to women for their extraordinary contribution to society. The main purpose of celebrating the day is to extend solidarity to women who fall victims to all sorts of inequalities and injustice. Meghalaya also celebrates the day every year in a befitting manner; but the purpose of the celebration remains futile. In the matrilineal society of Meghalaya atrocities upon women are rising by leaps and bounds and proving a challenge to the law and order of the Government. Crimes like allegations of

witchcraft, of girls being gang-raped, trafficked sexually harassed and even minor girls and babies are subjected to such brutalities. The criminals, though sometimes caught red-handed, are not given exemplary punishment. Cases are pending for years and justice is delayed on the plea of investigations etc. As a result, the criminals are emboldened to repeat the crime and atrocities on women.

Many women suffer from domestic violence which is the highest form of inequality in the domestic sphere. Woman, being the physically weaker sex, our society is dominated by males and women are the victims of physical torture, mental harrassment, rape, exploitation and extreme cruelty. Even the safety and chastity of minor girls or child-girls are at stake where male guardians or protectors themselves become the predators. Even the representatives of the people i.e the legislators are not above such crimes. What can be more pathetic than this and where is the solace?

The aim of International Women's Day is not only women's em-

powerment or acknowledgement of women achievers. The first and foremost aim should be to ensure the safety and security of women, so that they as a class can move freely and safely. So it is high time for women to raise their voices against atrocities and violence against them and demand for proper enforcement of the existing laws. Courts should stop granting bail to the culprits to prevent repetition of heinous crimes on women. Moreover weak and debilitating justice delivery should be substituted by a robust one. Rapid and stringent action by the Government on atrocities on women should be given top priority.

Celebration of Women's Day will only be meaningful when our girls, our women, our flower like innocent baby girls are able to move freely and safely. Will we ever see such a day?

Yours etc.,  
Uma Purkayastha  
Shillong - 4

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

“ A woman that knows her worth doesn't measure herself against another woman but stands strong, calm and self confident. ”

--- Auliq Ice

## The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2019

### International Women's Day

INTERNATIONAL Women's Day (IWD) has a long history. It started in 1909 to celebrate working women and was a socialist-political event. Since then the United Nations has turned this day into an international event to draw attention to the gender biases that are still present in institutions and workplaces across the globe. IWD tries to dismantle the socially constructed roles of gender which not only divides humans based on their biology but on their attributes as male and female. While the categories man and woman are natural, the attributes of male and female are constructed by society which also circumscribes what role each gender will play. The aim of the United Nations is to ensure that men and women enjoy equal rights and opportunities in the economic, political and social spheres. This however is easier said and done. However, over the years governments across the world have been pushed by the Women's Movement to ensure that the development arms of governments and non-government institutions provide an equal and inclusive space devoid of gender discrimination. Years of research have shown that when women are consulted in policy making or are placed in strategic decision-making positions, institutions tend to fare better. However, since women are often handicapped by their reproductive roles, they often have to drop out of their careers and join back after a few years or start from scratch.

Most organisations now provide adequate facilities for working women, especially those in their child bearing years in the form of nurseries and crèches where they can bring their babies and feed them without much hassle. All these incremental gains have been achieved because of the struggles of feminist leaders and feminist politics which have made systems and governments more gender-sensitive and conscious of their responsibilities towards their women workforce. Indeed, it would not be possible to have increased women's workforce participation without addressing their reproductive roles and health.

But UN resolutions do not always work in most countries where governments are led by insensitive patriarchal despots. Indeed patriarchy is the dominating male attribute that sees women only as reproductive machines fit for the domestic space. In India, women have struggled long and hard to win their rights over what were traditional male domains in the workplace. While there are areas like the judiciary and academia where women will continue to remain hidden from leadership roles, more women today are ready to break all the ceilings that hamper their ambitions be they - glass, steel or stone. Good luck to them!

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Machismo versus feminism

Editor,  
International Women's Day is celebrated on March 8 every year. However, gender equality is not possible in a society that has been suffering from the contagious disease called machismo.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, machismo means exaggerated pride in masculinity, perceived as power, often coupled with a minimal sense of responsibility and disregard of consequences. In machismo there is supreme valuation of characteristics culturally associated with the masculinity and a denigration of characteristics associated with the feminine. It has dominated Latin American politics for centuries. Military dictators of Latin America have typified machismo with their authoritarian approach to government.

It is difficult to get rid of the problem of tobacco, alcohol and drugs because these things are interwoven with masculinity. They have become signatures of machismo as these destructive elements show I-don't-care attitude

which is a characteristic of machismo as it is "coupled with a minimal sense of responsibility and disregard of consequences".

Machismo is indeed a contagious disease that can spread quickly. It causes nasty symptoms in a society. For example, Dalits have been killed for growing a moustache and riding a horse because the moustache is a biological attribute of the upper caste and horse riding a traditional symbol of masculinity. If a society is obsessed with machismo then the powerful people want to have a monopoly over these symbols to exploit others.

The humorous Bengali poet, Sukumar Roy made a dig at machismo in his poem *gouf chiri* (Missing Whiskers). His son Satyajit Ray translated the poem into English. In the poem a man became hysterical about his moustache and equated it with his identity. He even went on to declare that his moustache is his master ~ "What man is to Moustachio / Man is slave, Moustache is master./ Losing which Man meets disaster!"

March 8 has been observed as International Women's Day worldwide. This day is set aside globally to ostensibly celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. This year the theme is Balance for Better. Indeed women are only claiming their due after having been discriminated against for centuries by the dictum of patriarchy. But the very idea of International Women's Day appears clichéd and jaded. It echoes like a broken record that's played over and over again to make us women believe we have been released from the societal chains that tie us to patriarchal value systems. As a tokenism for one day (March 8) we feel or are made to feel elated. The next day we are back to the grind; to the drudgery of home making; back to the kitchen; to the job that keeps our kitchens going; to the normal domestic pressures where many women are subjected to unbearable physical and emotional bruises - all of which fall under the rubric of "domestic violence."

For a long time women were led to believe that March 8, holds the promise of better laws to tackle violence against women with a sensitive, responsive justice system. Alas! This week while attending a conference organised by the International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IWAART) at the India International Centre, New Delhi, I heard articulate young women in the media speaking their minds and pointing out that the processes for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace based on the Sexual Harassment of Women At Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, such as the formation of an Internal Complaints Committee and its enquiry processes are not working for them. Many don't file FIRs because the process is simply too dense and inefficient.

Women also feel violated when they enter a police station to file a rape case and they are already being judged by the police personnel and subjected to unnecessary queries. Recently a human rights lawyer citing a study conducted by Ministry of Law and Justice, Govt of India and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) dated May 2017, said that contrary to the stipulation in S.309 (2), CrPC of completing rape tri-

als in a period of two months, the study found that the deposition of the survivor could not be completed within this time period. Delays occur for multiple reasons, including receipt of the FSL reports and other systemic factors like increasing case-load, which make delays unavoidable. The minimum time taken to complete just the deposition of the prosecutrix (the female prosecutor) according to data was 77 days (2 months 16 days), with the average time period being 37 weeks (8.5 months). In some cases, the deposition of the prosecutrix continued even after the 15 month period of the study. Although in court there were separate physical spaces for the accused and the victim it was found that the accused and his relatives continue to have access to the victim, even within the court precincts in the waiting areas. The access of the accused and his associates to the victim tends to build pressure on the victim and often makes her turn hostile. Since in most cases rape is committed by some family member or acquaintance who has access to the victim outside the court premises there is need to protect the victim and witnesses beyond the deposition and during the trial. The rape survivor often does not have access to counseling to get over her trauma.

The #MeToo Movement is essentially a movement to call out sexual predators in the form of employers or colleagues. These women find the justice system too cumbersome. They find the #MeToo movement liberating for allowing them to call out the perpetrators. They are then ready to pay for the consequences of their actions and even risk being hauled up for defamation. At least they feel they have done their bit to warn other women of repeated sexual offenders, some of whom are big names in the incestuous world of media and cinema.

International Women's Day only reminds us that women are still living in a non-inclusive, unequal, violence-ridden, gender-discriminating world even now and heaven knows for how many more decades. Women are discriminated against at the workplace and even their homes - the domestic space. Both these spaces are also the locations of violence, not nec-

essarily physical but are psychological, mental and emotional in nature and which may not lend themselves to vivid descriptions. They are often subtle and subversive forms of emotional blackmailing. Sexual violence is a result of poor upbringing. In most Indian homes, even if we don't openly say so, the messaging is loud enough in the way the male and female roles are constructed. Even today gender roles in homes are clearly specified. Women who allow themselves to be abused by their husbands and in-laws in the presence or within hearing distance of their children are actually communicating to their sons that it's okay to humiliate women and their daughters that this is how they deserve to be treated.

Coming to other aspects of women's welfare which is essentially their health, the absence of gender sensitive and gender nuanced health indicators is a problematic factor. In Meghalaya as of 2016 the maternal mortality rate (MMR) for 2015-16 is 211 per 1,00,000 live births. The MMR is higher in West Garo Hills at 66/100,000 and East Khasi Hills at 43/100,000. After Assam at 237/100,000, Meghalaya is the second highest in MMR. And the Meghalaya statistics does not appear in the national MMR statistics of 2014-2016. As far as infant mortality is concerned, Meghalaya has 39 deaths per 1,000 live births, Meghalaya's IMR is higher than the national average of 4. Further, IMR is higher in the rural areas at 40/1000 which is almost 15 points higher than the urban areas.

According to data from NFHS-4 (2016) the percentage of institutional births - a crucial parameter for access to healthcare services in Meghalaya is only 51.4% in 2016 which is behind the national average by 27.5%. The percentage of institutional deliveries in rural Meghalaya is almost half of those in urban areas. Meghalaya is the second worst performing state in terms of institutional deliveries in the entire north eastern region, according to the 'Healthy States, Progressive India,' report by the NITI Aayog. Similarly, the percentage of assisted births (by a doctor/nurse/LVH/ANM/other health professional) was as high as 90.8% in the urban areas and slips to only 48.1% in the rural areas of the state.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

subject to a lot of traffic, or a lot of trash blows in, keeping it clean does not need to be difficult. The first and simplest thing that the authority concerned can do is - provide trash bins. Employees can spend just a few minutes putting on some gloves and doing a quick pick up around the parking lot, or they could hire people to have them do that. Whatever the method, taking those steps to keep the parking lot clean will make a big difference. I think it's about due that the money we put in goes towards not just a parking space but towards what the society and people desperately need and that is a clean space and place.

Yours etc.,  
Manisha M Pala,  
Via email

**Correction:** The letter written by Malabika Bisharad as a rejoinder to the article by Uma Purkayastha captioned, "Where history resides" (ST Feb 24, 2019) was wrongly captioned "Religion Not a Public Affair." It should have been captioned, "Jitbhuni - the legacy of Tagore."

Keep MUDA parking lot clean

Editor,  
A clean community, a clean public space, a clean home equates to a clean and healthy society. It seems to me that in certain places in the 'Scotland of the East' as many call it, cleanliness has become just an aspiration unfulfilled. Here, I would like to express my serious concern towards the poor maintenance of the MUDA Parking lot at Khyndailad, Shillong. The place has become an abode of dirt and trash and there seems to be no trash bins in any of the parking levels. Much to my surprise, there's bad urine odour emanating from behind the cars parked in spite of there being a public toilet for use.

Funny how some of us think that this building is just a big slab of concrete that takes care of itself! Even if the parking lot is

Among nutrition outcomes in Meghalaya, anemia (among women of reproductive age) is the only indicator that has worsened over the last 10 years. This continues to be a very worrying factor because it is the primary cause for maternal mortality.

Interestingly, contrary to popular perception women in Meghalaya experience violence from their spouses. NFHS 2015-16 says that while spousal violence is lower among more educated women, almost 1 in 4 women who have at least 12 years of schooling have experienced physical or sexual spousal violence.

Also it would be wrong to surmise that Meghalaya does not experience misogyny and sexism because it is a matrilineal society. These facets are alive and kicking. Despite the constraints, however we are seeing a generation of women who have grown to expect equality - to be allowed to succeed academically, to progress professionally, to nurture families and to live public lives unimpeded by discrimination although they do not experience this as a given. They still have to fight for that equal space.

In a paper captioned, "International Women's Day: Yes, we still need to protest this shit," authored by Rose Capdevila and Liza Lazard of The Open University, the authors observe, "Invariably, around International Women's Day, people ask whether feminism is redundant. Don't the women of the Western world already have equal rights? Do we still have to protest this shit?" Their answer is, "When the most powerful man in the world (Donald Trump) thinks 'you can do anything,' to women, the answer can only be yes."

We in Meghalaya many not have a Trump who constantly disparages women but the recent proposals for amendments to the Sixth Schedule which target women as being social deviants that weaken the bedrock of matriliney are ideas that are embedded in right wing fundamentalism that Trump and his ilk propagate. And except for a few women, who also faced scorn and derision, no one protested loudly against this misogynistic idea. So much for International Women's Day!

Balance for Better is in our case, 'Imbalance for Worse' for we are regressing with each passing day!

## International Women's Day Musical colours of a woman

By Cassandra Syiemlieh

In an age where there is so much oppression, threats, cold and callous cruelty, sexual exploitation, rapes, horrifying murders committed only against women folk alone it unconsciously makes any woman lose faith in her own customs and traditions, no matter how menfolk blow their own trumpets to kingdom come. Practice what you preach! Sad to say, it is never absorbed. In their day-to-day life, women don't see that traditional values are perpetuated. Therefore how can a woman believe in values that are not concrete? Her five senses crave for them. Nothing happens but rather the reverse that can even invite a Divine Intervention on the Jaibynriew. Woman, take heart! God does not make you in vain. The bitter truth is that man cannot live without a woman.

How inspiring it is when world famous songwriters display in their songs the poetical and ethereal colours of a woman and how a man's jaw drops in looking at such ladies of character. The recent Noble Prize winner Bob Dylan wrote a song entitled "She Belongs To Me", where one verse is sufficient to be quoted.

*She wears an Egyptian ring  
That sparkles before she speaks  
She wears an Egyptian ring  
That sparkles before she speaks  
She's a hypnotist collector,  
You are a walking antique.*

Who says that human beings are perfect in every way? Men have their own defects, women too. Peter Sarstedt released the song in 1969, entitled "Where Do You Go to, My Lovely".

The song seems to cast a picture of a woman's desperate struggle for security in whatever way that is possible. Here are a few selected stanzas.

*You go to the Embassy parties  
When you talk in Russian and Greek  
All the young men who move in your circle  
They hang on ever word you speak! Yes they do!*

*I've seen all you qualifications  
You got from the Sorbonne,  
And the paintings you stole from Picasso,  
Your loveliness goes on and on, yes it does.*

*They say that when you get married  
It will be to a millionaire,  
But they don't realise where you come from  
And I wonder if they really care or give a damn!*

The question arises: Who is to blame? A woman's wiles or a man's lust and short-sightedness? One can recall the historical, beautiful and exquisite Cleopatra of Egypt. During her reign, the Roman Empire turned upside down, on account of her charm, beauty and brains, in preserving and expanding her own kingdom. Man should understand that is also part of what womanhood is made of - an intense and innate Patriotism!

Billy Joel sings with affection and understanding certain aspects in a woman's personality. In the song entitled "She's Always A Woman To Me", his voice carries the

words:  
*And she only reveals what she wants you to see*

*She hides like a child,  
But she's only a woman to me.*

In the second verse he says:

*Yeah, she steals like a thief  
But she's always a woman to me.*

However in the third verse, Billy Joel sings emotionally:

*But she'll bring out the best  
And the worst you can be  
Blame it all on yourself  
Cause she's always a woman to me.*

Most important is the chorus, with the following words:-

*Oh, she takes care of herself  
She can wait if she wants  
She's ahead of her time  
Oh, and she never gives out  
And she never gives in  
She just changes her mind.*

If famous singers - songwriters, sing so wholeheartedly with an understanding of a woman's plus and minus points, why not menfolk of Meghalaya sing together on a Woman's Day?

As a lady citizen of Meghalaya, I feel happy to see that a large section of society at least still take an interest in the innumerable compositions of Khasi, Pnar and Garo songwriters who praise the precious qualities of womanhood. For example - the compositions of Bah Beriwel Kyndiah, Bah Brektis Wanswet, Skendrowel Syiemlieh and his family, Kong Listrimai Syiemlieh and many other song-writers.

In a nutshell I'll only refer to some of their poetic symbols on woman. To them, a woman is a "Tiew Lamatieng" - a symbol of modesty and humility; "Tiew Lily" - a picture of chastity and purity of heart; "Tiew Kulab Saw" - a picture of the glowing beauty of woman and many others. I am not well-versed in Garo songs, hence I am unable to quote them. It is a fact that a native song touches double on a native.

In spite of songwriters showing the path to respect women one loses hope when life shows otherwise. Today, why is man so cruel and hard-hearted towards the female species of his own kind? In a Khasi and Pnar society, is there no more joy in rejoicing the birth of a female infant in a family, when she is so soon being mauled and raped? Who cares for the mother, previously respected as the "Lukhimai" of the hearth and home, when she is brutally raped, murdered and discarded as a piece of junk? Where is man's conscience? Where are the knights of tradition? Nowhere and nothing! Is it because victims of the "bloodiest of bloodiest" happen to be women only? A friend remarks "Silence reigns where cowards live!" Customs and traditions are not gently "Blowin' in the Wind", but ignominiously thrashed by a Satanic hurricane. Only it is good to remember that a Woman is a Phoenix of fire-She rises again from the ashes!

(The author is former teacher of St Edmund's College, Shillong)

*"Don't part with your illusions.  
When they are gone you may still  
exist, but you have ceased to live."*

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

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### All set for polls

With the bugle for General Elections 2019 ready to be sounded, the nation is set for a massive poll exercise involving the Lok Sabha and several state assemblies. Indications are that the polls would be spread over six phases, and the issue of notifications could be expected for the first phase before the end of March and voting could start in the second half of April, spread through May. The term of the present Lok Sabha ends in the first week of June, before which a new government will have to be in place. Prime Minister Modi had taken some efforts to configure assembly and Lok Sabha polls across the country at one go, but the matter could not be pursued with vigour. The idea got stuck on the if's and but's. Yet, in normal course, several states are getting set for assembly polls. Maharashtra and Haryana had assembly polls immediately after the last Lok Sabha polls in 2014. So did Jammu and Kashmir, followed by Delhi. Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh too are ready for assembly polls. This time, the Election Commission seemed to be taking more time than in the past for announcing the polls, and the principal Opposition the Congress party is rightly exercised over this. The Congress felt the EC was giving a long rope for PM Modi to go around announcing new schemes - which cannot be done once the polls are announced.

The phasing out of the poll process has proven to be effective and this helped in properly organising the elections, giving sufficient time and space for the polling staff as also the police establishments to spread out or redeploy their personnel. This is more so in sensitive areas, including states like once-unruly Bihar, or politically volatile West Bengal. At the same time, the long pause before the announcement of results robs the process of the elements of surprise and euphoria. This is unjustifiable when such is the scenario even in a by-poll. This is so, even as electronic voting machines are easier to handle. This might, at worst, strengthen the feeling that Indians cannot do a thing fast enough. At the same time, the announcement of all the results in one single day after the general elections is appreciable. The successful conduct of elections year after year is a credit-worthy performance for India. The Indian electoral system is effectively being copied elsewhere too, a sign of its strengths.

# Tribals need all protection to stay in forest land Centre and State Govts must act to ensure their rights

By Arun Srivastava

Tribal lands have always been up for grabs. On March 4 the tribals observed Bharat Bandh in protest against their evictions from their own land and accused the state governments of helping the big business in their attempt to grab their lands.

The ground to evict them was being prepared for quite some year. The most potent design which formed the basis for Supreme Court ordering their eviction was the allegation of tribals destroying the forest and killing the animals. A closer look at the background of the champions for eviction will reveal that they are the cohorts of the big business or corporate houses. It is an irony that a sustained effort was being made by vested interests to malign the tribals and blame them for destroying the forests.

Wildlife groups had petitioned the court saying India's limited forests were being encroached upon, and endangered wildlife was being further threatened by illegal squatters on forest land. They believe allowing people to live in scattered parts of forest land is also leading to the break-up of large forests and fragmentation of the habitat. They say the forest law provides for the resettlement of people living in national parks and sanctuaries, but none of this has happened.

The fact of the matter is this is being propagated with ulterior motives of grabbing their lands. It is also being disseminated that they are anti-Hindu. Basically this has been the reason that neither the RSS nor the BJP is keen to stand by them.

An insight into the procedure adopted to verify their claims on the lands has been tapered. The procedure adopted while rejecting the claims made by the Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDSTs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTDFs) was constricted and wrong. Instead of banning the vested interests from acquiring tribal land, it has been on the contrary planning to evict the adivasis, the real owners.

Any move in this direction should have been holistic and looked at the matter in the larger interest of tribals, farmers

and forest dwelling communities. It is surprising that the state governments did not take proactive stance. It is worth mentioning that the protection of forest dwelling tribes is consistent with the protection of forests. It is shocking that some states had not followed due procedure while considering the claims. The states have to be

**The ground to evict them was being prepared for quite some year. The most potent design which formed the basis for Supreme Court ordering their eviction was the allegation of tribals destroying the forest and killing the animals. A closer look at the background of the champions for eviction will reveal that they are the cohorts of the big business or corporate houses.**

judicious in their approach as most of the tribals simply have customary rights.

The Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDSTs) and Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTDFs) are extremely poor and illiterate people and not well informed of their rights and procedure under the (2006) Act. They live in remote and inaccessible areas of the forest. It is difficult for them to substantiate their claims before the competent authorities.

It is unfortunate that the claims of FDSTs and OTDFs were rejected in a summary manner, and due opportunity was not provided to the claimants. In some cases eviction orders are issued even before the appeals under the Act are exhausted.

It is still uncertain if the data furnished by the states accurately indicates whether the rejection orders were passed after observance of due process of law and natural justice and whether appeal mechanisms had been exhausted.

On February 13, the Supreme Court directed the eviction of families whose claims had been rejected under the Forest Rights Act, an order impacting over 10 lakh tribals and other forest dwellers across the country. It was after protest by the tribals that the apex court put on hold its order directing

states to complete the eviction of tribals and forest dwellers whose claims over forest land were rejected under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. The states have time to file their affidavits till July 10, when the court will examine the matter.

Tribals are visibly angry at the government babus,

recognised". The court order would become a pretext for forest officials to "attack" people who live in the forests.

Such fears are not unfounded. An earlier eviction drive - between 2002 and 2004 - to rid the forests of encroachers resulted in some 300,000 forest dwellers being forced out from lands. Tribals and other forest dwellers are labelled as encroachers simply because their ownership rights have not been recorded and settled by officials as stipulated by forest laws.

In a recent affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) also recognized the historical injustice done to tribal and forest-dwelling communities whose rights were not verified or recorded during consolidation of the forests. This historical injustice had been highlighted earlier by Dr. B.D. Sharma in the Twenty-Ninth Report of the Commissioner SC&ST, submitted in May 1990. At one stage apprehensions were being expressed that the forest encroachments by powerful lobbies may be "regularized" by the government.

Experts estimate that the February 20 order could result in some 8 million tribal people, including women and children, leaving forest areas spread across 17 Indian states which their ancestors had inhabited for centuries. Little doubt the judgement is a death sentence for millions of tribals. The eviction is nothing but a kind of land theft by the states.

While the petitioners asserted that tribals were encroaching on diminishing forest spread across 500 wildlife sanctuaries and 90 national parks the fact remains that the big business and vested interests have been denuding the forests and poaching the animals.

Realising the political cost of tribal eviction, the BJP has made a U turn and asked its state chief ministers to swing into action and file review petitions. The Supreme Court order came a year after it first asked states in March 2018 to provide a status report on evictions and what action had been taken in case of rejected claims. (IPA Service)

Advocacy group Campaign for Survival and Dignity alleges that "huge numbers of claims have been wrongly rejected and that forest officials, in particular, have a track record of illegally preventing people's rights from being

people of India. CM Kejriwal can read the writing on the wall and foresee a mass electoral defeat without collective support and seat sharing with other parties. That an individual who was so vocal regarding the monumental corruption of Congress is today hesitating to decide whether or not to go with that same party in the forthcoming election is an absolute shame! The only success and focus of the party and its leaders have been in participating in spicy television debates with no credibility or accountability towards its voters.

Yours etc.,  
Saikat Kumar Basu,  
Lethbridge AB Canada

### Shillong DC's office needs a clean-up

Editor,  
Through your daily I wish to formally lodge my complaint to the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills, that the lavatories in that office are emanating a

stench that pervades the entire corridor. Moreover, they are ill and shabbily maintained wherever they exist. The office rooms and corridors are dirty and in shambles. Papers and files are strewn everywhere and the office premises and surrounding are dirty and filthy. This does not speak well of the dignity of the Office of the Deputy Commissioner. This important public office is frequented by members of the public. It is sad to note, that no toilet facilities are being provided for them. To address this issue, may I suggest that a dedicated officer be put in-charge of cleanliness so that proper cleaning and maintenance of toilets at the office is regularly and meticulously done. This will also put an end to the stench which these toilets emanate at present which is also a health hazard. I therefore, earnestly appeal to the present DC to address these issues on a priority basis.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via-Email

## Politics of Sharing Indian version of alliances

By Dr. S.Saraswathi

Veteran leader Mulayam Singh of the Samajwadi Party, one of the biggest challengers to a second term for the Congress and CPI (M) in the parliament over the hit fund scam. Bengal CM replied that she would remember what happened in Parliament. Looking back, we can recall how she fared as alliance partner in NDA government of Vajpayee.

"Poll alliances and party ideologies are two different matters", said Tamil Nadu CM justifying electoral alliance between AIADMK and PMK important to prevent PMK from joining the DMK in Assembly by-elections. To the PMK, one of the harshest critics of the AIADMK, it is a change in strategy to win seats and not change in its stance. It says that it will continue to criticise alliance partners.

The Indian version of alliance politics compels the leaders to face critics outside and inside the alliance. It can make the system more democratic provided public interest underlies criticisms and not sheer show of number game.

"Joint alliances are not forged based on principles, but to bring down the enemies", said another leader citing the importance of a negative aim. This object brings together sworn enemies. Existence of multiple axis in multi-party alliances is common. "The fight with the Congress will remain in the State. At the national level, we will fight together", said Mamata affirming her dual role. Similar is the situation for the TDP also. However, it is still not clear what stand the SP and BSP will take to reconcile their dual role vis-à-vis the Congress.

Among the various regional parties, the DMK and the AIADMK seem to be under compulsion of circumstances to ally with the Congress and the BJP respectively and have no other alternative. Other regional parties like the TMC, TDP, SP, BSP, RJD, JD(S) have an option and have chosen to be anti-BJP, but still undecided about leadership and even about having the Congress in the alliance.

Among rare instances in the politics of alliances, the AGP's decision to sever ties with the BJP over the issue of Citizenship Bill and possibilities of revival of ties with the lapse of the Bill needs mention.

Political parties in western democracies have declined as mass democratic parties in recent decades especially in membership. On the contrary, parties in India continue to be vibrant and their membership grows in millions. People's interest in politics and political leadership is growing due to several welfare schemes bringing the masses in direct contact with political leaders at least in their locality. Parties occupy a central place in the collective life of common people who look upon them as the agents for transformation of their lives.

Party alliances are very common in many countries like Brazil, Italy, and the Netherlands. Under the German Federal Electoral law, members of a parliamentary group having the same basic political aims do not compete with one another. In most countries, parties fight under the banner of the larger party and campaign together.

An alternative to alliance is Electoral Fusion which is an arrangement where two or more parties list the same candidate. Parties are separately listed, but candidate is common. The system is also known as cross endorsement, multi-party nomination, and plural nomination.

Such a system is unworkable in India where parties remain separate not because of policy differences, but for gaining political places. Alliance is a strategy not for fusion but for sharing. ---INFA

(The author is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Women's Day tokenism

Editor,  
In our state the numbers of rape cases leading to murders have been awaiting verdicts for several years. The newspapers too don't follow up these cases beyond a point. The fact that cases between tribals are transferred to the District Councils courts makes matters worse. The District Council courts hardly function and cases drag on for years. What then is the point of observing this one day in our lives when every day our women and girl-children are subjected to such terrifying experiences? There are also not enough NGOs to follow up these cases since most of the victims are poor and without any support system. When will these victims of rape ever get justice? Those who survive live their lives in agony without counseling and healing. I often wonder what their future will be like especially when they are raped at a tender age. And the worst part is that

Meghalaya is known for its matrilineal tradition. This is the irony that women here live with and as a woman I feel this pain too. Who will take up the cause of raped victims? And please don't ask me to call them survivors because they can never really survive the pain and hurt of being raped.

Yours etc.,  
D Lyngdoh,  
Via email

#### Women and men are equal

Editor,  
This refers to your thought-provoking article "Musical colour of a woman" By Cassandra Syiemlieh (March 8, 2019). Mahatma Gandhi said, 'Intellectually, mentally, and spiritually, woman is equivalent to a male and she can participate in every activity.' International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have

played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities.

Every year we celebrate International Women's Day" but we find that crime against women seem to be increasing at an alarming rate. Crime is endemic to the human condition, but a crime specifically directed at one sex is most despicable and unfortunately, the one that is punished least. It is found that the media exposure and all the legislations have little impact.

It is time for women to introspect on their positive and negative attitude towards life. It is the time for them to pat themselves on their back for some of their achievements in that whole year. The road is lengthy and they have to travel steadfastly to achieve freedom in all walks of life. No longer is the "hand that rocks the cradle" the only womanly hand that rules the world.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit  
Ahmedabad

#### Aam Aadmi Party directionless

Editor,  
If there has been one big political disappointment in India in the recent past, it has been the rise and fall of the Aam Aadmi Party and its legendary leaders. AAP was supported and quoted even in international media as a party with difference, high morality and monumental expectations. The party has failed miserably in achieving all major electoral promises, in fights and controversies with relentless intra and inter party clashes. These have weakened its support base among ordinary voters as well as amongst political analysts of all color and dynamics. The party head always seems to be confused in taking any major decision(s) independently or democratically and has neither direction nor future plan as to what it actually wants to achieve for the

people of India. CM Kejriwal can read the writing on the wall and foresee a mass electoral defeat without collective support and seat sharing with other parties. That an individual who was so vocal regarding the monumental corruption of Congress is today hesitating to decide whether or not to go with that same party in the forthcoming election is an absolute shame! The only success and focus of the party and its leaders have been in participating in spicy television debates with no credibility or accountability towards its voters.

Yours etc.,  
Saikat Kumar Basu,  
Lethbridge AB Canada

# A trust & not govt should be in charge of museums

Vinod Daniel, chairman of AusHeritage & board member of International Council of Museums, says Indian museums need to stop depending on government funds

By Godhuly Bose

Vinod Daniel is an Australian citizen of Indian heritage. He received degrees in chemical engineering (BTech and MTech) from IIT Delhi and IIT Madras and has worked with institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum, NY and J Paul Getty. He has worked extensively on museum preservation across the world, as also in India (Kolkata, Shantiniketan, Prince of Wales, Mumbai, Madras Museum, Indira Gandhi Museum, Delhi etc. Soft-spoken and incessantly polite, Daniel discussed his work at length over a cup of masala chai. Here are some excerpts from the conversation:

**How did you start working with museums? What does it mean to be a museum specialist?**

I did my BTech and MTech from IIT Delhi and IIT Chennai, respectively. After that I went to the US to do a second Master's degree. There I had an opportunity to start working at the J Paul Getty Trust, which is the largest philanthropic body in terms of museums and museum related things. My role there was to conduct research on how to better preserve collections. It included working with the preservation of mummies in Egypt and developing new methods for getting rid of insects, which pose a big problem in cultural preservation. I moved to the Australian Museum in Sydney in the mid-90s

where I got more involved with education and outreach, etc. Since then I've had the opportunity to work with museums in over 45 countries and I've also been involved in a broader role with global museums. I had a special interest in museums in the developing part of the world. I am also a board member of the International Council of Museums (ICON), which is based out of Paris and has a membership base of about 20,000 museums and has national committees in more than 145 countries.

The museum movement is very active in the developed parts of the world, especially in countries like France, Netherlands, etc. They try to make visiting museums very attractive there. In the past few years, the US, Canada, and Australia have also done very well to popularise museums. In recent times, Singapore has been very proactive in developing their museums as well.

**What do you think needs to be done to improve the conditions of the museums in India?**

I believe that the next big movement in terms of museums needs to happen in countries like India, Nepal, Indonesia, etc. I think that in order to capitalise that, there are some time-tested successful broad approaches that are essential components in museum revival. Consider this, globally you cannot consider anything a museum unless it is non-profit. All of the vibrant countries have museums as independent entities that are not government-con-

trolled but rather report to a trust. This has been a huge incentive to push for museum reformation and revival. I think that this has to be implemented in India too in order to have vibrant museums. It would make it easier for the museums to be more aggressive in organising programs, fundraising, curating exhibitions, etc.

A good example is the Chhatrapati Shivaji Museum in Mumbai, which I think is the only Indian museum that has performed very well in recent years. They have an independent trust. There also needs to be a broad master-plan that addresses any lags that may be present in the physical infrastructure, and also ensures the preservation and maintenance of the collections and their relevant databases. Aside from these, the plan needs to include a good educational unit, have committees that work on establishing and maintaining communication with the public, and curate vibrant exhibitions. This plan may take 10 to 15 years to complete; it cannot be done in the space of a few years with a light-hearted mindset. Just take a look at all the good renewal programs – the CSMB renewal project took nearly two decades to complete, and now it is an excellent example of what a good museum can look like in India. In order for all this to be accomplished, you need strong leadership in the form of a museum director who is there for at least eight years.

**What is the role of museum staff in generating interest about museums among the public?**

It is very important for dedicated staff to be available alongside a strong leader.

There is a particular skill set required in order to successfully run museums. Currently, there are only a handful of good programs in India that teach Museology. The National Museum in Delhi has a few programs, as does the University of Calcutta. I think that educational programs directed towards this will automatically gain momentum when the museum revival projects go underway. Working in a vibrant museum will then be a prestigious job like it is in many other countries today.

**What can be done to popularise museums among the public in India?**

Aside from a holistic approach to reviving museums, which does not solely focus on celebrating centenaries or such, there is another effective approach that is being practiced in the west. Exhibitions are being designed to specifically appeal to sections of the public. In order to do this, there must be enough information to suggest the current interests of the people, which can be acquired through public outreach and surveys and such. Successful exhibitions are curated with the help of audience interest evaluations.

If a museum is not independently managed and rather fully funded by the government, then there is no incentive for them to find ways to attract larger audiences and curate exhibitions that will appeal to them. In the West,

they try to find innovative ways to do this – they keep certain spaces of the museum open after hours, open bars or cafes etc. to generate more interest and attract more people. If one museum per state takes the initiative to show the way, then I think the museum scene will greatly improve in India. It is important for the government to give them enough operating funds to keep them working and motivated but to incentivise the venture by allowing them to gather the rest of the funds by pulling larger audiences. If this can be done then it will spread a lot of knowledge and also feed into the education sector, giving rise to more courses in conservation and museum management etc.

**Despite the lack of specific museum-oriented courses, do you think that other graduates can look towards museums as a career prospect?**

History and archaeology can always help to work at a museum. It is important to be excited about it, and if the opportunity to work there presents itself, then one can transform. Currently there's a lot of inertia in the system, so, I think there needs to be a radical shakeup. Museums need to generate excitement in India just like other countries have done. It is a great honour to be the director of the British Museum, but there just isn't that much interest for museum work in India. For that to occur, museums themselves need to market themselves as a possible career option that is vibrant and exciting. (TWF/IBNS)

Vinod Daniel speaks at Cultural Academy



## Learn without attending college

By Ranjan K Baruah

Many students ask me about distance courses or open learning. As there are many institutes offering courses under distance mode, many students who do not attend regular universities or colleges enrol themselves. Distance education or long-distance learning is the education of students who may not always be physically present in an educational institute. Traditionally, this usually involved correspondence courses wherein a student corresponded with the school/college via post. Today it has changed and along with distance mode now it also involves online education.

The University of London was the first university to offer distance learning degrees, establishing its external programme in 1858. Distance Education "is a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both". In other words, distance learning is the process of creating an educational experience of equal qualitative value for the learner to best

suit their needs outside the classroom. With the recent trend of technological advance, distance learning is becoming more recognised for its potential in providing individualised attention and communication with students internationally. It is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy and andragogy, technology and instructional systems aimed to deliver education to students who are not physically "on site" or on campus.

### DISTANCE EDUCATION

This mode of education has been popular in India too. We are aware that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is where teachers and learners need not necessarily be present either at same place or same time and is flexible in regard to modalities and timing of teaching and learning as also the admission

criteria without compromising necessary quality considerations.

ODL system of the country consists of Indira Gandhi National Open University, State Open Universities, Institutions and Universities offering education and Correspondence Course Institutes in conventional dual mode universities. With the dissolution of the Distance Education Council of the IGNOU, the regulatory power on ODL is currently vested with the University Grants Commission.

Degrees and certificates from recognised universities are valid but first choice of students should be regular courses as we learn more from regular courses than via distance mode.

Updates:

NEST Entrance: National Entrance Screening Test (NEST) is a compulsory test for students seeking admission to National Institute of Science Education and Research (NISER) Bhubaneswar and University of Mumbai - Department of Atomic Energy Centre for Excellence in Basic Sciences (UM-DAE CEBS), Mumbai. Both NISER and UM-DAE

CEBS were set up by Department of Atomic Energy, Government of India in 2007. Their mandate is to train scientific manpower for carrying out cutting edge scientific research and for providing input to scientific programmes of Department of Atomic Energy and other applied science institutions in the country. NEST 2019 will be conducted in around 91 cities across India. Last date for applying is March 18.

NERIST Entrance: Online applications are invited for NERIST Entrance Examination (NEE) 2019 to be conducted by the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science & Technology (NERIST), Nirjuli, Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh) for Base Module (Certificate Course), Diploma Module & Degree Module Courses in Technology streams and also Degree Module course in Forestry. The NEE 2019 shall be conducted for admission at three levels/courses and aspirants may fill in forms by March 25.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjani@gmail.com for career related queries)

## Mythical birds of India

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Other countries celebrate their mythical animals. Garuda belongs to Indian mythology but is the national bird and symbol of Indonesia. The Phoenix or Homa is revered in Iran. Here are some we should know:

Byangoma/Byangomi are the legendary birds of Bengal. They look like hoopoes, are wise, strict and assist whom they consider deserving. They are born blind and need a few drops of blood from a donor to activate their sight. When they tell the future to someone, that person hears voices, a bird song and suddenly has an intuition about something which is to happen.

Gandaberunda is a two headed, long tailed mythological bird who possesses enough, immense, magical strength. The bird is depicted as clutching elephants in its talons and beaks. In the ancient coins of Madurai, it is shown holding a snake in its beak. In the Chennakesava temple there are depictions of a chain of destruction: A deer is eaten by a python who is destroyed by an elephant who is attacked by a lion who is destroyed by Shiva in his incarnation as Sharabha. Sharabha is then destroyed by Narasimha (man-lion) as Gandaberunda.

The tale is like this: The demon Hiranyakashipu is killed by Vishnu who comes as Narasimha. But even after he was slain, Narasimha, who had tasted blood, did not change back his form to Vishnu. The gods grew scared of his raging form and they appealed to Shiva. Shiva turned himself into Sharabha – a combination of man, lion, bird – in order to subdue Narasimha. But Narasimha changed into Gandaberunda, with two heads, fearful rows of teeth, black in complexion, and with wide blazing wings, and fought with Shiva-Sharabha for eighteen days, killed him and then died in a massive explosion of energy.

Gandaberunda was first adopted by the Vijayanagara empire in 1510, and as the royal insignia of the Wodeyar rulers of Mysore 500 years ago. Coins from the rule of Achyuta Deva Raya are thought to be the first to use the Gandaberunda on currency. Found in the sculptures and bas-reliefs of many temples in the South of India, it is the official emblem of Karnataka.

The Homa bird, of Vedic times, lives and breeds in the air, lays eggs in the air, and, before the eggs reach the earth, they hatch and the baby bird flies upward to join its mother. They never touch the earth. Persian, Turkish and Sufi poets praise them as divine birds, and birds of paradise.

In Vedic literature there are references to birds bringing the divine Soma plant from the mountains. S and H have been interchanged in Greek and Persian: Hindus, eg. those living on the banks of the river Sindhu, are called Hindus. Six becomes Hexa in Greek. Perhaps the Soma bird is the mythical Homa bird. In Persian mythology it was believed that if this bird flew over someone's head, and its shadow fell on him, he would become a mighty king. This belief made Tipu Sultan of Mysore create a golden throne with the Homa bird, in gold and jewels on the canopy.

The mythical Hansa or Swan/Goose represents purity, perfect union with the universe, divine knowledge. The Hansas, also called Aryannas, live in Manasaras (Manasarovar) in the Himalayas. They don't like rain, so they come to Earth when it rains in their abode, and return as soon as rain begins here. They are the children of Dhritarashtra, who is the daughter of Kashyap and Tamra, according to the Valmiki Ramayana. The Hansas were first black and white, but they became pure white as a boon from Varuna the god, who once took their form to hide from Ravana. The gods had assembled for a havan and had to change into various bird forms when Ravana attacked them. The hansa eats pearls and separates milk from water from a mixture of both. The Hansas play an important role in the story of Nala and Damayanti.

In the Hindu epic Mahabharata, Navagunjara is a creature composed of nine different animals/birds. Navagunjara has the head of a rooster, and stands on three feet – those of an elephant, tiger, deer or horse, the fourth limb being a raised human arm carrying a lotus or a wheel. The beast has the neck of a peacock, the back or hump of a bull, the waist of a lion, and the tail of a serpent.

Navagunjara is a common motif in the Odisha Pata-Chitra style of painting. The creature is considered a form of Vishnu. Once when Arjuna was meditating on a hill, Navagunjara appeared. Arjuna was terrified, as well as mesmerised, by the strange being, and raised his bow to shoot it. But he realised that Navagunjara was a manifestation of Vishnu, and dropped his weapons, bowing before the bird creature.

The Chakora is a legendary immortal partridge/crow pheasant that lives on moonbeams. On the full moon night, the Chakora cries passionately for the moon, shedding tears of unrequited love for the moon in all her glory shining high in the sky. In the Mahabharatam, when Kuchela was on his way to meet Krishna, he saw the Chakora. By the time he returned home after meeting him he was rich!

The Chakora is believed to bring good luck. The association of Chakora and Chandra, the moon god, has inspired a number of love stories in India.

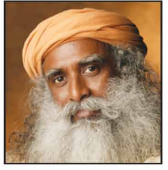
The Chataka is a mythological cuckoo, who is unwilling to drink water found on earth, choosing to drink only fresh pure rain water as it falls from the sky. It has a shrill voice. The Chataka pleads with the clouds to bring in rain so that its thirst can be quenched. A black/yellow/white bird, smaller than the dove, it has a long tail. The long crest on its head is shaped like a bow with an arrow stretched tight on it. References to this bird are made in Kalidasa and Adi Shankaracharya.

The chataka and chakora depend on natural resources – rain water and moonlight, a lesson that nature needs to be preserved without destruction. These are only very few of our mythical birds, but you need to tell your children about them.

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

# Is life a dream?

**Sadhguru, Isha Foundation**



**Questioner:** When we dream, dreams seem so real but I know these are illusions. Is that the same thing for my life right now? How real is this life?

**Sadhguru:** The problem is that you have been reading bits and pieces of Zen. Bits and pieces of Zen are dangerous. Bits and pieces of anything are dangerous. Now, what you are saying is true in a way because ninety-nine percent of your life is just thought and emotion. Thought and emotion are only a projection of life; they are not life. Emotion is also a kind of thought, a juicer thought. Thought is dry. Emotion is juicy, but still a thought.

The way you think is the way you feel. If you think, "Oh this person is a wonderful person," you will have sweet emotions towards that person. If you think, "Oh this is a horrible person," you will have nasty emotions towards that person. You cannot think this is a wonderful person and have nasty emotions, nor can you think this is a horrible person and have sweet emotions, because the way you think is the way you feel. Because emotion is juicy, it has a drag time, so you think they are different.

You could think somebody is a very wonderful person, but tomorrow morning if he does something that you don't like, suddenly you think he is a horrible guy. Your thought immediately takes a right angle turn. But emotion cannot turn so quick. It takes a long turn. It takes a few days or months but after some time, it will come and join the thought. So thought and emotion are not different, they are same. If your whole life is just thought and emotion, it is very much like a dream.

Now that you are on to Zen, you must know about Chuang Tzu. He was a great Zen master, and many monks lived in his monastery. One morning, suddenly, he was in a great state of misery. When the monks

saw the master in misery, everybody was terrified. If the master is in misery, something really bad must have happened, because he was always joyful and nice. So the senior-most monks slowly approached him and asked, "Master what is happening?" Chuang Tzu said, "Don't disturb me, I am in deep distress. Get away!" The monks said, "If you are in distress, that should be death for us. Please tell us what is causing distress to you!" Then Chuang Tzu said, "Oh, yesterday night in my dream, I was a butterfly." The monks said, "What is wrong with being a butterfly? Sometimes we have been pigs, birds, we have been many things; that is not a problem. A butterfly is quite good, what is wrong with a butterfly?" He said, "You idiots, you don't understand. When I was a butterfly, I actually

flew, I went and sat on the flower, I could feel the flower, I could smell the flower, I could taste the flower. My life as a butterfly was so real and true for me. But morning when I woke up, I found myself as Chang Tzu. And my life as Chang Tzu is also so real and true for me. Now, I don't know whether

yesterday night, Chang Tzu was dreaming as if he was a butterfly, or now the butterfly is dreaming as if he is a Chang Tzu. I don't know which is true. Because both look equally vivid and real." When you live just through the thought process, this is how it is. He was using it as a method to shock his monks out of their stupor of spirituality, because people read sutras and books and think what they read and think is spirituality. Chuang Tzu was trying to knock their psychological structure out, so that they become existential. If you are experiencing life as such – not thought, not emotion – then such a question will not come. But when most of your life is just thought and emotion, it is very true, it is very much a dream. It is just another projection.

*(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan in 2017 for exceptional and distinguished service)*

**Emotion is a kind of thought... Thought is dry. Emotion is juicy, but still a thought**



From time keepers to wardrobe must-haves, it's interesting to observe the evolution of watches

**By Ritusmita Biswas**

In Kolkata's refurbished South City Mall that now houses some of the top global brands, there is a new store drawing a lot of interest from those sold over possessing luxury watches. Inaugurated by Bengali actor Abir Chatterjee last month, the new Seiko boutique in a plush mall of Kolkata boasts of a wider range of exclusive and limited edition product collections from its luxury range.

The new store of the Japanese brand Seiko, which introduced many landmark innovations like production of Japan's first wristwatch in 1913 and including the creation of the world's first quartz watch in 1969- is just a testimony to the rather sizeable constituency of the watch lovers' clan in this eastern megapolis.

There used to be a time when watches were kept by the town watchmen in England to keep track of their shifts. It was around the 15th century. This is one of the accounts of the origin of

the word 'watches'. However, there is another account, which says that the term came from 17th century sailors, who used the new mechanism to time the length of their shipboard watches. Whichever is the origin of the word, the use of watches has always been primarily to keep track of the time. From the first clock or pocket watches to the latest quartz or smart watches, the journey has been pretty impressive and remarkable all the same time.

### The time of the Big Boom

When Seiko first came up with the revolutionary Quartz technology in 1969, perhaps little did they know what was soon going to follow. People wondered, what could be next? Now with the rise of smart watches, they know, witnessing the onset of a new era for watches.

The Seiko brand's revolutionary technology brought in many new innovations in the world of watches. The advent of Swiss and American watch brands, like Fossil, Guess or Swatch introduced a new category to the world- the fashion watch.

The idea of just fine technology went for a toss — the look mattered. The shift in focus put on the table watches in multicolours, quirky designs and cool straps. Look around and you will find that more than insistence on the precision of the ma-

chine or the technology involved, it is about the look that many customers are concerned about. And thus a new phenomenon has been created- 'watch wardrobing' or buying multiple watches to match outfits and the occasions.

### The look

This new attitude has made the age-old time-keeper a piece of fashion statement. The watch which used to be affordable accessory has meanwhile become a luxurious fashion item integral to the lifestyle, thanks to the designer watches that have flooded the market.

From movie stars to youngsters, all boast of more than one watch in a varied price range to keep up with the trend. Kolkata has seen a drastic rise in the number of stores selling high-end luxury watches. Since ages, as veterans would confirm, Titan Stores or the S.H. Mumtazuddin outlet have been ruling the market when it comes to luxury watches. But now many other stores have stepped into the market. The biggest launch has been of Helios, a brand by the Tatas that sells multiple luxurious brands.

Shopping malls that dot the city today also boasts of many designer stores which sell the most trendsetting watches, perfect to complete one's wardrobe. Most of the fashion enthusiasts of the city on an average

boast of more than two watches at a time. Yash Nagpal, a college student confesses, he is a watch freak, "I love adding watches to my collection and every six months I tend to add at least one designer watch to my collection".

Deven Agarwal, a businessman also says, "I swear by designer watches and make sure I convey to my family and friends, 'if you are looking for a gift for me, simply head towards 'Helios', because that store is the key to my heart."

### Catching the imagination

From a student to a businessman, from a celeb to an IT professional, luxurious watches seem to have caught the imagination. While for some they are a means to show-off, for others they are pieces of art.

Now every time we get a glimpse of the bright green strap of Amitabh Bachchan's watch, we are reassured that designer watches are not always about metal straps and elegant looking designs, a funky colour or a quirky look can be equally luxurious and coveted. Why not add it to our wardrobe?

To sum up, watches have not lost their fans since the 15th Century. In fact, the number of them is increasing as time goes by. The difference is, the functional object has now acquired an aura of luxury. (TWF)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 10, 2019

It is a phase of work and development as Moon conjunct Uranus on your solar return chart. It's also a good time for expressing your creativity. Reach out, but avoid scattering your energies. Your ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. Your main focus is on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new friends. You are enthusiastic and ready for adventure. Contentedness in love is likely to figure and to attract positive circumstances into your life. Trips bring good luck and you will be happily surprised by some outcomes.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

The planetary configuration brings mixed results for you. You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives. You are likely to see benefits and improvements in the areas of work and health, as well as daily routines. Your ability to handle the details required to do a good job is significantly enhanced and others increasingly become more aware of your skills. Benefits may come through co-workers or employees during this period. You spend more time on phone calls, emails, short frequent trips and communicating with friends.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity and success. There would be cooperation and understanding in professional and relationships. You might pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain. You would always be willing to work all the more harder to meet your new responsibilities. Your love life has been erratic for some time, and this trend continues. You could find that you invest in real estate. You would also bring a more playful environment to your home. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

The planetary configuration of this phase brings good results. Any type of service that you may provide is likely to go well. You are more successful in hiring people to work for you and improvements in your working environment are likely. You find more enjoyment in the work you do, and it is easier than usual to find employment now. You may get a new job during this period. Others will derive more enjoyment from the current job. Work tends to be very easily accessible to you. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

Your natural talents would meet with reward and acceptance. Practical matters are a large focus and are very strong. More security in your job is likely. You are more willing than usual to work diligently for money, and your natural talents are likely to be utilized more in the work you do and appreciated by others. You would enjoy some time in your family and there you find affection and love. This is altogether a happy and relaxed time for you. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular work and exercise.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

Communication, creativity and authority in professional matters are highlighted as an exciting job offer, reward, recognition, or promotion is possible. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. You are ready to perform and express yourself and take charge and responsibilities on your shoulders. This is a very significant period when you are inspired creatively and emotionally. Romance could make you think along serious or practical lines and look to a more committed relationship.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 24)**

This is a phase that brings fun, entertaining events and happiness to the fore. Your effectiveness, self-worth and finances are also highlighted. This stage of your life may be marked by hard work. Financial success may not be remark-

able, yet it is generally steady, if slow to come by. Matters of personal courage, confidence and independence are emerging. Issues surrounding Income from foreign sources could also figure at this time. You should be careful not to over-analyze your relationships. You feel on top of things with good health and positive energy.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

You would participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. You are in a position to inspire others through what you create. Turning a hobby or favorite pastime into a career could also figure. Partnership ups and downs continue to persist, as you struggle with matters of freedom and dependency. Children may require more discipline or attention. You may also bring more creativity into the work you do. Health is likely to prosper and medical procedures or programs, if necessary, are more apt to be successful.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 24)**

Good financial returns are on the cards. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. You probably should be on the lookout for a tendency to create your own financial stress due to extravagant spending habits. You may visit religious places and strong feelings towards religion are enhanced. You learn to look inside of yourself with a newfound clarity and realism and ideally draw up considerable strength from within. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or a structured exercise routine.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

The planetary combination opens new horizons in your romantic and love life. You would pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds. You are bound to experience your fair share of fun, and good times. Creative projects are likely to fare well, and could possibly even bring some type of recognition. Love and romance may enter your life or is enhanced with good humor and warmth, and social engagements abound. For singles, meeting a special person is highly likely. Health is likely to prosper and medical procedures or health programs, if necessary, are more apt to be successful.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

You would be more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental about work commitments. Investments in stocks and other speculative matters could earn tidy profits, although care should be exercised with any dealings that tie you to other people and others' money. Your creativity and social life are stimulated, and plenty of opportunities to express yourself uniquely and creatively will present themselves. Relationships with your children may be especially fulfilling now. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be strong.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

This is a fabulous period in which to take the vacation you have always wanted to take. Those with artistic or athletic talent can be especially prolific and prosperous at this time. You may find great joy and reward in your creative projects and hobbies, and could discover a new hobby or creative talent you never knew you had. Healthy risks are likely to pay off, but be careful of overconfidence in speculative investments. Pleasure-seeking activities, recreation, and amusement are increased. Health is likely to prosper.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. You may visit and spend a lot of time in the company of your friends and loved ones. This is also a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. Your family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. These positive circumstances will not necessarily fall into your lap, and are unlikely to come all at once. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities in these areas of life.

# Why discriminate?

India is culturally and religiously a rich country. Indians worship several forms of female deities and every deity symbolises some unique characteristics. However, the contradiction lies in the mindset of a few Indian people who in spite of worshipping the divine female deities, show aversion towards women. Gender inequality is all over the world but preference for a male child is found in India and some other countries.

As per the national statistics, the national average is 917 girls for 1,000 males. In some villages, this ratio is skewed to as much as 500 females for 1,000 males. To add to it, there are around 70 villages where girls were not born in the last decade.

The point to highlight is female foeticide where people abort female foetus or sometimes abandon newborn girls. Despite the existing law that prohibits sex determination, people find illegal ways to determine the gender of the foetus. In some rural areas, few elderly women follow ancient technique to determine the gender of the foetus by simply touching a pregnant woman's stomach and feeling the pulse of the foetus.

As per the national census, the Indian rural population stands at approximately 66.5 per cent and the literacy rate is around 74 per cent with 66.5 per cent educated female and this rate varies from state to state and urban and rural areas. The urge for educating female child is low in most of the places in India.

### Sons carry forward family lineage

This is again another deep-rooted tradition of the patriarchal society that male members will take forward the family lineage. Daughters are not considered part of the family

lineage and in many cases, ignored from the inheritance of wealth.

For ages, the mindset that sons should take care of parents continues. As we have moved to the 21st century, with both men and women getting education and earning their living, daughters and sons should be equally responsible for their parents.

It gave me an utmost sense of pride to read about the bold judgement of the Bombay High Court — "A married woman too is responsible for maintaining her parents." This is really a huge step forward towards gender equality.

Our parents have struggled to educate both sons and daughters. So

customs related to putting the dead soul's body to rest are performed by male members of the family. In case the dead person has no son, the rites and rituals are performed by other male members of the family but not the daughters.

In this modern era, the reasons might feel illogical and impractical but they are ingrained from generations and it is not possible to bring about radical changes in a day. It is not only the rural population but also the educated urban society that shows their preference towards male child.

In India, many urban families are trying to become nuclear with just one or two kids. However, if the first child is a girl, pressure builds up on the couple to deliver a second child hoping for a boy. It is really a matter of disgrace if we focus on the gender of the child before birth. Instead, the focus should be to deliver a healthy baby as the gender does not matter at all.

In this era when Indian societies are matching up with the most advanced societies of the world, gender discrimination should be the last thing in our minds.

Women are reaching the pinnacle of success and walking hand in hand with boys in most of the fields of work. The point to highlight is whether gender equality really justifies when both men and women have similar roles to play as mother or father, wife or husband, son or daughter, brother or sister etc. These roles are consistent throughout the world.

Do you think man can surpass the woman or vice versa? Well, there is never a race between them as both have to co-exist.

The discrimination is created by a superficial mankind, which needs to be buried forever.

*(Contributed by Konkona Choudhury)*

## SOCIAL CHANGE

both sons and daughters should be equally responsible for their parents' well-being.

### Women vulnerable

The heinous crimes of rape, sexual assault and child trafficking have made people believe that girls are an added responsibility and bringing them up is a lot of additional burden. Girls should be made mentally and physically strong to fight the society and uproot the old thought process and stand up for themselves.

### Religious factors

One of the most disturbing theories I have heard in these modern times is "to attain salvation, gain a son". In other words, if one has no son, one's soul will not liberate from the worldly attachments. Most of the

“Be careful about reading health books.  
You may die of a misprint.”

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

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### Hide & seek in Balakot

GRANTED that a lot of confusion surrounds the IAF assault on Balakot on February 26 and there are also reasons to believe in the assertions from the Indian side that it razed the principal training centre of Jaish-e-Mohammed deep inside the Pakistani territory, much beyond the PoK. Balakot is not far from Islamabad, the political capital, and Rawalpindi, the military headquarters. To that extent, even granted for argument's sake that no serious damage might have been caused in the IAF bombing, and only “pine trees were bombed” as was told to the UN, Pakistan has been made to take a huge hit. Pakistan's military brass, never tired of bombasts and holding out threats to India about its nuke strengths, hid its face for a day and then retaliated with less success. PAF could not cross the border much beyond the Line of Control, and was chased away. If its targets were Indian military bases, PAF miserably failed in its attempt to save face.

India, on the other hand, always took the position that it aimed only at targeting terrorists. In the retaliation, India lost one fighter jet, and it shot down a Pakistani F-16 too, thanks to IAF pilot Abhinandan Varthaman's bravado. Overall, Pakistan was made to eat humble pie, but could does not seem to have learnt the bitter lesson. India's cautious approach won it global praise; but stronger action from India's part would have raised its esteem higher. Now, weeks later, truth seems to be the main casualty of the Balakot hits. No one really is sure as to what happened. India itself is not coming up with strong evidence. Pakistan has always been in a state of denial. It denied Ajmal Kasab was its baby; it denied Pakistani involvement in the Pathankot and Uri terror strikes on military installations. It denied Jaish and its chief Masood Azhar were behind the several terror attacks on India including the attempt on Parliament building. Notably, it had also denied Osama bin Laden was hiding in Pakistan, until Americans dug in deep and pulled him out from Abbottabad, close to the military establishment. Denials apart, what gives sizeable credence to the Indian claim of dropping bombs to devastating effect on a terror training camp is the hesitation on the part of the Pakistani establishment to allow foreign media to inspect the scene of the bombing. Clearly, Pakistan has things to hide in Balakot.

# MDA First Anniversary: Nothing to Write Home About

By H H Mohrmen

There is no fanfare in the completion of one year of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance government. So the question that follows is whether it is because there is really nothing to cheer about? On the other hand it looks like the government too has forgotten that it has crossed the one year milestone and the simple celebration and release of the booklet was a last minute afterthought. The other question is whether one year is too long a time for the National People's Party-led government.

The MDA was a coming together of political parties that are opposed to the Congress and it also looks like the only reason that they formed the coalition is to keep the Congress at bay. The influence of the big party in the national capital helped the NPP and the regional parties in the state to form the government even if they have nothing in common and NPP and Congress coalition would be a more viable alternative.

During the earlier part of the coalition government, the leaders of the parties had announced that they would come up with a common agenda or a common minimum program to provide the government with a sense of direction. But three hundred and sixty five days have lapsed and the government and its coalition partners are yet to come up with any kind of document or roadmap to indicate where they want to take the state to. It is not only that the government does not have a common agenda, but it also looks like the Chief Minister is not in control of his flock.

Every cabinet minister in the MDA government is like a king of his own kingdom functioning at his own whims and fancies. This is obvious from the order for shifting the Head Quarter of PWD (Roads), North Jowai Division from Jowai to Shangpung vide notification No. PW/Admn/39/2015/46 dated 20th, December 2018. The reason is because currently the minister in-charge of the Department is from Shangpung and wanted to shift the Headquarter to Shangpung in spite of the fact that there is already a sub-division in Shangpung.

The ministers in the MDA government are becoming constituency

ministers who do not see beyond their constituencies or beyond the prospect of winning the next election. The minister did not even consult his colleagues in the district and it is obvious that he did not consult his colleagues in the cabinet either; otherwise why would they later protest against the order.

The plan to shift the division from the Jowai district headquarter, to Shangpung is not only impractical but it is also an absurd idea as there is already a sub-division to cater to the needs of the people in the area. Besides, the division also caters to the villages in Thadlaskein block which is far from Shangpung. Jowai is centrally located and it is conducive for serving both the Nartiang and the Shangpung sub-division, and fortunately due to public pressure the PWD department had to withdraw its order and the Division continues to operate from its Jowai office.

The Education Department which is headed by a very active cabinet minister, has promised so much, but delivered very less. The much talked about Education Policy is becoming a lifeless document because in reality nothing has changed on the ground and schools continue to function as usual. The decision to make sure that schools should not make students of a younger age group carry school bags beyond a certain limit is becoming an empty rhetoric, because the schools have not acted upon the order. One wonders if any of the schools even have any means to weigh the school bags and similarly the order which prohibits schools from giving homework to students of a specific age is not being implemented by any school.

The Education minister also announced that the government would control exorbitant school fees charged by private schools in the state, but three months have elapsed since the new school season has begun but nothing has happened on this front too. Schools continue to

charge as much school fees as they like. The minister did not realise that this issue is like a holy-cow which he should distance himself from because expensive schools are not only fashionable but they are powerful too. The minister instead burnt his fingers and has to now keep mum because all private schools are either run by influential churches or by people in high places in the state.

The decision to control schools from charging inflated prices on text books and exercise books supplied to the parents of the students was also not acted upon. The question is why would schools engage in the business of selling of school text books, exercise books, uniforms and even stationeries? Is it the business of the school to educate a child or to do business?

The government has failed in its effort to control commercialisation of education and schools continue to do whatever they like. Parents have no other option but to comply with the school's order for the so called best school. In Meghalaya too, like in the other states of the country, the quality of the schools is judged from the amount of fees charged; the higher the fees the better the school is. The rate of school fees is the indicator we use to determine the quality of education in the school.

The minister is not even able to ensure that the interest of the children in the villages in his own constituency are being served. The LP School in Moosakhia village is one of the many one teacher schools because no teacher was appointed after the former teacher retired last year. The same teacher has to look after five classes and also visit the District School Education Officer's office and even attend to the election duties.

The MDA government is right now buoyant on its recent achievements to take control of the two Autonomous District Councils that went to the polls recently. The coalition partners indeed have every reason to gloat about being able to gain control of the two important ADCs, but does the coalition partner have anything to offer than

merely gaining control of the two ADCs?

The NPP may look like a happy family but in reality that is far from true. The recent election to the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council has brought that to the fore. Madonbai Rymbai the former Chief Executive Member of JHADC who contested from the Khliehrychi-Sohmynting constituency on NPP ticket came out openly and accused NPP leader Sniawbhalang Dhar of supporting the independent candidate instead of supporting the party candidate. This is an open secret and all the party workers in the district know about it, yet no one, not even the party State president dared to raise this pertinent issue raised by the party candidate.

Similar is the case of the Wahiajer - Mukhla constituency, where the party ticket was given to Paia Dhar from Wahiajer - the right-hand-man of Sniawbhalang Dhar. The local MLA of Mukhla had to obey the dictates of the Raid Mukhla which has resolved to put Ailad Bhoi the independent candidate against the official party candidate. That the official party candidate lost the election to the independent candidate in this particular constituency should be a matter of surprise to no one who follows politics in Jaintia hills. The truth is that the two major villages in the constituencies of Wahiajer and Mukhla were strongholds of both the NPP MLAs in the last LA election, so how come a party MDC candidate lost the election from this constituency?

These two cases tell us so much about the discipline or to be specific the lack discipline in the NPP. The party leadership will have to take some of its MLAs to task if the discipline of the party is to be maintained. The NPP has an ambition to contest from all the MP constituencies in the North Eastern Region, but if the party has not even achieves much in the only state where it is in the government, and the party is also in disarray, then it is biting more than it can chew. Perhaps the reason is also because the NPP is not even sure if its government will last beyond May 2019.

Something to chew on until then!

## Governors Revolving Door Kal Neta Aaj Rajyapal Kal Neta

By Poonam I Kaushish

Public office has a lot to do with perception. Your actions do the talking. Alas last week in a Constitutional onslaught, the Modi Sarkar turned gubernatorial and political posts into revolving roles which not only highlights India's open secret but also undermines a Governor's position and impartiality, a crucial bastion of our democracy. With the devil taking the hindmost!

Unsurprisingly, like its erstwhile predecessor Congress, the BJP has turned the conventions of a Governor always being a Governor on its Constitutional head whereby a Rajyapal relinquishes his office and again returns to active politics. Friday last Mizoram Governor K Rajasekharan did just that; resign his office and is set to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections from home State Kerala where the BJP wants to make a dent.

Governor Rajasekharan is correct when he asserts there is no Constitutional or legal bar restraining him from going back to rajniti after serving as Governor of a State. And neither has he violated protocol. In fact, the Justice Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations is spot on when it desired eminent persons being appointed to State Raj Bhawans.

Nothing new though. Various Congress regimes since the 1970s have eroded gubernatorial impartiality without outwardly violating the letter of the Constitution. Trust them to find a lacuna and brazenly and blatantly exploit it by taking advantage of the “silence” of our Constitution framers.

Their leader reveled in anointing “distinguished people” who belonged to six illustrious categories: Defeated netas (from the ruling Party at the Centre), politicians who needed to be retired or sent far away from their home State (also from the ruling Party at the Centre) or those whom it perceived as a threat to the High Command, ‘unwanted’ leaders and even trusted lieutenants or retired ‘loyal’ bureaucrats to play ‘I-spy game’ on Opposition-ruled States to the ‘high and august’ Office of a Governor, read be the Centre's ‘kathputli’, yes-man, chamcha.

Pertinently, Karnataka Chief Minister SM Krishna was first appointed Maharashtra Governor and later India's Foreign Minister. Ditto the case with Sushil Shinde who relinquished the Office of Maharashtra Chief Minister in November 2004 and was anointed Andhra Pradesh Governor the same day. Two years later he re-entered active politics and within a few hours was sworn in as the Congress-led UPA Government's Cabinet Minister for Power, before taking over as Union Home Minister in 2012.

Sheila Dixit who was three times Delhi Chief Minister became the Kerala Governor after the Congress lost to Kejriwal's AAP. She resigned her post soon after following her nomination as Congress Chief Ministerial candidate for the UP Assembly elections in 2017. It's another matter she did not contest and is now the Congress's Delhi Chief.

What its bête noire did, the BJP could do one better. It rewarded senior Sangh leaders with gubernatorial posts. SP Malik a career politician is now J&K Governor, Meghalaya Governor V. Shanmuganathan was a RSS pracharak who was forced to resign following allegations of sexual harassment and running the Raj Bhawan as a “young ladies club”. Kalyan Singh, former UP Chief Minister is Rajasthan Governor and his erstwhile Cabinet colleague Lalji Tandon is Bihar Governor, KN Tripathi ex-UP Speaker sits in West Bengal's Raj Bhawan, BR Maurya in Haryana and ex-Petroleum Minister Ram Naik occupies UP.

Worse, the Party went a step ahead and anointed former Chief Justice of India P. Sathasivam as Kerala's Governor. Like it had done ex-CAG TN Chattervedi, first electing him to the Rajya Sabha and thereafter appointing him Karnataka and Kerala and presently UP Governor.

To be fair to the NDA Government, it is only carrying forward a long established tradition! Recall, ex-CJI Ranganath Mishra accepted

Congress nomination to the Rajya Sabha and Justice Baharul Islam-turned-Congress Lok Sabha MP, Punjab and Haryana High Court Chief Justice Rama Jois turned-Governor-BJP Rajya Sabha MP and Supreme Court Judge KS Hegde-turned Congress Rajya Sabha MP-turned Janata Party Lok Sabha MP-turned-Speaker.

Yet again, the country's first woman Supreme Court judge Justice Fatima Beevi was appointed National Human Rights Commission member post retirement in 1992 and in 1997 appointed Tamil Nadu Governor where she was in the eye of a political storm over her decision to anoint late AIADMK supremo Jayalalithaa as Chief Minister in 2001, despite her inability to contest Assembly polls due to her conviction in a corruption case.

I remember a famous 2004 anecdote when Punjab Chief Minister Badal reprimanded former CEC MS Gill for accepting Rajya Sabha MP-ship from the Congress by stating those who held august offices should not contest on Party tickets. Retorted Gill: “Maine koi theka liya sau saal da”. There is a revolving door between the bipartisan role of a Governor and active politics. Predictably, this has tossed out the ‘safety valve’ envisaged by the Constitution makers of who should be appointed Governors, manner of their appointment and their role. During Constituent Assembly debates leaders hoped that eminent individuals, preferably not those directly involved with politics should be appointed to this ‘exalted’ position.

There was a time when there was a process of consultation between the Union Home Minister and State Chief Minister and his consent taken prior to a Governor's appointment. Soon this convention was thrown to the winds primarily because the Party that ruled the country wanted to impose Governors, especially in States where its opponents were in power.

Alas, this is par for the course today. Instead of consultation, Chief Ministers are either informed directly or learn through the media. Never mind if it goes against the spirit of the Constitutional intent. In fact, every Government has given short shrift to gubernatorial posts whereby today over 60 per cent of the present lot of Governors are active politicians.

Recall, the Justice Sarkaria and Justice Punchhi reports had recommended certain criteria for anointing Governors namely, he should be eminent in some walk of life, be a person from outside the State, be detached and not intimately connected with local politics of the State and a person who has not participated in politics generally, particularly in the recent past. This was endorsed by the Justice Venkatchaliah National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution.

All relegated to the dustbin. Clearly, we need to find a new method of appointing Governors. Consultation with the State Government might not be enough as some might be supportive of the Central Government. Instead, the Rajya Sabha should screen prospective candidates who should be interrogated, investigated and judged on suitability before confirmation.

The President too should not just act on the advice of his Council of Ministers but could lay down guidelines wherein he is not misled about a person's political affiliations and politics and only those citizens appointed who are politically neutral. Questionably, can India afford to allow persons holding Constitutional offices to accept political “rewards” for doing at its bidding? No. Ultimately, principles emerge from good practices not bad ones. Good principles recognise Constitutionalism and Democracy. Time we restore the office of the Governor to its old glory. This calls for fairness, uprightness and adherence to Constitutional values and conventions. Our leaders need to rise above politics and appoint neutral non-political Governors not neta-turned rajyapal-turned neta. It is now imperative that Prime Minister Modi who postulates the Constitution also practices what he solemnly preaches! ----- INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

## Whither Press Freedom

Editor,  
The values of democracy are what govern the country and society. To preserve the democratic way of life it is essential that people should have the freedom to express their feelings and also to make their views known to the people at large. The press, a powerful medium of mass communication, should be free to play its role in building a strong, vibrant society. Denial of freedom of the press to citizens would necessarily undermine the power to influence public opinion and be a counter to democracy.

The freedom of press comes within the ambit of Freedom of Speech & Expression as guaranteed under Article 19 of our Constitution. In a democracy, freedom of press is extremely important as it (the press) acts as a watchdog on the three organs of a democracy viz. the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. But of course, the freedom of press is not absolute in nature as there are certain grounds of restrictions under Article 19 (2) laid down which entails security of the State, public order, decency and morality, contempt of court etc.,

The recent order of the

Meghalaya High Court which took up contempt proceedings against the editor and publisher of The Shillong Times by imposing a fine for a report in the daily which critiqued an order of Justice SR Sen on the retirement benefit of judges is problematic. While we may not be in contention with the findings of the court, the order which states that failure of payment of the fined imposed would lead to a ban on the publication of the oldest English language daily is condemnable and regressive. It deals a huge blow to the Freedom of the Press and is reminiscent of events during the reign of our colonial masters when press freedom was denied. For an ordinary viewer it may seem far-fetched that the judgment which ends with the words, “the paper will automatically come to an end (banned)” would actually be carried out, but the fact that such an order persists, shows that this pillar of democracy is under attack at each of its key frontiers.

In the words of Thomas Jefferson “The press is the only tocsin of a nation. [When it] is completely silenced... all means of a general effort [are] taken away”.

Yours etc.,  
Rayner Dkhar,  
Via email

## Stop cutting down trees!

Editor,  
I'm no environment activist, but I hurt like hell every time I see a tree felled or even trimmed. I also have no clue as to how this sensitivity for the well being of trees resides in some remote corner of my subconscious mind as something that's right and virtuous. Recently I lost sleep and suffered immense pain at the loss of three trees which I had grown up with. A pain whose intensity was much less than that suffered by a friend who lost one of his own in the extremely unfortunate and sad tree collapse incident near Raj Bhawan, which mother nature very rarely subjects us to. The fall-out of that incident was that a fear psychosis gripped many Shillongites, leading to the felling, half-felling and trimming of many trees. We have thus lost a fair bit of green cover in the past year and am sure Google Earth imagery would back this observation. I also feel it's time to stop the cutting; its also time to stop being

fearful, for statistics would reveal that death or injury of a human due to the collapse of a tree or the falling of a branch is extremely rare as compared to the slow deaths due to respiratory ailments and reduced immunity as a fallout of breathing in more carbon dioxide and less oxygen.

Trees, we were taught in Science class, breathe in carbon dioxide and convert it into wood (carbon). We were also taught that trees on land and plankton in the oceans are the only sources of new oxygen on this planet. The more oxygen we breathe in the healthier we become due to improved resistance to all diseases. When we burn fuels like petrol and diesel in the internal combustion engines of cars, gas or kerosene or wood for cooking, coal in industries and power plants, crop stubble or forest fires, the carbon removes the oxygen from the air and combines with it to form carbon dioxide thereby reducing the amount of oxygen (O2) in the atmosphere and increasing the poisonous carbon dioxide (CO2) content. So aren't we taking this oxygen for granted, which in the 1980's we were told constitutes 21% of the atmosphere and

carbon dioxide a mere 0.03%. Hasn't that component undergone a drastic change in the last 40 years with cars replacing trees in our psyche and on planet earth, besides the manifold increase in industry, cooking gas etc? Has anyone done any research to find out what percentage of carbon dioxide in the air would be the tipping point for the human race? Can we as blessed Shillongites overcome our fear of being held responsible in case an extremely improbable mishap were to happen? Can we not succumb to the pressures of some of our cleaners who find it tedious to broom the fallen leaves every morning? Can we not repair the cracked boundary wall or retaining wall which a tree has grown into? Can we stop treating trees as criminals saying, “We received a complaint against those trees and therefore axed them”? Can we not object and take affirmative action rather than just feel bad when we see a tree being cut?

We've witnessed trees falling during storms all our lives but it is the first time that there has been such a concerted drive against them. We cry ourselves hoarse over buzz words like Environment, Global

Warning, Climate Change yet do not make any efforts to plant & protect trees. One can never replant a tree that is felled by the road side. When the Assembly Complex at Khyndailad was annihilated 15 years ago, we were told that it would be made green again, yet very few trees were replanted and those too the most slow growing variety which will take another 15 years to attain substantial greenery. Do we want to be breathing air worth 20-50 cigarettes 24x7 in the same way that 70 Crore Indians have subjected themselves to in the North “by doing nothing”. Aren't even places like Guwahati, Jorabat, Byrnihat, Umiam perpetually smogged out these days? Isn't this a big wakeup call to one and all? Do we want our Green City to be named in the 20 most polluted in the world or be the 16th Indian city on that list OR retain the character of Shillong as the greenest city in India /the world?

Yours etc.,  
Gagann Jain,  
Via email

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

“ Voting is how we participate in a civic society - be it for president, be it for a municipal election. It's the way we teach our children - in school elections - how to be citizens, and the importance of their voice. ”

--- Loretta Lynch

## The Shillong Times

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### LS Poll bugle sounded

THE much anticipated poll announcement for the 17th Lok Sabha election is now out. Meghalaya votes in the first phase scheduled for April 11. The results will come after a long wait of 42 days. This is necessitated because of the movement of centrally armed police force from one state to another, to ensure that polls are held in a climate that's free from violence or intimidation of any kind. The Chief Election Commissioner added several adjectives to define the polling scenario that is expected to prevail. He used the words free, fair, participatory, inclusive, ethical and accessible. In that sense the Election Commission has taken cognisance of the needs of different constituents, including the disabled. The blind will be assisted with Braille election papers. Polling stations would be disabled-friendly in that they would have ramps for voters using wheelchairs. To that extent the polls would be truly participative and inclusive. These too are aspects of fairness.

In Meghalaya, the State Election Commissioner has listed 22 out of 60 constituencies as being expenditure sensitive meaning that these are likely to cross the Election Commission of India's (ECI) expenditure ceiling of Rs 70 lakh. Expectedly the bulk of these constituencies are in East Jaintia Hills the coal belt of Meghalaya. In the recent elections to the Autonomous District Council of Jaintia Hills a sitting minister of the MDA Government was captured on video chasing out voters from the queue at the polling station who he was sure were not voting the National Peoples' Party (NPP) of which he is part. The State Election Commission has not taken any action on this as yet. We wonder if any action can be taken against a minister. This is the impunity with which election ethics are pulverised. And the CEC speaks of ethical elections? Where are the ethics when money plays such a dominant role?

What about the issues in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls? Have voters thought through those issues or are they going to wait for political parties to thrust their clichéd manifestoes down our throats? Will the two MPs (one of whom is a chief minister now), be asked to give their 5-year report card? Will elections here be rattled by the Rafale deal on which the Congress is riding? Doubtful; here employment matters! A recent study by the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) has recorded Meghalaya as having the highest urban youth unemployment figure in the country. This is a worrying statistic which elected representatives can no longer ignore. A time is soon coming when the same youth will demand their pound of flesh from the people they supported to be in power.

# Are we heading toward a political monopoly?

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

this now.

Another aspect is that the government's top priority too is for the welfare and well being of the party members in the coalition. Looking at the swift action taken by the government to complete the process of notification of EC members on the same day is nothing but the politics of monopolizing

ing and getting certain privileges as protection of their minority status, these people who advocate dissolution of Sixth Schedule have perhaps forgotten the fact that our cultures and our traditional institutions like the Hima, the Raid, land, etc. which are our only identity left as a tribe and community can only be

*A Bill is an outcome of legislation of a legitimate legislative body. Therefore, the question of scrutiny or interpretation can only be done by the judiciary after it has become a law provided if there is repugnancy. Otherwise, what is the scope of the judiciary then?*

the situation in the interest of the coalition partners. But for those who dare to critique those in position of power, even if they are right in the context of the larger interests will be doomed to suffer adversely to the extent of being wiped out permanently. Such is the type of environment that is pre-

regulated in a modern system of governance by an institution like the Autonomous District Councils. Provided, that we the people too, understand the need to elect representatives to these autonomous bodies who are intellectually mature and well versed with the culture and tradition of the society. However this

*The purpose of every election as commonly understood is to elect a governing body which is stable and for a fixed tenure. The stability of governance is in fact beneficial for the people governed by it. But as we have witnessed, the people/electorate have not precisely voted with that collective understanding of giving a clear mandate to any party.*

vailing where the basic tenet of democracy to honour and respect a democratic expression is totally absent from the code of our politicians. It is a sad state of affairs when unknowingly we are approaching and adopting a system of governance by monopoly.

On the other hand, there are individuals who advocate and favour the idea of winding up the District Councils which to me is a weird idea. The reason that compelled them to favour such idea is simply because they found themselves incompatible to adjust and fit in the system due to their personal limitations. In the backdrop where many sections of community in the country are demand-

is not the case today. In fact the purpose of this election is mainly to maintain the interest of the party in relationship with the public and also to partially satisfy and stabilize the unfulfilled desires of the party functionaries. In this manner, those in power can monopolize the political situation for their future benefit.

As far as the recently concluded MDC election is concerned, nowhere would we find such thinking among the general public and the elected members. The slogan 'ieid ri or Jaidbynriew' is an issue without substance. The entire process is mainly a game of exercising control and show of strength among political components. In

my observation, I see every election as a commercial transaction of political parties both big and small. How political parties are making money is amazing. Initially, fund flows to the party in the form of donations but the one who gives the highest donation is also the highest bidder for the party ticket. If we assume that election is an industry and political party as an enterprise or business entity, then party ticket is like a trade license that traders are willing to pay at any cost. These things are very much in discussion today so we do not need to elaborate further.

Time and again we have said that people here are voting for the individual not for the party. There may be a party lover here and there but that seems to have disappeared today. No matter who that individual is, he should be financially influential and vociferous. The greatest drawback in our democracy is when people favour an individual consecutively. Such an opportunity is hazardous, even an angel can become a devil and that is why many crorpati politicians have been created by the people because of our foolish simplicity or may be due to ignorance about democratic responsibilities. This is another factor that keeps many parties busy and sustainable thereby making their business a thriving prospect. How the electorate of Shillong North L.A. Constituency elected a candidate, who is financially non-influential, less educated and whose party is not very popular is something that I fail to understand or perhaps there may be some external hidden factors in such a situation.

In a natural climate of monopoly, the quality of products acquired due to technological achievement will dominate the market. Or a group of enterprises can also come together and determine the price of a commodity. But to create such an opportunity, there is a huge cost which has to be incurred. But in the political monopoly things are different. There is a cost no doubt to acquire a coalition in order to come to a majority but the policy outcome or legislation of that coalition will be very poor and low since the interest of all components in the coalition has to be taken care. In such a situation, the people of the state will stand to be the major losers.

## Widening inequality

# Revive Gandhian values

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Poverty has been plaguing most countries of South Asia, specially India. Successive governments have tried to eradicate poverty but such attempts or the strategy adopted may not be on the right lines, even though some positive results may have been accomplished. But while one can contemplate abolishing poverty say in another decade or so, the inequality that we witness in society, has been widening with every passing year.

It is extremely difficult to tackle inequality and narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. Various reports have come up in recent years showing the dimensions of inequality, specially the ones by Oxfam, but no strategy by any country of how to bring down inequality has been put forward.

Remember, the latest Oxfam report found that 73 per cent of wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest one per cent, while 67 crore Indians, who comprise the poorest half of the population, saw one per cent increase in their wealth. Moreover, renowned economists Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty had observed that current inequality in India is at the highest level in 76 years.

Very recently a wealth study by property consultant, Knight Frank revealed that Asia's billionaire population is set to outpace other regions between 2018 and 2023. The number of billionaires from the region will rise by 27 per cent, surpassing growth in North America (17 per cent). India saw a whopping rise of 116 per cent in billionaire population between 2013 and 2018, while the expected growth of 37 per cent for the next five years (2018-2023) beats the global and regional average. The country's wealth is expected to charge ahead over the next five years with the number of ultra high net worth individuals (UHNWIs) rising to 2697.

If this be the situation, the word 'development' is left with no meaning. Economists and planners the world over, and specially in the Third World, where the dimension of inequality is brazenly evident, have proved that they have very little contribution in the development discourse. While it is understandable that politicians may have self interest or would like to align with the rich and shower them favours to get something in return, developmental economists are professional people.

All talks of inclusive and/or sustainable development has lost its meaning as these remain theoretical dictums and slogans, possibly meant to hoodwink the common mass. Or is it that in modern concept of development inequality would remain a key feature in society?

There has been some discussion regarding the maladies of inequality. In this connection, the underlined would like to mention that at a recent conference in Bhubaneswar, the Registrar of a well known University pointed out that the rich who drive to 3 Star and 5 Star hotels have no feeling for the pavement dwellers and shanty colonies they see on their way. Clearly, grave are the maladies of inequality but the State virtually ignores these.

We talk of modernisation and the impact of technology in this process. May be those who are at the helm think that inequality can be ignored or some good words, from time to time, would help the impoverished, languishing in poverty and squalor. In such a situation, the question arises can society retain its

passive and non violent character? How could people be made to accept that increase in incomes is for the higher echelons of society and standards of living of the rural poor need not be given priority?

Let us now come to the affect of inequality on health, specially mental health, of human beings. It is a well established fact that mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders and schizophrenia are on the rise in this country. In fact, statistics show that people with mental illnesses directly account for nearly 7 per cent of the total population and is predicted to increase by 20 per cent by the end of this decade. But if the indirect causes are also considered, this may reach anything around 9 per cent.

Mental health issues are projected to reduce economic growth in India by more than 9 trillion dollars in the next 12 years. A World Health Organisation report showed that India happens to be the most depressed country in the world followed by China and the US. However, it needs to be mentioned that the nature of depression in this country and the US are very much different.

In the US, depression is because of the fast life that they lead as also the materialistic civilisation where the craving is more wealth and power. In India, the nature of depression is essentially due to lack of employment opportunities, increasing debt and inability to meet medical expenses, poverty and inability to meet the aspirations of the young generation etc. It cannot be doubted that growing income disparities and polarised societies increase social anxieties and this has an adverse effect on human health. The worst affected might withdraw completely and engage in health compromising behaviours like substance abuse.

In their latest book, The Inner Level, social epidemiologists Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson have rightly pointed "The reality is that inequality causes real suffering, regardless of how we chose to label such distress. Greater inequality heightens social threat and status anxiety, evoking feelings of shame which feed into out instincts for withdrawal, submission and subordination: when the social pyramid gets higher and steeper and status insecurity increases, there are widespread psychological costs". Thus, can the increasing suicides in our country be attributed to poverty, debt and income and social inequality?

It is quite rational to think that greater thrust is necessary towards welfare programmes, public spending and comprehensive social security and investment in human capital development. However, it needs to be emphasised that in spite of all these, there is need for a drastic change in our development strategy, which obviously has to be geared to harnessing people's power. Added to this, a truly decentralised process of decision making and operations has to become a reality.

Civic awakening is the need of the hour and a grass-root approach has to become effective, as visualised by Mahatma Gandhi. Though we have completely forsaken his social and economic philosophy, after the death of Vinoba Bhave, his true disciple, who launched the famous Bhoodan-Gramdan movement, it is time that our political leaders instead of misusing Gandhi's name just for political rhetoric, deeply give cognisance to Gandhian thinking. - INFA

## TO THE EDITOR

### Criteria for politicians

Editor,  
Judging from the level of discourse of most of our political leaders across party-lines, I very strongly feel that people should start demanding for a legal provision that will ensure that only those who pass certain eligibility criteria should enter politics and only if the person possesses a minimum degree. As of today even an illiterate person or a primary school passed one can become a law-maker and can rule over an IAS or an IPS. Also, I feel there should be some age limit fixed for the legislators/parliamentarians. If a Govt./Public servant is subject to a retirement age then how come a politician can still continue when his mind, his

brain, his body - everything is in shambles due to over-age! We have had many examples where a politician contests an important election even when he/she is unable to even stand properly on his/her feet. My question to the Election Commission/NGOs/Judiciary: Can we still afford to allow these sorts of uneducated/lowly-educated/over-aged politicians to play with our lives like this?

Yours etc.,  
PS Gupta,  
Via email

### Solving the Kashmir issue

Editor,  
The issue of Kashmir is a chronic one, and has festered for nearly three

quarters of a century. Those familiar with Kashmir's history would be aware that violence in Jammu and Kashmir generally tends to come in "waves". The centre and state governments have been deliberately silent till the situation boils and bursts. Problems are due to the insincere and inept polity. Unrest in Kashmir reveals the failures of the ruling People's Democratic Party. To be fair to the security forces, they have faced exceptional ferocity from groups of young people. Slogans are becoming the main instigators of violence even though sloganeering has been a part of long cherished history of the world. The security forces do not appear to be following standard operating procedure. Whenever there is a riot,

there are plenty of ways in which the situation can be dealt with. The country needs tough laws to curb the misuse of information technology. India always thought that peace can be made by sincerely addressing grievances of people. India must take its cue from those instances and solve the Kashmiri conundrum once and for all. Tourism is the main business of Jammu & Kashmir and gives employment & business to lakhs of local people. This business can only flourish if there is peace and tranquility.

Countries across the world must unite to fight terror so that the innocent people of Kashmir can live in peace and not in pieces. It should also be the responsibility of every citizen to cooperate with the

government as well as our armed forces by ushering in a climate that is terror-free and peaceful. Good governance and good policies will address the problem to a very large extent.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit,  
Ahmedabad

### Military belongs to the country!

Editor,  
To milk political advantage from the success of our soldiers is a dangerous practice. Our soldiers fight for the whole country and not just for one political party! If a military operation has been projected as a political asset of one political party then it will send a wrong im-

pression that the whole country is divided in terms of our defence policy. The whole country needs to be behind our soldiers during a war-like situation. The fact of the matter is that there is a clear difference between the government and the ruling party. The government of India and our defence force have to represent all the people of our country and not just one third of the electorates who exercised their franchise in favour of the ruling party.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

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

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing you can do is keep your mind young.”

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.210 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2019

### Coal mining and crime synonymous

THE State Government has been making a mockery of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) ban on coal mining which is now reiterated by the Supreme Court ruling banning coal from being transported out of Meghalaya. The incident on Monday evening where a coal truck capsized and killed four people who are probably labourers engaged in the coal trade, is a case in point. Anyone who travels on the Shillong-Guwahati highway in the early morning hours will find coal trucks by the dozens parked by the roadside along Byrnihat up until Jorabat. They are parked close to Jorabat possibly to find the appropriate moment to cross the state's borders. Connivance between the Meghalaya and Assam Police to allow smooth passage of coal trucks cannot be ruled out. Without the abetment of the police so many coal trucks could not have come from different parts of the state and travel via Assam. On this score alone the MDA Government must be held solely accountable for completely failing to maintain law and order; nay in the abetment of what can be called 'blatant' contempt of the Supreme Court's repeated orders to ban the movement of coal until certain matters are set to rest.

The problem with the apex court's order is that it is expected to be implemented in letter and spirit by the State Government. Hence the Court has not set up an oversight body to keep watch over this illegality. But when the State and its organs of governance are interested parties in the coal mining business and are facilitating this wrongdoing then who will call out this violation of the Court's order except the media. The problem today is that any attempt to blow the whistle on illegal coal mining is fraught with personal dangers for journalists. Attempts to record the movement of coal trucks on camera or to ask intrusive questions would invite the wrath of the coal mafia. Journalists are the most vulnerable group of people in a state where the mafia rule the roost. The statement made a bystander that those at the accident site were chased away and that none other than a senior police official claimed that pictures of the accident were not allowed to be taken and that the dead bodies were hidden and only found a day later is an indictment on the district administration. This is what happens when venality becomes the hallmark of any government. With elections approaching, the illegal transportation of coal would only surge while Government looks the other way. Meghalaya has the makings of a rogue state today.

## Pulwama Tragedy

# Raising the right questions?

By Dr. D.K. Giri

The Pulwama terrorist attack and the subsequent counter-operations by the army are the hot topics for debate and discussion across the country. The hyper-nationalist media, especially the television, hypes it so much that, one can hear the echoes of 'Bande Mataram' chanted by invited audiences in the studios. Even the public domain, the streets, parks and parties are abuzz with India-Pakistan relations, especially following the Pulwama incident.

Curiously, one runs into a bevy of retired army and air force personnel in the TV channels. I found, at one time, about 15 ex-military officers of different ranks immaculately dressed finely articulate, in one channel, explaining to an audience the sophistication of modern warfare etc. Good to see our ex-military officers serenely but seriously (so they are trained and groomed) interacting with the public; a good opportunity for the public to meet and make conversation with senior ex-officers of our army, an undiluted national pride.

But it is in party political arena, the debate is becoming increasingly messy, and divisive. It started with a complete consensus but soon began drifting into a slanging match between contenders amid chest-thumping, name-calling, finger-pointing and moral-posturing etc. Perhaps, it is not unexpected and unbecoming of the politicians in the face of elections in a few weeks time. And, normatively speaking, in a democracy, there will be party political contestation and questions on actions of government, more so, in election time.

The burden of my argument here is that the Opposition has the right to ask questions, but is it asking the right ones? Apparently not. The questions the Opposition raise are turned and twisted by the ruling party to paint them with an 'anti-nationalist' hue. Take for instance, 11 days after the Uri attack, the Indian army conducted a surgical strike. The Opposition leaders asked for evidence, as they thought Modi government was making it up for electoral purposes. Was it

right to question the operation of the army which was officially informing the country of the strike?

True that in a democracy army takes orders from the national civilian government of the day but Indian army is apolitical, thoroughly professional, disciplined and committed. They will not do the political bidding for even the ruling party. There is no such evidence in Indian military history even in sensitive security situations.

Now on the second surgical strike, in a complex security situation the Opposition is asking for evidence of casualties, provoked perhaps by Amit

**As a civilian, I am told that the targets are indicated by the government, and the army's job is simply to neutralise them. So, as the IAF said, counting casualties is not their job, it is that of the government.**

Shah's preposterous claim of 250 deaths etc. However, that is for Amit Shah to prove to the alert and agile public of the country, not the job of the Opposition. In a TV channel, I was talking to a former Colonel who asked me if the number of casualties mattered. Was it not enough that the Air Force went deep into Pakistan territory beyond LoC and bombed the targets? I could feel the pain in his heart as he was speaking as if their valour and heroism were being undermined. I instantly said, Colonel, the number does not matter. What IAF has done is commendable.

As a civilian, I am told that the targets are indicated by the government, and the army's job is simply to neutralise them. So, as the IAF said, counting casualties is not their job, it is that of the government. Opposition therefore, may be politically correct to question the government on the outcome of the action, as their claims are not verifiable. Yet, to an independent political analyst, this is a wrong question. As said earlier, the army's operational efficiency is willy-nilly

drawn into the controversy. This does not go down well with the public or with the army although the latter is unfazed by party political skirmishes.

One may urge the Opposition to desist from raising questions related even remotely to army operation, irrespective of incredible claims by one set of politicians. Opposition can ask a barrage of questions on political strategy and diplomatic acuity, under which the government cannot even duck, let alone counter-attack. Let us list some of these. One, how did 400 kg of RDX find its way into a house in Kashmir which a 20-year-old boy could carry and detonate? What

happens to heavy surveillance and intelligence gathering in Kashmir? Has any head rolled so far for such a humongous failure that caused the death of our so many security personnel? Why has no enquiry been ordered completed, and the guilty identified and punished?

Second, why do deaths continue at the border? Before and after Pulwama and surgical strikes, our soldiers and security personnel are being killed day in and day out? When will the blood-shed stop? What is the government strategy to stop this?

Third, how are we going to dismantle the terror camps in Pakistan? Rahamullah Nabil, former chief of Kabul's intelligence said: "Pakistan is sheltering 45 to 48 terror groups in the country, the Indian army should have bombed Balakot earlier." Indians would like to see the end of the death of its soldiers and innocent civilians, or is it a fait accompli, and above all, a normalisation of relations with Pakistan?

Fourth, which countries are our allies in these difficult times? The government has not got, as it claims, the US fully on

board, because of our prevarication on Afghanistan. We should have been actively and even militarily engaged in Afghanistan. Why have we left the Afghan space fully to Pakistan making USA lean on the latter?

Fifth, what is government's policy on China? Is it not best defined as confused and cluttered? China has been consistently opposing our attempts at the UN and is supporting Pakistan. Why did Modi go into 'swing and stroll' diplomacy with Chinese President? Why did we not convey to Beijing that we could not have business-as-usual as long as they support Pakistan sponsoring terrorism?

Sixth, has BRICS condemned it? Has SAARC taken any position? Why has not any of our neighbours condemned it? Modi started by inviting all of them to his swearing-in ceremony. Where are they today?

Seventh, what is our equation with Iran? We have a common ground vis-a-vis Pakistan. But how can we take the US into confidence as we move closer to Iran? One has friends and adversaries. One cannot please all, which Modi tries to do, not at home but internationally. Can we run with the hare and hunt with the hound? How does Modi government explain this? Can the government show us our die-hard supporters? Look at what China is doing to Pakistan with a permanent seat at UN gifted by Nehru, an idealist and impractical.

Finally, India-Pakistan problems have been fuelled by involvement of external players, the arms sellers, Jihadists and so on. We may claim it to be a bilateral issue, Kashmir as an internal matter, both correct. But can we ignore the external influences of big military powers and arms market etc?

There is a litany of questions to ask. So let the Opposition raise the right questions, which may even expose the historical fault-lines drawn by them. But in their own interest and that of the country they will have to take this call. --- INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

## Kickbacks, scandals in Defence Deals are common Government refuses to learn from the past

By Nantoo Banerjee

More than the magnitude of possible financial irregularities in the 7.8-billion Euro Rafale deal, relating to the purchase of only 36 multirole fighter aircraft from France's Dassault Aviation, it is the government's frank admission before the Supreme Court, last week, that the documents on which the case rests were "stolen" and could not be produced in the court is more scandalous. It raises a very pertinent question about the safety are our 'secret' documents under seemingly inviolable custody of the country's defence ministry. Do the "stolen" Rafale purchase documents compromise national security? Who is or are responsible for the "theft" of such sensitive documents from the defence ministry's high security vault, getting them "photocopied" before smuggling them out? Attorney General KK Venugopal's revised version of the 'theft' raises more questions than it answers. Was the AG misled in the first place? Why did the government hid such a critical information from the country's highest court of judicature, earlier. Why did the defence minister maintained her silence even after the official admission of theft of these documents. The government's admission further fuelled the political controversy, which is unlikely to die down soon.

Top opposition leaders were quick to express their anguish and concern. West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool supremo Mamata Banerjee came down heavily on the government over the "stolen" Rafale documents marked 'secret' from the defence ministry. "If defence documents can be stolen, how can the Modi government protect the nation? ..... What has happened is unthinkable," she said. Congress president Rahul Gandhi's tweet — there is now enough evidence to prosecute the PM in the #RafaleScam. The trail of corruption begins & ends with him....— suggests the nature of political potshots the present government may face from top opposition party leaders in the coming weeks.

Incidentally, controversies over kickbacks and irregularities in defence equipment import deals are nothing new in India. It started from the time of the country's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. The tradition continued through the successive governments. The major defence import scandals in the past included Bofors guns from Sweden, German HDW and French Scorpene submarines, Tatra trucks from Czech Republic, Cargill war coffins from the USA and Agusta Westland helicopters from Italy. But, nothing to beat the scandal now surfacing around the nature of Rafale deal in terms of its military exigence, the high contract value, reduced size of acquisition and involvement of Gujarat businessman Anil Ambani. The latter is running a market debt of over Rs.50,000 crore and recently sentenced by the Supreme Court a jail term if failed to pay Ericsson dues.

Yet, this is not the first defence purchase scam under the present government. Soon after the Modi government came to power in 2014, Ukraine alleged kickbacks to defence ministry officials for the supply of spares for the Indian Air Force's transport aircraft AN-32. Ukraine's National Anti-corruption

Bureau (NAB) had sent a "request for international legal assistance" to India's home ministry through its ambassador in Kiev. The Ukrainian firm Spetsstechnoexport alleged that even after 11 months of signing the deal with MoD, another pact was signed with the Global Marketing SP Ltd for its implementation. NAB has the details on the second agreement with Global Marketing and names of the defence ministry officials who were the parties in the discussion with this agency. NAB has also initiated an inquiry for the alleged transfer of funds through their account in Noor Islamic Bank in Dubai. In value terms, it was a small scandal that went almost unnoticed by the country's opposition parties, which were still recovering from a huge setback in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

Despite the series of defence import scandals over the years, the government refused to learn and take actions to correct its purchase procedures. Instead of building a large defence manufacturing base within the country, the government continues to depend heavily on imports to meet its growing defence requirements. India, the world's largest defence equipment importer, spent over a record \$100 billion in defence imports in the last 10 years. Incidentally, defence deals are always linked with kickbacks. A five to seven percent kickback in defence deals are said to be common in the \$100-billion-plus annual defence trade. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India's defence imports increased by 24 percent over the last 10 years. India's arms imports accounted for 12 percent of the arms transfers in the world. "The tensions between India, on the one side, and Pakistan and China, on the other, are fuelling India's growing demand for major weapons, which it remains unable to produce itself," the SIPRI report said. China spends heavily on defence manufacturing and exports. China upped its defence expenditure by 7.5 percent in 2019. It is emerging as a major arms supplier to Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Although Russia still continues to be the biggest supplier of arms to India, accounting for about 60 percent of India's imports. The picture is changing. Lately, India is importing heavily from the US, EU and Israel. Imports from the US increased by a whopping 557 percent between 2012 and 2017. The US is now India's second largest arms supplier, sharing nearly 15 percent of its imports. Israel's share of India's arms import has grown to over seven percent. And, India accounts for over 40 percent of Israel's global arms export. SIPRI said "India expects increasing deliveries due to several major orders from France (another traditional supplier) and from the US, South Korea and Spain - all of which only recently became suppliers of major weapons to India." Unfortunately, the Modi government's \$250-billion domestic defence manufacturing plan to produce fighter jets, guns and submarines locally remained largely in the drawing board. Under such circumstances, India may not be able to escape from arms import scandals until the country becomes a major global producer itself like China. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

## Pro-active MLAs in the House

Editor,

The Budget session which began on March 8 saw a number of MLAs taking active part in the proceedings of the Assembly. In fact the House was very lively due to the participation of many members from both sides. It is very heartening and encouraging to see that even new members took active part in the proceedings so much so that even the Deputy Speaker was fully awake to the issues raised by them. The most active among them were surprisingly first timers like HM Shangpliang, (Mawsynram), George B. Lyngdoh, (Umroi), S.K Sunn (Mawphlang), P.T Sawkmie (Mawlai), Marylborne Syiem (Nongpoh), Gavin M. Mylhem (Sohra) Renikton Lyngdoh Tongkhar (Mawkyrwat), Dr. Azad Zaman (Rajabala), Miani Shira (Ampati) Kimfa Sydney Marbaniang (Rambrani-Jyrngam) and Lazarus Sangma (Dalu). I was indeed

gratified to see them doing so well. I hope that the constituents they represent and the State as a whole would benefit from their deliberations in the House. I wish them well for the remaining sessions for the next four years.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via-Email

## Toothless notifications

Editor,

We must acknowledge that KHNAM as a regional political party has taken up in right earnest the flagrant violation of the notification by the Union Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) insofar as the weight of the school bag is concerned. The Education Department has apparently not adhered to the notification to reduce the weight of the school bag. Whether schools are actually following this notification is yet to be assessed. Secondly, the State Education

Department should also direct the schools to streamline their respective fee structures before the start of the new academic year. Most private schools are least bothered about the Education Department notifications. Hence they become mere paper tigers. Mr Lakmen Rymbui as the Education Minister should address these issues in a more proactive manner.

Yours etc.  
Dominic S. Wankhar  
Shillong

## Road etiquette can reduce traffic chaos

Editor,

Road safety is a concern for all irrespective of gender. It is a matter of fact that lack of etiquette on the road is becoming very dangerous to the lives of citizens. Road safety is a priority and concern for all of us and there is a need to regularly reinforce this message. No one follows the traffic rules and even

the traffic police can no longer handle the traffic violations. Bikers are often a headache and we need to focus more on such offenders. Drivers must be sensitized about the rights of the pedestrians. Lack of knowledge about correct use of high-beam headlights creates problems at night.

Stringent laws against drunk and rash driving, proper and effective enforcement of the laws and the tough and sincere judiciary in dealing with the accidents alone could ultimately have a positive effect in dealing with the ever growing accidents. If people drive more sensibly, our roads will be safer for all. Let's stop giving excuses; instead let's look for solutions on the basis of suggestions received from experts and concerned citizens. People must be taught road etiquette, which could reduce 50% of disarray on streets. Yours etc.,

Vinod C. Dixit,  
Ahmedabad

## Prejudiced view

Editor,

Apropos the letter, "Military belongs to the country" by Sujit De (ST, March 12, 2019), I wonder how he arrives at the conclusion that the Govt. at the centre is taking undue advantage from the military operation! As a matter of fact the Modi Govt is automatically getting the advantage, not taking it forcefully! Everyone knows that the Prime Minister is the ultimate authority to order for any major operation and, if something goes wrong it is the PM who has to bear the brunt of attacks from all quarters, as it happened in the case of Demonetisation or GST, wherein some major loopholes were detected in the context of proper implementation. Hence, in the case of a success why should the PM be criticized when he/she derives some advantageous credit? I do not understand how it is unfair! Is it not that some

people started to vehemently justify it as unfair just because they enjoy opposing the PM or his party in whatsoever way possible? Actually, this is what is unfair! My advice to such people is to please stop taking it for granted that the people of this country are fools and cannot comprehend any mischievous plot! Mr De should also understand the bitter fact that there is no ruling political party in our country which is/was shy of taking credit/ advantage from the success of a project/ operation undertaken by it/during its tenure. Can he name even one such? The present PM, as we can see, always asserts in public that he represents 125/130 crores people of this country and not just one-third of the electorate that had voted for his party. Lastly, I feel that people should not be biased in their desperation to prove someone biased.

Yours etc.,  
PS. Gupta,  
Viaemail

*“The one pervading evil of democracy is the tyranny of the majority, or rather of that party, not always the majority, that succeeds, by force or fraud, in carrying elections.”*

--- John Dalberg-Acton

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.211

SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2019

### Priyanka's debut

HOPES were that the Congress party would put its best foot forward at its Working Committee meet and rally in Gujarat, which came close on the heels of declaration of the Lok Sabha polls. The Party obviously failed to do so if reports coming from Ahmedabad and adjoining Gandhinagar were any indication. There, the party harped on the same old themes against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his government and the BJP, with no element of surprise thrown in.

For one, the low-key debut by Priyanka Gandhi outside UP failed to inspire even the Congress ranks. She failed to establish a connect with the moderate-sized audience she addressed in Gandhinagar – something that had marked out the speeches of grandmother Indira Gandhi. She stressed that the campaign should focus only on joblessness, women safety and farm distress. Rafale didn't figure in her anti-Modi agenda, though Rahul Gandhi who spoke later brought it up. The issues that Priyanka raised were relevant, no doubt, and touched directly upon the daily lives of the ordinary masses. Yet, these were subjects raised with tiring regularity and there was nothing new to this. The same issues had been raised against the Congress in the past. The Congress meet overall failed to open new fronts against Modi.

Notably, the idea of holding the campaign launch and the crucial CWC meet in Gujarat itself failed to make a big impact. Gujarat has drifted further from the Congress in recent times despite a good but not very successful show by the party in the last assembly polls. The powerful Patel community is brought back by the BJP to its side through the unveiling of the Patel statue. Patidar Andolan activist Hardik Patel joining the Congress now is immaterial. He's progressively losing his clout. Politics is no child's play; it's a hard-edged battle of wits.

This is true for Rahul Gandhi too. The launch of the party campaign for LS stakes could have been done elsewhere. It should have been an event in itself. Instead, Gandhinagar turned out to be a tame affair. Reports are also that many of those who attended the meet left after Priyanka spoke and before Rahul Gandhi stood up to speak. The Congress virtually failed to rise to expectations at a time when Prime Minister Modi recovered dramatically from a steady downslide in his popularity and caught on the Balakot IAF action to his political advantage.

## A little too late to return to 'Asli' issues

# Warning shots over the head of a cult building

By Sushil Kutty

Keeping to his notorious reputation, he reneged against his own advice to close ranks behind the government and not politicize national security. The BJP openly politicized national security by claiming credit for Balakote ("Modi's political will")

regional fiefdoms. Brigade Grounds in Kolkata is a distant memory, a Mirage!

The Mirage 2000s, which struck deep in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, not only broke the Jem's back, they also left opposition unity in shreds. Mayawati said Tuesday

from the debris of Balakote and led the crowd in shouting 'Chowkidar Chor Hai'. It was planned, working to a strategy, perhaps to be fine-tuned in the coming days. But the question remains: Will the course correction draw the people's attention back to the "asli" issues, blunt Modi's Balakote-advantage?

Modi is the sort of person who is consumed by his own infallibility. And the BJP is building him into a cult figure. Omnipotent. The one person who can save the country from its enemies, external and internal. The impression given to the Great Unwashed is that Narendra Modi can never go wrong. That he's the only leader who has India's interests at heart.

And the legions who follow him believe! It's Black Magic. Voodoo! The "bhakts" are in a trance. The fence-sitters are hypnotized. Sections of the media are co-opted to build the Modi cult. 'Modified television anchors' are openly threatening "guests" to prove allegiance to India, stand with Modi. It is now about more than Modi's broken promises. It's about what's in the future. Modi has correctly diagnosed that over-dependence on the Nehru-Gandhi family is the Congress's Achilles Heel. The larger-than-life image of Modi is to cut "dynasty" to size.

And less than 60 days are too few days to move the axis. The Axis lost WW-II because the Allies were united. Neither did Prime Minister Winston Churchill nor did President Franklin Delano Roosevelt look for personal or respective nation's glory. They fought as one and defeated the Dictator. There is no such unity of purpose in the Opposition – Rahul Gandhi and Mayawati, Mamata. Divided they will fall and the cult of Modi will rise. Even today, at this late stage, the Congress should declare Rahul Gandhi its PM Candidate and give the electorate a clear choice: Dictator Vs. Dynast. Choose. (IPA Service)

The Congress has less than 60 days to stop Narendra Modi from becoming Prime Minister again. And allowing Modi to set the electoral agenda is not how it should be done. The electorate wants an alternate plan of action and Modi should be rightly attacked on his many broken promises, his omissions and commissions. His bluff on national security should be called out and 'Rafale' shouldn't be consigned to the hangar. But will these be enough?

The theme of the Congress Working Committee meeting in Ahmedabad Tuesday was "Gandhi and Godse", symbolizing "love and hatred". Modi's 'Feku' image was at the core of the discussions. Turn the pages back to before Pulwama and Narendra Modi and the BJP were in deep-sh\*t trouble. Modi was getting hammered on his record on jobs and unemployment, BJP spokespersons unable to defend him on missing jobs data and insurrection at the NSSO.

Modi's 'Feku' image was tightening around his neck to the point where it was the proverbial albatross. It looked like nothing could save him from the wrath of farmers and youth, one in distress – at the end of the tether – the other in despair, their futures bleak. By January 31, the Modi Government was at a loss for words and the headlines spoke the story, loudly.

Then, out of the Kashmir fog, Pulwama happened. Massive intelligence failure and homegrown terrorism! The result of a failed Kashmir policy, forgotten in the dastardly nature of the attack, the twisted skeletal remains of the bus and body parts found scores of metres away. Modi called for national unity, asking that nobody use Pulwama for political and electoral benefits. The Opposition listened and spoke in one voice.

But the saying "trusted like a fox" applies to certain people. True to his style, Modi shifted the goalposts.

*“Modi's 'Feku' image was tightening around his neck to the point where it was the proverbial albatross. It looked like nothing could save him from the wrath of farmers and youth, one in distress – at the end of the tether – the other in despair, their futures bleak. By January 31, the Modi Government was at a loss for words and the headlines spoke the story, loudly.”*

even while hailing the IAF's precision strikes and Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman's bravery in the face of the enemy.

Post-Balakote, Modi became hero. The avenging angel. Protector of India's borders. And Modi made a clean getaway on his many broken promises. The military build-up was not at the borders but in the minds of the people. The National War Memorial was one more link in the fence. Patriotism consumed all other issues. 'Ghar Mein Ghuske Mareng' drowned 'Chowkidar Chor Hai', in its repetition and decibels.

Today, the Opposition is in total disarray. With no help from Mahagathbandhan and Federal Front, Rahul Gandhi stands lonely on the burning deck. Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav; Mamata Banerjee and Chandrababu Naidu, none of the vaunted have time for the Congress. Pulwama and Balakote have limited them to their

the BSP will have no alliance with the Congress anywhere. And the Congress does not want any tie-up with the AAP in Delhi. The Ahmedabad CWC Tuesday sought to cut losses with a return to "asli" issues: unemployment and farmers-distress, compel Modi to answer to his many failed promises.

The CWC resolution made a distinction between Modi's "broken promises" and the Congress party's "kept promises". It said while the BJP routinely dishonoured electoral promises, the Congress always honoured the promises it made, right from "MGNREGA on." It also asked Modi "not to play with people's emotions" by building a sense of insecurity in the country. Sonia Gandhi charged Modi with "compromising national security for electoral benefits."

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra made her "debut" and asked Modi to stop "lying" to the people. Rahul Gandhi resurrected Rafale

# Will Modi become the PM of India again in 2019?

By Arvind Kala

Yes, everybody says he will. Their reasoning: If not Modi, will people vote for Rahul Gandhi, Mamta Banerjee, or Mayawati? No way. So Modi will be back, India says. A view that is echoed in tens of thousands of daily conversations. I have another theory. When a democracy goes to vote, strange things happen. Look at recent history.

Hillary Clinton was seen as a certain winner. She lost to Trump. Dead sure of winning, British PM Theresa May called a snap general election in 2017. She lost. Her predecessor David Cameron held a Brexit referendum in 2016 fully expecting to win. He lost too.

Britain has 20 times fewer voters than India. The US has three times fewer voters than India. If these mature numerically smaller democracies can produce poll upsets, why not India? Remember Indira Gandhi way back in 1977? She had muzzled the press and looked more unbeatable than Modi does today. She was routed.

India's unravelling economy is the elephant in Modi's room that Modi refuses to see. But a harsh reality doesn't go away if you ignore its existence. It's the Indian economy which may doom Modi. India's job situation today is the worst in the last 45 years. Some 12 million young boys and girls enter India's work force every year. Which means 33,000 new jobs required every day. But wherever we go in India, we hear a two-word lament: No jobs. By the way, when a young Indian talks of a job, he means one of two things.

One, a government job. Or two, a private-sector job with a five-figure monthly salary. Widening joblessness and farmer distress apart, Modi's economic mismanagement has even damaged India's independent self-employed professionals. They saw a huge income drop thanks to demonetization, according to M. V. Vyas, India's most credible cruncher of economic data,

*“The year 2005 saw a charismatic Atal Behari Vajpayee losing to a lacklustre Italian bahu Sonia Gandhi with her halting accented Hindi. So Modi can lose too. Right now this seems unlikely because Modi strides like a Colossus over India's political landscape. And his powerful voice rings from a million TV sets. But does anyone listen to him? I doubt it. Modi's become India's biggest bore.”*

The year 2005 saw a charismatic Atal Behari Vajpayee losing to a lacklustre Italian bahu Sonia Gandhi with her halting accented Hindi. So Modi can lose too. Right now this seems unlikely because Modi strides like a Colossus over India's political landscape. And his powerful voice rings from a million TV sets. But does anyone listen to him? I doubt it. Modi's become India's biggest bore. The reason is over-exposure. Just as we tire of even a brilliant talker who talks non-stop, nations get fed up with a leader who talks non-stop. This is Modi's situation today. India's tired of him. And the more he talks, the more votes he loses.

Looking at Modi, we almost miss robot Manmohan Singh's unblinking eyes and squeaky voice with Sonia Auntie's benevolent eyes resting on him. Somehow, he seems so much more attractive than Modi. In a beauty contest, he would beat Modi hands down.

With next month's election looming, my mind shoots back to Bill Clinton's famous four-word slogan when he beat the first George Bush in 1992. Clinton's slogan was, "It's the economy, stupid". Just as Modi's crowing about his Pulwama strikes today, George Bush was rejoicing over routing Iraq in the 1991 first Gulf war.

But a canny Bill Clinton zeroed in on a gathering US anxiety over a looming recession. And his campaign focussed on how George Bush's rule had led to job losses and falling incomes. Sure enough, Clinton touched a chord in anxious American hearts and they voted George Bush out.

I see the same fate overtaking Modi next month. In-

a Gujarat.

Ranging from engineers and doctors to architects accountants, lawyers and chemists, these entrepreneur professionals numbered 1.6 million in Jan-April 2016. Their number fell to one million in May-August 2018 in a space of two and a half years, Vyas says.

Meaning that Modi's unravelling economy forced them to shut shop and take up salaried jobs. Look at the significance of this. If qualified professionals cannot survive indently under Modi's misrule, how will the plain BA graduates coming out of our colleges?

Meanwhile, Modi keeps strutting around. His passion for multi-coloured turbans is deepening.

He wears a new one every new day. His kurta chooridars pajamas are becoming brighter too.

To hone his image, Modi's seeking newer and newer photo ops. Wearing a bright yellow Modi jacket, he washed the feet of five sanitation workers at Kumbh Mela.

He rode the Delhi Metro flanked by two bearded Muslims wearing skull-caps. Modi's face was split into a grin he summons when a camera's watching him.

He immersed himself chest-deep in the Ganges fully clad in a black kurta, mercifully sparing us the sight of his bloated torso.

Alas for Modi, when a UP or Bihar peasant casts his vote, he doesn't think of how cute his PM is.

He thinks of how he has suffered since Modi came to power. India's 900 million voters have one fixed image of Modi. As a harbinger of misery.

## TO THE EDITOR

### Free & Fair General Elections, 2019

Editor,

The general elections in India will be held in seven phases between April 11 and May 19 and the results will be declared on May 23, the Election Commission announced on Sunday (10th March, 2019). With the announcement of the poll schedule, the model code of conduct has kicked in. Assembly elections will be held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls in four states of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim. The poll panel said that while Jammu and Kashmir will vote in the general election, there will be no simultaneous Assembly polls there because of the security situation.

There will be single-phase polling in 22 states and Union territories while Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar will vote in each of the seven phases. The poll panel claimed the requirements of force movement had dictated the state-wise schedule. The electorate's size is now close to 90 crore, up from the 81.45 crore in 2014. More than 1.5 crore voters are aged be-

tween 18 and 19, representing a population born this millennium.

For the first time use of the voter-verifiable paper audit trail machine with every electronic voting machine will be in use but the poll panel is yet to decide what percentage of the paper trail to count. Currently, one paper audit trail device per Assembly segment is tallied with the result on the voting machine, but there is a demand to raise the percentage to address tampering fears. Since the matter is sub-judice, the poll commission has set up a high powered committee of experts from the Indian Statistical Institute to look into the demand. The CEC is expecting the report before the poll process is over.

Although there is no adverse reaction about the schedule & phases of election from any other state, the front-line leaders/MLAs/spokespersons of the ruling party in West Bengal are trying to add communal colour to the time-schedule fixed by the Election Commission for the general election inciting religious sentiments. Indulging in such provocation is very unfortunate and a dangerous game for gaining political mileage. AIMIM

Chief Asaduddin Owaisi has already asked parties to desist from using Muslims and Ramzan for political reasons dubbing Ramzan poll controversy as "uncalled for". Some of the leaders are threatening the electorate that the central forces may be there for 2 to 3 days but thereafter the state-sponsored goons would spare none. So the Election Commission has to make plans in advance to combat exigency situation that may be created by the ruling dispensation and ensure that the voters are able to exercise their franchise fearlessly.

All the party/polling agents need to be protected inside the polling booth. No political leaders shall be allowed inside polling booth and debarred from coercing voters to vote to his/her party nominee as it happened in the past in Bengal. False voting (impersonation of voters), rigging and booth capturing by armed cadres and bikers are to be prevented by all means. Since there is a deteriorating law and order situation in Bengal the state police & Central forces have to guard/protect and encourage willing voters to cast their votes freely. Election Commission has to ensure

free & fair election in the state of West Bengal.

Threats with dire consequence, terrorising and intimidating genuine voters/ electorate of the constituencies by Trinamul musclemen/ vandals/goons/supporters inspired by their acme leader during 2016 Assembly elections is still fresh in the memory of people of West Bengal.

This time during parliamentary elections it would be necessary for the Election Commission to guard all the declared sensitive constituency booths of the state with adequate force and order the central paramilitary forces to start patrolling immediately in all the villages for escorting the voters up to the polling booths for exercising their franchise fearlessly and freely on the day of polling. This is absolutely necessary for the protection and continuance of Democracy in the country. The onus for the conduct of free and fair polls in all the seven phases of election in the state of West Bengal lies squarely on the Election Commission of India.

Yours etc., Samares Bandyopadhyay Advocate, Kolkata High Court

### Rotten branches a present danger

Editor,

Through your esteemed newspaper, I wish to bring to the notice of the Forest Department concerned about the dangers posed by rotten tree branches which hang over public thoroughfares and main roads. On March 12, a young lady driving to her place of work, had a very narrow escape when, on taking the turn at the Deputy Commissioner's office opposite Wards Lake, a large and rotten tree branch from the side of the D.C.'s office, fell right in front of her car - the thin branches were on the bonnet and the main trunk just inches away from the car's front grill. A few seconds faster and the branch would have fallen right on top of the car - the young lady was saved by a miracle. Can we, therefore, request the concerned authorities to identify such rotten branches along our roads and to remove them before a more serious accident takes place?

Yours etc, DM Pariat,

Via email

### Thin attendance from Opposition

Editor,

It is very unfortunate that the attendance of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was very thin on Tuesday, March 12 and Wednesday, March 13. Except for PT Sawmie, the Opposition Chief Whip, H.M Shangliang, Mohendro Rapsang, Lazarus Sangma, George Lyngdoh, Mayrylbon Syiem, Dr. Azad Zaman and few others most of the chairs in the Opposition benches were empty. In fact the Opposition in the Assembly comprises mainly of the Congress. It was reliably learnt that some of the members have left for Delhi for some urgent work. It would have been beneficial to the House and the people of the State if all the members were to be present and taken active part in the deliberations and debates.

Yours etc., Philip Marwein, Via email

*“Education: that which reveals to the wise, and conceals from the stupid, the vast limits of their knowledge.”*

--- Mark Twain

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.212 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2019

### Jaish conundrum at UN again

PREDICTABLY, China stepped in again to put a spoke into India's Jaish wheel at the United Nations as it did repeatedly in the past. Beijing blocked the plea that sought a UN ban on Jaish-e-Mohammed and declaration of its chief Masood Azhar a global terrorist – actions that would force Pakistan to stop its support to the Kashmiri terrorist and bring Azhar before the arms of international laws against terrorism. Curiously, it would appear that the Indian government put some faith in China this time – as was seen in the past too – to strengthen hope that Beijing would finally see reason. China didn't, and followed its policy of colluding with Pakistan for its self interest. China remained quiet until the last moment, apparently to tease India, before it rose to let down this country – this time, even in the face of the deadly Pulwama attack. Jaish had accepted responsibility for the terror act, and it claimed responsibility for several other major terror attacks in India in the past too. All these had the unmistakable stamp of an ISI involvement; meaning the Pakistani army is out to achieve its openly stated aim of “bleeding India with a thousand cuts.” China's support to Pakistan to protect Masood Azhar and his Jaish is a provocation in itself, but considering the overall scenario, two possibilities exist: one, to grin and bear with this scenario. Or, concentrate attention on other options before India to target Azhar and his terror outfit. What China asked now is more time to consider the matter and hence a hold-back of the matter at the Security Council. This could drag the issue for nine more months, when China can again put another spoke in the Indian wheel.

It would look odd that the collective concern and might of the US, France and the UK could not have any impact at the Security Council this time again. This, for the reason that China has a Veto power, while India is still not a full-fledged member of this Council. By adopting such diversionary tactics, China is doing no service to global peace or the fight against terror – of which it is a victim in its own backyard close to the Isthms in the west. Considering China's huge military might and clout arising out of its economic power, India has its limitations in dealing with this northern neighbour. All the more reason why alternative routes to reach at Azhar are necessary!

# National security not a political ballgame

By Patricia Mukhim

It is a sad precedent in India that every defence deal is embroiled in a controversy beginning with Bofors. Somehow we never get to the root of the matter because such deals become the subject of electoral gains or losses. This time it is the Rafale aircraft deal which occupies the mindscape of the elite, urban voters and has been a subject of intense debate and the talking point for the Congress Party for a while. It is unfortunate that the Rafale has even entered the recent controversy vis-à-vis the air strike at Balakot.

And now that the elections are announced the Election Commission of India (ECI) has tightened its grip around the behaviour of political parties and their camp followers. Two days ago Facebook was asked to remove the picture of Wg. Cdr. Abhinandan Vartaman from the Facebook post of a BJP MLA. Post Pulwama and the Balakot air strikes, there hoardings with the military on one side and the Prime Minister on the other. This is a great disservice to the men in uniform who put their lives on the line to secure this country from external forces and sometimes from internal dissensions manifested by events in Kashmir, triggered by terror outfits based in Pakistan. Thankfully, these days all is quiet in the Eastern front and insurgency has taken a dip although it is not fully uprooted.

The Pulwama incident took the nation by storm. We were angry, distraught and wanted to avenge the bloody attack on our jawans by a suicide bomber. The reactions have ranged from the mature to the radical. Across India candle-light vigils and solemn tributes were paid to the martyrs whose lives were blown apart due to a 'major intelligence failure,' considering that there was enough intelligence inputs about the possibility of such an attack. A dispassionate analysis of the incident by security experts suggests careful planning, infiltration of an IED doctor (a technical person capable of fabricating IEDs) and a module fully functional at work with a network of over-ground workers.

Democracy has its downside. It is noisy and cacophonous and every subject is intensely debated over social media by experts and by those

with little understanding of security doctrines. As stated above the acquisition of defence equipments is always a subject of intense debate. The country's defence capabilities are laid bare before the world. This was brought to the fore at the time when Wg. Cdr. Abhinandan was a captive in Pakistan. While he in perfect military discipline refused to divulge anything to the Pakistani interrogators, including his native place, our own TV channels parked right outside his home were giving a running commentary. That's democracy's soft underbelly. True democracy gives us the space to dissent and argue out our ideas often to the highest decibels in TV studios but this should not on account be at the expense of national interests. After Pulwama the nation's pride was hurt. The nation wanted retribution for the 40 or more lives lost in the suicide bomb attack. A cloud of despair hung over the country and people wondered how long India would allow this 'sense of defeat at the hands of the enemy' to continue.

For too long India has been playing softball with Pakistan in the hope that that country would end its noteworthy ambition of “bleeding India with a thousand cuts.” Pakistan obviously does not know how to respond because the raison d'être of its army is built around the narrative of India as the enemy. On India's part, every terrorist attack from the Pakistan-backed jihadist is followed by knee jerk reactions but we have not been able to come up with a comprehensive and well thought-out policy to contain Pakistan and the terror modules that are bred in that country. The abrogation of the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status by India in its trade relations with Pakistan is just one small step and will not make much impact considering that the balance of trade is in India's favour. Trying to isolate Pakistan in the international community is also a futile effort considering China's presence as the bulwark for Pakistan, due to its own geo-political and strategic interests in the region. These are the pitfalls of

international diplomacy and strong nations tend to break all the rules of the game. They are interested in pushing their own dominant agenda of conquest and control even in this day and age of peace-building overtures based on economic cooperation. Every nation seeks to be the most powerful military and economic power and every other attempt to build a violence-free world fails at the altar of self interest.

This time India decided to retaliate and how! On February 26, India launched air attacks aimed with clinical precision to hit the Jaish-e-Mohammed training camps cum madrassas at Balakot in the Pakhtunkhwa area in the wee hours. The next day, Pakistan sent its F16 supersonic combat aircrafts to hit at Indian installations inside the LOC. This was thwarted by the Indian Air Force. One MIG-Bison aircraft was shot at by Pakistan and the fighter pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Vartaman, now a national hero ejected and was taken into Pakistan's custody. He was released two days later and continues to remain under treatment for his injuries.

After this incident, there was sort of code across political parties that none should use the surgical strike at Balakot as a political scoring board. This lasted until Wg. Cdr. Abhinandan was safely handed back to India by the Pakistani Government. After that Wg. Cdr. Abhinandan's picture has been used by BJP candidates and Prime Minister Modi's picture was juxtaposed to that of the Indian army in hoardings across the country. This is like using the military to boost political fortunes for the ruling party. There is no doubt at all that the NDA Government under PM Modi took a decisive step to hit the terror camps inside Pakistan. This is also calls out the lies of Pakistan which unconvincingly denies that such factories inside its territory exist and that they are being nurtured by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which reports directly to the Army Chief and the Prime Minister. This grievous plan to weaken India has been unleashed time and again by preaching the language of jihad in Kashmir and indoctrinating hundreds of its youth. Now that the terror camps in Afghanistan are being

demolished courtesy the US intent to pull out of that country, those terror outfits will return to Pakistan and infiltrate across the Indian border to cause havoc here. This is where the Indian Government requires a futuristic, strategic security document to handle the aftermath.

So initially the attempt to politicise the Pulwama issue and the Balakot air strike was largely muted due to the fear that such stratagem might backfire and alienate even the non-partisan voter. But very soon statesmanship gave way to blatant use of the air strikes to win points for the BJP and to turn this into electoral dividends. This should not be allowed to happen at any cost, least of all by the Party currently running the Government and looking for a triumphant return.

The military belongs to the nation and is dear to every Indian irrespective of political affiliations. We grieve as a country when they are killed in action and rest secure in the thought that our borders are well guarded by women and men dedicated to serving the nation. I therefore find it extremely distasteful when retired generals whose view are politically slanted, frothing away on Prime Time television. It's almost as if the TV anchors are allowed these retired army personnel to vent some unexplained venom against those who hold views different from theirs as far as India's policy towards Pakistan is concerned. India is a diverse country and there are the doves who believe that was extract a high cost from any country and that peace is the way forward. But the hawks, most of whom will not be donning the uniform or fly a fighter aircraft or fire a gun that raise shrill war cries inside the TV studios.

And there are TV channels whose anchors are not even apologetic about their compassion for the BJP. How such channels can still claim to be fair and independent is a question the media fraternity should be answering right now.

The elections are at hand and attempts to use those war scenes in the backdrop of TV studios ostensibly to discuss Balakot again and again on the plea that there are sceptics asking for evidence is actually an insidious attempt of politicising the recent air strikes. The ECI should not allow this cheap propaganda by the media.

## Tweets good and bad for party and elections Rahul needs wise counsel for social media

By Sushil Kutty

China once again came in the way of designating JeM terror boss Masood Azhar a global terrorist in the United Nation's list and political parties in India have reacted. Two tweets from Congress leaders put the country's main opposition party's view on the global community's failure to convince China in perspective. One from party spokesman Randeep Surjewala, which he tweeted within minutes of the news breaking, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's China policy has been a “series of diplomatic disasters” and the other from Congress President Rahul Gandhi who said that “Modi is scared of Xi Jinping.”

While Surjewala's reaction is measured and mostly to the point, Rahul Gandhi's tweet can be construed as the outburst of a juvenile, gleeful and celebratory. Whoever is managing Rahul Gandhi's twitter account, punching in the 140 letters, surely cannot tell his boss to hold his horses but there are other top leaders who can and should. As part of political rhetoric at a time of a looming general election, Rahul Gandhi's reaction is perhaps pat and will be consumed and applauded by the Congress base. Quite a lot of the fence-sitters will also look at it as Modi's personal failure.

But Rahul Gandhi's tweet will reverberate across the border, in Pakistan. That is dangerous and not good for

“anti-national” at this juncture in time and, unfortunately, the allegation will stick in these times of rabid patriotism.

Pitted against a “hurting BJP”, a “celebratory Congress” is not what the Congress should want at this point in time. Let's not forget India and China are not friends. If anything, China is seen as the bigger enemy than Pakistan by Indians at large. China has occupied Aksai chin and runs its trucks on the Karakoram “highway”, which India claims title to. And who can forget 1962, the ultimate example of Chinese perfidy and duplicity. It is widely known that India's nukes are pointed towards Beijing and other Chinese cities and China harbours a certain fixed hatred for India, which is the only country that has refused to join Xi Jinping's Belt and Road initiative, something which Xi hasn't forgotten.

Then, of course, there is the CPEC, in which China is hugely invested in, which runs through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and passes by Gilgit-Baltistan, both territories claimed by India. China's inroads into POK and Pakistan are both for economic and strategic reasons and China, which keeps Chinese Muslims under a tight leash, labelling a big group of them as “terrorists”, is apprehensive that declaring Azhar Masood a global terrorist could result in the JeM

### The Congress is already taking a lot of flak on its perceived and alleged sympathies lying with Pakistan on the Balakote strikes. This is another opportunity for BJP and Modi to buttress that impression.

the Congress. Pakistan harbours Azhar Masood and Pakistanis are taking an unduly keen interest in the Indian general elections. Pakistanis are rooting for the Congress and would love nothing better to see than Narendra Modi and the BJP sent to the cleaners by the Indian electorate. Under such circumstances, the Congress should not be seen standing with Pakistanis and the Pakistan establishment. An under attack BJP has already pointed this out in its reaction to Rahul Gandhi's tweet.

The Congress should have left it with Surjewala's tweet, which squarely put the onus on India's series of diplomatic failure in taking China head-on on various issues under Modi's watch, from Doklam to the yawning trade deficit to sourcing material from China for manufacturing bullet-proof jackets for the Indian Army. The Congress should have refrained from reacting like AIMIM leader Asauddin Owaisi, who calls the latest China blockade on Azhar's dubious designation a failure of Modi's 'Jhoola Diplomacy', referring to Modi and Xi Jinping sharing a swing on the banks of a Gujarat river.

The Congress is already taking a lot of flak on its perceived and alleged sympathies lying with Pakistan on the Balakote strikes. This is another opportunity for BJP and Modi to buttress that impression. “National” and “anti-national” have become an issue in these elections and media supporting Modi have taken distributing “national and anti-national certificates” to citizens and political leaders alike to absurd lengths. The Congress party's “celebratory” tone and tenor at China blocking India's move to block Azhar Masood will be seen as

targeting the CPEC with terrorist strikes. The Congress, when seen in a “celebratory mood at China's success” at the expense of India, is taking a risk, which it should not, not if it wants Modi on the mat.

This is the fourth or fifth time, China has put its lot behind Azhar Masood and Pakistan. When it did it in 2009, Manmohan Singh was Prime Minister. Besides, this time, the initiative to designate Masood a global terrorist was taken by France and the United States, a total of 14 countries, so if anybody has “failed”, it's the United Nations and the United Nations Security Council, France, USA, UK, maybe even Russia. China stood with India on Pulwama and the Balakote strikes but not on Azhar. That is not because Azhar is Xi Jinping's favourite son but because China's national interest lies in following that line of diplomacy.

Social media is the common man's media and tweets are light and fluffy as much as they are positive and negative, poisonous and uplifting. Rahul Gandhi's “Modi is scared” tweet opens him to the charge of being juvenile and childish, which can be taken advantage of by his rivals. Sometimes leaving the crass and cr\*p to “juniors” is far better than jumping into the mud-pit for a slugfest. Shashi Tharoor is far more nuanced and grown-up when he says that “fingers should be pointed at China for supporting a global terrorist against the sentiments of the entire global community” even while not forgetting that Modi's “Wuhan Spirit” has all but evaporated. At least on that score Modi is living in delusion and his China policy is a series of disasters, a net failure. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Interesting contest for the MP seats this time

Editor,  
Meghalaya will go to the polls on Thursday April, 11. This time there are 18,92,716 voters in Meghalaya (11,82,725 voters for 1-Shillong Parliamentary Constituency and 7,09,991 voters for 2-Tura Parliamentary Constituency). Judging from past records this time in order to win from Shillong seat a candidate has to get not less than 4 lakh plus votes and for Tura seat a candidate has to poll not less than 2.5 lakh votes.

We know that the two main rivals for 1-Shillong seat are MDA sponsored candidate Dr. Jemino Mawthoh of UDP and Congress sponsored candidate Vincent Pala. There will be more than two candidates vying for the Shillong seat but the main contest will be between the above two contestants. One really cannot predict who of the two will come out victorious. Irrespective of whoever is the candidate the Congress has got its own vote bank of not less than two lakh votes in the Shillong

seat. On the other hand UDP alone has got a vote bank of one lakh plus. This time the Congress goes it alone while the UDP is supported by the NPP, HSPDP, PDF, NCP and others supporting it. In other words the UDP candidate has got the support of the ruling MDA partners in the run up to the elections. This is a great plus point. One does not really know how the elections are going to pan out but we are going to witness a very interesting tussle for Shillong.

As far as Tura seat is concerned the main rivals will be the NPP sponsored candidate Ms. Agatha Sangma and the Congress candidate Dr. Mukul Sangma. Ms Agatha Sangma has won the seat twice in 2008 and 2009. She defeated her Congress rival Deborah Marak by a margin of 17,945 votes. However this time the contest is different. This time she contests from the Meghalaya ruling party NPP and Dr. Mukul Sangma is a formidable candidate. He is a very senior Congress leader and was Chief Minister of Meghalaya for more than ten years with many political achievements to his credit. He is considered to be one of the tall leaders

of Meghalaya and one of the top leaders of Garo Hills. Hence with his entry into the fray the contest is bound to be very stiff and highly contesting. May the best person win.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via-Email.

#### Corruption is uncontrolled greed

Editor,  
It was my mistake. I thought I gave her twenty rupees. But it was actually two twenty rupee notes. They were stuck to each other so closely that I thought it was just one note. After a few minutes the woman came running towards me and returned one twenty rupee note after politely pointing out my mistake and then went away without giving me an opportunity to thank her. But could I thank her if she had given me the time? No, I could not because it had a shocking effect on me. Her old sari and her torn plastic-slippers were as rickety as she herself was. But she breathed a sigh of relief after returning the money.

The incident happened many years ago. But I could

not forget it. Whenever I hear the story of corruption at the highest level, her face comes to my mind. This restores my faith that most of the ordinary citizens of our country are extremely honest. Indeed, their honesty has passed the test of poverty. This is really a paradox! When most of the poor people are showing exemplary honesty, some rich people who have nothing to worry about are resorting to unscrupulous means. Tagore highlighted this in his poem ~ “Dui Bigha Jomi” (My last piece of land). In the poem, Tagore said, ~ “e jagate hae sei beshi chae achhe jar bhuri bhuri” (“Alas, in this world those who have most want all”).

The face of the lady and this poem of Tagore came to my mind again when I saw a video which was made and circulated by UK's Telegraph newspaper. In the video, Nirav Modi was seen walking freely around the streets of London sporting a handle bar moustache and an ostrich hide jacket. It is reported that the cost of the jacket is 10,000 pounds which is approximately Rs 9 lakh!

This had a chilling effect on me. Here was the

billionaire diamond tycoon who was accused in the Rs 13,500 crore Punjab National Bank fraud case! And ostrich leather is one of the world's most expensive and also the toughest leather. It is as tough as the hard truth mentioned above which was Tagore's poetic burden.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

#### Seng Khasi College advertisement

Editor,  
I refer to the Seng Khasi college advertisement which came out in the Shillong Times, dated March 12, 2019 in which the College had advertised the vacancies in three (3) Government sanctioned posts namely History, Economics and Mathematics. As per my information Seng Khasi College is only an Arts College at the degree level. The Commerce stream was introduced a few years ago and that too only at the HSSLC level.

The point I am trying to make here is that as per the new Semester System there is no Mathematics subject in the Arts stream as a

discipline in Seng Khasi College so how can the College advertise for the post of Mathematics teacher as a Government Sanctioned post with all the requisite qualifications for an Assistant Professor whose job would be to teach Degree level students and whereas Mathematics in Seng Khasi College exists only at the HSSLC level? It seems that the management of the College is misleading the Government by advertising the Government Post in the department of Mathematics which is non-existent in the College. If at all it did exist, it was only during the annual system not in the semester system.

Hence I appeal to both the Government and the Management of the College to rectify the same and not to succumb to any favoritism. This also is a testimony to the fact that Seng Khasi College is receiving preferential treatment when it comes to the issue of delinking HSSLC from the Degree College as a policy direction given by the State Government in total violation of all norms and guidelines.

Yours etc.  
J Lyngdoh  
Via email

*"The first step to getting the things you want out of life is this: Decide what you want."*

--- Ben Stein

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.213 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 2019

### Democracy on a roll

ELECTION time is also time for gimmicks, trading of accusations, and floor-crossing by disgruntled elements. The BJP might be doing a disservice to itself by encouraging defections of the worst kind. Note the hurry with which it issued party membership to a rank outsider like Tom Vadakkan -- a Congress spokesperson who was trashing the BJP all along. Or, see the BJP's induction with lightning speed of a TMC MLA after he was denied party ticket to contest the forthcoming polls. Congress president Rahul Gandhi, having tasted success in assembly polls in the three Hindi-belt states late last year, appears to have re-energised himself for the big battle ahead -- and with a new sense of confidence. But, there still are chinks in his armour. The Congress chief wrapped up the CWC meet and launched the party campaign for the Lok Sabha polls with a rally in Gujarat, and lost no time in flying South to engage in a rock star-style show with college girls in Chennai. Later he addressed a few campaign meets in Kerala as also Cape Comorin. Overall, it was a no-holds-barred attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In the process, he went too far.

Rahul Gandhi ended up with shame on the Congress when he blamed PM Modi for his China policy vis-a-vis targeting Masood Azhar at the UN Security Council meet. Finance minister Arun Jaitley caught him on a slippery wicket and gave him an earful. What Jaitley sought to hammer home was that it was Jawaharlal Nehru, Rahul's grandfather, who messed up with foreign policy with Pakistan vis-a-vis Kashmir and with China by trusting the inscrutable Mao and Beijing. This may be part of the normal political slug-fest, but election time is when rival sides have to build strong defences as also stronger offensives. Else, they end up as losers. As an Opposition the Congress strategy obviously is to try and catch Modi and his government on the wrong foot and expose wrongdoings but going for the overkill on issues like Rafale is tantamount to the Congress leadership forgetting the past. Public memory is short too, but not as short as to forget scams like Bofors. At the same time, the Congress leadership is found wanting in action -- where action was urgently needed. While the Congress managed to firm up an alliance with the JDS in Karnataka for the upcoming polls, it stands to lose heavily in Uttar Pradesh due to its failure for a similar tie-up. So too with several other states.

# Job creation is a paradox, joblessness the truth Industry survey does not stand the test of facts

By Gyan Pathak

Paradox is a situation when a mathematician proves a thing true which is otherwise untrue. The latest CII report on net job creation in the MSME sector probably falls in this category of paradox as against all gloom over joblessness in the country. The report was a surprise because only a few weeks ago NSSO's leaked survey said unemployment rate was worst in 45 years. The chairman of PM's Economic Advisory Council had said, "We will have a new round of the NSS which will... show...substantial employment and substantiated job creation". Now CII has come up with a survey that proves his claim. Everything seems to have a pattern in this election season.

The CII report claimed that MSME sector in India has shown a 13.9 per cent net increase in jobs in the last four years, ie a 3.3 per cent growth per year. It was the result of surveying 1.05 lakh selected MSME firms based in 350 industrial centres across 28 states of the country. CII research scholars, let us assume they are bonafied, seem to have forgotten to verify the survey results they landed at with other tools available. A little commonsense will convince that the level of growth in job creation should have been reflected in the growth pattern of everything of or related to MSMEs, such as investment, credits, production, electricity consumption, deployment of machineries, and the status of their being operational or closure etc on the one hand, and savings, consumption, and well-being of the employees on the other on the other. Since MSME is the second largest sector in providing employment in the country giving employment to about 12 crore people, such level of net job creation should have not been gone unnoticed by common people as well as experts.

One cannot understand as to why there is no explanation on the fact that out of about 63.4 million registered units few millions remained non-starter, and some another few millions shut down. As per a report published by SIDBI in association with TransUnion Cibil only 51

million MSME units were operational at the end of the period under consideration. Shutting down or closure of about 12.4 million units does not reflect the growth. Every document, the government's and the institutions' mentioned the adverse impact of demonetization and implementation of GST, from which the MSMEs are now recovering, albeit slowly. Even RBI mentioned the dual economic disruption for the corresponding period in connection with the credit off-take by MSMEs

sharply declining since 2012-13 when it was 15.27 per cent. The latest data available with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) shows that the growth rate declined to 7.62 per cent at the end of March 2016 per cent of the GDP. When we consider it in the backdrop of the widening of the domain of this sector across sectors of the economy producing diverse range of products and services the relative growth of each individual sector, it is clear that all of them are declining. The trend aggravated more sharply after demonetization and

from the operating MSMEs while the job losses in about 12.4 million shutdown or closed units are not taken into consideration while calculating the net job creation. Moreover, the claim contradicts all available data provided by the government and other national and international institutions.

In the fag-end of January this year, the leaked NSSO's report said that joblessness in India touched 6.1%, the worst since 1972-73, in July 2017-June 2018. The government was not ready to publish this report though it was scheduled to be released in December last year. Two of the senior members had to resign in protest. Niti Aayog clarified that the report was being processed, but not contradicted or approved the content. Aayog merely called it a draft report and promised to share it by March, which is yet to happen. Niti Aayog CEO, however, had accepted lack of good quality jobs and the crisis of the large informal and MSME sector.

The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, a leading independent think-tank, said the country lost as many as 11 million jobs last year. Though the Govt of India claimed that MSMEs have created 11.10 crore jobs during 2014-18, we find discrepancies in the data. How such level of job creation is possible when even skilled persons are not getting jobs? For example, MSME technology centres skilled 6.42 lakh people but provided only 91.6 thousand jobs in four years. Under ATI, 2.07 lakh people were trained but only 43.7 thousand got wage employment, and 21.7 thousand could be self-employed.

A recent RBI report said that the core problem of MSMEs of lack of access to formal finance remains which means the sector is still suffering from financial crisis. How can they have contributed in job creation up to such an extent while struggling for their own survival? Most probably the CII survey has landed at wrong conclusion. There is no reason to believe it to be true and all other directly or indirectly contradicting official and non-official reports false. (IPA Service)

**The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, a leading independent think-tank, said the country lost as many as 11 million jobs last year. Though the Govt of India claimed that MSMEs have created 11.10 crore jobs during 2014-18, we find discrepancies in the data. How such level of job creation is possible when even skilled persons are not getting jobs? For example, MSME technology centres skilled 6.42 lakh people but provided only 91.6 thousand jobs in four years. Under ATI, 2.07 lakh people were trained but only 43.7 thousand got wage employment, and 21.7 thousand could be self-employed.**

which remained very poor along with overall NPA rate for the sector hovering around 8 to 11 per cent. One of the SIDBI-Cibil report mentioned that default rate among the MSME borrowers taking multiple loans for a period of 60 days have increased from 2.5 per cent to 4 per cent during September 2015 to September 2018. Even Industry people claim that MSMEs are in crisis and therefore they are not able to earn that much amount even to pay their debt. Had there been growth in jobs, it would have been translated into earning of the MSMEs with less number of defaulters.

One cannot also ignore the fact that the growth of MSME GVA has been

introduction of GST.

In the backdrop of the recent controversy over 'jobs' and 'joblessness' in India, the CII survey itself has become a suspect. First, because the report lauds certain Union Government's programs such as a beneficiary does. Secondly, the pragmatics of language reveals that its language is not that much neutral as a research work or survey requires. Thirdly, it has its limitation too obvious, because the data on which the report is compiled is provided by the government's Labour Bureaus. Fourthly, it has very small fresh empirical data set that cannot be treated as conclusive and quality of sampling and analyzing data is questionable. The sample is

from the market abuse and social injustice. Given that we live in a sellers' market and in the bubble of their fantasy advertisements, this day holds special importance.

The World Consumer Rights day was inspired by the President of the United States of America, John F Kennedy. In 1962, he highlighted four consumer rights ~ Right to safety, Right to be informed, Right to choose and Right to be heard. Thereafter, four more rights added in 1980. They are ~ Right to redress, Right to satisfaction of basic needs, Right to consumer education and Right to a healthy environment.

Indian consumers got their Consumers Protection Act in 1986. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs of the Government of India has been making consumers aware about their rights through the campaign "Jago Grakak Jago" ("Wake up Consumers"). Now, the question is ~ why mustn't Indian voters be treated as consumers? Why mustn't

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

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

## Voter Wish List Parties in a quandary

By Shivaji Sarkar

The election process has begun. People's aspirations are soaring. A lot, says the government, has been done, but many more people want to be taken care of. They want a bonanza, putting political parties in a quandary.

The wish-list of the people is long and expensive. But are the political parties aware of it or not, is the big question. They thus have a problem, as people are tightlipped.

The political mud-slinging would heat up the poll arena but whether these would be vote getters nobody is sure. Voters are silent listeners and apply their own logic to accept or reject the charges-- some real, some imaginary and some out of the blue. Will any of these stick?

Another problem that would have its impact on the polling scenario is just not the national issues but regional and local desires. Election is game time. Voters are not bothered about the jurisdiction. If their comfort has not been taken care of, the elected representative to the local bodies to Parliament are held responsible.

Due to lack of a national issue, except 'nationalism' and 'military honours', regional and sub-local issues might play a role that party leaders may not have even considered. Let us take the issue of roads. These are being constructed and entailing huge budgets. It is also burdening people with huge costs in tolls and raking up never heard questions.

granting benefits most probably all are at one level, even the BJD in Orissa, the TRS in Telangana, the TDP in Andhra and the TMC in West Bengal. This makes the job of the voters more difficult. They have one vote each and cannot please all.

The economy and developmental issues thus may not become vote-clinching issues. There can be acrimony. The BJP says it has taken the benefit to all without any discrimination. The BSP, SP and some other parties may have done it selectively.

Is corruption an issue? It is but not at the level it was in 2014. Graft and Ram temple have become far softer issue or the barbs are hitting all. The election, despite pan-national approach, is to be fought on clans, classes, castes, religious groupings.

Economy and development may be a concern but parochial group interests always sway the minds. Democracy is a game of numbers and promotes groups. There are groups within party folds. Frequent induction from other parties by almost all is causing internal dissent. These may look minuscule. But it affects the outcome, morale of party workers.

And yes, jobs, farm-related classes' distress, high cost of education, rising inflation even at a slow pace are real issues. The ruling BJP can take solace that the Opposition has not yet been able to corner it. The Mahagathbandhan is still emerging. In Uttar

**The BJP says it has taken benefits to the grassroots and in a graft-free environment. Farmers they add, have been given 1.5 times of the cost as minimum support price and 14 crore soil health cards issued. Their claim is not wrong.**

Pradesh, the SP-BSP may look formidable. But there is a third element -- Congress. With Priyanka Gandhi entering the fray and softly cajoling and reassuring the people, it can make a change in electoral arithmetic. If Congress does even a little better, its tally, according to observers, can swell.

The Congress' approach this time is soft, persuasive attack. It also is trying to develop an emotional connect with the people against the BJP's high patriotic emotional sentiments backed with extolling the uniformed people. Who is that going to benefit? The BJP or SP and BSP or loose State-wise opposition alliance. The answers are not easy today.

The BJP is trying to unify the voters on pan-national sentiments. Its stress is on ideology, culture and creating friends across the border. These impress people, but this time it would be a test for getting votes. Had it made the income-tax more realistic, its problem with GST could have been solved.

Would not budgetary benefits given to the people be an issue? To some extent all the benefits that the government has announced will be. The most forceful would be a battle on the rural arena about guaranteeing income of the people.

One solace for the BJP is that the Opposition still does not look to be a unified force to match aggression and sharp attack of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But the scenario may change if the Opposition suddenly starts sprinting. Whatever it may be, the General Election this time is more complex with both the ruling party and the Opposition gasping to get a grip over the issues. In the end, it will be the voter, who will decide on many unseen aspects and what he considers best for his well-being.---INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

## Clean up the University

Editor,  
The detailed report in your esteemed daily (ST February 11, 2019) that a Central Institution of higher learning has transformed in a hub of corrupt practices is unfortunate. Your report has unfolded serious irregularities in the tender allotment process in the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), which conspicuously smacks of a shady racket run by engineers in cahoots with the Building Sub-committee and Evaluation Committee of the University.

It is apparent from the report that the Building Sub-committee of the University openly flouted the Central Government norms by fixing lower limit of acceptance of the estimated cost of the projects, which is sheer absurdity and against all the norms of financial propriety. Eventually, such conditions will prompt all the bidders to

quote only up to 10 % below the estimated amount, putting all the bidders on the same platform, although they may be willing to work even more than 10% below, but having such condition compels them to quote only 10% below the estimated amount. It is also pertinent to mention here and also as reported vide your esteemed daily that the estimates have been loaded with premiums to the extent of 50%. So, when all the bidders are on same rate, it gives enough scope of manipulation in allotment of the works to a bidder in exchange for kickbacks, which appear to be prevalent in cases cited in your esteemed daily.

It is expected, that the Vice Chancellor, who is the head of the University will take appropriate steps to conduct full enquiry into the matter and expose corrupt officials involved in shady deals as reported by the media. I also hope that the stake holders at the various levels will also take

initiatives to-ensure that NEHU is freed from corruption and malice.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request

## Meghalaya's natural beauty

Editor,  
Confront nature in its sky clad nudity at Lawsohtun Shillong. Walk briskly at cockcrow and sing along the crooning passerine and joining in the mellifluous warble of the songs of birds. Enter alone inside the pine grove next to the Presbyterian Cemetery, sway and swagger with the lush swinging pine trees. Do the Surya Pranam to the emerging glow of the sun in the distant horizon. Sing Vande Mataram in tune to our proud nation. Enjoy the Yoga exercises lying on the cemented ground in the centre of the cemetery. Condemn violence in the name of religion. When all is done and nature has

come of age with the bright and glowing sun, then go home feeling at peace within and the world around. Learn to regard and respect nature in its original form for it is the benison imparted to mankind by the Almighty.

Yours etc.,  
Col A A Siddiqui,  
Shillong -4

## Consumer Rights Day

Editor,  
Every year March 15 is observed as World Consumer Rights Day. Consumers International has announced the theme for World Consumer Rights Day 2019 as "Trusted Smart Products" to make us aware about the need for a connected world and "importance of the development of digital products and services." The movement for consumer rights is for promoting basic rights of the consumer and for safeguarding consumers

# A different love story



## Space for LGBTQ stories opening up in show business in India

With Indian society becoming more empathetic towards the LGBTQ community, the entertainment space is also putting a spotlight on narratives on homosexuality, according to filmmakers Onir, Sridhar Rangayan, Hansal Mehta and actress Shabana Azmi.

Asked if the decriminalisation of Article 377 has created more space for films on the LGBTQ community, Rangayan said: "Well, the narratives of this community are surely coming out from the dark and the audience is also interested to go to the theatre and watch the films. However, it has not opened the mind of filmmakers... producers, distributors who decide to invest in such stories."

Rangayan spoke at a panel discussion at the 20th edition of Ficci FRAMES, a global media and entertainment conclave here on Thursday.

Citing his film 'Evening Shadows', Rangayan said: "When we went to distributors to release the film, many asked us if the film is mainstream enough to release on a large scale. The point is what is a mainstream film? Is it the one which the audience is ready to celebrate or is it the one which has big stars in it?"

Shabana, who featured in Deepa Mehta's Fire, mentioned the latest web series Made In Heaven, in which the male lead is homosexual.

"The homosexual character is completely normalised in the show. It (the sexual orientation) of the character was just another aspect of the character, instead



of dwelling on it... So, I would say the space is opening up.

"What happened after the release of Fire is that few films attempted to capitalise on it (the topic of homosexuality) and made some sleazy films. Mercifully, none of them did well. Now, I see the space for such a narrative has opened up and it is also because society has changed," she said.

Considering that the constant talk on gender equality is also trying to include the transgender community into the mainstream, the panelists were asked why the transgender character of Kuku in the web series 'Sacred Games' was not performed by a real transgender.

Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laaga writer Gazal Dhaliwal, a transwoman, said, "I had two minds about it. When I read a tweet by Varun Grover, the writer of Sacred Games, he said they had auditioned a lot of



Scenes from (top) Evening Shadows, Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laaga and Aligarh

transgenders but none of them were capable enough to justify the character as an actor or as a

performer. "While I believe that transgenders could get an equal oppor-

tunity because they are a really underprivileged community, I also think that the story should be told well. The performance of the character should be presented well in a film."

Adding to that, Shabana said: "As an actor, I would say that when you are playing such characters, you have to be a damn good actor. That should be the first consideration. Of course, that should be the touching point where it would be great to find an actor from the LGBTQ community to play such a character. But as a filmmaker, the priority should be finding a great actor to play a role."

In Sacred Games, Kuku was essayed by actress Kubbra Sait.

Onir said one's sexual orientation must not be a priority in playing a character.

"Acting is an art. But when it comes to mainstream actors playing the role of a homosexual, mostly they are not open about it... I am saying it from experience," said Onir.

However, Aligarh director Hansal Mehta said he didn't face any problem from the producers and actors.

"I was asked who all were ready to play the roles. When I said Manoj (Manoj Bajpayee) and Raj (Rajkumar Rao), they asked me to go ahead and make the film," he said.

The film was written by Apurva Asrani, who is openly gay.

Mehta said, "He did not write the story because he is gay. He wrote the story because he is a brilliant writer. He is excellent in his job. So, when I believe in inclusivity, I want that to happen, based on merit." (IANS)

# More meat more drugs

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



When cooking chicken, or meat, for one's family, most people are very careful to wash and cook the flesh properly. Unfortunately, there are some things which any amount of washing, boiling or roasting cannot clean out – and those are drugs.

There is a cocktail of drugs in your meat and all of them are going to go into your body.

These drugs are a mainstay of meat production in many parts of the world, and Indian producers have adopted western practices of food production that keep profit far ahead of animal or human health. In 2018 India produced 4.3 million tonnes of buffalo (carabeef) and cattle (beef) – 1.5% higher than 2017.

Chicken meat increased from 1.9 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 3.46 million tonnes in 2016-17. Goat meat increased from 0.97 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 1.4 million tonnes in 2016-17. Sheep increased to 0.5 million tonnes. This means an estimated 238 crore chickens and 1.2 crore pigs were slaughtered for their meat in 2016-17. A grand total of over 10 million tonnes of meat.

How does a meat producer get so many crore animals to kill, and how does he get them to put on weight in the quickest possible time so that he can get more meat? How does he do this without spending money on feed? The answer is that he pumps drugs into these animals. One of the main drugs is Ractopamine.

Ractopamine was approved by the FDA 16 years ago. As much as 20% of Ractopamine can remain in the meat by the time it reaches our plates.

In fact, the residue in humans can be so high that it could even be detected in a dope test! Internationally acclaimed cyclist Alberto Contador failed a Tour de France anti-doping test in 2010 for levels of Clenbuterol (a drug of the family of Ractopamine) which he had gotten from eating meat.

In animals Ractopamine is known to cause reproductive dysfunction, hyperactivity, broken limbs, birth defects such as short limbs, missing or fused digits, open eyelids, enlarged hearts, stress, lameness and premature death. How could an animal, that is itself so sick, possibly give good quality meat?

In human medicine, beta-agonists are inhaled directly into lungs of asthma patients to relax muscles that constrict airways; they are routinely used on smooth muscle tissue through direct entry into the cardiopulmonary system, and pregnant women who are in premature labour have beta-agonists injected into their blood to relax the muscle tissue of the uterus, preventing premature births.

But if eaten through food, Ractopamine has been linked to increased heart rates, high arterial blood pressure, chromosomal abnormalities, anxiety, intoxication, tremors, headaches, muscle spasms and many more serious effects.

Considered even worse than Ractopamine is another alarming beta-agonist drug used in animal production to increase weight – Zilmax or Zilpaterol. Zilpaterol was approved by the FDA in 2006. Cattle and pig feeders use feed additives like Zilmax to increase the rate of weight gain without any additional feed. It can add many pounds of meat to a bull or buffalo. An estimated 700 million pigs receive beta-agonist drugs, each producing six ad-

ditional pounds of pork.

However, this comes with a trade off. Zilmax has been known to cause severe reactions in animals leading to painful hoof loss and, very commonly, death. Since the drug was introduced in 2007 in the US, several hundred cattle have unexpectedly died after being fed Zilmax. Zilmax is considered to be about 125 times more potent and dangerous than Ractopamine, and this is likely the reason why side effects in Ractopamine studies are often overlooked when compared with the destructive power of Zilmax. 60% to 80% of feedlot cattle in the US are fed beta-agonists. America refuses to remove beta agonists from cattle feed: The reason? Stopping their use will result in each animal carcass being about 10-15 pounds less – a total of 0.5 billion pounds of beef, or about 1% to 1.5% of production. More corn will be needed to feed cattle to reach the same weight. This will raise the prices of the rest of the beef.

Another contaminant hiding in meat is Glyphosate. It is the active ingredient in Roundup (made by Monsanto) – one of the most widely used weed killers in India. In India the consumption of glyphosate was 148 million tonnes in 2014-15, the highest for any herbicide.

These crops are fed to animals and you eat the animal's meat, along with it comes Glyphosate. Studies around the world have shown Glyphosate to cause cancer, genetic mutations and disrupt endocrine functions in human consumers.

It is toxic to our DNA even when diluted to concentrations 450-times lower than what is allowed in agricultural use. This is not a drug to be taken lightly. The direct deaths of humans from pesticides have been estimated at 7000 in 2015 and increasing every year. Yet, no one has related the deaths from cancer from eating the same pesticides in meat. Glyphosate use is permitted only for one crop: tea.

But it is sold by dealers all over India where no tea is grown. It is used also for cotton which is sold for cattle feed. And the more BT cotton is grown, the more glyphosate is used. A study in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) found that exposure to glyphosate in the US, where GM crops were introduced in the early 1990s, increased almost five times in a 23-year time span.

Animal meat producers use over 450 animal drugs, drug combinations and feed additives, to promote growth of animals and suppress the negative effects of confined and unhygienic conditions in animal factories. Apart from the ones above, synthetic hormones, such as zeranol, trenbolone acetate and melengestrol acetate, are commonly used. These have been shown to increase the risk of breast cancer and prostate cancer. In India it is also common to feed chickens with arsenic to help them get fatter faster and develop a better colour. This arsenic reaches your plate through chicken meat.

Are you eating meat or a dead body that, during its lifetime, bore little resemblance to the animal it was supposed to be? Do you eat food to be healthy or to get sick?

You need to want safer food for your family. The industry is demand-driven, so if people are unwilling to eat dirty chemical treated meat, producers will be forced to stop these practices.

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

# Not many are aware of options

By Ranjan K Baruah

Board examinations are going on and students would be worried to choose streams in Class XI. A student who gets good marks prefers science and then arts and commerce. If we look at commerce students in the North East, we will find that commerce students are less when we look at arts or science. Many students and even guardians are not aware about this stream of education and the prospects. Till recently, people believed that commerce means something to do with accounts or they can join banks. There are many options for students studying commerce. It is important for us to be well informed about the options and choices which we have for ourselves after studying in commerce stream. Some options are:

**Chartered Accountancy:** CA or Chartered Accountancy course is managed by The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India. Students may enrol after Class XII or after graduation. The Chartered Accountants Act, 1949 (Act No XXXVIII of 1949) regulates the profession of Chartered Accountancy in the country. The institute functions

under the administrative control of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. The ICAI is the second largest professional body of Chartered Accountants in the world, with a strong tradition of service to the Indian economy in public interest. Details about the course and its scopes are available online at the website of ICAI.

**Company Secretary Course:** This course is managed by Institute of Company Secretaries of India. There are few stages to become CS and they include passing senior secondary or Class XII and go through three programmes namely foundation, executive and professional programmes.

The Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) is the only recognised professional body in India to develop and regulate the profession of Company Secretaries in India. It is a premier national professional body set up under the

Company Secretaries Act, 1980. ICSI functions under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India. The institute provides top-quality education to the students of CS course and best quality set standards to CS Members. At present, there are more than 50,000 members and about 4,00,000 students on the roll of ICSI.

**Actuarial Science:** "Actuary" means a person skilled in determining the present effects of future contingent events or in finance modelling and risk analysis in different areas of insurance, calculating the value of life interests and insurance risks, designing and pricing of policies, working out the benefits recommending rates relating to insurance business, annuities, insurance and pension rates on the basis of empirically based tables and includes a statistician engaged in such technology,

taxation, employees' benefits and such other risk management and investments and who is a fellow member of the institute. Institute of Actuaries of India is a statutory body established under The Actuaries Act 2006 (35 of 2006) for regulation of profession of Actuaries in India. We will write about few more options in commerce stream for our readers. Students must remember that mere academic qualification will not guarantee a good job. Employability skills are must along with qualification be successful in life. One must be equipped with technical skills like uses of internet and effective communication is always helping students to get suitable job.

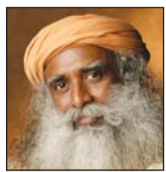
**Updates:**  
**New Zealand Commonwealth Scholarships:** Ministry of Human Resource Development invites applications from Indian nationals for the New Zealand Commonwealth Scholarship 2019 in the Masters and PhD level. Last date for sending application is March 28.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjn@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)



# Karma is software

**Sadhguru, Isha Foundation**



One day I happened to be driving with an affluent person in a particular town. We started talking about the abject poverty in the area. He shrugged and said, "It is these people's karma. They must have done something bad in the past to deserve this." I cautioned him, saying, "Economic well-being and impoverishment are caused by a complex set of factors." But he went on about how the poor deserved their lot. Ironically, this man later lost all his crores in the stock market crash, and went through terrible times.

Karma is the most misused word in the modern vocabulary. In the name of divinity, we have ended up forsaking our own humanity. When someone else is hungry, it's easy to philosophise and talk of divine plans.

But when we're hungry, we have to make our own plans, don't we? The fundamental problem is that karma is seen either as a philosophy, or as a moral system of reward and punishment. It is neither. It is just a description of the way things are.

Existentially, there is no good and bad karma. It is just that for every action, there is a consequence. Actions may happen knowingly or out of ignorance, but there is always a consequence. So when you perform an action, the question is, 'Are you ready for the result?' If you can joyfully accept any result, do whatever you please. But if the consequence matters to you, then you have to perform action for which you can take responsibility.

Karma is software. Because you wrote a particular type of software in the past either consciously or unconsciously, you tend to move in certain ways.

If the past rules you entirely, your future will just be a rehash of your history. Because we want the future to be a new possibility, we often talk of karma as bondage. But there is nothing good or bad about it. Your previous physical, mental, emotional and energy actions have accumulated in such a way that they are creating certain tendencies, compelling you to move in a certain direction.

Karma is bondage, but it is also protection. It is the very basis of your physical existence. If there were no karmic substance, there would be no way to root yourself in the physical. If we were to wipe out that karmic cement, your body would drop. So, karma is not your enemy, but it has become a mansion of self-imprisonment. You can't do with it, you can't do without it.

There are always two impulses in a human being: towards preservation and expansion. If the preservation impulse did not exist, the body would be endangered. But there is another inner impulse that longs for limitless expansion, for unbound-ness. That's the problem. Your history is animal. Your future is divinity. Right now, you are swinging like a pendulum between the two.

So, where did this karmic circus begin? The problem is not that you started the karmic process of cause and effect; it is just that you complicated it; you got attached to it, entangled with it. From simple physical karmas, you moved into a complicated mess of karmas. The whole science of yoga is not to destroy your karma, but to disentangle you from it.

Whatever the nature of your baggage, whether to be joyous or miserable is hundred percent your choice. It doesn't matter what kind of karma you carry because this moment's karma is always in your hands.

Karma is the seed; what you are going to make of this seed is entirely up to you. The spiritual path is about removing all compulsiveness so that you can lead your life consciously, so every moment can become a choice. On this path, karma does not rule you; you rule karma.

Ultimately, the paradox is that when you fully accept that your karma is something you created, you suddenly find that it is not there anymore!

You realise the baggage you carried never existed. It is a big deception, so destroying it is an even bigger deception. When the bondage is a lie, striving towards liberation is a bigger lie. When you come awake, the dream simply vanishes..

*(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan in 2017 for exceptional and distinguished service)*

# A cup of tea, with a twist

In the fast-paced urban environment where there's a marked change in millennials' preferences, the perception of tea is fast shifting from being a commodity into a lifestyle product, say experts.

"They travel, they see, they taste and above all, they are conscious about their health. They like to experiment and understand. They have found the sunshine in a cup to be their go to beverage. It serves their purpose of feeling rejuvenated and are ready to seize the day," Anamika Singh from Anandini Himalaya Tea said on the sidelines of the Superfood for Super women session at The Imperial Culinary Club.

According to Siddharth Jain, founder, Brewhouse Ice Teas, not just millennials but people of all age groups are looking for healthier alternative beverages.

"Iced tea is an alternative to unhealthy, sugar-laden, flavoured beverages. People are realizing that tea is healthy for its antioxidant properties, is not very high on caffeine and is a natural way to relax and unwind, which is becoming a common need in the fast-paced urban environment," Jain said.

"There is a shift happening towards black and green tea without the use of milk. In addition to this, people are developing an interest in flavoured and blended teas with herbs and tisanes. The motivation for this change is not only the taste but functionality as well. All these factors are pointing towards strong demand for such tea-based beverage options in the future," he added.

Parimal Shah, President, MK Jokai Agri Plantations Pvt Ltd, a manufacturer of Assam Orthodox Tea, says the charm of tea cuts across all classes and regions across India.

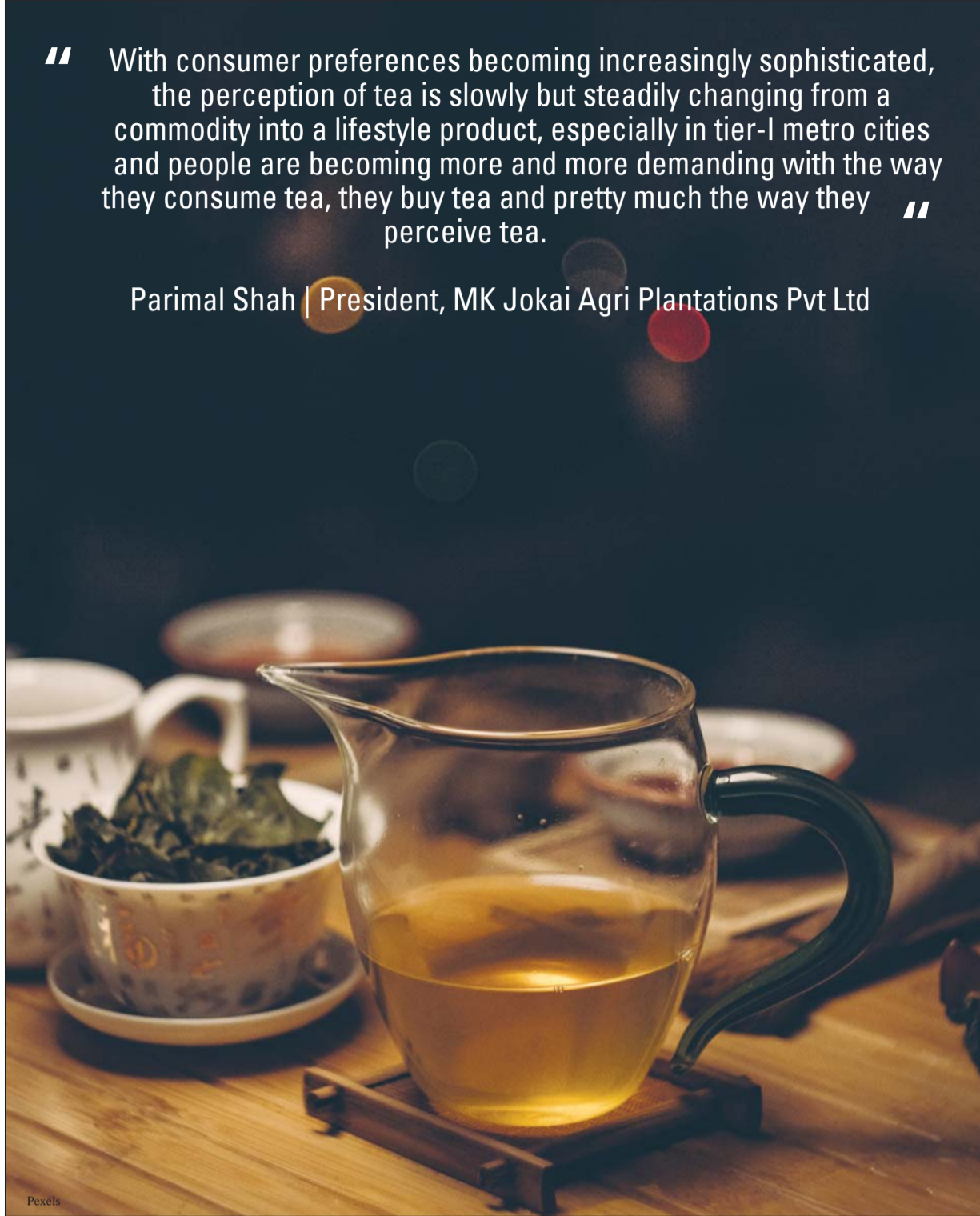
"With consumer preferences becoming increasingly sophisticated, the perception of tea is slowly but steadily changing from a commodity into a lifestyle product, especially in tier-I metro cities and people are becoming more and more demanding with the way they consume tea, they buy tea and pretty much the way they perceive tea.

"Those organisations who have managed to use technology to market tea and who have gone out of the way to formulate creative and innovative blends have gained immense goodwill and recognition," Shah said.

Stressing on the importance of in-

"With consumer preferences becoming increasingly sophisticated, the perception of tea is slowly but steadily changing from a commodity into a lifestyle product, especially in tier-I metro cities and people are becoming more and more demanding with the way they consume tea, they buy tea and pretty much the way they perceive tea."

Parimal Shah | President, MK Jokai Agri Plantations Pvt Ltd



novation in tea, he said: "It has indeed become quite crucial and people, especially youngsters are ready and in fact looking forward to experimenting with their taste buds instead of merely going ahead with consuming traditional tea," he said, maintaining that

the traditional masala chai has and will continue to remain an integral part of the Indian diet.

"Also, more and more people are looking for tea blends with medicinal properties which aid in soothing the mind and senses, especially in the

evenings, after a meal or before going to bed.

"Several herbs which aid in digestion are now used as part of herbal and ayurvedic tea formulations and are finding increasing demand in the consumer's shopping cart." (IANS)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 17, 2019

On your solar return chart Moon square Uranus indicates some mixed results. This is a time when you may need to adapt to situations and circumstances to make the best of what is available. Financially this continues to be a stable period. However extravagant tendencies need to be curbed. In general you fare well on the professional and academic front. Nevertheless some projects may not yield desired results. Family will help you. You need to keep pace with a tight schedule so organize your travel. If you are in the midst of any dispute regard ancestral property then try to settle it amicably.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

You are committed, bold and adventurous right now. You are more effective in general, in attempts to express your creativity. You have a stronger ability to hold the attention of an audience. Love, love affairs, and other social activities help to enhance a healthy self-image. You may spend extra money on things that will make your life more comfortable and pleasant, and work that needs to be done in and around the home becomes a priority. You may find yourself in a position in which there is a blending of the financial with social or public affairs.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

By the present planetary combination you would focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. A love affair may become a little more serious now. Spending time with someone special is a focus. You are looking to expand your activities, and you may find that you have a lot of energy for higher studies, travel, or brand new subjects. It's a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You receive pleasure from anything that expands your horizons, both physically and mentally. You derive pleasure from your health regimen.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

This is an excellent time for travel, education, communications, and higher learning. You might consider furthering your education and hobbies; it is a fabulous time to do so or simply broadening your knowledge in a more informal manner. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. Much of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional success, and leadership during this period. Some form of pleasant results in your education or profession brings rewards and recognition.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

This phase brings fabulous results for domestic and work related matters. Sports person also benefit from this planetary alignment as they are infused with positive energy and gain recognition for their talents and hard work. You are more stimulated by all that is unconventional and your ideas are original and progressive now. This is a time to follow your dreams and ideas, and to plant a seed in the form of a wish for the future. People at work might be surprised by your ability to assert yourself and your needs. Speculation, as long as it's reasonable, may prove worthwhile. Your creativity is stronger than usual, and children can figure prominently in your life.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

This period enhances funds, brings monetary gains and you may earn from previous investments. You have more faith in general regarding your career and the direction in which you are headed. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. You are far less inhibited when it comes to expressing yourself creatively, and you are a lot more fun to be around. Children, romantic trips, hobbies and other forms of communication and making connections would strongly appeal.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

You would enjoy making things that are beautiful and you succeed in areas that require an aesthetic sense as well as artistic ability. Matters concerning your career come to the fore. You are likely to enjoy a strong feeling of happiness

and solidarity in friendship and love. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don't get caught up in the past. You are physically fit and on top of things.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

This is a period of romance, creative activities, entertainment and children. There would be cooperation and harmony in relationships and this is the time in which you can work on resolving differences with loved ones. You are in a position to inspire others through your work. Income from foreign sources could also figure this time. You work on your effectiveness and examine exactly what has been holding you back from achieving the results you want. The challenge here is to capture the newly found and defined self-confidence you have gained. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or a structured exercise routine.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

This phase brings responsibilities, seriousness and sensitivity in relations. The purpose of this combination is for you to make the connection between your own feelings of self-worth and what you produce in the real world or get back from the real world. Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this time.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

The planetary configuration brings financial gains and profits from business. This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel is possible now. It is more about how you express yourself than the specifics of what you are saying that helps away others to your position. More contact with authority figures is likely at this time. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are in the forefront of things. Finding a balance between your public life and your private life is in focus.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

You pour more energy into self-promotion or business activities. It's a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You tend to be expansive and generous when it comes to love and relations. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in several aspects of your career. This is an especially spiritual time for you. You enjoy doing things with others at work and home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you now.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

Taking care of business is primary during this phase. You need the energies, companionship and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. You are called upon to deal with the details and practicalities of everyday life, to become more organized, and to take charge of your routines. It's time to formulate some clear goals and plans. Circumstances are such that you need to develop some healthy habits, routines, and schedules.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or at a place where you are a volunteer. Your job could become rather tedious and boring, or working conditions may be poor, demanding, or frustrating. Believing in a grand plan is fine, but practical concerns need to be dealt with as well. Recognizing your personal limitations in terms of just how much you can give to others and just how much compassion and understanding you can show is essential now. Anxieties tend to structure your life. Issues of guilt, worry, and anxiety could crowd your mind - relaxation techniques and drawing on your inner strength would be beneficial.

# Hush, blush, rush

By Lopamudra Gogoi

I was recently brainstorming to catch hold of a topic that would really ignite my mind. But nothing seemed to be working! It is not uncommon among many to write and then refute. This had been the trend for me for quite some time. And then I knocked upon the idea of getting some physical exertion so as to activate my "temporarily inactive" brain cells.

Hence I landed on that Sunday afternoon in the garden of our residential complex for a brisk walk hoping it would open up my already existing blockade. Mrs. Dubey, an overtly loud neighbour in her late 50's, who was already in the garden for her evening stroll, greeted me with a broad smile. Her unnaturally broad smile signalled her happiness on having me as her partner for the next half an hour or so and it did not take too long for me to comprehend that I ought to forget my "brisk walk" for that evening.

As we both strolled around the mini garden, Mrs Dubey, in her not so gracious tone, broke the ice by probing into my professional life straight away. Upon learning about my work from home profile (which at the least sounded professional to her), her reaction was such that as though all hell broke loose on her.

What astonished me most was her next statement wherein she derisively yet earnestly tells me what good such works for when it does not accrue any good sum of an amount and of course status which comes along with it! She was closely shocked to know that after having a decent educational qualification I choose not to go out and earn good. She did not take a fraction of a second to bring in an example of her daughter, who instead of being less than a graduate, earns a whopping five-digit salary. The statements which followed next sealed not only my vocal cord but my mind too, which I would not like to delve further.

What struck me was not her judgmental attitude towards my earnings or her take on my "work from home" profile but it is the general notion that people are developing and drawing a conclusion on your ability and efficacy based on the kind of work you do or the money you earn. Precisely, the latter is more a matter



of concern for many.

Professional empowerment is definitely and should be the most important prerequisite for all of us. After all it is this which we have been chasing since years and again it is this from where we earn our bread butter for a living. However, being judgmental on the basis of one's

**THINKING ALOUD**

inflow of income or his or her social standing does not sound sane at all. In many situations it is viewed that if the woman (mostly after marriage) is incapable of earning, which may be accounted for the obligations she might have, is looked down upon as a "thing" who is "good for nothing". The peer pressure of marching on the frontline has got into us so much so that even a step behind makes us sleep into deep depression and despair. When I look around, many of us are at race trying desperately to be at the race if not at front of the race. The constant comparison and assessment we ought to face has, at best, crippled us furthermore. The restlessness among the younger generation for marking a niche and creating an identity has got them into

unhealthy and depressive competition. Such completions might definitely lead to some astounding career options but, I fear, the contentment of creating something worthwhile in life would fade away very soon.

The world we are heading to is fast progressing, so much so that many of us are caught in the web of confusion which our minds are not able to get hold of. We are all at a juncture between the old value system and the modern progressive world where the ambition of creating a self-made image has got rooted alarmingly, debarring the true creative system of the human mind. The attitude to get everything easy has become the order of the time. The social media has added fuel to the fire all the more. Image creation and presenting to be on a high social standing has actually disabled the productiveness of our minds and we have started living a life very much masked by insincerity and disingenuousness.

My concern is whatever we do or how much we earn must not be a stand point for us to be judged on. The point is that our work should be the source of our genuine happiness and contentment rather than a source of just earning a living. And how do we create genuine happiness? It is by creating value and adding value to whatever we do or whatever we are be it a housewife, be it an entrepreneur, be it a cooperate or be it an artiste.

*(The author is a travel blogger & costume stylist based in Mumbai)*

*"There are two ways to slide easily through life: to believe everything or to doubt everything; both ways save us from thinking."*

--- Alfred Korzybski

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.215 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2019

### New twist to terror

WHITE Supremacists were lying low for a long time, but Friday's shooting in two New Zealand mosques demonstrate their lethality yet again. Some 50 people were killed in the shootings in two mosques, five of them Indians, and the ire was targeted at immigrants. Worse, the assailant live-streamed the incident to millions across the world via social media platforms, adding to the pathos of this human tragedy. Islamophobia is at the root of the incident as is clear from a manifesto assailant Brenton Tarrant posted online and reached New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden too. It was thick with anti-immigrant and anti-Islam sentiments. Notably, the assailant has referred in specific to attacks on Whites in Nice, France, which saw an Islamic suicide bomber using a truck to mow down over 80 unsuspecting people in 2016. Tarrant's sojourn through Europe in the past four years also seemed to have occasioned his radicalization and eventual motivation for this act. The mass migrations from Asia and Africa to Europe and elsewhere, causing strain on natives' lives, have been a matter of serious concern to governments too. Now, White Supremacists appear to have taken things too far, and its implications are grave.

As of now, no organised terror group is behind this act. It was an isolated act by an Australian, who found that his plan to target immigrants could be better executed in New Zealand where it was easy for him to procure guns due to lack of strong anti-gun-running laws there. Social media demonstrated its ugly side. Both Facebook and Twitter could not block the live streaming online of the horror scenes from the scene of the shootings. They did make an effort after being alerted, but the automated software was of no help. It could not distinguish between a game video and the Christchurch video. Neither could the hate manifesto be taken out before it reached millions of viewers and users of online platforms which spread anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim content over a period of time. Global action against terrorism of various persuasions, mostly of the Islamic fundamentalist kind, still lacks the sense of seriousness it deserves. China, itself a victim of Islamic terror in its western provinces, is backing Pakistan's attempt at UN to protect its agents of terror. The US is serious about terror acts when its own interests are directly affected. Big talks will not help unless UN and lead nations like the US and China demonstrate a resolve to squarely face global terror networks. White Supremacists have arrived with a bang. This is a warning and a wake-up call to Islamic nations as well.

# Pulwama Tragedy Raising the right questions?

By Dr. D.K. Giri

The Pulwama terrorist attack and the subsequent counter-operations by the army are the hot topics for debate and discussion across the country. The hyper-nationalist media, especially the television, hypes it so much that, one can hear the echoes of 'Bande Mataram' chanted by invited audiences in the studios. Even the public domain, the streets, parks and parties are abuzz with India-Pakistan relations, especially following the Pulwama incident.

Curiously, one runs into a bevy of retired army and air force personnel in the TV channels. I found, at one time, about 15 ex-military officers of different ranks immaculately dressed finely articulate, in one channel, explaining to an audience the sophistication of modern warfare etc. Good to see our ex-military officers serenely but seriously (so they are trained and groomed) interacting with the public; a good opportunity for the public to meet and make conversation with senior ex-officers of our army, an undiluted national pride.

But it is in party political arena, the debate is becoming increasingly messy, and divisive. It started with a complete consensus but soon began drifting into a slanging match between contenders amid chest-thumping, name-calling, finger-pointing and moral-posturing etc. Perhaps, it is not unexpected and unbecoming of the politicians in the face of elections in a few weeks time. And, normatively speaking, in a democracy, there will be party political contestation and questions on actions of government, more so, in election time.

The burden of my argument here is that the Opposition has the right to ask questions, but is it asking the right ones? Apparently not. The questions the Opposition raise are turned and twisted by the ruling party to paint them with an 'anti-nationalist' hue. Take for instance, 11 days after the Uri attack, the Indian army conducted a surgical strike. The Opposition leaders asked for evidence, as they thought Modi government was making it up for electoral purposes. Was it right to question the operation of the army which was officially informing the country of the strike?

True that in a democracy army takes orders from the national civilian government of the day but Indian army is apolitical, thoroughly professional, disciplined and committed. They will not do the political bidding for even the ruling party. There is no such evidence in Indian military history even in sensitive security situations.

Now on the second surgical strike, in a complex security situation the Opposition is asking for evidence of casualties, provoked perhaps by Amit Shah's preposterous claim of 250 deaths etc. However, that is for Amit Shah to prove to the alert and agile public of the country, not the job of the Opposition. In a TV channel, I was talking to a former Colonel who asked me if the number of casualties mattered. Was it not

This does not go down well with the public or with the army although the latter is unfazed by party political skirmishes.

One may urge the Opposition to desist from raising questions related even remotely to army operation, irrespective of incredible claims by one set of politicians. Opposition can ask a barrage of questions on political strategy and diplomatic acuity, under which the government cannot even duck, let alone counter-attack. Let us list some of these. One, how did 400 kg of RDX find its way into a house in Kashmir which a 20-year-old boy could carry and detonate? What happens to heavy surveillance and intelligence gathering in Kashmir? Has any head rolled so far for such a humongous failure that caused the death of our so

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enough that the Air Force went deep into Pakistan territory beyond LoC and bombed the targets? I could feel the pain in his heart as he was speaking as if their valour and heroism were being undermined. I instantly said, Colonel, the number does not matter. What IAF has done is commendable.

As a civilian, I am told that the targets are indicated by the government, and the army's job is simply to neutralise them. So, as the IAF said, counting casualties is not their job, it is that of the government. Opposition therefore, may be politically correct to question the government on the outcome of the action, as their claims are not verifiable. Yet, to an independent political analyst, this is a wrong question. As said earlier, the army's operational efficiency is willy-nilly drawn into the controversy.

many security personnel? Why has no enquiry been ordered completed, and the guilty identified and punished?

Second, why do deaths continue at the border? Before and after Pulwama and surgical strikes, our soldiers and security personnel are being killed day in and day out? When will the blood-shed stop? What is the government strategy to stop this?

Third, how are we going to dismantle the terror camps in Pakistan? Rahamullah Nabil, former chief of Kabul's intelligence said: "Pakistan is sheltering 45 to 48 terror groups in the country, the Indian army should have bombed Balakot earlier." Indians would like to see the end of the death of its soldiers and innocent civilians, or is it a fait accompli, and above all, a normalisation of relations with Pakistan?

Fourth, which countries are our allies in these

difficult times? The government has not got, as it claims, the US fully on board, because of our prevarication on Afghanistan. We should have been actively and even militarily engaged in Afghanistan. Why have we left the Afghan space fully to Pakistan making USA lean on the latter?

Fifth, what is government's policy on China? Is it not best defined as confused and cluttered? China has been consistently opposing our attempts at the UN and is supporting Pakistan. Why did Modi go into 'swing and stroll' diplomacy with Chinese President? Why did we not convey to Beijing that we could not have business-as-usual as long as they support Pakistan sponsoring terrorism?

Sixth, has BRICS condemned it? Has SAARC taken any position? Why has not any of our neighbours condemned it? Modi started by inviting all of them to his swearing-in ceremony. Where are they today?

Seventh, what is our equation with Iran? We have a common ground vis-a-vis Pakistan. But how can we take the US into confidence as we move closer to Iran? One has friends and adversaries. One cannot please all, which Modi tries to do, not at home but internationally. Can we run with the hare and hunt with the hound? How does Modi government explain this? Can the government show us our die-hard supporters? Look at what China is doing to Pakistan with a permanent seat at UN gifted by Nehru, an idealist and impractical.

Finally, India-Pakistan problems have been fuelled by involvement of external players, the arms sellers, Jihadists and so on. We may claim it to be a bilateral issue, Kashmir as an internal matter, both correct. But can we ignore the external influences of big military powers and arms market etc?

There is a litany of questions to ask. So let the Opposition raise the right questions, which may even expose the historical fault-lines drawn by them. But in their own interest and that of the country they will have to take this call. ---

INFA  
(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

# Breaking the Chains of Violence

By Arlene J. Schar and Dr. David Leffler

In the words of New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Arden, today is "one of New Zealand's darkest days." In the aftermath of today's terrorism, 49 are left dead and at least 20 seriously injured by a calculated attack against two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The 70 page manifesto posted online by one of the perpetrators espouses white supremacist views and inspiration from current and past leaders, citing the names of other individuals who have taken part in shootings throughout history to justify their "assault on civilization."

Prime minister Jacinda Arden states, "These are people that I would describe as having extremist views, that have absolutely no place in New Zealand and in fact have no place in the world."

As a civilization, how have we come to this? So far, our way of addressing terrorist attacks has been to capture the perpetrators and administer justice, which unfortunately does nothing to bring back the victims whose lives have been taken. We have grown so accustomed to terrorist attacks that we have resigned ourselves to a feeling of inevitability that

when IDT is utilized. Due to this research the non-profit organization Global Union of Scientists for Peace (GUSP) advocates this simple and cost-effective approach for reducing social stress (see: <https://www.gusp.org/global-peace-summit>).

### Invincible Defense Technology is Cost-Effective

For about the cost of a few modern fighter jets, any military could establish a group of warriors trained in this advanced IDT approach. This Prevention Wing of the Military would practice IDT programs twice a day in large groups, defusing societal tensions not only in their country but also globally. The collective consciousness of all populations will rise through the influence of greater harmony and peace. Those who have engaged in violence will no longer do so. Studies have shown repeatedly that this method works—and will continue to work as long as the peace-creating group is maintained.

**Implementation**  
IDT is not restricted to the military; any large groups of experts trained in the advanced IDT techniques can accomplish the same goals of alleviating terror and violence simply by practicing this approach in groups twice a day. These

**Political commentator Ayesha Hazarik, speaking on CNN Talk, said that as a Muslim, she is "sickened and frightened" by the attacks. "We have a culture, a media and social media culture, that not only tolerates hatred to Muslims but celebrates it," she said. "Shame on the people who have promoted this." A culture that promotes hatred will surely continue to foster terrorist attacks.**

they will occur. Over time, we have created a culture which in many ways condones and promotes terrorism; a culture that is xenophobic, glorifies violence, and instills fear of those who are different from us.

Political commentator Ayesha Hazarik, speaking on CNN Talk, said that as a Muslim, she is "sickened and frightened" by the attacks.

"We have a culture, a media and social media culture, that not only tolerates hatred to Muslims but celebrates it," she said. "Shame on the people who have promoted this."

A culture that promotes hatred will surely continue to foster terrorist attacks. To stop these attacks, we must shift our cultural values to peace and tolerance. A proven way for us to accomplish this is by utilizing a little known means of ending all war and terrorism once and for all: Invincible Defense Technology (IDT).

### Invincible Defense Technology:

**A Non-Religious, Humane and Beneficial Approach**

The practical components of IDT are the non-religious Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the more advanced TM-Sidhi programs. When large groups of experts practice these programs together, a powerful field effect of coherence and peace is generated that spills over into the surrounding population. Extensive scientific research has repeatedly confirmed measurable decreases in war deaths, terrorism, and crime

groups could be comprised of congregations at places of worship, prisoners, the elderly in nursing homes, even schoolchildren. The important factor is that the techniques be performed by trained experts consistently in groups twice a day. In this way the chains of violence will finally be broken.

### Nothing Else has Worked

At this critical juncture of our history, it is not only enough for governments and militaries to take preventative action; it is up to each of us as individuals to examine our own values and honestly assess whether we are promoting peace and tolerance or fostering hatred in our everyday speech and actions. As individuals, we can each embrace the tenets of Transcendental Meditation and set aside twenty minutes twice a day to practice the techniques that will ultimately shift our culture from hate to love.

It is up to each one of us to now take responsibility for the world we have created by together consciously creating a world without terrorism.

**About the Authors:**  
Arlene J. Schar has served as Dr. Leffler's Executive Assistant at the Center for Advanced Military Science (CAMS) (<http://www.StrongMilitary.org> since 2015. She has edited and co-authored many of Dr. Leffler's articles.

Dr. David Leffler served as an Associate of the Proteus Management Group at the Center for Strategic Leadership, US Army War College. Currently, he serves as the Executive Director at CAMS.

### TO THE EDITOR

## Old wine in new bottles or .....

Editor,  
I was more relieved than ever at the victory of the Congress Party in the elections to the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly held on November 28, 2018. This memorable Congress victory has come after a lapse of many years after the State in question has been helmed by the Hindutva oriented dispensation which had issued scrupulous food restrictions – abstaining from beef consumption on the Christians, Muslims and other such communities. Indubitably, as a poetic justice, the BJP, in this state, had it coming really! Now, with the installation of the Congress led government in Madhya Pradesh under the leadership of Kamal Nath, I thought that citizens, especially the aforementioned fraternity, could henceforth be at their

own volition to pursue their traditional dietary habits, but lo and behold; the so called secular grand old party in Madhya Pradesh has of late invoked the NSA (National Security Act) against its citizens for cow smuggling, for ferrying cows and for cow slaughter. And to add insult to injury, this state government has boasted that such overreaching enforcements would be clamped on the defaulters in future, too.

Thus the State Congress government has per se exposed itself to be no different from the erstwhile saffron government and the infamous Gau rakshaks who with impunity murder people at the slightest clue of having a link with cow/beef context. And it goes without saying that this case in point, exhibits the blatant hypocrisy of many national political parties whose pre-eminent focus is exclusively vote bank

politics and where everything else is besides the point. In a word, the Congress government has explicitly proved itself to be old wine in new bottle or, better still new wine in old bottles?

Yours etc  
JeromeK.Diengdoh,  
Shillong – 2

## Ease of information technology?

Editor,  
The previous Congress government had initiated a slew of changes to streamline administration and speed up development by introducing e-governance and ICT tools. In fact when the Digital India program was launched all over the country many states leveraged from it and advanced their government functions but here in Meghalaya we suffer from a funny syndrome called

the laid-back syndrome. A visit to some department websites will reveal that almost half of their information is either stale, unrelated or not updated. This shows the pathetic work culture in such departments and yet we hear all the big talk of e-governance and ease of doing business. If the state has to excel in the IT sector it has to employ professionals. Many of our young people working in the corporate sector outside our state this will plug the brain drain that is happening currently.

Yours etc...  
Dominic S. Wankhar  
Shillong-21

## Paying Advance Tax

Editor,  
Tax payers have been foxed by the financial terms. Financial Year (FY) or Fiscal Year is the year for

income earned and Assessment Year (AY) is for income assessed thereby taxes are paid and Income Tax Returns (ITR) filed. Advance Tax is paid before the end of the FY in four deadlines: June 15 (25%), September 15 (50%), December 15 (75%) and March 15 (100%). March 15 is the last day for payment of Advance Tax for the FY 2018-19. Advance Tax applies to all tax payers, salaried, freelancers and businesses. Senior citizens who do not run a business are exempt from paying advance tax.

Individuals whose tax liability is Rs 10,000 or more in a FY have to pay Advance Tax. Generally employer including PDA (Pension Disbursing Agency) deduct the TDS. Interest is applicable on late payment if it is not paid according to schedule. Taxes paid after FY are called Self-Assessment Tax i.e. AY 2019-20 before filing the IT

Returns. There is no specific date for paying this tax which should be done by filling a Tax Challan ITNS 280 at specified bank branches or online.

There are tax exemptions under Section 10 or 54 where leave travel allowance, interest from tax-free bonds, or long-term capital gains on equity funds are excluded from the gross total income. For calculating taxes, permissible deductions under Section 80 (80C to 80U) are deducted from gross total income. 4% for education cess and secondary & higher secondary cess is to be added.

Yours etc.  
Kamal Baruah  
Guwahati

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

“Our death is not an end if we can live on in our children and the younger generation. For they are us, our bodies are only wilted leaves on the tree of life.”

--- Albert Einstein

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.216 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2019

### A Gentleman- Politician Passes On

GOA Chief Minister, Manohar Parikkar has been ailing for a while now and it was perhaps only a matter of time before his body would give up the fight. Parikkar, four times chief minister of Goa - an otherwise politically unstable state succeeded in bringing political stability which is the basis for development. A technocrat of IIT-Mumbai, Parikkar was one of those rare politicians who was not self seeking at all. He was described as the real “common man” who chose to live an austere life. Parikkar started his career as a RSS sanchalak and was only later seconded to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to take on political work. Naturally despite his personal virtues as a politician he was often guided by party ideology and would not tolerate people who expressed dissent with that of the BJP.

Parikkar was India’s Defence Minister in 2014-17 when Pakistan funded Islamist mercenaries attacked Uri in Kashmir. He later supervised along with the Prime Minister the surgical strikes by the Indian Air Force into Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) to avenge Uri and Pathankot. Parikkar was most at home in Goa where he felt he has greater chances of delivering governance in the state. However, he had to take on the role of Defence Minister to relieve the burden from Arun Jaitley who was also the Finance Minister then.

It is uncommon to find a politician who would do away with security paraphernalia whenever he travelled. There are accounts of him driving a Maruti 800 to the airport and dispensing of all VIP frills and checking in at airports like an ordinary passenger. This is a trait that is missing in the politicians of India today. The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) states that India has about 20,000 individuals in states provided security by 50,000 personnel. In comparison, France has 109 VIPs, Japan 125, Germany 142, US 252 and UK just 84. Mr Parikkar was seen arriving in a taxi to attend an event at a Mumbai Hotel. “Whenever he was invited to attend a private function he would travel economy and handle his own baggage at airports,” says senior journalist Rajdeep Sardesai. Even his manner of dressing shows that he identifies with the ordinary voter. This model conduct by one politician who truly understands the meaning of public service will be missed in a country that believes in flaunting the VIP card. We can only hope that other young Goans and youth of this country follow in his footsteps.

## Dynastic politics gripping BJP in Madhya Pradesh

# Leaders determined to nominate their family members

By L S Herdenia

years. He is general secretary of the party’s state youth wing and has every right to demand ticket for himself.” After a pause, sources said, he added, “But I believe one should not be denied or given a ticket just because he happens to be the son or daughter of a politician. If

tics are BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, who vacated his seat for his son Akash in 2018. Akash was elected from Indore-3 constituency and Vijayvargiya is said to be in the fray for ticket from the Indore Lok Sabha

finalised candidates for 15 Lok Sabha seats in the state. They include Arun Yadav (Khandwa), Ajay Singh (Sidhi), Siddhartha Tiwari (Rewa), chief minister Kamal Nath’s son Nakul Nath (Chhindwara), Prahlad Tipaniya (Dewas), Ram Niwas Rawat (Morena), Kavita Singh (Khajuraho), Prabhu Singh Thakur (Sagar), Madhu Bhaghat (Balaghat), Ramu Tekam (Betul), Pramila Singh (Shahdol), Kantilal Bhuria (Jhabua) and Meenakshi Natarajan (Mandsaur).

A joint meeting of the heads of police of the neighbouring states was held in Bhopal on Friday. They included DGPs of MP, UP, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. The conference discussed measures to ensure orderly and peaceful voting in the General Elections. It was agreed to constitute a co-ordination cell to exchange information between the states. It was also agreed to take a series to ensure orderly polling in naxal-affected areas.

The murder of a political worker, who had recently joined the Congress after severing his ties with the BJP, has caused ripples in the political circles of the state. The murder took place in the Damoh district of the state. Police have booked the husband and some relatives of BSP MLA from Patharia, Rama Bai, for the murder.

Devendra Singh Chourasia’s switching to Congress had angered a section of the BSP rank and file but the immediate provocation for the murder seems to be a dispute related to the district panchayat elections. Police say Chourasia’s daughter-in-law is one of the panchayat members. Ram Bai has denied all the allegations. “False cases have been foisted on my husband and my brother-in-law to malign my political image because of my popularity,” she said. She was vice-president of the panchayat before being elected as an MLA in the 2019 polls. (IPA Service)

The BJP often accuses the Congress of dynastic politics and the party chief Amit Shah has said more than once that the Congress is a family affair. But in Madhya Pradesh, the BJP itself is the worst victim of this malady. Defending the trend of veteran leaders promoting their sons and daughters in politics, leader of opposition in the MP Vidhan Sabha Gopal Bhargava advanced a rather strange argument. He said, “What should the son and daughters of politicians do? Should they become beggars?” Bhargava is lobbying for his son’s candidature from one of the Lok Sabha seats.

The list of top BJP leaders seeking tickets for their family members include former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, whose wife Sadhna Singh is said to be keen to contest from Vidisha Lok Sabha seat. Union minister Narendra Singh Tomar is pitching for his elder son Devendra and national vice-president Prabhakar Jha wants a ticket for his son Tushmul. Former minister Narottam Mishra is batting for his son Sukarna, who is a member of the party’s youth wing.

Former state finance minister Jayant Malaiya’s son Sidhartha has already entered active politics and is busy building a base for himself in the Sagar region.

Dynasty politics had turned out to one of the stumbling blocks for the BJP in the 2019 Assembly polls. The clamour for tickets for kin, triggered turmoil, the party could have done without in the run-up to the hotly-contested elections, which, it eventually lost. At least five candidates, who got tickets courtesy of their kin, were defeated.

With more that prestige at stake for the Lok Sabha elections, ‘parivaarvad’ was expected to take the back seat. But at a meeting convened at the BJP headquarters here on Friday to discuss poll strategy, leader after leader justified their demand for tickets for their sons or daughters. Bhargava said, “My son Abhishek is assisting me for the past 14

*The list of top BJP leaders seeking tickets for their family members include former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, whose wife Sadhna Singh is said to be keen to contest from Vidisha Lok Sabha seat. Union minister Narendra Singh Tomar is pitching for his elder son Devendra and national vice-president Prabhakar Jha wants a ticket for his son Tushmul. Former minister Narottam Mishra is batting for his son Sukarna, who is a member of the party’s youth wing.*

he is eligible, he must be given the ticket. But it is up to the party and whatever decision is taken, will be accepted.”

He then went on to justify his demand, “When son of an officer, joins the administrative services, son of a trader continues his business and son of a farmer does farming then what should the son of a politician do after spending 20 years in social service? Become a beggar?”

Joining the chorus, Gaurishankar Bisen said that the party had chosen his daughter Mausam as a probable for Balaghat Lok Sabha seat in the 2014 polls. However, later, it was decided to field Bodhsingh Bhagat.

“The leadership decides who will contest. Mausam is an engineer and a topper from Nagpur University. She is also a topper from the Scindia Kanya Vidyalyaya. She has staked her claim for the ticket. The party will decide and the decision will be accepted,” he told reporters at the party office.

Among those whose children are already in poli-

seat. Vikram Singh, son of former minister Harsh Singh won from Rampur Baghelan constituency in the Assembly polls and former chief minister Babulal Gaur’s daughter-in-law won from Govindpura. Rajesh Prajapati, son of former MLA RD Prajapati is an MLA from Chandla.

The BJP had adopted a unique procedure for the selection of candidates. The party has assigned the task to individual leaders. Ex-chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, state president Rakesh Singh, organisational general secretary Suhas Bhagat, leader of opposition Gopal Bhargava, national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and national general secretary Prabhakar Jha have been assigned different Lok Sabha constituencies.

The leaders, instead of meeting at one place, will conduct review meetings at five different places to list the probable candidates.

Reports indicate that the Congress has nearly

horror scenes from the scene of the shootings.” Indeed, the horrific killings at two mosques in Christchurch was broadcast live on the Internet. The shooter also uploaded his manifesto allegedly equating the shooting with the typical trolling tactics of the Internet’s most far-Right instigators. Social media channels later reportedly struggled to remove copies of the stream.

It is a matter of concern that we have a huge trolling factory in our country. It first targets a victim. Then it starts trolling on social media channels to hurl unprintable filthy language on that person against whatever she/he posts. Interestingly, the New Zealand massacre has a similarity with what happened to Afrajul Khan, a poor labourer from West Bengal.

He was hacked to death and burnt in Rajasthan by a lone assassin who made inflammatory comments and footage of the murder was uploaded on social media. The killer allegedly got influenced by hate speeches and messages

on social media. Afrajul murder was also a chain of events that had originated in hate speeches in the social media and then it snowballed to a street murder and then it went back to social media for further snowballing.

The terror attack in New Zealand again highlighted the urgent need to make the global tech companies nip violent content in the bud and quickly block such addresses of hatred.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

### The menace of drugs

Editor,  
Drug trafficking is one of the major crimes. Killing someone or helping someone to kill himself is equal to a crime. This is what common sense and human sense says. The ones who are trafficking and helping such drugs reach each and every corner of the country are committing a big crime. Drugs and drug dealing is a scourge that can bring down a mature and

# Elections 2019: India at Cross roads

By Ram Puniyani

Elections in a democracy can rightly be called as festival of the masses. They determine the course of the country in times to come. That is generally the case and Indian democracy has been steering this path, deepening the democratic process so far. It is not that there are no problems. Many issues related to money power, muscle power, EVM machines reliability have marred to objectivity of the process. A newer dimension to the hindrance in the march towards a substantive democratic society has been intensified during last close to five years. That factor relates to the division of society along religious lines, undermining the democratic process by blatant abuse of power to browbeat the religious minorities. The guardian of democracy, Indian Constitution has been challenged and opposed bluntly by the forces, which resort to the politics in the name of religion’s identity, namely by using identity issues related to Hinduism. The events of last five years, the Modi regime has alerted, frightened and shaken various sections of society for different reasons.

The large section of population which voted for him in the hope of Acche Din (good days), 15 lakhs in accounts of everyone, end of corruption, control over price rise, strengthening of rupee vis a vis dollar, creation of employment, and Minimum support price for farmers have been totally disillusioned and are suffering the pangs of joblessness and agrarian crisis. Rising prices have broken the back of average sections of society. The fragmented opposition has realized the folly of disunity and serious though not totally successful efforts are going on to forge the opposition unity. The opposition has realized major reason for Modi’s victory apart from massive propaganda and corporate funding has been the fragmented opposition. While a lot more is expected from opposition to forge a minimum program, the sharpening the focus of people’s issues, whatever little has been achieved so far, is likely to become stronger as the elections come knocking on our doors.

Modi and company have driven a serious wedge in the unity of the country. The issue of Ram Temple, Ghar Wapasi, Love Jihad and finally Cow-beef have seriously affected the fraternity of Indians, which is the foundation of the secular democracy. The pluralism, which had been the backbone of Indian freedom struggle and the underlining point of our Constitution has been attacked recklessly by the ruling Government. While BJP has driven its agenda hard, its allies, enjoying the perks of power have quietly acquiesced in the BJP agenda.

Modi’s rise to power began after the Godhra train burning issue was politicized, communalized and was made the pretext of unleashing a carnage in the state. This polarization gave bigger electoral support to BJP in the elections that followed. After this Modi switched the language and started talking of Vikas (development). For him Vikas is synonymous with giving blank chits to his capitalists hanger-on’s. Capitalists reaped rich dividend and started asserting that Modi

should be the next Prime minister. RSS, BJP’s parent organization, played its card with deftness and put in lakhs of its swaya m s e w v a k s / prachraks to ensure the victory of Modi. This was the first time that BJP crossed the Rubicon of simple majority and along with pliant power hungry associates unleashed the agenda of RSS Combine, the agenda of Hindu nationalism. Kashmir became a real estate issue more than before. The so called fringe elements, the essential part of ‘division of labor’ of RSS Combine, started ruling the streets and lynching became the dominant part of the politics of Modi combine. The intimidation of religious minorities did get accompanied by the attacks on dalits and insecurity of women increased. The farmers, totally neglected by corporate oriented politics of BJP started protesting time and over again, to no avail of course. Their dissatisfaction is simmering and adding on to the disquiet among other sections of society. All this put together the electoral surveys started revealing the defeat of BJP.

Here comes in the terrorist attack in Pulwama, which is being milked by the ruling regime to gain electoral advantage. BJP is projecting the actions of army as the achievement of Modi-BJP. BJP which came to power last time on the slogan of Acche Din is now out to project that Modi is a majboot (strong) leader. This media blitz is dominating the scene. The opposition which asked questions about the claims of the ruling government is being defamed as if they doubt the claims of army! What a twist and convoluted way to criticize opposition parties! Will this work for Modi’s electoral prospects?

As such today the countymen are facing the choice between the ‘idea of India’ which emerged from freedom movement, the idea which saw people of all religions as being equal partners in the enterprise of nation building, equal before law and equal in all matters of citizenship. The competing narrative is that of Modi-BJP, where Hindu elite are the pivot of politics, where problems of average people are put on the margins, where dalits are subjected to Una type beatings or Rohith Vemula type institutional murders, where the women face the situation like Kathua and Unnav, and religious minorities are relegated to second class citizenship.

Despite the mighty propaganda machine of Modi, what is clear is that you can’t fool the people all the time. The Acche Din could delude the masses for once. The hyper patriotism, muscular nationalism may put the masses in trance for temporary time, but that can’t last beyond a point. The pangs of problems, will surely assert themselves this time around and the moderate language of opposition, the cry for addressing problems of issues will surely prevail and those standing for the idea of India of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Sardar Patel will surely triumph this time around. The hope is, wisdom of the masses will realize what is best for the country in times to come, and that’s what will come to the rescue of Indian democracy, that’s what will thwart the danger of sectarian nationalism.

### TO THE EDITOR

## Will Meghalaya vote Congress to LS?

Editor,  
The topic of conversation today is only about the Lok Sabha elections. Many people in the urban areas feel that they should vote the Congress candidates and reject the regional party and NPP candidates in Shillong and Tura respectively because of their alignment with the BJP. People equate the regional parties with the MDA Government which in turn is in league with the BJP at the Centre. The NDA Government at the Centre has created a climate of insecurity for us smaller tribes of the region. The attempt to push through the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) recently is one example. Fortunately better sense prevailed this time but Amit Shah the belligerent BJP President had stated at Guwahati recently that the CAB would be pushed through once BJP-NDA returns to power in 2019. This

means that the protests by minority groups here had no impact at all on the BJP. Who knows what other Bills the BJP has in store which it would push through to take away the minority rights in the manner that it is trying to dilute Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. The tribes of this region have always respected the secular nature of the country and the freedom that respective governments in the past had given to citizens to practice their faiths and follow their own cultures as far as choice of food is concerned. After 2014 we have seen lynching taking place and people suspected of keeping beef at home or transporting it elsewhere or trying to sell cattle have been mercilessly killed. This is not the India that we inherited in 1947. It is unfortunate that the regional parties of Meghalaya should align with a national party that has no respect for tribal faiths and cultures.

Yours etc.,  
Ksanbor Syiem,  
Via email

## Terror mutates

Editor,  
This refers to your editorial, “New twist to terror” (ST, March 18, 2019). New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was a picture of humanity when she hugged members of the Muslim community at a Christchurch refugee centre. Just after the mosque massacre, what she had said, would definitely energize our journey for a better tomorrow. She said, “We were chosen for (the attacks)... because we represent diversity, kindness, compassion, a home for those who share our values, refuge for those who need it. You (the attacker) have chosen us but we utterly reject and condemn you.” Fanatics and terrorists cannot stop the journey of humanity so long as the people like her are there among us.

But one thing that we need to focus is on social media. You rightly said in your editorial, “Social media demonstrated its ugly side. Both Facebook and Twitter could not block the live streaming online 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.

*“Life improves slowly and goes wrong fast, and only catastrophe is clearly visible.”*

--- Edward Teller

## The Shillong Times

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### Election disenchantment

NORMALLY when elections are announced there is excitement in the air. People who are disillusioned by their sitting MPs and MLAs feel they have an opportunity to vote them out and usher in change. They begin to discuss issues from the local to the state to the national. Political party workers gear themselves for the month long campaign and keep every other thing on hold. But this time around things seem to have arrived at a plateau. There have been far too many elections in Meghalaya since 2018. The recently held elections to the two autonomous district councils of Khasi and Jaintia Hills were very low key especially in the urban areas. People seemed to have reached a point of election fatigue. The election wave much spoken about in the past and which determines which way the voters would go is missing this time. Election waves usually revolve around issues that are closest to the hearts of voters such as corruption in high places as happened during the UPA regime. At that particular juncture in 2014 voters not only desired to punish the corrupt but also hoped that the next government would do a clean-up job. In 2014 that was what catapulted the BJP and Narendra Modi to power. The youth were hopeful that Modi and his government would generate employment and support native entrepreneurs and desi start-ups. Somehow things did not add up. And now no less an economist that the Nobel Prize winning Paul Krugman has warned that India could end up with huge mass unemployment if it does not grow its manufacturing sector.

Indeed, manufacture is the only way forward and for that to happen the market has to be given free rein because it is not government but the market that creates employment. Governments are there to regulate the markets so that they do not turn into runaway sharks. Krugman warns of Artificial Intelligence and its ability to replace humans which in turn could lead to further job losses. The economy has no doubt slowed down after demonetization and the poor implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime. This sluggish growth is palpable in the market. The fact that most transactions are now cashless has also reduced cash in hand for candidates fighting elections. There is stricter vigilance by the Election Commission on cash changing hands during this campaign period. Without the feasting that usually marks election campaigns, the enthusiasm is bound to flag and voters are listless. As it is Lok Sabha elections are not as exciting as the assembly elections. All this has added to a somber pre-election ambience.

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Roadside parking anarchy

Editor,  
The road connecting Motinagar with the old Jowai road at Fire Brigade is used by a number of localities such Lumdiengsoh, Lumsophoh, Lumpyngad and parts of Lawjynriew. It is an area with a large population and high vehicle density made worse by the location of numerous government offices and residential quarters such as the AG colony, the Central Pool, the state government quarters, GAD, NEC etc. As one enters Motinagar from near Marbaniang petrol pump, the roadside parking of vehicles near the Bank of India, GSI office and beyond ensures a traffic jam almost every day. In fact most of the GSI office vehicles are always parked on the roadside causing obstruction to smooth flow of traffic. The other entry from behind the Pantaloons too is not without problems with roadside parking of trucks and other private and commercial vehicles on the entire stretch up to the mosque and beyond.  
The question which city administrators need to

answer is whether permanent roadside parking of vehicles in a public thoroughfare and obstructing the smooth flow of pedestrians and vehicles is legal and permissible? Second, can residential complexes, government offices and commercial establishments be allowed to use the public roads, as is being done in Motinagar as their private parking areas?

Can we borrow an idea or two from Sikkim, where no car can be registered unless the owner provides evidence of his/her own parking space? In Gangtok, even vehicles of bureaucrats, cops and politicians parked in violation of parking rules are booked. In fact a top cop once told me that in order to test whether the rules were being followed, he would park his official vehicle violating rules to see whether he would be booked. If not, the cop on duty would be asked for an explanation! Not long back we had a brave Shillong Traffic Police do the same to a big wig. This should become more of a regular practice in Shillong too. Moreover, the traffic jam which starts at Motinagar

Water scarcity is fast becoming, or has already emerged, urban India's number one problem with government data revealing that residents in 21 or 22 out of 32 major cities are facing daily shortage these past years. In fact, with every passing year the surge in population and supply of renewable freshwater water dwindling, the country is in the midst of a severe crisis. The warning is: India will become a 'water stressed country' shortly, while another section of experts believe this stage has already been reached.

On 22 March, India must take note of the theme of World Water Day 2019: 'Leaving no one behind'. This is an adaptation of the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SD Goal 6 includes a target to ensure availability and sustainable management of water for all by 2030. By definition, this means leaving no one behind.

However, India is badly afflicted. The worst-affected city is probably Jamshedpur where the gap between demand and supply is a yawning 70 per cent. The crisis is also acute in Kanpur, Asansol, Dhanbad, Meerut, Faridabad, Visakhapatnam, Madurai and Hyderabad. Though not mentioned by the Government, presently Chennai has also been affected by water scarcity in recent years. The figures further revealed that Greater Mumbai and Delhi, which have the highest water demand among all cities, the gap between demand and supply is comparatively less. The shortfall was estimated at 24 per cent and 17 per cent for Mumbai, both of which have increased significantly and may be around 30 and 25 per cent respectively at present.

In most cities, the spurt in population resulted in the demand for more water. The data pointed if corrective steps are not taken, the situation may further aggravate. Meanwhile, it may be mentioned that most cities are recharging groundwater to tackle the water shortage.

According to noted expert on water management Rajendra Singh, the over exploitation of groundwater, unplanned construction, mindless destruction of environment in the name of development and no water management plan on the part of Government has resulted in

often has a spill-over effect on the highway. It is time the authorities got their act together and strictly designate No Parking areas. As it is, the narrow roads cannot take the burgeoning traffic so unless we ensure strict compliance of no parking on public roads, especially during the day, the situation will become impossible.

Yours etc.,  
Sanjeeb Kakoty,  
Shillong-14

#### Agriculture & allied sectors overlooked?

Editor,  
The current sectoral budgetary allocations for 2019-20 to the 20 departments of the state as enunciated by Chief Minister Conrad Sangma on the floor of the State Assembly on March 12 last must have come as a cheer to some establishments like C&RD, Education and MGNREGS which garnered more than Rupees One Thousand Crores apiece of the share and, contrastingly, it may be a disillusionment of sorts to some others. Come what may, the powers that be

the current situation. Obviously, this precarious situation calls for the Government to take urgent steps to prevent misuse of water resources and insist on conservation measures.

Per capita freshwater resources have greatly diminished and are no longer a sustainable resource for potable applications and also for agricultural and industrial use. In regions lacking freshwater resources or water-stressed by climate change, 'wastewater' has been reinvented as a water resource. Whatever we call wastewater today, it is still H<sub>2</sub>O. It is only the remaining one per cent which renders as 'wastewater'. The in-migration to the cities, which has expanded over time, aggravated the problem.

Take the example of Bengaluru whose

**The WHO has warned that long-term intake of such water leads to arsenic poisoning or arsenicosis with cancer of bladder, kidney or lung or diseases of skin -- colour changes and hard patches on palms or soles or blood vessels of legs and feet.**

population is around 0.5 million and by 2020, more than 2 million IT professionals are expected to live there. Its ground water level has reached zero in many pockets and the city is dependent on private water tankers for its supply. Question is how can the city, which is dependent on ground water for 40% of its supply, meet the increased demand for water in future?

Another example may be Gurgaon which is hardly 30 km away from the Lutyens Delhi zone but facing severe water crisis and is dependent on water tankers for daily supply. Climate change, early summer, deficit rain-fall, depleting water level, rising population and lack of water management policy is making it difficult for the urban local bodies to meet the increasing water demand. According to a World Bank report, most of the cities are moving towards zero ground water level by 2020, which has already set alarm bells ringing for policy makers and urban

planners. As per Government's estimate, our cities produce nearly 62,000 mld of sewage, out of which only 18,883 mld sewage is treated. Rest of the untreated sewage goes directly to water bodies, polluting our water resources. Domestic sewage accounts for 70 per cent of the contamination of rivers and ponds. The department of water and sanitation are among the top spenders, but if sewerage water is treated and reused for industrial purpose, it will supply water to cities and also help save millions that we spend on cleaning our rivers every year. Countries like Singapore, which faces acute water crisis, have already set an example of how effective management can ensure safe water supply to people. With technology available, there is no reason why India cannot replicate this in its

cities. It is vital to generate public awareness which can help save water. People need to be sensitised about water's judicious use, such as cutting wastage of water in showers, toilets, and sinks, which account for approximately 75 per cent of the water used in our daily lives.

The other dimension of the problem is the issue of contamination, specially of arsenic and fluoride in different parts of the country. An alarming 75% or more of India's surface water is polluted, says an assessment by Water Aid, an international organisation working for water sanitation and hygiene. The report, based on latest data from the Ministry of Urban Development (2013), census 2011 and Central Pollution Control Board, estimated that 75-80% of water pollution by volume is from domestic sewerage, while untreated sewerage flowing into water bodies including rivers have almost doubled in recent years. While availability is a problem, if

floricultures, etc where significant portions of the same are exported overseas.

It bears recall that our ex-Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh had once asserted that agriculture was a vital engine of National growth and further re-iterated that everything can wait but not agriculture. No wonder then, Dr. Singh as an eminent economist has, inter alia, put agriculture on top priority.

Ironically, the current positioning of our Agriculture and allied sectors at the 17th position of the 21 departments must have reduced to a stage of non-plus to the sectors concerned!

Yours etc  
Jerome K. Diengdoh,  
Shillong-2

**Exemplary punishment for acid attackers**

Editor,  
This refers to your report, "Acid attack is a crime that does not deserve clemency: SC" (ST- March 19, 2019), in India, acid has often been used as a weapon against women who have turned down advances by men. Acid

attacks are seen as one of the most vicious crimes as it causes perpetual suffering to the victim. Perhaps the most dangerous thing about acid attacks is the fear they create. With just a few rupees, anyone can buy a weapon that can ruin another person's life in just a few seconds. Part of the reason is that acid is cheap and widely available. Many Indians use concentrated acid to sterilize their kitchens and bathrooms, as Americans would use bleach. There is an immense need to come out with legal measures and medical reforms by our government to help these victims. Men who commit these crimes are usually spurned suitors who want to avenge their rejection. The men guilty of such crimes should be given exemplary punishment so that no one will ever think of attempting to ruin a girl's life.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit,  
Ahmedabad

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

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit,  
Ahmedabad

this becomes contaminated, it has grave consequences on human health, specially for the poor.

Around 239 million people spread across 152 districts in 21 States drink water that contains unacceptable high levels of arsenic, in effect they are being slowly poisoned. In response to a question in Lok Sabha, the Water Resource Ministry revealed that 65% of Assam's population or about 21 million people have been drinking arsenic contaminated water, whereas in Bihar it is 60% and in Bengal 44% of the population is dependent on this poisonous cocktail to quench their thirst. In terms of absolute numbers, UP has the largest number exposed to the risk, with over 70 million people consuming polluted water.

The WHO has warned that long-term intake of such water leads to arsenic poisoning or arsenicosis with cancer of bladder, kidney or lung or diseases of skin -- colour changes and hard patches on palms or soles or blood vessels of legs and feet. Further evidence indicates possible association between intake of contaminated water and onset of diabetes, hypertension and reproductive disorders.

It appears that our political leaders and bureaucrats are deliberately not acknowledging this threat and advising their constituents how best to combat the problem and making investments in the technology necessary for delivering arsenic-free water. What is the problem in setting up inexpensive community-run arsenic treatment plants that can ensure the long-term environmental health and economic security of an urban neighbourhood?

The challenge of the impending urban water crisis needs to be tackled with all urgency before the problem goes out of hand. Though the recently released Special Report of the IPCC has not clearly highlighted this aspect, it is clearly manifest that the increase in warming levels may need more water, which would become scarcer with every passing year. It goes without saying that intervention of both the Central and State governments, is urgently called for to evolve a plan of action to tackle this crisis.--INFA

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Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit,  
Ahmedabad

## BJP changes stance as war cry following Pulwama fails

By Dr Satish Misra

"National Security Safe with Modi" narrative painstakingly built by the ruling party top policy makers in the wake of the Pulwama's terrorist attack on CRPF convoy and retaliatory Indian attack on terrorist camps at Balakot inside Pakistan is losing steam fast with reports of popular doubts reaching New Delhi. Top policy makers comprising of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP president Amit Shah and National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval are reported to be worried that narrative that they expected to create a national wave in favour of the BJP in the coming general elections is ebbing so fast.

Slogan that Modi hai to mumkin hai is being countered with Modi hai to desh ki mushkil, Modi hai to desh par mushkil has added to the worries because the opposition is going to people telling them that all your problems are because of Modi and nation's problems are because of Modi.

One of the consequence of the failure of the BJP-RSS combine to create a national wave for ensuring a presidential kind of election is that the coming electoral battle until May 19 is going to fought region-cum-state wise and precisely on the constituency level.

As real issues of rising unemployment, price rise, non-fulfillment of promises, wrecking of institutions like the RBI and judiciary, undermining of the Constitution and student unrest because of attack on academic institutions take over pushing Pulwama-Balakot national security insecurities in the background, contest between the ruling BJP-led NDA and the opposition is no more hands down for Modi. It appears to be an open and balanced contest with no side enjoying an edge

Revelation that the Prime Minister's November 8, 2016 decision to declare currency notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 denomination illegal tender was done without the Reserve Bank of India's approval has gone to confirm the impression that the government violates the autonomous functioning of its institutions,

At the same time, the revelation that came out in a RTI reply has refreshed the public memory of four senior Supreme Court judges holding a media conference over the government's alleged interference in judiciary. Ongoing case in the Supreme Court over purchase of 36 Rafale jet fighters and the Attorney-General K K Venugopal's first submission that papers from the official files that are being quoted by the petitioners were stolen which was a crime and therefore should be rejected by the apex court went on raise several questions about the Modi government's credibility.

The Attorney-General later revised the government's submission stating on oath that papers had merely been photocopied and not stolen. In any case, it further strengthened the popular impression that the government was lying and was inefficient in governance. Despite the Modi government's efforts to announce several popular schemes to lure voters in its last budget, there seems to be no groundswell of popular support for the ruling party visible that reflects in public meetings and rallies. Media reports about Modi's several rallies are not very exhilarating. Dalits and minorities other

than Muslims had voted for the BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections but treatment meted out to them in the wake of cow vigilantism and lynching incidents has eroded the confidence that these groups had in Modi. Suicide by research scholar Rohith Vemula, killings of Dalits in Una in Gujarat and elsewhere in the country, jailing of a Dalit leader from western UP Chandrasekhar Azad "Ravana" under NSA for about a year by the BJP government and similar incidents are etched in public memory. Sweet words and deeds like issuing of an ordinance to upturn the apex court's order are not going to help much.

Adding to the woes are the emerging electoral alliances between opposition parties in states. While in UP, the BJP had ensured that the electoral contests in the biggest state is not direct but should be at least three-cornered if not multi-cornered, news from West Bengal from where the Modi-Shah duo was hopeful of reaping a reasonable good harvest to compensate its losses in the Hindi heartland is not very encouraging.

Faced with multifarious challenges and considerable erosion of the credibility of Modi brand, the BJP is now going to embark upon an aggressive and no-holds barred campaign to paint most of the opposition leaders as corrupt, unscrupulous, self-promoting dynastic lot.

Recent Income Tax, Enforcement Directorate and CBI raids on either leaders or their close associates like that on the former IAS officer of UP cadre Netram who served BSP leader Maaywati are an evidence of the BJP's frustration.

With this in mind and sticking to the aggressive path, the Prime Minister launched "Main Bhee Chowkidar" (I am also a guard) campaign. Modi is heard saying in a video that "Your Chowkidar is standing firm & serving the nation. But I am not alone. Everyone fighting corruption, dirt, social evils is chowkidar. Everyone working hard for progress of India is chowkidar. Today every Indian is saying 'main Bhee Chowkidar.'"

The campaign that is primarily aimed at blunting the Congress's charge that Chowkidar chor hai. The campaign had raised an accusing finger on Modi who had asked for votes portraying himself as a chowkidar (guard) who would protest their interest while sitting on the prime ministerial chair and it had made adversely impacted Modi's popularity. The BJP, by launching this campaign, is hoping against hope that it would generate positive sympathy for the Prime Minister and result in votes as a similar approach had benefitted the party in 2014.

While Union Minister Piyush Goel was one of the first to join the campaign, other ministers are going to follow suit with lakhs following them thus creating a flood of support in the virtual world. It remains to be seen whether this campaign would generate enough traction to garner support in terms of popular votes or not. In normal times when the credibility is high, such campaigns succeed but such attempts in the past like "India Shining" have failed too.

(Dr Satish Misra is a Veteran Journalist & Research Associate with Observer Research Foundation).

"Obviously, the highest type of efficiency is that which can utilize existing material to the best advantage."

--- Jawaharlal Nehru

## The Shillong Times

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### New leadership for Goa

DECEASED Manohar Parrikar's successor, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, lost no time in winning the confidence vote in the state assembly Wednesday, a day after he was sworn in as CM. Sawant has proven beyond doubt that his government will be stable, at least for now. The 20 votes he won in favour in a house of 36 members is more than what he has bargained for, and should dampen the spirits of the Congress, the single largest party with 14 members in the assembly. The Congress efforts immediately after the demise of Parrikar Monday failed just as its attempts to form a ministry failed in the immediate aftermath of the assembly polls in 2017.

Sawant as Parrikar's protégé functioned as Speaker of the assembly in an admirable manner. Hence, his choice as new CM is not disputed within the party. At the same time, he will now have a hard time ahead to match up to the kind of leadership Parrikar gave for Goa even as he was ailing and under treatment for the past one year. Parrikar left behind a great legacy as CM for repeated terms and also as defence minister in the Modi government for some time. The mass leader that he was, and a Brahmin by birth, he rose beyond sectarian considerations and won the admiration of all, including the strongly entrenched Christians who are generally not well-disposed to politicians of the saffron shade.

Sawant has strong backing of the RSS, which should keep him in good stead in the BJP's scheme of things. At the same time, the RSS in Goa is a divided house, as past events showed. Parrikar had the knack to tread a careful course and keep everyone on his side. Sawant will now have to prove he would not let the party down. Parrikar's demise might revive debates over allegations surrounding the PMO's role in the Rafale deal, about which the deceased leader reportedly carried with him copies of some confidential files. If this was true, the BJP leadership might have acted in haste to cover up matters. If not, embarrassing new disclosures could be expected in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls.

Parrikar as a politician was a class by himself. He walked with the ordinary people and never threw his weight around. His untimely departure is a matter of grief to one and all.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Roadside parking

Editor,  
I fully agree with Sanjeeb Kakoty that roadside parking is a huge menace and is increasing by the day across the city. I have observed that the road from MPSC office and its nearby areas such as the MBoSE office in Lachumiere, the road from All India Radio to St Anthony's College etc are always parked with cars even on very narrow space thereby obstructing the flow of traffic and causing massive jams. Flying squads should be engaged on a war footing to check this insurmountable problem immediately. The bend near DTO's Office & PWD Office Lachumiere, the narrow road near the BJP office should be marked 'NO PARKING' once again. Will the Shillong Traffic Police please act immediately?

Yours etc.,  
Reward Rymbai,  
Via email

### Stop exploiting the environment

Editor,  
The unified stand taken by the Village Dorbar of Lumshnong on Tuesday to protest and voice their opposition towards the attempt of Star Cement to mine limestone from the area to feed its factory in the heart of East Jaintia Hills District, is something we should learn from. Unity in-

deed is Strength. The arm twisting tactics by the District Administration in collusion with cement firms is a well known fact. It is highly condemnable and disgraceful that instead of standing to protect the rights of the local community and especially the rights of the environment (even nature has its rights) the district officials chose to send the local police armed with guns as if the locals are akin to terrorists. What nonsense is this!

For too long, the entire district of East Jaintia Hills was seen as a "gold mine." It has borne the brunt of over exploitation and abuse that has affected the fragile eco-system, almost rendering the areas where limestone mining and cement manufacturing happens, totally lifeless. The once lively and pristine River Lukha that was the lifeline of the fish trade in the early days is now a dead river. Next we have the district's largest wildlife sanctuary the Narpuh Forest Reserve.

Time to tell these cement firms and the state authorities that enough is enough. The people of Lumshnong have their fundamental Right to Life, their Right to Clean Air, Right to Clean Water, Right to Food etc. not only as human rights but as rights that cannot be bartered away for money, power and non-productive development. Period.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Wankhar,  
Via email

### People's manifesto

Editor,  
The Election Commission has announced the itinerary for the Parliamentary election. Now, it is both our right and duty to vote and to elect a good candidate from our respective parliamentary constituencies. Before getting the top-down manifestos from the political parties, I want to place my bottom-up version for them. First of all, I want 100 per cent implementation of the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission including land reforms to solve agrarian crisis. Second, I want a paradigm shift in bank loan policy from Non Performing Asset generating macro credits to job generating micro loans for farming, cottage and small scale industries. This is necessary to address the problem of unemployment which has at present reached an all time high in 45 years.

Third, I want 100 per cent implementation of the 2006 Forest Rights Act to honour the symbiotic relationship between forest dwellers and forests. Fourth, the next government must invest 6 per cent of national income in education and ensure Universal Quality Education as per the recommendations of the Kothari Commission. Fifth, double the number of government hospitals to give the com-

# UNSC permanent seat Nehru's sinophilia curbed India

By Dr. D.K. Giri

Following the Chinese veto for the fourth time on listing Masood Azhar as an international terrorist, India woke up to the historic blunder made by Nehru on refusing UNSC permanent membership. The debate has revived and rages on as Parliament election unfolds. The admirers of Nehru seek to shroud it in the smoke of history; argue that the offer was never made to India, and yet others contend that Nehru was right in refusing it; the critics scream that Nehru almost sinned by depriving India of the most powerful position in world politics.

Admittedly, the historic slip committed or not by Nehru is seven decades ago. So why dig it up now? But as the aphorism goes, those who do not learn from their mistakes are doomed to repeat them. Hence, unless we are cautious, we may be repeating the stary-eyed approach of Nehru to China in particular and internationalism in general.

Let me preface my critique of Nehruvian foreign policy, as I limit my argument to UNSC membership, by acknowledging that Nehru was a democrat, an integral part of freedom movement, a favourite protégé of Mahatma Gandhi and so on. But undeniably, Nehru erred on our foreign policy, prompted by his visceral approach to idealism, far from realpolitik, a euphemism for national interest. Even observers like Shashi Tharoor, MP, a former Minister in Congress government has said on more than one occasion, that Nehru's foreign policy was like a "running moral commentary".

Having said that, let us substantiate our change vis-à-vis the UNSC membership, offered to India in 1950, and again in 1955. The Nehru apologists' defensive arguments are: the membership was not offered to India at all, in 1950 by the US and not even by Nikolai Bulganin in 1955. They quote Nehru's answer to a Parliament question raised on 27th September 1950, by Member of Parliament, J.N. Parekh, "There

Second issue that calls for discussion is, if Nehru was not aware of any offer in 1950 or 1955, how he made such statements on the membership, write letters to Vijay Laxmi Pandit, and mentioned in his notes. He wrote in his answer to Vijay Laxmi Pandit, "We will not countenance the US offer to us to replace China in UNSC...we shall go on pressing for China's admissions in the UN and the Security Council." In his

mercial health sector a run for their money. Sixth, ensure total occupational safety for the highly risky jobs such as scavenging, mining and construction work.

Seventh, employment of rag pickers by Local Self Governments to promote recycling. Eighth, ensure minimum income guarantee for all the poor citizens of our country to alleviate poverty. Ninth, build separate lanes for bicycles in every major road to check road accidents. It will also check air pollution as separate lanes make more people opt for bicycles. Tenth, ensure quality midday meal to check malnutrition among children and dropout rate among students.

Eleventh, protect RTI and introduce a Lok Pal to check corruption. Twelfth, shift focus from unequal GDP growth to inclusive HDI growth. Thirteenth, promote tourism to generate employment and to foster fraternity. And fourteenth, make educational loans interest free to encourage higher education.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

### Conserve water to preserve life

Editor,  
Kudos for your well-researched and informative article giving a significant message - World water day

notes on the Soviet visit, he mentioned, "We cannot accept the US offer to take the seat in UNSC in place of China as it means falling out with China and it would be very unfair for a great country like China not to be in the Security Council".

Nehru said to Bulganin, "I feel that we should first concentrate on getting China admitted." He expressed similar views in his letter to Vijay Laxmi Pandit, "India is not anxious to enter the Security Council at this stage, even though as a great country, she ought to be there. The first step to be taken is for China to take her rightful place and then the question of India might be considered separately."

Arguably, some commentators suggest that Nehru did the right thing by twice rejecting the offer. But, clearly Nehru, in his self-proclaimed idealism failed to secure India's interest. Now China is blocking every proposal that aims to put India in the word leadership, or seeks to promote India's interests. Our memberships in the UNSC would have given us the veto on Kashmir and related issues. Admittedly Nehru's policy towards China was full of foibles.

Remember Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's criticism of Nehru's China policy from 25th October 1951 to 8th February 1952. Nehru admirers dismiss it as a part of election rivalry. But foreign policy was not a major issue in Indian elections, it was a genuine concern by an informed and highly educated man like Ambedkar about Nehru's missteps on China.

Nehru's reading of history and international political perceptions drove him to seek accommodation with China. He was wary of growing US hegemony. According to him, a post-partition India did not want a new imperial master in the US. He was perturbed about being drawn into a defence network the US was apparently building to contain the pre-

"India in severe crisis" (ST-March 20, 2019). Water is the base on which our life is built and is one of the most valuable resources of nature. It is an endless creation by God so people don't take care. Can we imagine a day without clean water? No, not a single day of our lives can go on without water. In spite of having 70% of water on earth only 1% of water is fresh & useable and the other 97% of water is salty. 2% of water is in the form of ice in the glaciers & icebergs. Human beings are destroying the environment by wasting this 1% of clean water in various ways.

Day by day, it is becoming clear that water is going to be the biggest casualty of the modern development process. We are forced to buy clean drinking water after having polluted every known source. Nowadays mineral or purified water is billion dollar business. People are ready to spend Rs 20 for a water bottle as we know it's not easy to get pure or clean water.

Increasing population and rapid urbanization has led to over-use of water resources leading to water pollution and scarcity. Rain, rivers and wells have been man's traditional sources of fresh water. Global warming upsets natural patterns of rainfall. Rivers are slowly killed at their sources by steady destruction of forests and the construction of big dams, and

sumed communist expansionism. He was anxious about the consequences of the invasion by North Korea of the South which became a theatre of a big power rivalry, the South Korea supported by Allied powers led by the US and North by USSR and China. He was worried that the Korean crisis would spiral out of control leading to another world war, use of atom bombs etc. Nehru was obsessed with international politics but denied India a historic opportunity of being a part of the table with six-powers running the world.

Nehru in the cold war era, followed a policy of non-alignment, but tilted towards Soviet Union. India was insisting on recognising China, a communist, authoritarian state, remained in angst of USA, a democratic country. US President Truman regretted that India was holding aloof from the democratic nations.

So evidently, the US did make offer to befriend India. But Nehru dithered and even rebuffed them. Only after Nehru's rejection of US overtures, the latter made a military pact with Pakistan. This initiative towards India challenges the assumption that the US was committed to a strategy of equidistance between India and Pakistan. Further, Pakistan would have felt alienated from the US if India became a permanent member of the UNSC, assisted by the US, giving India an upper hand on the Kashmir issue.

Nehru's China policy including Tibet which could be discussed on another occasion has cost India dear. Anybody arguing that India did not give away its UNSC membership to China or Nehru was right in doing so is oblivious of history and China's invidious attitude to India.

It is high time to correct the fault lines drawn by Nehru on the shifting sands of international politics and of India's foreign policy in particular. --- INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

over-exploitation of groundwater. Frantic use of water without any thought of conservation is a bad sign. We use water to wash away our dirt, but in turn we forget to clean the water.

We leap to blame nature whenever there is a flood or a water scarcity. On the other side experts feel that bad management of water resources has encouraged unsustainable use of water. Unless water is used equitably, and in a non-partisan manner, playing with it may prove to be more risky than playing with fire. A growing population and a consumptive lifestyle add to the depression. Development cannot be reversed. But technology could be reoriented to serve the dual purpose of conserving water and regulating its use. We have to pay attention to the importance of fresh water and be able to maintain the management of fresh water resources. Leaving aside global solutions, something should be done at the national and regional levels? Let's join our hands in saving water as much as possible. Let our motto be "Save water, save life, save the world".

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit  
Ahmedabad

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.

## Election manifestos Key area for reforms

By Dr.S.Saraswathi

The Election Commission has fixed the outer time limit for release of political party manifestos for 2019 General Elections as 48 hours before polling. The bar on declaration of manifestos in the last two days before election is now brought under the Model Code of Conduct Part VIII relating to Guidelines on Manifestos.

The rule is significant as elections are drawing closer and campaigns are growing more and more vigorous, but most of the parties have not yet released their manifestos outlining their policies and programmes. Hundreds of meetings are taking place and countless promises are extended orally, but written promises are coming very slow. The BJP released its 2014 manifesto on the day of polling in first phase!

Under this rule, in the multi-phase polls of 2019, the 48-hour ban -- the silence period -- will apply before each polling date. During this period, direct or indirect way of soliciting support for parties or candidates including release of manifestos in concerned constituencies is prohibited.

Though very important to get votes, manifestos come after alliance formation, and delayed as much as possible. They are gaining importance with increasing people's awareness, but losing meaning because of alliances of parties with contrary views.

Asserting that it had fulfilled 520 out of the 549 assurances given before 2014 election, the BJP is working on a Report Card of its performance.

This time, election manifesto labelled "Sankalp Patra" is given special importance by the BJP as the focus of electioneering. The process of preparing the document is democratised to make it a people's exercise. The Party president went round the country seeking people's views and involving them in deciding the framework of what the party claims to be the "New India" they want. In 2014, the BJP came up with the idea of launching a website to seek suggestions from people. Later, social media came to play a significant role in assembly elections.

The Congress has also launched a website to gather suggestions for drawing up its election manifesto. It is holding wide consultations with the public known as Jan Awaaz (people's voice).

The word "manifesto", derived from the Latin "manifestum", means clear or conspicuous. World famous manifestos include the United States Declaration of Independence (1776), Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens (1789) after the French Revolution, The Communist Manifesto (1848) issued by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and the Anarchist Manifesto (1850).

In British election campaigns, launch of party manifestos is considered a decisive moment conveying to the electorate what they can expect from different parties. Manifestos are not only promises to capture votes, but they also set the agenda for the government if the party forms the government. In this way, they are commitments of the parties far different from platform promises.

One of the principles agreed in 1911 in Britain states that: "Any tabled bill set out in the governing body's manifesto may be subjected to possible short delay, but pass, but anything else would be subject to full debate". The rule was clarified by Lord Salisbury in 1945 to prevent House of Lords blocking any government legislation promised in the election manifesto.

Intra-party differences are perceptible in general election manifestos at the British, Scottish, and Welsh levels showing sub-national differences. National identity is prominent in Scottish and Welsh manifestos of the same party. State-wide parties -- Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrats -- now prefer to produce detailed manifestos separately for each of the three countries that make up the Great Britain.

British parliamentarians hold that manifestos have a quasi-constitutional authority in the unwritten British Constitution and parties are expected to stick to the policies enshrined in them. This document is generally very long. The manifestos of Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democracy contained over 26,000 words in 2015.

Writing party manifesto is taken up by parties as a serious work in Britain. In the Labour party, for example, the Parliamentary Labour Party, trade unions, constituency labour parties, and affiliated societies take part in preparing the document and it must be formally endorsed by all stakeholders at a special meeting of the National Executive Committee. Conservatives, on the contrary, are flexible in giving control of their manifesto to leaders at the central party organisation almost entirely.

However, party manifestos cannot be taken as agreed bonds. In course of time, they have lost credibility and in many respects have become a mere piece of paper as a CJI remarked. Judiciary has no authority to ensure parties' compliance with the manifestos. Governance is also not a simple matter to carry out any wishful ideas that may come to political leaders.

The Model Code of Conduct in India prohibits promises that would exert undue influence on voters. But, the Code is not enforceable in a court of law.

Still, the Election Commission can check fanciful promises that may misguide the voters. In August 2016, it censured the AIADMK for not being able to give a rationale and show the means to raise the finances required to carry out poll promises in the party manifesto like waiver of all farm loans due to cooperative banks, free distribution of washing machines, steam boiler, and idli cookers, gift coupons for all ration card holders, etc. The EC also asked the DMK to be more circumspect and adhere to the Model Code of Conduct.

A PIL seeking judicial action for ensuring compliance with manifestos was rejected. Writ of Mandamus is "wholly misconceived" to enforce manifestos, according to a verdict of Punjab and Haryana High Court.

Pre-poll alliances have become common, but not common manifestos of constituent members. Recently, JD(S) leader suggested a common manifesto for the mahagathbandhan against the BJP, but it did not find takers. Some regional parties stick to their poll promises regardless of their post-poll alliance.

In 1998, the Left Parties comprising the CPM, CPI, Revolutionary Socialist Party, and All India Forward Bloc issued a joint left manifesto expressing their commitment to a strong secular-democratic system, a just social order for all oppressed sections, growth with equity, and corruption-free and accountable government. The United Front issued a "Common Programme and Joint Policy Declaration". --- INFA

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

“The malaria parasite has been killing children and sapping the strength of whole populations for tens of thousands of years. It is impossible to calculate the harm malaria has done to the world.”

--- Bill Gates

## The Shillong Times

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### Lokpal, finally

THE Centre, upon a directive from the Supreme Court, has finally set up the Lokpal. This is one of the NDA government's last acts. With a panel headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi clearing the name of Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose as the first Lokpal, a long-held demand from the anti-corruption activists has come to fruition. How this matter would now play out will be closely watched.

The Modi government was obviously not keen on introducing the Lokpal system, which would have authority to proceed against former prime ministers, present and past ministers, bureaucrats, MPs and other public servants as and when complaints against corruption are referred to it. It can look into the complaints and refer the cases to a special court. The Lokpal bill was passed by Parliament in 2013 during the UPA II period, after activist Anna Hazare reached up to Delhi and staged a massive show to press for steps to check corruption in public life. The Manmohan Singh government did not proceed further and left it to the Modi government that took power the next year.

All through the five years of the NDA, action on the Lok Pal legislation remained stalled for the reason that the Opposition nominee Mallikarjun Kharge boycotted the selection panel meet repeatedly. The reason was that he was called in as a special invitee, and not as a full-fledged member of the panel, on the ground that he was not Leader of the Opposition, per se, due to the fact that the Congress party did not have the required 50-member strength in the Lok Sabha to claim that position. This matter could have been sorted out sooner than later, but the Modi government took no serious initiative in this direction. With the Supreme Court intervening and putting a February-end deadline, the government was forced to act.

The appointment of Lokpal – alongside the already existing Lokayuktas in states – by itself means little. How things would now shape up in respect of its functioning is important. Corruption has spread its tentacles in public life so deep and wide that such sharks are capable of subverting any system that undercuts their sway. Putting too much hope on the judiciary as the ultimate saviour might pose its own risks. Corruption can be controlled or checked only if there is the requisite political will; something that's lacking in India with its weak vigilance systems, weak leaderships, and antiquated systems. Going round and round is not the right way to take matters forward or attain goals.

Democracy is a word that even dictators love to orate about. Those who run elections in this country also believe they are doing a great job for democracy. After all their work is not to make people understand that democracy is not merely the inking of one's forefinger every now and again but that it's a deeper, more fundamental system of governance where people can hold their elected public servants accountable. But are the elected really public servants? Where on earth do servants rule the roost while the masters (electors) are increasingly reaching the status of grave indigence? All of us repeat the phrases such as “Dance of Democracy” and some such hocus-pocus which ultimately is only a lot of noise. The outcomes turn out worse with every election.

Look at those running the present government in Meghalaya. We were all so hopeful that they would focus on governance; put the right people to do the right jobs; take tough decisions; strengthen law and order and address some of the key areas of human development such as Education, Health, Agriculture, Water Supply and Conservation and of course Power Supply. All these aspirations, we realise are not likely to be met any time soon. And guess what? An otherwise proud tribal society, conscious of its intrinsic values; devoid of any sense of hierarchy and believing in a shared history and a shared future is today being reorganised by Democracy. We are now part of a top-down system of command and control. The few in the Government devise plans and programmes that do not even remotely resonate with the people and they ensure the successful coordination of the many around such plans. Do people actually have a voice? You must be stark raving mad to even ask. Poverty ensures that your right to speak up is forfeited.

For the large majority of Indians and Meghalayans, Democracy is a figment. They have never understood it and never will. Words like ‘people’ too are political constructs aimed at deceiving the voters and making them feel important for one single day in five years. Alas, we voters fall in that trap again and again. What politicians try to sell us is Utopia. They know for

# Democracy on its last legs

By Patricia Mukhim

a fact that solutions to many of the present problems are not available and that any attempt to even speak of bringing justice and equity in development would result in the politician losing the next election. We are therefore victims of this inherent asymmetry in the democratic system. Democracy for a country that is not only diverse but also culturally asymmetrical every which way we look at it – from caste to class to religion, is set to fail. Implanting western cultural values into our Constitution has not necessarily made it work in our convoluted polity.

It is no wonder that a sort of apathy has now crept in when it comes to voting. ‘What's the point of voting someone who will then become a VIP along with his/her family, enjoy the best of life and forget his/her voters until the next election? Over and above, those same VIPs will move around in speeding vehicles with their entourage of security personnel who will even run us down if we are not careful.’ That's the wail one hears today. That's what democracy has become! Democracy turns the ordinary citizen into a hapless observer of everything that is wrong with it. The very pillars supporting this Democracy are eroded by the absence of accountability. Those heading these pillars of Democracy are beyond criticism. You do that at your own risk!

So what's there to feel good about elections? Now the debate surrounding the MP elections is not about core issues affecting us in this State vis-a-vis the country. The debate will be about what the Congress MP in his two tenures has done for Meghalaya. While that question needs to be asked and answered the counter question to his rivals this time would be – what do you want to offer the voters that is different and shorn of rhetoric? I recall that when Vincent Pala was MP and a junior minister in the Union Ministry for Water Resources he had complained that State Government officials take their own time to submit schemes to the different departments of the Union Government; that the schemes are often badly conceived and the detailed project proposals (DPRs) are often not done professionally. He had said that as MP he can follow up

those schemes and as minister he can try and push his Ministry to take up schemes in Meghalaya provided the DPRs are technically sound. I am not sure that any scheme was implemented by the Ministry of Water Resources between 2009-2014. We had then hoped that the three important rivers of Jaintia Hills that had been poisoned by acid mine drainage and other effluents from the cement industries would be detoxified and restored to their earlier avatar. That never happened. The rivers continue to be dead.

In the next term of 2014-2019, not much was expected from the MP other than the MPLADs of Rs 5 crore a year. The sitting MP therefore might like to give an account of how this amount of Rs 25+25 or Rs 50 crores was spent between May 2009 to February 2019. A report card on every penny spent and the schemes on which they were spent and where, are due to the voters. This should hopefully give us an idea of what the MP has been doing over his ten year tenure in Delhi.

Coming to Ms Agatha Sangma the Tura MP candidate who was elected to the Lok Sabha in 2008 (to fill up the vacuum left by her father after he returned to state politics), and later from 2009-2014 and even became a junior minister in the Ministry for Rural Development, her performance in the Lok Sabha is lacklustre. The Policy Research Studies (PRS) Legislative Research India, which keeps track of all Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha proceedings show that Agatha Sangma's attendance during the tenure 2009-2014 was just 49%. Her participation in debates is NIL. Number of questions asked in Parliament – NIL. Private Member's Bill – NIL. It would appear as if Meghalaya has no problems at all. Or rather that Garo Hills had no pressing issues that needed to be raised in Parliament. In comparison, Vincent Pala's attendance during the same period is 92%. Number of debates he has participated in – 32. Number of questions asked – 264. Private Member's Bill – 4.

We send representatives to Parliament to raise issues of importance not just for our state but also those that afflict the region and even the country. PD

Rai the MP from Sikkim has the highest number of debates spoken at 70. The national average for debates spoken is 38. Badruddin Ajmal has asked the most questions (320) with Khagen Das from Tripura coming a close second (310). The national questions average is 300. Those interested in finding out how their MPs are performing can go to the PRSIndia website and check out whether their MPs are on holiday most of the time or are actually representing their constituents. It's high time we had an institution like the PRS here in Meghalaya too to track the performance of MLAs in the Assembly. Then only can we claim to be a Democracy.

An excerpt from the book, ‘How Democracies Die: What History Reveals About Our Future’ by Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt is a real shocker. The authors say, “Many government efforts to subvert democracy are ‘legal,’ in the sense that they are approved by the legislature or accepted by the courts. They may even be portrayed as efforts to improve democracy – making the judiciary more efficient, combating corruption or cleaning up the electoral process. Newspapers still publish but are bought off or bullied into self-censorship. Citizens continue to criticise the government but often find themselves facing tax or other legal troubles. This sows public confusion. People do not immediately realise what is happening. Many continue to believe they are living under a democracy. Because there is no single moment – no coup, declaration of martial law or suspension of the Constitution – in which the ruling regime obviously ‘crosses the line’ into dictatorship, nothing may set off society's alarm bells. Those who denounce government abuse may be dismissed as exaggerating or crying wolf. Democracy's erosion is, for many, almost imperceptible.”

Indeed, when those who elect their representatives are no longer able to hold them accountable for the 5-year tenure and that's because the electoral process itself is fraught, then the essence of Democracy is lost. What we have is only an empty shell. We are a people without power to check misuse of executive, legislative and judicial privileges. Whither Democracy?

## The importance of being Bernie Sanders U.S. presidential campaign gets leftward shift

By Meagan Day

“Bernie! Bernie!” the crowd chanted in Council Bluffs, Iowa on the campaign trail last week. But Bernie Sanders demurred. “It ain't Bernie, it's you. It's not me, it is us.” The crowd responded with a new chant: “Not me, us! Not me, us!”

A similar exchange took place at each of the two campaign kick-off rallies the previous weekend, first in Brooklyn and then in Chicago. In Iowa, Bernie gave a rationale for his response. “The truth is that the powers that be,” he said, “they are so powerful, they have so much money, that no one person, not the best president in the world, can take them on alone. The only way we can transform America is when millions of people together stand up and fight back.” No viable presidential campaign has ever been so encouraging of agitation from below.

Bernie who has declared his candidature for Democratic Party's nomination for 2020 Presidential elections is often compared to Franklin D. Roosevelt, but while Roosevelt inveighed eloquently against inequality, he was nowhere near as consistent in calling for mass political activity from below. It was his contemporary, the socialist leader Eugene Debs, who spoke of the power of working people to change the world despite the considerable political advantages of elites.

“Employers, who are the beneficiaries of the wrong, have hitherto been able to crush, in most of the states, all remedial legislation,” Debs wrote, but “labor may be induced to unify, and taking the aggressive in politics, bring about the reform required.”

The language is old-fashioned, but the formulation is almost identical to Bernie's in Iowa: an acknowledgement of the ruling class's formidable power, paired with an insistence that ordinary people can break that power by uniting and fighting back.

In the few weeks since he announced his 2020 run, Bernie has made it clear that he plans to emphasize the importance of political activity outside the established channels of state power.

At his Chicago rally, the first speaker to appear before the crowd was Destiny Harris, an eighteen-year-old local Black Lives Matter activist. Harris is active with the No Cop Academy campaign, which aims to prevent the construction of a \$95 million law enforcement training center on Chicago's West Side, arguing that the city already spends far too much on policing and should spend that money on youth and community services instead.

But the project is strongly backed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the rest of the city's political class. Opposition from elected leaders has become nearly unthinkable in Chicago – so much so that local alderman and Democratic Socialists of America member Carlos Ramirez-Rosa was expelled from the city council's Latino Caucus as a result of his lone votes against the academy. Few local elected officials will touch the No Cop Academy campaign, yet Bernie chose a No Cop Academy activist to open up his rally.

Joining Harris on the bill was Ashley Galvan Ramos, a twenty-one-year-old anti-gentrification activist in Chicago's Logan Square, a formerly working-class, Latino neighborhood that has gentrified in recent years at rapid speed. By inviting Harris and Ramos to the

stage to make their cases to a captive audience of over twelve thousand people, Bernie was lending his platform to the construction of extra-parliamentary political movements. Chicago's local movements against over-policing and gentrification were stronger when he left than when he arrived.

When he took the podium, Bernie gave a new speech, this one centering on racial injustice and detailing his own early political history. He focused on a time before he became a mayor, a congressman, a senator, or a potential president – when he was an activist with no formal state power. He spoke about coordinating a sit-in to protest racially segregated housing owned by the University of Chicago, where he was a leader of the campus chapter of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE). And he also spoke about being arrested by police and bailed out by the NAACP after a civil disobedience action protesting racial discrimination in the Chicago education system.

“My activities here in Chicago taught me a very important lesson that I have never forgotten,” he said. “Real change never takes place from the top on down. It always takes place from the bottom on up.”

Bernie then spoke about traveling in 1963 to Washington, DC to attend the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where Dr Martin Luther King – one of Bernie's two biggest personal heroes, the other being Eugene Debs – gave his most famous speech.

Many Americans remember the line from that speech about not judging people by the color of their skin but instead by the content of their hearts. Few remember that King praised the “marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community” and warned that “the whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge.”

Because Bernie's politics were forged in that era of mass protest, it comes as little surprise that he values extra-parliamentary politics on principle. But there's a very good strategic reason for him to value grassroots left-wing and working-class movements as well. If he becomes president, he will need them to accomplish anything ambitious.

In a different, perhaps more ideal scenario, an openly socialist presidential candidacy would be the culmination of an intensive decades-long political project. The candidate would rise organically through the ranks of a dynamic and powerful organized Left. That Left would consist of, among other things, strong left-wing unions, innumerable community groups knitted into tight coalitions, and a mass political party with a democratic membership structure and credible means of candidate discipline. The candidate would emerge as the leader of a substantial movement made up of rock-solid working-class institutions.

But that's not how things have played out. Instead, the socialist idea morphed in the late twentieth century from a powerful taboo to a tacit impossibility, unions were hollowed out and hamstrung, and the organized Left was placed on the back foot. Without a unified mass movement to represent, Bernie marched to the beat of his own drum for decades. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

## Of short-sighted governments

Editor,  
The letter, ‘Boundary Dispute’ by FB Lyngdoh (ST Feb 22, 2019), quoting the speech of late EK Mawlong in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly in 1978 regarding the two villages Jatalong and Sabuda in Ri Bhoi district where Assam police harassed and arrested the people of these villages. There was a primary school in Sabuda run by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council since 1952-53 when the United Khasi & Jaintia Hills District Council was established. When Govt took over the administration of primary education from the District Council in 1983 the undersigned was appointed the Administrator. At that point of time there was a lot of confusion in order to segregate the DCLP schools, the Faith based schools, the Govt. Schools inherited from Assam and other private/village schools as salary had to be paid to the concerned teachers. There

were also a number of so called ‘ghost schools’ which existed only in name. I clearly remember one gentleman who came to my office with a simple request, ‘Please Sir, do not abandon the DCLP school at Sabuda. there is one teacher in that school.’ I was curious and asked him why? His answer was, ‘If there is no school there, the people will shift as there will be no schooling for their children; the Assam Govt will then encroach and take away our land.’ I took him at his word and made sure the teacher got his salary and stayed there. I don't remember the name of this gentleman but I appreciate his concern and vision.

Over the years (1983-2018) primary education in the districts had gone through many changes. Sabuda came into the limelight again when I read the news that the Assam Govt had constructed a building for the Bank in the village and claimed it as their own. We talk of documentary evidence. Sabuda is one of the many villages which is clearly within the

United Khasi & Jaintia Hills District Council since 1952-53. I read in the papers that Ms Fennela Lyngdoh is filing a boundary case in the Supreme Court and naturally would require many documentary evidence to support that case. Records such as that of the Sabuda case will be one. We wish we had more gentlemen then like the one I mentioned above who had the vision and took the trouble to see that our boundaries are secured. Unfortunately the powers that have ruled the state over the years do not seem to share his vision.

We have an international boundary policy which we call Border Area Development perhaps because of the central funding but there is no tangible policy on inter-state boundaries. The villages which should guard our boundaries are deprived of the basic livelihood facilities like roads, health, schools, electricity, drinking water etc. It's only natural that people would abandon their villages and it is also natural that the vacuum gets filled up by

people from the other side of the fence.

Yours etc  
Torist Mark,  
Via email

## Recognise the real protectors of forests

Editor,  
The International Day of Forests (IDF) is celebrated worldwide every year on March 21. The theme of this year is ~ Forests and Education. A report by “Forests trends and Eco-agriculture partners” recognized community forest management as “an essential means to sustainably manage forest resources while supporting local livelihoods and cultural values.” It is a shame that instead of rewarding the forest dwellers for their outstanding contribution towards protecting the forests of our country, there is an effort to jeopardize their symbiotic relationship with the forests. Forest dwellers preserve forests not just

as their habitation but as God. They worship the ecosystem as a spiritual being.

Now, let us focus on the Bishnoi tribe of Rajasthan. They derive their name from the set of 29 (bish = 20 + noi = 9) rules which they are supposed to honour. Some of these rules showcase the spiritual relationship between them and the forest like don't cut green trees (runkh lila nahi ghave) and provide a common shelter for all abandoned animals so that they are not slaughtered (amar rakhe that). Felling trees and killing animals are treated as crimes in Bishnoi society.

The Bishnois are rightly called the first environmentalists of India. They build water storage tanks that can store rain water for humans and animals. They bury the deceased instead of following their religious tradition to cremate the dead body. They do it to avoid wastage of firewood and air pollution. To minimize the use of green trees, they use cow dung cakes

as fuels for cooking. They only collect dead wood. Even a carpenter waits patiently for a tree to fall. Bishnois have been fighting court cases and poachers no matter how big the suspect may be ~ even if he is as famous as Mansur Ali Khan of Pataudi or Salman Khan of Bollywood.

Indeed, the environment and the lives of the forest dwellers got improved in less than three per cent of the forest cover of India where traditional inhabitants became managers of their forest land. Undoubtedly, we need to immediately implement the 2006 Forest Rights Act in the remaining 97 per cent of the forest area.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

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

*"It's not true that life is one damn thing after another; it is one damn thing over and over."*

--- Edna St. Vincent Millay

## The Shillong Times

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### Bjp list sans Advani

WITH the BJP having come up with its candidates list in part, the heat at the hustings has risen but marginally. There are no major surprises, while attention is concentrated on the "grabbing" of the Gandhinagar seat by party chief Amit Shah from veteran L.K. Advani. The 91-year-old may still be in some form, but this is no age for him to practise politics or engage in public activities. The veteran leader who played a major role in crafting a strong national party in the saffron shade as an alternative to the grand old party was a phenomenal success as a politician but stopped short of becoming Prime Minister. This may or may not have something to do with perceived RSS game-plans, which saw a Narendra Modi coming from behind and placing himself at the centre of national politics. Past the Goa conclave that brought Modi centre-stage, LK Advani was no longer his normal self. His praise of Pakistan's founder leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah during a visit there came as the right opportunity for the RSS to neutralize Advani.

Another leader who has been denied the party ticket in the first round is Murli Manohar Joshi, the learned professor from Uttar Pradesh who too is now on the wrong side of his age. The 85-year-old had made minor waves in the past and is still seen as a prominent Brahmin face for the party. He too has been relegated to the Margdarshak Mandal brought into being by Modi after he took power in Delhi, and he can now only sit back and brood over his past. As long as PM Modi retains his hold over the party, Joshi would remain in oblivion as is very obvious. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will re-enter the fray from Varanasi, and it is unclear whether he will also contest from another constituency too as he did from Gujarat last time. Roads minister Nitin Gadkari, who still has fire in his belly, has been re-fielded by the party from his home turf of Nagpur. Veteran home minister Rajnath Singh will be fielded from his pocket borough of Lucknow. He is one person who managed his ministry well. Smriti Irani can be trusted to give some uncomfortable moments to Rahul Gandhi in Amethi. Yet, overall, it is premature to say who all will be axed by the BJP this time, as more names are in the reckoning. To some comfort for his rivals in the party, PM Modi has lost that old magic and will have to tread a careful course.

# Need to ensure its protection and equitable provision to all Water : Our common heritage

By Phillippe Cullet

The release of the latest UN World Water Development Report coinciding with World Water Day 2019 provides an appropriate context to rethink our relationship to water. In India, water is a daily worry for many people throughout the country. This is now also the case in Meghalaya that has long been known to the outside world for its plentiful rain but is increasingly in the news for its water scarcity and pollution. There are various worrisome trends with regard to water: In urban areas, supply can be erratic, insufficient and the water may not be safe. Such is the problem that the Meghalaya High Court took up the issue in October 2018 and is in the process of hearing a public interest litigation focusing particularly on the quality of the water provided. One of the consequences of the provision of insufficient or unsafe water is that this leads to various forms of privatisation of water supply, be that in the form of 'water trucks' or the newer water ATMs. This should not happen in a context where the fundamental right to water has been repeatedly recognised by the Supreme Court since the 1990s and where water is a common that should be shared freely among all water users.

While urban water supply may attract most of the attention of policy-makers and the media, there are broader issues that deserve as much attention. Water scarcity is increasingly affecting many people during dry months is, like in other parts of the country, linked to changing weather patterns and anthropogenic climate change. At the same time, Meghalaya has no lack of rainfall and scarcity is due at least in part to other factors, among which deforestation and watershed management play a large part. This is surprising in a state known for its conservation ethics reflected, for instance, in its sacred groves often located on purpose at the source of streams used for drinking water.

This links with the issue of river pollution that has

diverse impacts, including on drinking water supply and the environment. The problem includes untreated sewage disposed in rivers that become the source of drinking water for downstream communities, effluents from factories and water discharged as a by-product of mining operations. The latter was in fact one of the issues taken up by the National Green Tribunal when it decided to ban mining in 2014. Pollution of water sources is also caused by the increasingly indiscriminate disposal of plastic packaging into the environment, including in water bodies, which is first a visual eyesore but more seriously a sign of the broader lack of concern for the protection of water in general, including catchment areas.

These worrisome developments call for urgent action. The first step needed is to ensure that the right to water is realised similarly for every person. This requires enshrining the right in water legislation that the government will apply on a daily basis. This is in fact what is proposed in the Draft National Water Framework Bill, 2016 and in the draft Meghalaya Integrated Water Resource Management Bill, 2015. Both these proposed instruments would provide a statutory framework to realise the right to water, something that is currently missing in all states. Without this, right holders - namely every individual - have no way to hold the government accountable for its actions or inactions.

The second thing that the state needs to do is to adopt legislation to protect water comprehensively. The national Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 is limited to addressing point sources of pollution and is therefore very narrow in scope. The Meghalaya Protection of Catchment Areas Act, 1990 constituted an early recognition that a broader perspective to protection of water is needed but it does not seem to have been effective in

practice and efforts to amend it have not borne fruit yet. Other initiatives have been taken, such as with the Water Harvesting Mission but on the whole there is no comprehensive effective framework for protecting water, whereas efforts have been made at promoting water-based livelihoods and economic activities, for instance, through the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority. The legislation that is needed must address not only the scarcity prevalent in some areas of the state but also the recurrent floods occurring in plain areas. In other words, scarcity is crucial but is not the only important dimension that needs to be addressed.

In terms of actors involved, the state is not only duty-bound to ensure the realisation of the fundamental right to water for all individuals but it must also ensure the accountability of all state and non-state actors for their use of water, whether in terms of avoiding the depletion of water sources or in terms of preventing pollution and ensuring that anyone harming water sources is held liable. In particular, it is crucial to ensure that private sector actors are made to comply with existing principles of environmental law and existing liability standards. This is a challenge throughout the country but one that needs to be addressed in each individual state in earnest.

The onus of taking necessary measures to realise the right to water and to ensure the protection of water sources and catchments is first on organs of state. Yet, the state is not separate from its people whose democratic responsibilities include not only voting but also prodding the state to effectively realise their fundamental rights and to hold all actors involved in the water sector accountable. The key point is that individuals have rights whose realisation they are entitled to demand. The fundamental right to water gets priority

but it goes without saying that a people that has a strong environmental conservation ethic will find it easier to prod the state in doing what it should be doing. This is where the traditional customary norms concerning protection of the environment come into the picture. Interestingly, if a lot of attention is still given to sacred groves, much less attention is given to traditional wisdom and norms centred on protecting water sources. The result of such loss is easily appreciated in the case of urban rivers turning into untreated wastewater drains and plastic waste dumps, as in the case of the Umkhray and Umshyri rivers in Shillong.

Addressing the challenges of water availability and water quality will require an effort from everyone. The state government must take a lead since water is a state subject and a number of issues can indeed be addressed at the state level. At the same time, water is first of all a local concern and must be equitably used and protected by local institutions at the village and municipal level, as well as in the district councils. Everyone must therefore engage with institutions of water governance from the local to the state level so that people's water entitlements are effectively realised for all and so that actors over-extracting or polluting water for profit-making activities are held to account. This also implies that everyone must be environmentally aware in their use of water, which for urban residents in particular starts with avoiding the use of bottled water whose plastic shells can be seen everywhere, in a stark reminder that protection of water and the environment in general cannot be separated.

*(Prof. Phillippe Cullet is Senior Visiting Fellow, Centre for Policy Research, Delhi & Professor of Environmental Law, SOAS University of London. He can be reached at pcullet@cprindia.org)*

## Modi Government policies cripple BSNL Employees suffering due to manufactured crisis

By B. Sivaraman

Binu Pandey is a single mother in Ghaziabad with two school-going children. A video footage of her crying in agony before her superior official in BSNL went viral on the Internet on 13 March 2019. She was in hand-to-mouth existence and had not been able to pay even the school fees for her children as BSNL had not paid the salary for February she was saying amidst her sobs. Recorded and released by some colleague, it stirred the social media and the government and the BSNL faced universal condemnation.

For the first time the state-owned telecom behemoth BSNL failed to pay salaries to its 1.76 lakh employees due to a severe financial crisis. Communications Minister Manoj Sinha tried to make it appear simple saying that 85% of the revenues go towards salaries and while the salaries were increasing by 8% a year the revenues remained stagnant. Only after the employees demonstrated everywhere under the banner of All Unions and Associations of BSNL (AUAB), including officers' associations, and there was a media outrage over the footage of the crying woman employee the government released Rs.1000 crore on 13 March with the instruction to the BSNL top-brass to consider all options including winding up of the company and then February salaries were paid. But the crisis has not blown over and the next month salary is still a question mark. How long can this go on? Why things came to such a pass?

The BSNL workers went on a 3-day strike on 18-20 February 2019. It was a strike not only over employees' demands like pay and pension revision but also over demands to save the industry like the one for granting 4G spectrum to BSNL. Despite the minister promising an early cabinet decision on allotting 4G on 3 December 2018 itself, the Modi Government was dilly dallying. Some lower level trade union functionaries wonder whether the non-payment of salaries was a vindictive measure by the top management in response to the strike and also to scare the employees from stepping up their protests. It could also be a ploy to adopt a tough negotiating posture over wage revision. These could also be true but the rot runs deeper, say some senior leaders. They explain that it is not just a liquidity crunch but a very basic existential crisis engineered by the government itself.

The BSNL's losses were Rs.4793 crore in 2016-17 and they jumped to Rs.7992 crore in 2017-18. BSNL's annual wage bill is Rs.15,000 crore and it used to account for 85% of its total revenues.

It might be true that BSNL might be highly overstaffed and the Sam Pitroda Committee recommended in 2010 that it should shed 50% of its staff. But the TU activists point out that 50% of the employees are due to retire in any case in the next 5-6 years and the government refuses to provide some salary support even for 5-6 years. Even otherwise, the Modi Government is now proposing a paltry Gujarat-style VRS scheme where an amount equivalent to 35-day salary for each

completed year of service and 25-day salary for each year of service left till retirement.

No wonder, employees are not coming forward as they don't find this VRS attractive at all. Some TU activists say that the telecom ministry is creating a fear psychosis among the employees that they should opt for this bad VRS or in future they wouldn't get even this much. Even implementation of the VRS scheme will have a one-time revenue impact of Rs.6365 crore only. The VRS scheme would have been successful even if the offer had been doubled and still it is not a big deal for the government if this can bring about a turnaround. So the problem seems to be different.

Some leaders opine that the Modi government wants to strangle BSNL for some mysterious reason. The government denied its own BSNL the 4G spectrum and expected it to compete with private monopolies like Reliance Jio and Airtel with one hand tied. No wonder BSNL's market share has fallen to just 11% of the mobile market. No wonder revenues are dwindling. Just to save the BSNL workers went on successive all-India strikes at the time of giving 2G and then 3G licenses to private corporates and recently they went on a 3-day strike with the main demand being that BSNL also be handed over 4G spectrum so that they could compete with the private companies on a level playing field. The struggle history of the workers of the past 15 years itself is a proof of who wants to save the BSNL and who wants to kill it only to hand over the carcass to some private monopoly. And everybody knows who the only telecom private monopolist left is and how close Modi is to that business baron?

Mukesh Ambani with his predatory Reliance Jio is on a killing spree in Indian telecom-after burying his own brother's Reliancecomm and finishing off Tata Telecom and Birla's Idea Mobile, he has inflicted heavy losses on Vodafone and Airtel. In the last 3 months of 2018 alone Vodafone-Idea lost 3.5 crore customers to Jio and Airtel suffered far worse onslaught. But it is amazing that BSNL could somehow withstand the predatory attack and increase its customer base-that too with mere 3G and without 4G! It had started making operational profits and its mounting losses were due to Jio's tariff war which the government and TRAI did nothing to curb and, worse still, the criminal denial of 4G to it. Some senior leaders of BSNL Employees' Union think that this perverse policy of Modi is to sufficiently weaken and ruin BSNL so that its massive infrastructure can be handed over to Ambanis on a platter.

They are of the opinion that this fraudulent handout of a PSU to a private monopolist is not privatisation, a simple transfer of a PSU to private hands at market values as prescribed even by neo-liberal economics. This larcenous privatisation is akin to handout of family silver to plain corporate thieves! There must be some organic link between razing to the ground medieval masjids and demolition of the "temples of modern India"! (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

### Plight of special educators

Editor,

The special educators under the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), SEMAM Meghalaya, DSEL Education Department are silent workers dedicated to the uplift of children in need of special education (disabled children) in every corner of Meghalaya. These educators teach in government and government aided schools to make these special children self-reliant and capable of standing on an equal footing with the rest of the world. These teachers have been working without salary for eight months. God alone know how they survive and feed their dependents. Their profession is very challenging as they deal with special children who are lesser known and less acknowledged and with very little opportunities. Parents of such children know the challenges involved in educating them and recognize the importance of a trained person (special educator) to assist them. But in spite of being qualified and trained professionals their rights have been ignored; they are taken for granted by the State government. Their contribution towards the uplift of our special children cannot be measured. But

who sees this and appreciates their dedication? Is there anyone who understands their difficulties? Just because they are not protesting and demanding their rights on the road, should they be taken for granted? Their silence means that they care for these special children. To our state politicians: if you are really serious and committed about providing equal opportunities to these special children then an equal effort is needed to also compensate the special educators for their services. Government has to show it means business by paying the long pending dues to the special educators for they are the supporting pillars of those in need of special education.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request

### Amit Shah - master strategist

Editor,

This refers to your report "Modi stays with Varanasi, Shah in fray from Gandhinagar" (ST- March 22, 2019). BJP president Amit Shah has attributed the success attained by the party since 2014 to the

unstinting commitment of party cadres at the booth-level. He is the master strategist, knows all too well how to carry them forward. His astute poll management has yielded results for the BJP in successive elections. He has succeeded in expanding the party's base across the country, including the Northeast. His abilities to keep his ear to the ground and establish deep and lasting connect with party workers enabled him to hone his organizational capabilities. He knows the art of politics, therefore he is known as the chief architect of the BJP and he is now known as the Chanakya of the BJP. He wants the BJP to go miles and his goal is to set the victory bigger target higher than that of 2014. Like Modi, he doesn't rest and doesn't let others rest. Chanakya, who is believed to be the greatest Indian strategist ever, had one lesson for all his disciples: "Never share your secrets with anybody. That will destroy you sooner or later." I think Amit Shah follows Chanakya. No wonder Shah's decisions surprise not just the masses but also those who used to be considered well-entrenched in Delhi's circles of selective leaks and gossips.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit  
Ahmedabad

### Spread peace, not violence

Editor

The horrendous mosque massacre in New Zealand has touched every soul across our planet. Such inhumane actions should be condemned in the harshest words and our deepest condolences go to those who lost their lives and to their bereaved families. This incident has brought into question the western ideologies. It has also blown apart the claims of success of Western democracy. Canada is the second largest country on the planet after Russia stretching coast to coast across the North American continent from the Pacific in the west to the Atlantic in the east. The province of British Columbia in western Canada along the Pacific Coast is separated from eastern Canada comprising of the province of Ontario, French-speaking Quebec and the Maritime provinces along the Atlantic coast by three major prairie provinces in the middle from the west to east as Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Over 90% of Canadians live within a two-hour drive from the C a n a d i a n - U S

international border. This is partly because of a settlement. It's just where people started communities and partly because of the difficult cold weather of Northern Canada. As one moves further from the warmer south to the colder north, the weather gets harsher and less forgiving. The northern Canadian Territories-Yukon, North West Territories and Nunavut represent an area for the world where the sun never sets during the summer and never rises during the winter. There is a constant struggle for survival. The region is so sparsely populated that there is no need for even petty squabbles. Everyone is on the same team and the common struggle is against Mother Nature for survival.

Canada is a multi-ethnic nation representing many ethnicities, cultures and languages that it is often difficult to identify who is a new immigrant and who is a third or fourth generation one regardless of their skin colour. Canada a former British Colony is a nation built by courageous, self-sacrificing and hard-working immigrants with a rich history, national pride and a unique unparalleled cultural heritage. Canada has been a humanitarian nation with more than its share of immigrants from all over the world, destitute,

asylum seekers and homeless people. It is a nation that accepts everyone with respect, warmth and kindness. The poorest of the poor and drug addicted members get treated with dignity and respect in this country. We as Canadians wish to spread the message of love, compassion and eternal friendship towards our Indian brothers during this era of constant hate, prejudice, discrimination, lack of faith and respect for others. We like to assure that the whole planet has not transformed into a hate bin and in spite of the harsh realities of human sufferings and injustice, we as proud Canadians stand by those who are suffering across the world due to hate and misinformation. We extend our love and cooperation to all in helping us create a better place for everyone so that we can share this beautiful planet with peace and serenity along with the warmth of love and respect for all.

Yours etc.,  
Saikat Kumar Basu,  
Canada

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# Assam village on sparrow mission

By Kasturi Das

WORLD SPARROW DAY WAS OBSERVED ON MARCH 20

All the 65 households at Borbali Samua, a little village in the Lakhimpur district of Assam, share their homes with a chirpy, industrious, oft-beleaguered creature: the house sparrow.

Forty-seven-year-old Jayanta Neog, the owner of a rice mill, is one of the principal conservators of the sparrow in this village. He goes around the village, educating the people and children about the importance of the sparrow. On a tour around Neog's house, one can spot various kinds of artificial bird nests made of cardboard, wood, shoeboxes and even bamboo.

"We had noticed that there were quite a number of sparrows in the village, but there was a lack of shelter because of new infrastructure — people are now starting to build concrete houses instead of the traditional mud houses," said Neog, who has been working for conserving the sparrows, since 2013.

The house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), one of the most commonly found bird species in urban as well as rural areas in India, is facing an uncertain future. Its number is declining and experts fear that the disappearance of the bird would mean a bleak future for farms and farmers. Apart from feeding on seeds, the bird also thrives on tiny insects and pests.

This social bird, often found in groups of eight to ten, has learned to live in close contact with humans and has coexisted peacefully with humans for years. But the last two decades have seen a steep decline in its population.

## A species on the decline

Meanwhile, Prabal Saikia, the chief scientist at the Regional Agricultural Research Station (RARS), Assam Agricultural University at North Lakhimpur, had conducted an extensive survey in 2009. The findings were disheartening; the population of the house sparrow was fast declining.

"The decline of the house sparrow is an indicator of the continuous degradation of the environment around us," said Saikia. "The house sparrow is believed to be declining for various reasons, ranging from the destruction of their habitat to lack of insects for the young, vanishing courtyards, cramped buildings, [and radiation] from phone towers. Their decline is an indicator of things going wrong in the space we live."

To increase the population of the house sparrow, Saikia came up with a solution — low-cost cardboard nests. He believed that the population of the house sparrow could get a boost if low-cost nest boxes were popularised amongst the common people. He went on to design a low-cost nest box for sparrows and promoted it across Assam.

"The sparrow easily adapts to man-made nests and if they are promoted on a large-scale, it can lead to long-term conservation of the bird," said Saikia. "Nest boxes are very easy to make and cost almost nothing. In our survey in several districts of Upper and Lower



(Clockwise from left above) Students of Borbali Samua village, Assam, with Jayanta Neog; a nest made out of a shoebox on display at Regional Agricultural Research Station; and all houses in the village, Assam have installed artificial nests for house sparrows.

Photos by Kasturi Das and Prabal Saikia

Assam, we have noticed substantial occupancy of the house sparrow in the low-cost nest boxes."

The predator-proof nest boxes are

made of cardboard and it costs around Rs. 10 to make one. In the past decade, Saikia has distributed over 20,000 boxes for free in villages across As-

sam. "We are adopting villages and installing nest boxes in the village houses to support the remaining population

of the house sparrow," Saikia said. "We also encourage people to make use of waste, such as shoeboxes, to make nest boxes."

"A little bit of love goes a long way."

For the inhabitants of Borbali Samua, it is more than just conserving sparrows. One can feel the love and compassion they hold for the beleaguered bird by merely talking to these villagers.

"You'll see these birds everywhere. They like to be around people. You eventually become involved in the life of these birds. You put up a nest for them, see them gathering twigs to build their nests, see them have young ones. A little bit of love goes a long way," Neog said.

Our conversation was interrupted by a group of school children who arrived at Neog's doorstep seeking bird boxes.

"The cardboard nests given to us by Dr. Saikia have been distributed in every household. We put up quite a number of boxes and we gradually saw an increase in the population of the sparrow. People who visit us also take away those boxes. They are quite in demand," said Neog, while assembling a few for the children.

The children in Borbali Samua are sensitised at an early age. Caring for and protecting the house sparrow and

other wildlife is something that has been ingrained in them. They often attend awareness meetings and have workshops in their school and have learned the importance of conservation of nature around them.

"We have held meetings in schools in and around the village. I think we have been largely successful in our endeavour," Neog said with a glint of pride in his eyes. Neog was conferred an award by the RARS in 2018, along with six others from various villages in Assam, for their exceptional efforts in conservation of the house sparrow.

Ever since 2009, Saikia has been conducting awareness programmes throughout the length and breadth of the state. This year, the Krishi Vigyan Kendras of the Assam Agricultural University will be observing the World Sparrow Day in 23 districts in Assam.

Saikia claims to have seen a tremendous shift of awareness amongst the common people, in the past decade, regarding the need to conserve wildlife. "I have always maintained that it is only the common man that can save the sparrow, the common bird," he said, adding that, "It is the need of the hour to start habitat conservation drives by switching to organic gardening, planting hedges and putting up artificial nest boxes dedicated to house sparrows."

(Mongabay-India/IBNS-TWF)

# 'Students must be provoked to keep up their motivation in mathematics'

Dr Stuart Kohlhaugen, the senior Fellow of Science and Learning at Questacon (Australia's National Science and Technology Centre), was present at a workshop in Kolkata recently. In an exclusive interaction with Souvik Ghosh, Dr Kohlhaugen spoke about some of the ways which must be devised to motivate students in mathematics.

**Often students get intimidated by Mathematics. Can you tell us any way to come out of this phobia?**

This is a global problem. The Indian students by and large recognise the importance of mathematics and at least start with an interest. The challenge is how to keep the motivation going. There are some mathematics which are hard and there we need motivation which comes internally. Only parents asking their children to do better doesn't help. To keep students engaged into mathematics, certain ways need to be devised. For educators, one of the strategies is to make students share their problems with their classmates once they get exposed to the topic. These are the strategies and provocations, which if introduced, will help students.

**Do you think curriculum needs to be modified too?**

Undoubtedly changes in the curriculum would be a great advantage. The only problem in large countries is the inertia in changing curriculum. Changing curriculum needs redeveloping curriculum documents, retrain teachers,

roll-out the resources. This is beneficial but a slow process. So certain 21st century skills needs to be developed and a change has to be brought in the way of doing the work.

A student will stop thinking if he is told by his teacher. But the same student will start thinking if he is asked. If the student comes up with his own questions after he is asked, he will never stop thinking. So that is the hierarchy to get a powerful learning. Undoubtedly a teacher will have to provide the basic knowledge but if the students reach a point where they can ask their own questions then they will engage with the subject in a more powerful way. The simplest thing is to spend a little bit of time in introducing these sorts of provocations. The curiosity and engagement that come from those small times will help them through the rest of the lesson even if nothing else is changed in the lesson.

**How do you think India is developing in science and technology?**

India has got a significant advantage and opportunity. The advantage is its culture of valuing education and seeing it as a pathway to self as well as societal improvement. One of the other assets India has is the strength in English language which allows interactions between researchers and students who study overseas. So an Indian student is globally connected. Having that flexibility in mindset and being able to work in cross-disciplines is really where the opportunities lie. India recognises that.

I have always found Indians as culturally

resourceful and the gateway of future is on how the resources will be harnessed with the kind of emerging technologies.

**We are seeing digitisation in India. How far do you think people of the country effectively use technology?**

There are two modes of technology (users) - one is consumer and the other is developer, creator, master of technology. Again this is not a uniquely Indian situation but India is becoming a younger demography. People who consume digital technology are not necessarily the master of it or have the depth of understanding. Using social media and its privacy is one form of digital literacy. But actually understanding of the development of system according to needs is far from common among the consumers.

Digital technology is pervasive but doing so actually changes the value of information. Knowing something now is less of a specific skill. What question he is asking and what he does with the information is the thing. So the value has shifted from knowing and remembering to the ability to filter what is important, find innovation and application and recombine information. That is a different skill set. These things are not specifically in schools. So introducing these kind of problem solving, open-ended inquiry and investigation which can still be applied to the current topics will develop these additional skills. That will greatly benefit India in going into the future.

(IBNS/TWF)

Photo: Avishek Mitra/IBNS

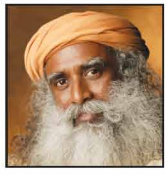


India has got a significant advantage and opportunity. The advantage is its culture of valuing education and seeing it as a pathway to self as well as societal improvement. One of the other assets India has is the strength in English language which allows interactions between researchers and students who study overseas

# Time to cut the cord?

**Sadhguru. Isha Foundation**

involved with your family.



**Q: I'm having difficulty in cutting the cord. With my attachment to my family, to my children – I get very easily disturbed by what happens within my close circle. Please help me with that.**

Sadhguru: I never said you must cut the cord. It is just that unfortunately, your motherly cord is too limited right now. Expand it a little bit. Make it connect to every piece of life on this planet rather than just to a handful.

Why do you want to cut your cord? There is no reason to cut your cord. There is a difference between involvement and entanglement. The only way to know life is with involvement. This is not just about spirituality. Would you know anything in your life if you are not involved? What is lacking in people is involvement.

## Indiscriminate involvement

When involvement becomes discriminatory, it becomes entanglement. Let your involvement become indiscriminate.

The earth that you walk upon, the food that you eat, the water that you drink, the air that you breathe and the very space in which you exist, see if you can absolutely involve yourself with everything. You are anyway involved, but unconsciously. If you were not involved with the air that you breathe, you would be dead. You just have to become conscious that this is the only way life happens. You have to see that you are consciously involved.

If you are unconsciously involved, it looks like one big burden. If you are consciously involved, it will become blissful.

Today, we can scientifically prove that every subatomic particle in your body is in communication with the whole cosmos. You are trying to ignore such a big phenomenon that is the basis of your life and creation. You suffer because you ignore that, not because you are

## Getting the right perspective

Today, is it true that the sun came up on time for the season? Yes. The planet is spinning on time, the flowers are blossoming, everything in the innumerable galaxies in the cosmos is happening absolutely perfectly well – but you have one nasty thought crawling through your head and it is a bad day. The problem is you have lost perspective of who you are. You think too much of yourself.

Right now, your whole experience of life is limited to the physical form that you are. As a physical form, what are you in this cosmos? In your home you maybe something, on the street – not much, in the town – nothing. In the cosmos, you are not even a speck of dust. Please get the perspective right. As a physical existence, you are really nothing. If you understand this, you would look at everything with absolute wonder and involvement. Then, one little thought or emotion would not be important because it is not even a concern. It is something that you are creating. What is happening in your mind is your making. Can I tell you a bad joke?

A lady went to sleep. In her sleep, she had a dream. In her dream, she saw a hunk of man standing there staring at her. He started coming closer and closer. He came so close she could even feel his breath. She trembled, not in fear. And then she asked, "What will you do to me?" The man said, "Well lady, it's your dream."

What is happening in your head is your dream. Your problem is not that life is not happening the way you want it. Your dream is not happening the way you want it. This is your problem. At least let the dreams happen the way you want. If the world does not happen the way you want, that is different. If your dream happened the way you want, you would still be joyful.

*(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan in 2017 for exceptional and distinguished service)*

# Living in a dark world

**Dr Anjana Kannankara**

The world that we live in is fast changing where life is not relaxed anymore. Work pressure, stress, anxiety and mood swings have become a part of our life without intention. To deal with competition we have become mechanical, running after deadlines, projects and prestigious courses to ensure a secure future. People of all age groups are put through such circumstances where there is no escape from anxiety, stress or pressure in day to day life. And the after-effect is frightening - depression!

## What is clinical depression

We need to understand what depression as a disorder means. Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how one feels, the way one thinks and how one acts causing significant impairment in daily life. Depression drains one's energy, hope and drive, making it difficult to take the steps which will help him feel better. But while overcoming depression isn't quick or easy, it's not impossible. The key is to understand that you do have more control than you realise, even if your depression is severe and stubbornly persistent.

## Primary causes

The exact reasons as to what cause depression are still unknown. A number of aspects are often linked to its development. Depression usually results from a combination of recent events and other longer-term or personal factors, rather than one immediate issue or event that might act as a trigger.

It is said that the imbalance of brain chemicals like serotonin and dopamine could play a vital role in causing this condition. We have seen that genetic factors are important in many cases of depression. Depression seems to run in families (as do other mood disorders), and about 30 per cent of the predisposition for depression is due to genetic influences.

Stressful or unpleasant life events play a part in the onset or relapse of depression. Vulnerable people or people with weak willpower are more prone to be affected.

Another possible cause of depression that should not be overlooked is physical illness or medications. Glandular fever, influenza, hepatitis, thyroid hormones, anaemia, diabetes, birth control pills,

alcohol and other substances of abuse, or other medications such as those for heart or blood pressure conditions, may all cause symptoms of depression.

## How to deal with it

The first and foremost step is the acceptance of the condition that can harm your life. It is not a fault, depression is an illness just like any other disease for which treatment and recovery are possible if timely help is taken. To be reasonable with the person who is going through depression and not compare his performance before being depressed and after is an important point. The person deserves to be appreciated for mustering the courage to do even small things each day. It is like learning to walk after a serious accident. What needs to be understood is that it is just a passing phase and life can offer many beautiful things even while you feel depressed as well as later.

Dealing with depression requires action but taking action when you're depressed can be really hard. Sometimes, even thinking about the things you should do to feel better, like exercising or spending time with friends, can seem exhausting or impossible to put into action.

Of course taking the first step is always the hardest. What can help the most are the things which are most difficult to do, but it is not impossible. You may not have much energy but by drawing on all your reserves, you will surely have enough to listen to a good song, take a stroll in the garden or have a nice chat with your friend or parent. By taking small but positive steps each day, you'll soon lift the heavy fog of depression and find yourself feeling happier, healthier and more hopeful again.

## For parents to know

Depression is very common today. One in three persons will experience a major depressive episode at some stage in his or her life. While most cases of depression are mild, about one person in 10 will have a moderate or severe episode.

The thumb rule is to be with the child throughout with unconditional support – nothing, not your job or financial situation, matters more than your child's life! Patience and understanding from parents and family are most required for the individual to get out of the condition. Blaming or ignoring the person would turn out to be cruel in their depressed state where they find themselves inefficient to even go through daily routine. Family support is detrimental since for them each day is a struggle for survival.

## For students' knowledge

Strengthen your will power which cannot be broken down at any cost. A person's personality and characteristics are an important factor. When people are depressed, they have a very negative view of themselves and the world. They do not appreciate good things and bad things seem overwhelming.

Internet is not a doctor. The access to internet provides too many incorrect and unwanted knowledge to children leading them to believe they have depression and start behaving in that manner unknowingly, which makes it tough even to extend help.

Never blame yourself, just look around to see how your family loves you. Accept that you require help, communicate to your dear ones and cooperate sincerely to move towards the path of recovery. Any delay in getting help will only deprive you and your loved ones from enjoying some valuable truly happy times with each other.

Life is too precious to waste. No one leads a perfect life. But the determination to overcome the obstacles and struggles is what makes the difference. To embrace life as a fighter is way better than succumbing to trivial matters.

Think positively. While unpleasant thoughts keep tormenting the mind, one can try to see the same events through a different positive perspective. Problem solving, where you think about how you can find peace in a situation can also be tried. Being engaged in physical activities can be of major

help though you feel lethargic. Make sure that you do not isolate yourself from your dear ones though you may not want to interact while depressed.

## Treatment and recovery

One of the major issues that we face today is that of the professionals having very less time to dedicate to each patient. Medicines are often prescribed in a hurry many a time without evaluating the pros and cons of a particular case carefully.

It is advisable to identify the first signs of depression and provide support required right from the initial stages. Psychological counselling could also be taken during mild to moderate stages. There are many therapies like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or Interpersonal therapy which might be helpful in some cases. The mental state of the person requires to be assessed in order to determine whether medicines need to be administered. If so, a consultation with psychiatrist would be essential. But it is important to find the right kind of medical professional and the right kind of treatment that works for you for fast recovery. Each person is different and the same style of treatment might not work for all. Dedicated support, affection, care and understanding are crucial for patients during this stage.

## Alternate aids

It is said chocolate can boost the mood of depressed people though it is not scientifically proven. Fragrances of lavender, chamomile are also said to create pleasant feeling. Natural herbs like ashwagandha, bhahmi, jadamanchi help in overall wellness if taken under supervision. Meditation, positive energy manifestation are also likely to boost the self confidence of the person by driving away negative thoughts. Music therapy by listening to certain frequencies of sounds have also been found effective in some in relieving the pain of past events.

*(The author is Director, TGL Foundation)*

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 24, 2019

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart denotes positive developments. Professionals and business persons will do very well as good opportunities will keep coming in their path. Solution of complex problems will be found as you make the most of the synergy and cooperation available to you. With the financial gains that are foretold, most of you will be able to establish themselves financially. Benefits can be derived out of a sale and or purchase deal especially in property. Long distance travel can materialize.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced by the planetary combination. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this period. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. Reliability and creativity will take you places now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You are outgoing and your initiative is stronger than ever. You would brilliantly and effectively handle difficult projects at work. Business associates bring good news and lucrative terms and opportunities.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

Friendship, love, romance and children are highlighted. You would have new attitudes towards family, finance, and social relationships. Home and family matters capture your attention and are a strong source of pride. It is a time when worldly matters are not as important to you. Use this energy to find ways to improve your interpersonal relations and your home and work environment. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and for joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. Your family would be more supportive. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

With communication, creativity and judgment you gain money and influence in business ventures. Success brings status and respect as you dominate the professional scene. This is the right time to participate in community events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. This phase brings rewards and recognition in your professional life. You would also work hard with an inclination towards more detailed work, and it can get to you at times. Personal projects are on an upswing. You are in a position to inspire others through what you create. Income from foreign sources could also figure this time. You feel on top of things and replete with good health and energy.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

A period of hard work and effort is in your forecast. You would be taking on new responsibilities and will enjoy the challenges. A new set-up in an existing home or a new home altogether may be part of the picture in the coming weeks. There will also be a sense of renewal and reinvigoration with regard to your domestic routines, comfort, and feeling of security. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of your need for a solid foundation—a place to return to when the rest of the world gets to you. Do not isolate yourself when you are feeling down. Friends and loved ones will support you and listen to you when you air your feelings.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

Practical matters come into strong focus and demand attention. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routine tend to speed up now. You are required to do a balancing act, and something big is in the pipeline. There may be some confusion about your dreams and ideas regarding your career. Give yourself time to digest everything before you make a move. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Increased energy for health routines and work is with you.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

There may be debates and discussions in family and you may face some opposition. You are likely to exert your energy and initiative into actively pursuing a rewarding love life, social amusement, and pleasure in general. You have

a likeable and competitive temperament. There is a stronger desire for creative endeavors, athletics and risk-taking pursuits. It might be hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner and a few conflicts are possible. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You have a stronger need than usual for intellectual stimulation.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

This phase brings good-luck for love and romance. Ego confrontations with family members are possible now, but the best way to handle this is to do your best to strengthen your relationship with your family and your home base. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself, so that regardless of what you meet in the outside world over the next weeks, you have a secure place to return to. Besides spending more time tending to domestic affairs, the focus can be on cultivating and nourishing your inner foundation that support you and your growth.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

Associates at work might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you status. You can improve your love life by bringing more understanding and sharing views with each other. You are more inclined to seek a broad understanding of people and of your immediate environment. Concentrating on listening, connecting, communicating, and learning is your best bet now. If health is affected, fevers or infections are more likely.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

This period brings new horizons in your romantic and love life. You explore and search, make new connections, and pay attention to your immediate environment. Give other people a little extra time and attention, notice their efforts on your behalf, and strengthen your connections. You are more curious and alert than usual, and you could be quite busy with work. Much energy is expended in understanding and adapting to your immediate environment. Siblings, neighbours, close relatives, friends, and co-workers may play a more important role than usual in your life. You are eager to investigate new things, whether scientific or technical.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

The planetary configuration promotes your luck in work related areas. You would be especially fond of home and family life. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental now. Loyalty and sensitivity in your relationships are more important to you. There would be a bright opportunity to travel, learning or the publishing of a project. Getting your finances on track will be necessary at this time. Do your best to avoid letting emotions rule over good judgment when it comes to expenses and other financial matters. Share your thoughts and feelings with others and you may be surprised at the support you receive from close friends and loved ones.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

Pay close attention to performance, it will be rewarded and continuity to perform work would be visible to senior colleagues and people in authority. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and can expect good returns from overseas business. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to yearn for a connection to more spiritual or idealistic pursuits. A sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself is something that is entering your life now. There may be a development of romance at your work place. You turn your attention on fitness and diet programs.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

There would be happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening of your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background. Your dreams and ideas about intimacy come into focus, but could also bring the flaws in this area of your life to light. An income boost is likely in this period. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of the physical world of the senses, and this is a time to start fresh in terms of how you arrange your life in order to feel a sense of value and worthiness. It is also a wonderful time for taking moments to please yourself through earthy, tactile, and comforting endeavors.

## SYMPTOMS

*There might be psychological as well as physical symptoms emerging as warning signs but a serious problem can be suspected only when more than five of them are exhibited consistently for a longer period of time.*

► Feeling miserable with varied intensity, despair, hopelessness

and lack of motivation

► Mood swings and social isolation

► Loss of interest or pleasure in activities that once used to be enjoyed

► Slow or inefficient thinking, poor concentration, memory problems leading to difficulties sorting out problems or making plans or decisions

► Recurring unpleasant thoughts, particularly about being guilty, a bad and unworthy person

► Hatred, stubbornness, hypersensitivity or insensitivity, aggressiveness, increased anger and frustration

► Suicidal ideation or thoughts that you would be better off dead or harming yourself in some way

► Loss of appetite or overeating, gaining or losing weight, insomnia or oversleeping

Photo: Pixels

# Options in tax in big cities

By Ranjan K Baruah

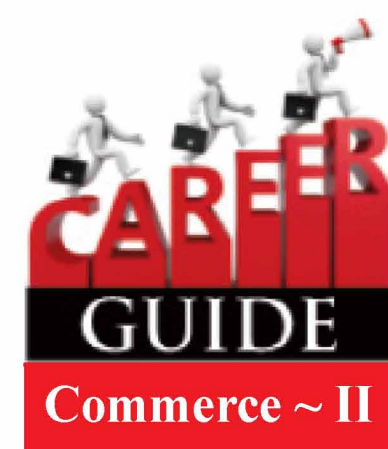
In our last edition, we published about few options in commerce stream. In this edition, we shall publish more options. One of the best options for commerce graduates is to join financial institutions like banks and insurance sectors.

In India or in any other countries, there are laws related to tax or trades which are very important. Paying tax in India is important for individuals as well as business houses and this brings more opportunity for commerce graduates as they are well taught on maintaining accounts for small or big business houses apart from maintaining individual's income tax file. Few more options after studying commerce are as follows:

**Accountant:** An accountant is a practitioner of accounting or accountancy, which is the measurement, disclosure or provision of assurance about financial information that helps managers, investors, tax authorities and others make decisions about allocating resources. Roles are different depending on income or investments. One may work individually or under any firm or group. Apart from commerce knowledge it is advisable to have technological skills to be successful as accountant. All government departments have accounts sections and separate department too.

**Tax Auditor:** A tax auditor is a professional who evaluates financial records to determine whether they comply with the applicable laws. All tax auditors apply the principles of ac-

counting in the course of their duty. They work to check if companies, individuals, agencies and organisations comply with the federal, state and local tax laws. This may be for small business houses or big corporate or even individuals. Tax auditors can either be internal, external or government auditors. Audit is done in all government departments apart from private business houses.



**Tax Consultant/Tax Advisor:** A tax advisor or tax consultant is a person with advanced training and knowledge of tax law. The services of a tax advisor are usually retained to minimise taxation while remaining compliant with the law in complicated financial situations. Tax advisors are also retained to represent clients before tax authorities and tax courts to resolve tax issues. In a country like India, there is a big demand for tax

consultant as there are many rules and regulations related to trade and commerce.

**Financial Analyst:** A financial analyst is a person who performs financial analysis for external or internal financial clients as a core part of the job. Financial analysts are often employed by mutual and pension funds, hedge funds, securities firms, banks, investment banks, insurance companies and other businesses, helping these companies or their clients make investment decisions. Financial analysts employed in commercial lending perform balance sheet analysis, examining the audited financial statements and corollary data in order to assess lending risks. We don't see more options in our region as trade and commerce yet to boom up in this region but the importance of financial analyst can be seen in metros and also in some other places. Aspirants may become financial analysts and also work for individual or small business houses by being anywhere in the country as many things are done online these days.

Though there are many options but students must focus on employability skills and prepare them as early as possible. Employability skills and required extra skills or life skill, one may excel by studying commerce stream.

*(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer, academic consultant and strategic planner and can be reached at [bkranjan@gmail.com](mailto:bkranjan@gmail.com) or 8473943734 for any career related queries)*

“Consciousness is only possible through change; change is only possible through movement.”

--- Aldous Huxley

## The Shillong Times

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### Lok Sabha Election 2019

THE battle lines are now drawn. The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) which is presently running the government in the state and is a coalition comprising the National People's Party (NPP), the United Democratic Party (UDP), the Hills States People's Democratic Party (HSPDP), the Peoples' Democratic Front (PDF) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has completely devalued the meaning of a coalition. The NPP has set up its candidate in Tura; so has the BJP. In Shillong the MDA was supposed to set up a consensus candidate but now the BJP has put up its own man. The BJP has also put up a candidate in Tura. Understandably, the BJP does not want to undermine its status as a national party and support a consensus candidate. Its commitment to the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) is therefore tenuous. In this situation, the Congress party might just win both seats because of the fragmentation of votes. Much will depend on whether the NPP in the 36 constituencies of Shillong would give its unstinted support to Dr Jemino Mawthoh, who interestingly is identified as the UDP candidate and not the consensus candidate of the MDA.

Agatha Sangma the NPP candidate for the Tura seat has been its MP and minister from 2009-2014. However, her performance in Parliament was dismal. Her attendance in Parliament was as low as 49%. She never raised a single Private Members' Bill, never took part in Parliamentary Debates and never raised any questions in Parliament. Her opponent this time is senior Congressman and former chief minister, Dr Mukul Sangma a veteran politician in his own right, articulate and experienced and more likely to take up issues in Parliament that are of consequence for the state of Meghalaya.

As far as the BJP is concerned it looks unlikely to win any of the two seats. While the party has put up Sanbor Shullai, currently the MLA of Shillong South Constituency, as its candidate for the Shillong seat, the Tura BJP candidate Rikman Marak is a businessman. Interestingly, the Meghalaya BJP which had at earlier decided not to put up a candidate for Tura and even told its party cadres to vote any other candidate barring the Congress, did an about turn on Sunday and nominated Marak.

Party President Shibun Lyngdoh who had contested the Shillong Lok Sabha seat in 2014 has developed cold feet this time. In fact, the BJP here seems unsure of its actions. This is reflected from the last minute decision to field two unsuspecting candidates for the Tura and Shillong seats.

Phew, after 50 long years and innumerable hiccups the long pending Lokpal became reality last week. The first baby steps towards cleaning up the political cesspool, belling the big fat cat of corruption and creating a structure of transparency. All have their fingers crossed as the taste of the pudding would lie in how effective it is at the ground work level. At best a work in progress.

Undeniably, the appointment reeks of an insincere gesture at worst and lackadaisical at best as the Modi Sarkar was pushed into a corner by the Supreme Court and left with no option but to convene the selection committee comprising Prime Minister Modi, Chief Justice of India Gogoi, Lok Sabha Speaker, and ex-Attorney General Rohatagi which anointed former Supreme Court Justice PC Ghose India's first Lokpal alongside one High Court Chief Justice and three ex-Chief Justices as judicial members in the anti-corruption ombudsman. Four vacancies comprising ST/SC, OBC, minorities and women are still vacant. That too, five years after the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act were passed.

Predictably, it triggered a political controversy as Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge, a "special invite" to the Lokpal selection panel, boycotted all meetings. Taking a pot shot at the BJP, the Congress fired its first salvo seeking the Lokpal investigate a media report alleging Rs 1800 crores bribes being paid by former Karnataka Chief Minister Yeddyurappa to BJP's top brass. Reportedly this was mentioned in a diary seized during raids by the Income Tax Department.

Questionably, are we better off with a Lokpal? Will it help put an end to the creeping systemic rot, pervasive corruption and misgovernance in political and administrative spheres? How does one expect the LokPal to work independently when it is dependent on the jaded CBI?

Clearly, there are no answers to these questions. It would be presumptuous

### Lokpal, finally!

# Battle for clean politics

By Poonam I Kaushish

to assume that a piece of paper will sound the death-knell of the corrupt. Given that every law has a loophole, each argument a counter viewpoint whereby one can't comply with 100% of laws without violating at least 10% of them! And just as all fingers are not the same, one cannot tar all men with the same corrupt brush.

Think. The Lokpal would be dependent on agencies like the CBI which is synonymous with being a "caged parrot" of Governments, hand maiden of our netagan and dances to their tune wherein its fatal attraction for political cover-ups, clean chits, hit-ins and fool proof surety for law enforcers to become law breakers. Till date it is directly under the Prime Minister. Worse, the drama played out recently between the agency's No 1 and No 2 fighting it out leading to ugly consequences has led to a steep fall of the institution's prestige in people eyes.

Another serious drawback is that the ombudsman would have to rely on State authorities for investigation. Given the departmental bhaichara between the investigating officer and the accused impartiality would be the first casualty. It has no power to suggest action for remedy. It is for the competent authority to decide what sort of action is to be taken or not taken against the report.

Certainly, the Lokpal's institution has met with mixed reactions. Not a few feel the ombudsman would be a powerful entity to check malpractices by ex-Prime Ministers, Ministers, MPs, bureaucrats etc with powers to use any central agency ranging from CBI, Intelligence Bureau to Enforcement Directorate and refer cases to special courts. The anti-corruption ombudsman could also requisition services of any agency in an investigation once it concluded that a complaint was valid and needed a thorough probe along-with sanctioning prosecution against public servants.

Others criticize it on several counts: One, it is

adding another institution without fixing the jaded ones like CBI, ED and IT and would not solve problems caused by too many layers of Government bureaucracy, instead it would worsen it. Two, it could short circuit Constitutional checks and balances. Three, paralyze the Executive's effective functioning which could be gripped by fear.

Four, honest civil servants would play safe and not take decisions. If at all they must, they would take the safest decision possible. Five, it could result in higher bribes as bureaucrats would see the Lokpal as an additional risk. Six, if the ombudsman gets full power, the first bomb would fall on our leaders. Why would they even make a mistake that can finish them?

Pertinently, the Lokpal would not obviate the vital reason for the CBI being supplicant to its mai baaps, as its outgoing CBI director's desiring future employment could influence and compromise his independence and the agency's while conducting an investigation.

An example: Even as the Lokpal would have a say in the transfer of officers investigating a complaint, it is also in the realm of possibility that the Government could ensure that a "pliant" official is earmarked to the ombudsman for investigations in sensitive corruption issues involving politicians and bureaucrats. Specially against the backdrop that there are over 1,300 cases pending against MPs and MLAs in various courts.

Additionally, we lack adequate resources for investigations and extensive technical capabilities, don't have unambiguous laws and active courts to deliver quick and strict verdicts on corruption, there is no system to properly measure ghooskhori and courts are not equipped with laws that allow them to deal with complex cases of huge and petty corruption.

Only time will tell whether the Lokpal would end sleazy, yet, it does not stop the Government from

making the institution a top-class outfit whereby it flushes out the political cesspit. Side by side the next Government must set in motion long pending judicial reforms. The judicial process must be overhauled post haste to deliver a final verdict in months, not decades as happens currently. Already over 3 crores cases are pending in various courts.

Two, the Supreme Court needs to streamline the functioning of the lower judiciary. Three, we need to bring into force the much-debated electoral reforms. As long as political parties continue to collect and spend funds in an unaccountable fashion, corruption in other walks of life in India will continue.

Parties collecting and disbursing money thus enable politicians to be corrupt, which, in turn, suborns the bureaucracy and governance. Sadly, as India goes to polls there is no mechanism in place to make Government functioning and political Parties funding transparent and accountable.

In sum with 'chowkidar' being the flavour of the season it remains to be seen how the ombudsman shapes out vis-à-vis it's functioning. Corruption has spread its tentacles so deep and wide that sharks are capable of undermining and denting the system to hold sway. After all, the Lokpal is no magic wand or messiah to erase the festering sleazy sores. It can only be stymied if there is political will. A tough act given our antiquated laws, weak vigilance and judicial system.

In a milieu where the nautanki of corruption has become an absurd annual feature, the time has come for our leaders to wake up from their deep slumber of self conceit and deception. Above all, we need politicians who are men of conscience, integrity and credibility. Not comrades in crime. Else the aam aadmi and history will never forgive them. Political accountability is paramount. The battle for clean politics is on. Ready to join? --- INFA.

### New electronics policy

# Boost to reduce import bill

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The march of technology is taking a new turn. With focus now concentrated on electronics, the demand for which has been increasing rapidly in most countries, India is no exception. In tune with oil and gas, a country has to develop its own resources and or manufacturing to bring down its imports.

Keeping this in view, the Modi government recently announced National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE2019), which aims to make the country an electronic manufacturing hub by promoting production of strategic electronics items such as artificial intelligence and defence electronics. Obviously, this would boost exports and a target of \$400 billion turnover has been fixed by 2025 through cheaper loan financing rates for loans up to Rs 1000 crore as well as easier credit access to companies.

The policy seeks not only to overcome the shortcoming of previous 2012 policy on electronics but due to the advent of 5G, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, India needed a vision document on how to use these digital tools for the growth and development of the country and their applications in areas such as agriculture, defence, health, smart cities and automation.

Today, the domestic electronics hardware manufacturing industry faces several disability factors which makes indigenous manufacturing uncompetitive, the reasons being high cost of power, finance and freight, inadequate infrastructure, lack of supply chain, high transaction cost inverted tariff structure.

Demand of electronic hardware has increased significantly but the value addition continues to be low in the absence of a robust components manufacturing ecosystem in the country. India has entered into Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with Thailand, ASEAN, Korea, Japan, etc., wherein import of electronic hardware from these countries is at preferential duty, lower than normal tariff rate which makes Indian product uncompetitive.

The strong domestic electronics manufacturing industry demand for a forward looking framework necessitated the new policy. It further proposes to boost mobile manufacturing in the country to 1 billion units, worth \$190 billion (around Rs 13 lakh crore) of which 600 million units, worth \$110 billion (around Rs 7 lakh crore) is expected to be exported from the country. Value addition in manufacturing would also be given a thrust in the country so as to become a global sourcing hub. The policy proposes help setting up cluster for the entire value chain and employing over 1 crore people directly or otherwise to achieve a growth rate of 32 per cent.

One can expect that now the Centre's efforts to promote local manufacturing through the 'Make in India' programme may reap dividends with domestic production of electronics, moving ahead of imports, which was achieved for the first time way back in 2016-17. At that time, the government had taken a number of steps to boost manufacturing of electronics, particularly of smart phones, appliances, set-top boxes and televisions. A majority of imports in many of these areas come from China, something India is now trying to counter through fiscal incentives and other measures.

In the past three years, there has been growth in local manufacturing as imports are moderating. The

government plans to give a massive push to digital activities and achieve turnover of \$1 trillion by 2022. Manufacturing of electronics is seen as a major contributor towards meeting the import-export gap. The policy initiatives of the Modi government have resulted in accelerating local manufacturing in electronics. Meanwhile, the demand is expected to be between \$171 billion and \$228 billion by 2020, almost double than \$86.4 billion in 2016-17.

However, it needs to be pointed out that though there are immense demands for electronic goods such as mobiles, laptops, pen drives etc., all these are sourced from China and South Korea. Considering the rapid growth of the internal market, it is necessary that, to start with, foreign companies that cater to the domestic market should be forced to open assembling units in the country. This should be a pre-condition for selling their wares in the internal market.

The application of electronics in various areas has immense possibilities to stand competition in the global market. Moreover, internal manufacturing could be geared up for better efficiency and increased productivity. One may refer here to the newly manufactured Train 18 where induction of new digital technology has made it a semi-high speed train, matching global standards. Such applications of electronics would have to be encouraged in a big way to every nook and corner of the country.

As is well known, electronics industry is the world's largest and fastest growing industry and is increasingly finding applications in all sectors of the economy. Everywhere electronics is recognised as a meta-resource. The new policy has reiterated the high priority being attached to this sector, not just in hardware manufacturing but being an important pillar of both 'Make in India' and 'Digital India' programmes of the government. The Electronics System Design and Manufacturing, a programme of Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology Industry is of strategic importance as well. India is a signatory to the Information Technology Agreement (ITA-1) of WTO and FTAs with various countries/ trading blocs such as ASEAN, Korea and Japan. However, it has to be understood that the electronics hardware manufacturing sector faces lack of level playing field vis-à-vis competing nations on account of several disabilities.

In the coming years, with India's emphasis on sophisticated areas such as space technology, marine sciences, medical electronics, artificial intelligence, automotive electronics, industrial electronics etc, the growth of electronics is imperative. The Policy should be an action plan to initiate research and development in these and related areas and ensure that innovations and opportunities are made available. It is expected that over the years the import bill on electronics would steadily come down.

There is no dearth of scientists and electronic engineers in the country having high skills and these have to be geared in the right direction. Moreover, with hiring costs much lower this should be an added advantage. There is no reason why India cannot be a leading player in the field of electronics, even if it is behind China or South Korea. ---INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

## CAB must be defeated electorally

Editor,

Election is less than three weeks away. Being the Lok Sabha election, we expect that the candidates should dwell on important issues that the country and North East in particular are facing right now. Unemployment which has been a problem for quite a long time, has in few years hit the all time high. Solution to this problem is not easy. It requires that whoever comes to power should tackle this issue with seriousness and responsibility. Some suggestions from the public could be welcomed, but right now this is not the time and space to do so before election. Farmer's distress can also be handled in a new way. Farmers should be informed of the various subsidies and aids which are their due. It is unfortunate that farmers in other states are not treated in the way they should have been treated. Irrigation which is the backbone of agriculture is scanty and the minimum support price is never honoured.

The new government in power should take care of these problems. The most important issue as far as the North East is concerned is the

Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB). The futility of our protests all over North East in the face of a strong resolute mind to go ahead with the Bill by hook or by crook is a matter of grave concern. Being in despair, I contacted some friends who informed that the CAB would not stand judicial scrutiny. The proposed amendment compounded with the fact that permanent citizenship would require only five years instead of twelve years, would mount more and more arguments against the wish of the centre. The second most important one is that citizenship should never be lined to religion. Another very important fact is that even if the Central Government could prove to the outside world of so called persecutions in these three countries, the onus lies entirely with the International body on human rights. Be that as it may, though the law may be with us, the need of the hour is to defeat the CAB by electoral means. Democracy planted by our past leaders and justifiably supported by the Constitution is not going to fail us. Let us be wise and judicious when we proceed to polling booths.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request

## World peace imperative

Editor,

Peace is the mother of progress. Today people all over the world crave for peace. The leaders and politicians of the world are trying to achieve world peace. But many difficulties come in the way. There is fear and suspicion among nations. Russia suspects the motives of America. America likewise does not trust Russia. Pakistan says that it is afraid of India. It is said that the voice of the people is the voice of God. Nowhere in the world do people want war. They are fed up with it. The desire for peace is supreme in their hearts. Powerful countries should give up the race of arming themselves and their friendly countries to the teeth. Peace and prosperity can be attained through the realization of five basic fundamental freedoms, for all people, everywhere in the world. They are: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, freedom for the environment, and freedom from fear. Without peace a nation cannot make any progress. So peace is ever desirable. World-peace is absolutely necessary. The public opinion of the world

is in favour of lasting peace. It is said "Peace begins with a smile." A smile can light up a room, so imagine what a world of smiles can do. If every day, someone does something kind for another it will create a ripple effect.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit  
Ahmedabad

## Forgiveness amidst tragedy

Editor,

He and his wife ~ the two heroes of this story ~ had emigrated from Bangladesh to New Zealand in 1990. But a tragic incident happened. He was hit by a drunk driver in 1998. He was 39 at that time. And he has been confined to a wheelchair since then. His name is Farid Ahmad and hers is Husna Ahmad. The third character in this story will not be referred to by name but only as a gunman. As the Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern said about him ~ "He is a terrorist. He is a criminal. He is an extremist. But he will, when I speak, be nameless.... He may have sought notoriety, but we in New Zealand will give him nothing. Not even his name."

Husna and Farid went to

Al Noor mosque at Christchurch in New Zealand on March 15 of this year to take part, as it were, in a real drama of bravery amidst cowardice and forgiveness amidst hatred. They were to show to the world what bravery and forgiveness were all about. The first act of the drama began. It was a fight between a dangerous, brutal armed man who was as coward as to kill innocent, unarmed people one after another and Husna, a simple, unarmed woman who was as brave as to give her life in order to save as many people as she could. She saved many but she could not save herself.

Later Farid Ahmad recalled ~ "She was screaming 'come this way, hurry up', and she took many children and ladies towards a safe garden." "Then she was coming back to enquire about me, because I was in a wheelchair, and she was approaching the gate when she was shot. She was busy saving lives, forgetting about herself," said Farid about his wife Husna. The first act of the drama ended after Husna had been murdered. After the interval, the second half of the drama began amidst bloodied dead bodies and fatal bloodletting wounds. Here the story was to narrate how forgiveness could

come out amidst the nastiest hatred.

Now, let us listen to what Farid Ahmad has to say about the gunman who killed his 44-year-old wife, Husna Ahmad and another 49 people. "I could not accept what he did. What he did was a wrong thing," said Farid. On being asked if he could forgive the 28-year-old white supremacist suspect, he said: "Of course. The best thing is forgiveness, generosity, loving and caring, positivity."

He said that if he were to sit down with the suspected mass murderer then he would encourage him to rethink his outlook on life. "I will tell him that inside him he has great potential to be a generous person, to be a kind person, to be a person who would save people, save humanity rather than destroy them," he said. "I want him to look for that positive attitude in him, and I hope and I pray for him that he would be a great civilian one day. I don't have any grudge." With these words of Farid, the curtain came down. But instead of the usual "The End", the words "The Journey is on" were to emerge on the curtain!

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Viemail

“The reason I talk to myself is because I’m the only one whose answers I accept.”

--- George Carlin

## The Shillong Times

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### Meghalaya a lawless state

JUSTICE BP Katoki heading the NGT panel made an interesting remark. He said that the State Government was unable to give details of the death of four coal miners in East Jaintia Hills on March 11 last when the truck in which they were travelling overturned. The DC, East Jaintia Hills apparently gave vague and unsatisfactory answers about the incident; he claimed he did not know who the mine owner was whose mine was being worked and from where the coal was lifted. The Deputy Commissioner has therefore completely failed to carry out his primary duty of maintaining law and order in the district. The Chief Secretary should have taken action against this dereliction of duty of an important functionary of the district. Since December 13, 2018 when the mining accident at the Ksan mine happened, the DC has been amiss in his duties as the person supervising the rescue mission. The administration has only worked after it is directed by the Supreme Court to carry out certain actions.

The District Magistrate heads the police and prosecuting agency. How is it possible that the police do not know about illegal mining when coal trucks pass through their jurisdictions day in and day out? Is it not true that the police too are complicit in this illegal trade? Is the Government and in this case the Home Minister not in the know of illegal mining and transportation of coal? Who will question the Government and hold it accountable? If the Supreme Court has repeatedly directed that coal mining and transportation should be stopped until the NGT lifts the ban and the state government turns a blind eye to this illegal business, then is that not a blatant contempt of the apex court's' order? The NGT panel has clearly laid out the rules under the Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Act 2016, whereby the Deputy Commissioners can file cases against any violation of the Act and assets such as vehicles and machinery can be confiscated. Section 188 of the Act prescribes simple imprisonment that could extend to a period of one month. So far 2155 persons have been arrested and 1316 cases of NGFT violations have been reported but what happens thereafter? Who follows up on these cases? They must simply be eyewash. At present the illegal nature of the trade is so insidious that reporting it is fraught with danger. A perfidious coalition of unscrupulous mine owners rule the roost in the coal mine rich areas. Meghalaya now stands out as a State where law and order does not prevail.

It was obvious for quite some time that the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), 2016 would become an election issue for the ensuing Lok Sabha polls. Now that it is so, political parties are taking a public stand on the matter. In general, apart from the BJP (which is still clamoring over the bill and trying hard to justify its validity); the other parties have taken an opposing stand on it (with the Congress even stating that it will scrap it altogether once it comes to power). Be that as it may, the degree and intensity at which it is referred to these days across the political spectrum is a clear indication that we have not seen the last of CAB as yet. In fact, for now it is behaving like a 'jack in the box' waiting to pop up at the opportune/inopportune time. For all we know, he recent lapsing of CAB at the Parliament has positioned the BJP in an even stronger position (across sections of the Hindu, Sikh and Christian electorate) come the term of the 17th Lok Sabha. As such and in the context of Meghalaya in particular, the shadow of CAB remains and it is waiting to raise its ugly head in due course of time. Accordingly, I place the following pointers -

Firstly, let us paint a CAB oriented picture. It is being projected as some scary phenomena by the pressure groups, NGOs and opposing political parties; apparently, it is so. As such, the people are getting into a mob mentality. It seems that the voice which is the 'loudest' is the correct one and the opinionated views follow suit. However, what exactly are the demographics of it? What are the numbers in question? Unless we counter on these facts, the entire debate on CAB is incomplete. In fact, it will be even better if we can have a break-up of the possible demographic impact nationally, region-wise (say, North-East Region) and state-specific (say, Meghalaya). Once we have these, we can have an informed discourse on CAB and subsequently say 'No' to it with conviction; and

# The Shadow of CAB Remains

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

indeed if it is a 'No', it will put the entire issue to rest for good. Interestingly, no one seems to have 'valid and reliable' demographical numbers on the issue (not even the ruling NDA). The only meaningful figures we have are rough estimates of around 1.4 crore people from Bangladesh who are deemed to benefit from it. Moreover, it is only the Government of Assam which has officially and categorically stated that the 'number of people to be considered for citizenship under CAB is 8 lakh' (Interview of Himanta Biswa Sarma [Assam's Finance Minister] to The Economic Times, dated 15th January, 2019). However, it must be noted that this is an 'immediate impact' only in terms of people already residing in India. What will be the 'gradual impact' is a very different and much more difficult matter altogether. Hence, the entire anti CAB conceptualization for now is purely theoretical. On hindsight, maybe the CAB issue was conveniently used by the NPP, UDP and others in the MDA government to project their anti-BJP face in line with the decline in the popularity of the NDA at the centre (during the pre Balakot [Pakistan] surgical strike phase). Food for thought!

Secondly, as per 2011 census, the population of Meghalaya is 29.67 lakhs. Our population is indeed very small. Picture this, even with this population we are stressed all ends up; be it with the provision of elementary to higher education, proper shelter and housing concerns, poor health provision and facilities, our civic amenities are stretched to the hilt, combined with the problems of youth distress culminating into challenges of drugs and alcohol amongst others. Most importantly, let us not forget the challenges to employment and employability. We have a plate full of exponentially multiplying problems.

Point being, our state is struggling even without the ratification of CAB. As such, one might appropriately presume 'that any more chunks of people coming into our state are bound to spell more doom and gloom'. Interestingly and viewing things from a different perspective, more than the fear/concerns of other people coming in and stealing our jobs and lands and livelihoods; if anything, CAB has highlighted again how 'under developed' and 'impoverished' we are as a state. In the current state of affairs, we cannot contemplate even taking in another (hypothetically) 1.5 lakh people. However, think of a 'utopian situation'; that being, if we are self-sufficient and strong (socio-economically) as a state, then this CAB issue may not be such a big deal after all.

Thirdly, CAB is basically a religion/faith-oriented communal issue that has taken an ugly turn as being a political dividend for the BJP. For months together, people and all interested parties have been debating and discussing on the economic, social and cultural aspects of the case. However, the hidden/ulterior motive is simply something else. It reads, 'get the Hindus in (along with the baggage of Sikh, Christians, Buddhist and others) so as to ensure political gains.' This is in line with the 2014 Lok Sabha election promise of the BJP to grant citizenship to Hindus persecuted in the neighbouring countries. Be that as it may, what is more intriguing is our response as a Christian-majority state to this narrative. As such, in one discourse with a pious personality; he said, 'PM Modi has stood up and tried to do things for his religion through CAB, but what have we done as Christians for our own persecuted people?' It must be noted here that we have a sizeable chunk of our very own Khasi-Pnar people settled in Bangladesh (around 85,000 as per Wikipedia) and facing degrees of persecution.

What about them? Are they not our people? The Khasi community has had histories of communalism; but, can we be communal towards our own blood of a foreign land? Well, one might argue that the cost (Hindus coming in) far outweighs the benefits, (taking in Christians)!

Fourthly, 23rd May, 2019 may yet be an indication of where this CAB issue might head. Going by the discourses on national television it seems more likely that the NDA would come back to power. This is more on the grounds that the opposition is struggling to present a united front against the BJP. If that be the case, then the shadow of CAB will dawn upon us into a real struggle once again. The NDA will not let go of it so easily. This is evident from the statements of Amit Shah on the wake of non-tabling of the CAB in the Rajya Sabha. As such, the non-tabling now looks more like a well formulated strategy to be implemented gradually rather than an acceptance of defeat. Hence, politically these are uncertain days. More importantly, in the trust of identity as a tribal/region in the greater idea called India (read Patricia Mukhim dated ST 15th February, 2019 'CAB: Challenges of belongingness, identity and citizenship'), these are history-defining days!

Lastly, whatever may be the outcome of the current Lok Sabha elections and thereby the actions of any coming government, a clear, cohesive and effective narrative on CAB is required (ILP/Entry-exit points are more of a 'response' only [definitely not an effective strategy]). This is the only way to effectively counter it. This is because bandh, road blockades, burning of effigies and so forth are only cosmetic and they do not achieve anything in the long-term. A solid countervailing argument is the need of the hour. As such, we have a month's time to prepare ourselves. Clearly, the last battle concerning CAB is yet to be fought!

(The author teaches at NEHU)

## New Electronics Policy Boost to reduce import bill

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The march of technology is taking a new turn. With focus now concentrated on electronics, the demand for which has been increasing rapidly in most countries, India is no exception. In tune with oil and gas, a country has to develop its own resources and or manufacturing to bring down its imports.

Keeping this in view, the Modi government recently announced National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE2019), which aims to make the country an electronic manufacturing hub by promoting production of strategic electronics items such as artificial intelligence and defence electronics. Obviously, this would boost exports and a target of \$400 billion turnover has been fixed by 2025 through cheaper loan financing rates for loans up to Rs 1000 crore as well as easier credit access to companies.

The policy seeks not only to overcome the shortcoming of previous 2012 policy on electronics but due to the advent of 5G, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, India needed a vision document on how to use these digital tools for the growth and development of the country and their applications in areas such as agriculture, defence, health, smart cities and automation.

Today, the domestic electronics hardware manufacturing industry faces several disability factors which makes indigenous manufacturing uncompetitive, the reasons being high cost of power, finance and freight, inadequate infrastructure, lack of supply chain, high transaction cost inverted tariff structure.

Demand of electronic hardware has increased significantly but the value addition continues to be low in the absence of a robust components manufacturing ecosystem in the country. India has entered into Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with Thailand, ASEAN, Korea, Japan, etc., wherein import of electronic hardware from these countries is at preferential duty, lower than normal tariff rate which makes Indian product uncompetitive.

The strong domestic electronics manufacturing industry demand for a forward looking framework necessitated the new policy. It further proposes to boost mobile manufacturing in the country to 1 billion units, worth \$190 billion (around Rs 13 lakh crore) of which 600 million units, worth \$110 billion (around Rs 7 lakh crore) is expected to be exported from the country. Value addition in manufacturing would also be given a thrust in the country so as to become a global sourcing hub. The policy proposes help setting up cluster for the entire value chain and employing over 1 crore people directly or otherwise to achieve a growth rate of 32 per cent.

One can expect that now the Centre's efforts to promote local manufacturing through the 'Make in India' programme may reap dividends with domestic production of electronics, moving ahead of imports, which was achieved for the first time way back in 2016-17. At that time, the government had taken a number of steps to boost manufacturing of electronics, particularly of smart phones, appliances, set-top boxes and televisions. A majority of imports in many of these areas come from China, something India is now trying to counter through fiscal incentives and other measures.

In the past three years, there has been growth in

local manufacturing as imports are moderating. The government plans to give a massive push to digital activities and achieve turnover of \$1 trillion by 2022. Manufacturing of electronics is seen as a major contributor towards meeting the import-export gap. The policy initiatives of the Modi government have resulted in accelerating local manufacturing in electronics. Meanwhile, the demand is expected to be between \$171 billion and \$228 billion by 2020, almost double than \$86.4 billion in 2016-17.

However, it needs to be pointed out that though there is immense demands for electronic goods such as mobiles, laptops, pen drives etc., all these are sourced from China and South Korea. Considering the rapid growth of the internal market, it is necessary that, to start with, foreign companies that cater to the domestic market should be forced to open assembling units in the country. This should be a pre-condition for selling their wares in the internal market.

The application of electronics in various areas has immense possibilities to stand competition in the global market. Moreover, internal manufacturing could be geared up for better efficiency and increased productivity. One may refer here to the newly manufactured Train 18 where induction of new digital technology has made it a semi-high speed train, matching global standards. Such applications of electronics would have to be encouraged in a big way to every nook and corner of the country.

As is well known, electronics industry is the world's largest and fastest growing industry and is increasingly finding applications in all sectors of the economy. Everywhere electronics is recognised as a meta-resource. The new policy has reiterated the high priority being attached to this sector, not just in hardware manufacturing but being an important pillar of both 'Make in India' and 'Digital India' programmes of the government. The Electronics System Design and Manufacturing, a programme of Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology Industry is of strategic importance as well. India is a signatory to the Information Technology Agreement (ITA-1) of WTO and FTAs with various countries/ trading blocs such as ASEAN, Korea and Japan. However, it has to be understood that the electronics hardware manufacturing sector faces lack of level playing field vis-à-vis competing nations on account of several disabilities.

In the coming years, with India's emphasis on sophisticated areas such as space technology, marine sciences, medical electronics, artificial intelligence, automotive electronics, industrial electronics etc, the growth of electronics is imperative. The Policy should be an action plan to initiate research and development in these and related areas and ensure that innovations and opportunities are made available. It is expected that over the years the import bill on electronics would steadily come down.

There is no dearth of scientists and electronic engineers in the country having high skills and these have to be geared in the right direction. Moreover, with hiring costs much lower this should be an added advantage. There is no reason why India cannot be a leading player in the field of electronics, even if it is behind China or South Korea and the United States.---INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Congress' NYAY scheme

Editor,  
The NYAY scheme or Minimum Income Guarantee Scheme of Rs 72,000 per poor family per year announced by Congress President, Rahul Gandhi, on the eve of the current Lok Sabha elections will definitely help the poor families of the country to some extent if it actually comes to fruition. But since it is part of the election manifesto people definitely have doubts and questions in their minds with regard to the intent of this scheme. Will the Congress storm to power in India on May 23 this year and from where will the party get the magic figure of 272 seats given the present political scenario in India? It is very unlikely. So what will be the fate of the scheme? In fact, many promises were made and schemes were announced by various parties in the past during elections but when they came to power all the promises were either broken or forgotten. To me, the NYAY is nothing but a big hoax or an election gimmick just to woo voters, especially the poorer sections of society, to vote for the Congress party so it can come to power in Delhi. I urge fellow voters to be wary of such promises during the elections because politicians can even promise to give you the moon and the

stars in heaven. I personally rubbish such promises. As for me, I believe only when such promises are implemented on the ground.  
Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via-Email

#### Fighting TB

Editor,  
India has close to 1 lakh cases of drug-resistant TB and most of them remain undiagnosed and untreated. Close to 100% of the country is covered by DOTS but still the death rates from TB have risen over the years. India's TB programme needs a focused and accommodative strategy. Early and accurate culture-sensitivity based diagnosis is key to success of the TB control program. Greater awareness among the public is the need of the hour on the causes and symptoms of the disease and the treatment options available in India. Even though TB drugs had hit the market 40 years ago, the disease is yet to be eradicated because patients do not undergo the full course of treatment or they treat the disease lightly. Unless TB patients realise that they have to adhere to the mandatory drug regimen, they cannot be cured of the disease, nor can it be eradicated.

Yours etc.,  
Vinod C. Dixit  
Ahmedabad

#### Smriti Irani's 2019 poll challenge

Editor,  
Though Smriti Irani lost to Rahul Gandhi in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls from Amethi, she made Amethi her second home, preparing for the 2019 elections and taking up a series of developmental projects in the region. Exactly five years ago, at the onset of the summer of 2014, the BJP surprised everyone by announcing Smriti Irani as its candidate from Amethi. Irani was the BJP's giant killer, to take on Rahul Gandhi, the heir of the ruling Congress and scion of India's mightiest political family. Amethi was the Congress first family's pocket borough since the 1980s. The constituency has the distinction of sending Sanjay Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi (four terms), Sonia Gandhi and whosoever it named, for example, Satish Sharma and Sanjay Singh. Rahul had won twice from Amethi; his victory margin in the election prior to 2014 was over 3.70 lakh votes. Congress had been projecting him as the future of the nation.

Smriti was tasked to take on the Gandhi scion in his home turf a bastion which even the BJP, its supporters

and Sangh Parivar thought was impenetrable. It was a challenge not many would have taken. She was a complete outsider to Uttar Pradesh. A television actor-turned-politician, Irani had contested one parliamentary election from Chandni Chowk against Kapil Sibal and lost badly. She is a Parsi by marriage, which perhaps didn't have any voter in that backward area called Amethi. It was brave on the part of BJP and Irani to contest from a state where caste was a guiding factor and in some cases the abiding principle of politics.

But Irani had the grit and determination to take on the challenge, and stamina to pursue it relentlessly. Over a period of time, having worked in various posts in the party as secretary, Mahila Morcha chief and vice-president and as a Rajya Sabha MP and campaigner, Irani had proved that she was a fighter and had a propelling capability to leave a mark. Her energetic presence, sharp oratorical skills and the backing of BJP came as a package deal which people, perhaps, had wanted to see for several decades. Still, not many in Amethi and outside the constituency believed

that she would win.

Amethi had been a living example of how leaders, including the topmost leaders of the party that ruled India neglected their constituency and believed that only cosmetic work and occasional presence would ensure their victory in perpetuity. Irani is there to challenge that.

Though she had lost, as the result showed, she caused a great deal of scare in the Congress camp. Rahul's victory margin was reduced from 3.70 lakh to 1.07 lakh. Those in rival camps dismissed her as a one-time phenomenon in Amethi and believed she would not return after the 2014 election. But contrary to their beliefs, Irani made Amethi her second home, preparing for the 2019 elections, and taking up a series of developmental projects in the region. Her name figured in the first list of BJP's candidates for Lok Sabha, which was released on Thursday evening. No surprises this time. It was taken that she may be the candidate to challenge the Congress president.

The difference between Irani's candidacy in 2014 and 2019 is noteworthy. This time around, the BJP and its sympathisers believe that she may win to write one important chapter in India's political history. In the last five

years, what Irani has done very effectively is, as they call "gherabandi (fencing)" of Amethi and Rahul Gandhi. Recently, a manufacturing unit for AK-203 Kalashnikov rifles, an India-Russia joint venture, was inaugurated in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath and Union Minister of Defence Nirmala Sitharaman. Ironically, Rahul had laid the foundation stone for the arms factory in 2007 but it did not get any traction because of a series of confusions.

Rahul Gandhi's Amethi home turf will not be a cakewalk this time. That's why the Congress in Kerala has proposed AICC President Rahul Gandhi's name for the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat, a party bastion in the state, probably to keep an option open to counter the dynastic scion's possible defeat in Amethi.

Yours etc.,  
Samaree Bandyopadhyay,  
Advocate, Kolkata  
High Court

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

“A picture is worth a thousand words. A satellite image is worth a million dollars.”

--- Sarah Parcak

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.225 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2019

### Mission Shakti

A new feather has been added to India's hat as a growing Space power. The nation took an admirable step forward by shooting down one of its own satellites up in the sky in an experimental hit at a range of 300km from base Earth, off Balasore in Odisha Wednesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the success of Mission Shakti and said India matched the success of three nations in this field. Surely, this is a matter of great pride.

Notably, while India is going slow on many fronts on the ground, it has several success stories to cite in matters of Space attempts. While the US started its research on a similar technology by the middle of the last century, its success was reported about 13 years ago, followed by China's success in 2007 and Russia's four years ago. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which developed and launched the Anti Satellite Weapon (ASAT), deserves special praise for this feat. ASAT weapons will be useful prominently in decimating enemy satellites for military and strategic purposes. In these times of highly strained ties with Pakistan, this feat has added significance.

India's successes in Space-related technology are thanks to many factors, including the vision exhibited by first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who set up the Indian Space Research Organisation and shaped it well within his life-time. India has a high global ranking in satellite technology and it is currently exploring its global commercial potential too. Now, in a step forward, satellite killers too have emerged out of our hands.

Notably, China was nowhere in matters of Space technology up until the turn of the century. Its growth and achievements in this field are fast-paced as with other areas. For India, a success here and there by itself should not occasion a thumbs-up beyond reasonable levels. As the adage goes, in a world moving at a frenetic pace, one has to run even faster to remain where he or she stands. India's R&D spend is among the lowest. With big promises coming for new pension schemes and Minimum Income offers in the social welfare sector, a fear is that growth in other sectors such as defence might suffer due to paucity of funds.

More effective efforts at economic growth and funds mobilization as China did, and a fair balancing of funds-spend without hitting the nation's long-term goals vis-a-vis growth and development are of prime concern.

The BJP unit in Meghalaya was in a confused state of mind. The party was not sure whether or not to put up candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha Election for Shillong and Tura Seats. The saffron party finally decided to field candidates for both seats at the eleventh hour. The CAB fiasco had put the leadership in a dilemma. Prior to the announcement the deliberations might be summarised this way. If the party contests on its own it stands little chance of winning. If it supports the MDA common candidates the party is going to become a liability for the UDP's candidate, Jemino Mawthoh and NPP's ticket holder, Agatha Sangma. The Congress would pound on the MDA partners and points to the UDP (and other regional parties) and the BJP in Khasi Hills and NPP and the BJP in Garo Hills. Neither the UDP nor the NPP want the support of the BJP. Strange that even though the BJP is a partner of the MDA it is a pariah. The reason is because of its communal tag and the push for CAB by the 'Hindutva' party.

Even now when the BJP has nominated candidates for the two seats in the state the accusation of a cosy relationship between Amit Shah's party and state's regional parties continues to fly around. The link is undeniable because the BJP is part of the seven party coalition of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government. If there is no relationship then the BJP should not be in the coalition. As simple as that! The regional parties in Khasi Hills try to distance themselves from the anti-minority party but they can't as long as that party is in the government. Foreseeing the burden on them in view of the Lok Sabha poll, the UDP and company recently demanded removal of the BJP from the government but they did it only unofficially. The BJP and regional parties are still partners. Sensing the damage the BJP would cost on his winning prospect, the UDP candidate, Jemino

# BJP, a partner but a liability

By Albert Thyrniang

Mawthoh denied his party's alignment with the BJP. However, he will have to do so over and over again because the Opposition will harp on it in every election speech. Plus the BJP's candidate, Sanbor Shullai candidly informed that the regional parties hate the BJP before election but they embrace it after election.

Irrespective of the BJP's decision to contest the Tura seat, the BJP-NPP nexus is more open and direct. The relationship goes back to the PA Sangma, the founder of NPP. The BJP supported his candidature for presidential election in 2012. From then on the NPP have always been with the BJP. The former Lok Sabha Speaker extended his support to the NDA while an MP. After the death of his father, Conrad Sangma too, when elected to parliament, joined the NDA on the plea that it was the BJP who wanted a tribal president. This is not true because the BJP supported a tribal in presidential election only when in Opposition. They did the same to GG Swell in 1992. They knew that both GG Swell and PA Sangma would lose. If the BJP wanted to have a tribal in Rashtrapati Bhavan why did they not sponsor a tribal candidate in 2002 and in 2017 when in power? A tribal candidate would have certainly made history. The BJP can never think of a tribal occupying the highest post in the country because it is not pro tribal and pro minorities.

Back to the point! Now that the BJP has declared its nominees for the two constituencies what will be the effects? Who will be affected? Will the BJP candidates eat into the Congress or regional candidates' votes? In Shillong, the Congress might stand to lose while in Tura the NPP might be the loser. Sources say that in the absence of BJP, the non-tribal votes could go for the grand old party. In Tura on the other hand, the non-tribals could have rallied behind NPP.

A word about the merit

of the candidates! The Shillong Congress candidate, Vincent Pala is a two time MP having represented the prestigious constituency in 2009 and 2014. Whether the engineer turned politician retains his seat remains to be seen. And whether the former union Minister of State for Water Resources from East Jaintia Hills can still beat anti-incumbency is something we will know on May 23. The coal baron is still a formidable candidate. He is a well-known face all over Khasi and Jaintia Hills and in fact the whole state. He has influence over majority of the MLAs and MDCs including politicians of NPP, UDP and other regional parties. He is close even to the Chief Minister of the State, Conrad Sangma. Will the MLAs and MDCs of the ruling party work for him, clandestinely?

The opponent of the rich 51 year old Congress strong man who holds at least 27 bank accounts with assets worth close to 50 crore is UDP's Jemino Mawthoh. The consensus candidate of the ruling Meghalaya Democratic Alliance chosen after almost a year of thinking is a former legislator from Nongthymmai constituency in 2013 when he sensationally defeated Congress heavyweight and the then Speaker of Meghalaya Assembly, Charles Pyngrupe. The learned professor, however, narrowly lost to the same rival last year. The 'David' with assets of about 62 Lakh will have an uphill task against the veteran Congressman in spite of being the common candidate of the NPP, UDP, HSPDP, PDF and NCP. He has made known the absence of any outstanding contribution of the sitting MP. On his part Pala has observed that regional parties can't contribute significantly at the national level. The other issue in Shillong will be coal mining.

The Tura fight is more interesting and unpredictable. The main contestants are two bitter rivals. Agatha Sangma is up

against the two-time Chief Minister of the state. Though he never applied for party ticket yet he is considered the best bet to take the fight to the NPP bastion. Expectedly, the main plank for the veteran is collusion of the NPP with the BJP. For him NPP and the BJP are the head and tail of the same coin. He has alleged that the BJP controls the MDA government and calls for a united fight against the BJP and NPP. He will also aggressively point to the persistent determination of the BJP to pass CAB in Rajya Sabha and the 'pretended' effort of Conrad Sangma and his government to stop the Bill. Will it cut ice among the electorate?

Agatha Sangma too has every reason to be optimistic. She won the seat in 2008 as NCP candidate riding on the popularity of her father, late PA Sangma. Though her dad is no more she will invoke his name every time and everywhere. The Tura voters' memory of their beloved leader is still fresh in their minds. Being the daughter of the once unmatched Garo strongman, the battle of the former youngest Minister of State in the UPA II is made that much easier. She is also at an advantageous position as she has her brother, Conrad Sangma who is the Chief Minister of the state. He is capable of taking on the might of Mukul Sangma. He is going to vehemently let the electorate know of his 'heroic' role in making sure that CAB was forced to lapse. He has combatively accused his predecessor of incurring huge financial burden on the State by his ill-conceived flagship missions including the Agar and Bamboo mission in the state.

Who will emerge victorious on May 23? Will we see an upset in the state capital or will status quo prevail? Will the NPP keep the Tura seat as its own or will Mukul Sangma wrest it from the PA Sangma family? Which of the two candidates will the BJP play spoilsport for? Unfortunately we have to patiently wait for the D-day.

A failed hero Vivek Oberoi doing role of another one

## Modi biopic should matter little to voters

By Sushil Kutty

The Narendra Modi biopic is in the news. Movies generally make it to the news. Quite a few of them make headlines. The good ones are feted. The bad ones are thrashed. But it's the previews that are killing the Narendra Modi biopic even before its release. Actually views. Of political parties. Of liberals. Their glimpse of the biopic so far limited to a trailer - picture abhi baaki hai! Opposition parties already view it as shameless publicity for Narendra Modi and the BJP in an election

him. There is no in-between. Shutting out Modi traits will stand out starker than if they are shown.

The Congress asks: "Why release five days before the first phase election date?" The biopic releases April 5. The first phase election date is April 11. That is cutting it a too fine. People will watch and hear of all the good things about Modi and they'll be so impressed, they'll vote BJP in droves, says the grand old party. Complaints have been lodged with the Election Commission.

“Maybe some dumbos would. The Rip Van Winkle-types who slept through Modi's five year tenure and, when awake, never watched Modi's coverage in the Republic.”

month. Propaganda.

Then, again, the pre-release publicity the biopic is getting a la Padmavati is what should worry political rivals. But, don't we keep hearing "Yeh voter Hai, Yeh Sab Jaanta Hai"; that it is very hard to fool voters? The majority of voters must have already made up their minds. It's a safe bet to assume that those who had problems with Modi's demonetization will not vote the BJP. Ditto those who think GST is a headache which should be treated, amputated.

Of course, we do not know if the biopic touches on demonetization and GST.

Maybe some dumbos would. The Rip Van Winkle-types who slept through Modi's five year tenure and, when awake, never watched Modi's coverage in the Republic. That being said, the release timing does raise eyebrows. It's also alleged that the biopic release was "preponed", a word the good sub-editor will try to avoid as much as possible unless threatened with lynching.

So, why advance the release? And why make the biopic in extra-quick time? Unless, it's to give Modi a sheen before voting day. The trailer shows in bold titles "Based on True

But then, biopics hardly make heroes. They don't have to. Most are about heroes; of living and dead legends. This one on Modi allegedly dumps truth for hoax. Ha!

If it does, it must be a skim-over, not a makeover of the two unpopular measures. The complaint is the biopic does not touch on 'Modi-the-Horrible.' Does not show Modi with warts and all; that it depicts Modi as "Vishnu and God-like." But most biopics steer clear of demonizing. Only the biopics of the already dead are honest renditions. And, then, too, they get into trouble.

Modi shown in bad light could lead millions to raise Cain. BJP 'bhakts' would be out on the streets and on twitter/Facebook raising ruckus and more. "How about the cow vigilante?" asks an actor; angry with the timing of the release of the biopic and taking objection to the creative licence taken by the fawning makers of the biopic. "The atrocities committed on Dalit and Muslims during Modi's time, the intolerance. Does the biopic dwell on these, too?"

Frankly speaking, it shouldn't actually matter. The people of India know Modi for a full prime ministerial term and before; what they don't know about Modi would not be enough to make a biopic on him. Modi is seen as "divisive" personality by most analysts. He brings out strong emotions in people. You either like him or you hate

Story". If so, why aren't cow vigilante and demonetization playing suitable roles, along with Vivek Oberoi? Now, Oberoi is more a flop hero than a successful actor. He's also allegedly a "card-carrying member of the BJP."

But then, biopics hardly make heroes. They don't have to. Most are about heroes; of living and dead legends. This one on Modi allegedly dumps truth for hoax. Ha! Who in Bollywood has the guts to show Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a way he shouldn't or wouldn't like to be shown? Do not look for sarcasm here, but it's a fact it will be very hard to find fault with Prime Minister like Modi, not till he's voted out.

There could only be trouble at the end of the rainbow for those who try to make an honest assessment of Modi the man. Modi is not an easy man to play catch-ball with. Neither cricket. And Kabadi, only Pakistan Air Force F-16s play: Flying into Indian airspace and scooting back the next second. Does the Modi biopic include scenes depicting Pulwama and the Balakote airstrikes? If so, does it end with Modi taking the oath for Prime Minister, the second time? Good question. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

## Unethical recruitment practice

Editor,

Apart from promoting knowledge and understanding on the different dimensions of science that correlate man to his surroundings, educational institutions also serve as a repository of human, social, cultural, ethical and spiritual values, where a person after gaining such values, exhibits them in the form of developed and refined behaviour. This is what makes our educational institutions highly distinctive in earning immense respect and honour among other institutions in the society. Our very own Shillong too is fortunate to have highly promising institutions like St. Anthony's college, which has, for decades, been a source of knowledge, advocating positive ideas and transforming societies. The college has benchmarked itself as an institution with highly principled values and reputable recognition not only in Shillong but throughout the North-eastern region. A common man like myself unambiguously believes that the premier institute operates with high

morale and deploys best practices always.

However, it is shocking and disheartening to learn that recently, the custodian of the college failed to uphold the integrity of the institution and its cherished values. In the recent recruitment for the post of Assistant Professor in the Department of Statistics of the college, I too had applied as a candidate for the post. After fulfilling all the criteria and submitting the relevant documents on time, I was astounded when on March 26, 2019 at around 12 noon, I got a call from a lady identifying herself as the staff of the college. She informed me that the college authorities have decided to conduct the written examination for the post on the very next day that is on March 27, 2019 at 9 am sharp. I was further instructed to come and collect the call letter from the college on that same day when I received the call. I could not believe that such a renowned college would be so unprofessional and take matters so casually as to put an applicant at a grave disadvantage. Someone's career was put at stake and this apparently points to the fact that the college is

not serious about the aspiring applicants. How in the world, would it be possible for them to come for the examination within 24 hours time and that too, when some are staying thousands of kilometers away from Shillong? This is totally unacceptable and unethical and an attempt to deliberately obstruct someone's right to free and fair selection. If such practices continue, the fabric of the historical glory that educational institutions hold will be demolished. As an educational institution that is the torch bearer of society, it is equally important for it to develop a set of judicious policies and best practices that will stand scrutiny and which are for the common good of all.

Yours etc.,  
Donald R Mawkhlieng  
Mumbai

## India an unhappy nation

Editor,

The United Nations' seventh annual World Happiness Report was released on this year's World Happiness Day (March 20). The report has

measured six variables ~ income, freedom, healthy life expectancy, social support, generosity and absence of corruption as they support the well-being of the people. Unfortunately, the World Happiness Reports over the last four years have showcased India's downfall by as many as 23 ranks from 117 out of 158 countries in 2015 to 140 out of 156 countries in 2019. Indeed, we have been sliding down from 117 in 2015 to 118 in 2016 (down 1 rank) to 122 in 2017 (down 4) to 133 in 2018 (down 11) and now to 140 in 2019 (down 7) in the World Happiness Index.

Growing unemployment which is now at a 45-year high, growing farmer's distress, growing intolerance and growing inequality in our society have undoubtedly contributed to our growing unhappiness. Now, our position is only better than Afghanistan (at 154th rank) among our neighbouring countries. All other neighbouring countries namely Pakistan (at 67th rank), China (93th), Bhutan (95th), Nepal (100th), Bangladesh (125th), Sri Lanka (130th) and Myanmar (131st) have outscored us in hap-

piness indices.

Nordic countries are known for their welfare economics. They give top priority to the well-being of their citizens including health and education. Naturally, they are as usual at the top of the index. The five Nordic countries got their places among the first ten countries with Finland at the top, Denmark second, Norway third, Iceland fourth and Sweden taking the seventh position.

Sometimes, we blame it on overpopulation for our not doing well for the welfare of the people. But we must not fail to notice that the Netherlands with a much higher population density (488 per square kilometre) than India's (382 per square kilometre) has achieved 5th rank in the World Happiness Index and 10th rank in the Human Development Index whereas we have relegated to 140th and 130th rank respectively in these two indices.

Growth can be counter-productive if it is unequal. Unequal growth is bound to cause rift and unhappiness in a society. According to the 2018 Oxfam report, the top 1 per cent of India's richest people have increased their wealth by 39 per cent as

compared to just 3 per cent increase in wealth among the bottom half of the population.

Things have come to such a pass in our country that while the top one per cent have got 51.53 per cent of the national wealth, the bottom 60 per cent have only 4.8 per cent of it! The Oxfam International Executive Director Winnie Byanyima said, "If this obscene inequality between the top 1 per cent and the rest of India continues, it will lead to a complete collapse of the social and democratic structure of this country." To add insult to injury, a section of political and media players are trying to vitiate the atmosphere with hatred and distrust. We need immediate policy review to arrest jobless and unequal growth by ensuring social security and employment and drive away hatred and distrust from the political and media narrative.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Via email

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

*“Man is born to live, not to prepare for life.”*

---Boris Pasternak

## The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 2019

### Season of defections

ELECTION time is a season of hope and despair for politicians. This is also time for defections by disgruntled elements. Leading the pack of defectors this time is former Bollywood actor and BJP politician from Bihar, Shatrughan Sinha, after he was denied ticket to contest the Patna Sahib seat he held in Parliament. A former Union minister, Sinha has been through thick and thin, and Prime Minister Modi had little to offer him. Yet, as a parliament member, he still held his head high. Sinha showed his disgust time and again in recent months, and made his presence felt at some prominent Opposition rallies, including one in Chennai and another in Kolkata. This, it turned out, was prescription for more trouble and the BJP quietly denied him the ticket, and Patna Sahib will have Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad fighting it out for the BJP this time.

Last heard is that Sinha will be joining the Congress, and the last shot yet of the shotgun was with Congress chief Rahul Gandhi. Sinha found virtue in the leadership that the Nehru family gave to the nation and Rahul Gandhi was happy Sinha's plight in the BJP ended after all. Notably, two former heavyweights in the BJP, LK Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, have taken a similar hit from the party, but faced it with a sense of fortitude. Not for them the game of defection. They are made of a sterner stuff. Their days might come, again, if PM Modi and the BJP take a major hit in the coming polls. The Congress also suffered a jolt in the game of defections. AICC spokesperson and close Sonia aide, Tom Vadakkan abruptly deserted the party and the BJP welcomed him into the party fold with great relish. Vadakkan expected a Lok Sabha ticket from Kerala, something that he had been repeatedly denied in the Congress, but the BJP is also not being generous to him. Another defection that hogged the limelight was that of Jaya Prada, who started with the Telugu Desam in the 1990s, shifted base to the Samajwadi Party later, and was welcomed into the BJP a few days ago. Elsewhere too, pre-poll defections are many, as from the TMC in West Bengal, and rumours are that more are likely. So it is with some other states too! What this reveals is that principles and ideology are things of the past when it comes to parties and politicians.

# A Govt that thinks, sleeps and dreams coal

By Patricia Mukhim

It is not without reason that coal is called Black Diamond. It indeed is the magic mineral that has occupied the mind space of Chief Minister Conrad Sangma and his cabinet colleagues like no other issue has, since he occupied the CM's chair in March 2018. Coal has created the affluent tribal elite. It has brought in a climate of fear and intimidation because of feuds on account of land grabbing. Coal mining is an environmental disaster where rivers are killed and drinking water is no longer available. The death of several miners not just in recent times but in the past too and who are buried unknown inside the mines forever does not seem to matter to Government. If what is happening in the mining areas of Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills and Garo Hills is not ecological terrorism then I wonder what is.

To have a Government that is inured to these issues and which incessantly makes out a case on behalf of coal mine owners, ostensibly because coal brings in revenue, shows we have reached the nadir of politics. The arguments favouring coal mining are facile. The fact of the matter is that coal money funds politics in the state; sustains it and fuels the political parties because elections are an expensive affair. Have money, win elections. No money; no votes. Our misfortune is also that we have a Government led by a political party that wants to carve out a niche for itself as a national party. Ask anyone running a political party whether anything is possible without money and you will get the answer why money is so important for the NPP. First of all you need to have some moneybags to fund the party; next you have to pay those moneybags with contracts and also dance to their tune. The people don't feature in the scheme of things of most governments today. Keeping the party alive and kicking is the sole pre-occupation.

In the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections we have no issue from the NPP other than putting the NGT ban

on coal mining at rest and reworking the mines. Are all of us buying into this issue? Is coal the end all and be all of our existence? The impression we get on reading not one, but several newspapers including the so-called national dailies with their sensational captions - "Meghalaya CM Sangma promises to restart coal mining after addressing safety and environmental issues," is that every Meghalayan has bought into this agenda. People who don't know better and rely on newspaper reports would believe that coal is the only revenue generating activity in the state. If so then what activity is tourism? Can coal mining and tourism co-exist? Are there many more stakeholders in tourism where incomes are spread horizontally across or are more people invested in coal mining which has only a few people owning hundreds of mines each? Take your pick! But impressionist politics can be misleading.

The Congress Party has been harping on the NPP's dalliance with the BJP and how the latter is anti-minority. We've got it and we were all united against the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) with or without the Congress telling us to do so. In short we know what is good and bad policy. So the Congress had better come up with a better agenda if it wants our votes. For the NPP-UDP, the blame game about what's happening and not happening in the state, during the Congress rule of nine years, no longer captures our imagination. We need something more meaty! Job creation and not NYAY where people will be paid for not working is not something that one expects from the grand old party. It's as if the Congress is just trying to top up what the BJP is doing. If people are paid for being jobless, instead of creating jobs for them it shows the Party in poor light. More so, because all this money will come from the taxpayer's kitty! Poverty in this country is real and in your

they don't have the start-up capital.

Hence wannabe MPs should talk to the youth, the farmers and entrepreneurs to feel their pulse and accordingly launch their election campaigns. They should stop mouthing rhetoric. The sitting MP should distribute pamphlets showing how he utilised his MP funds and not use the time allotted to him at public meetings to make claims about what he has done. We need MPs who are futuristic and can gaze into the crystal bowl of Meghalaya to see where it is poised to be in 2030. By then if the NGT ban is lifted the environmental degradation in some regions of Meghalaya would have become irredeemable. And why just coal? The speed at which limestone is being mined in the state is also going to turn into a horror story. The idea of inter-generational mining where the entire quantum of coal available is assessed and only a certain amount is allowed to be mined up to a particular year is unknown in this state. The motto here is, "If land belongs to me I can do whatever I want with it." It's a concept that the Khasis call "bam duh" or eat up everything until only the shell remains. The concept of earth as the mother and sustainer of life (Ka Mei Ramew) have long been forgotten or remain only as poems crafted by visionaries like Soso Tham.

The fact that in so many years we don't have a single school or a hospital set up the mining conglomerate in Meghalaya tells us how absolutely selfish their business model is. For them the concept of corporate social responsibility is alien. The environmental fund that they have started paying will not compensate for the ecological terror they have unleashed.

Normally in any election, the public should come up with a shadow manifesto which they should present to political parties. In Meghalaya we are all silent on this! That's why we get the MPs and MLAs we rightly deserve.

significant amount of time, money and energy is taken away by, what is called, 'school duty', which has in a way crucially affected the overall productivity of various government and private institutions leading to chronic deficiency in the state GDP.

It is time the administration makes it mandatory for all the premiere schools to introduce dedicated bus services for their students within a specific time period. The state authority should take it up as one of its priority policy initiatives in order to ensure greater efficiency in the state, to protect the environment, ensure minimum wastage of public resources and reduce health hazards. One school bus can reduce not less than forty to fifty vehicles on the road each day. IT IS TIME FOR GOVERNMENT TO ACT.

Yours etc.  
Jyotirmoy Prodhani  
NEHU, Shillong

### Ill-conceived write-up

Editor,  
The recent write up by

Benjamin Lyngdoh, "The shadow of CAB remains (ST March 27, 2019) is full of misconceived ideas. Among these the one that ought to be dealt with immediately is his allusion to the alleged persecution of Khasi/Pnar Christians in Bangladesh. Wikipedia had furnished facts and figures, but did the writer bother to consult the ground realities before publishing such information? Bangladesh is not far from Meghalaya and let it be known that many visits were made and are being made by church leaders of a particular denomination to look after the well being of the Christian brethren over there. The writer should also be kindly informed that these Khasi/Pnar along with the Bengali Christians have gatherings like Presbyteries, Synods, which are the large congregation of Christians at a particular point of time. Let him also kindly realise that for the last seventy years after independence, the Khasi/Pnars of both countries along with the Bengali Christians were having market avenues at different places all along the border from Borghat in West Jaintia hills to Dawki in the East Khasi Hills. These

markets take place once in eight days as practiced in our hills. There was never a discussion of persecution among these traders. These markets still takes place even today with the new country called Bangladesh. Thus to level such unwarranted charges against that country is not only unfair but would have an unpleasant impact on the cordial relations between two neighbours.

Let us pray that this write-up does not reach the concerned government. In as much as we rubbish the international media in respect of the Balakot airstrike, it is also imperative to disbelieve the other media too. Write-ups in a newspaper read world-wide has tremendous repercussions globally. Let us hope that the matter is hushed up before it is carried any further, otherwise no one knows the inevitable.

Yours etc.,  
M. Khyriem,  
Shillong- 14

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## India's Security New Delhi hitting the wrong targets

By Dr. D. K. Giri

Note the news that authorities in north-eastern China destroyed about 30,000 world maps showing Arunachal Pradesh as a part of India, and Taiwan as a separate country. A cartography company in the Chinese province of Anhui had printed these maps to be exported to other countries which may have ordered the print. China has done this in order to protect its own territorial integrity.

Beijing claims Arunachal Pradesh to be part of South Tibetan Autonomous Region, and Taiwan a break-away province of China to be eventually united with China. The Chinese authorities have investigated 100 times and destroyed over 10,000 maps "incorrectly depicting the Chinese geography", claimed the officials from the Chinese Government. How does Government of India react to this? Is it lodging a complaint that China is making fantastic and illegitimate claims and taking ridiculous actions to deliberately create a controversy? Or is it going to ignore the incident as internal matter of China? Interestingly, so far, there has been no official reaction to this shameful act of China.

Does New Delhi forget that Beijing objects to people visiting Arunachal Pradesh, including the Indian Prime Minister? It gives stapled visas to people from Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. How can then New Delhi not react to such an incident involving an outrageous claim. New Delhi's current engagement and obsession with Pakistan blinds it to Chinese challenge. Is not India focusing on a wrong target like Pakistan, whereas our main threat is China? No wonder the BJP President Amit Shah is asking for votes for a Prime Minister who can respond to Pakistan's challenge; but not a word on China. Clearly, the present Government does not perceive China as a threat, or it is incapable of tackling China diplomatically and otherwise.

Presumably, India's dealing with China seems to be driven by gross misperceptions on Chinese state and its external relations. In this column last week, I wrote about how Nehru's Sinophilia cost us heavily. The echoes of that historic blunder are heard even today. One had thought the BJP Government that cries hoarse about anything the Nehru-Gandhi family has done, is unable to correct the fault lines on China. And worse, even 'hull-nosed' Narendra Modi is pulled into complacency by Chinese.

Having fumbled initially, the United States and European countries have recognized China as the main threat to the free world. They are assisting those countries caught in territorial conflict with China - Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, Mongolia, and others. In fact, China is perhaps the only country in the world that is making territorial claims on other countries. But India has still not woken up to the reality on China. If New Delhi is wary of China's India strategy one may ask what India's strategy to deal with China is. Sadly, there is not one in sight. For the present Government, it is Pakistan, which is the only threat to India's peace and security.

India has incurred life-long wrath of Chinese by giving asylum to Dalai Lama. A virtual Tibetan Government runs from India. Is China not aware of this? Or New Delhi, while treating Tibetans in India as humanitarian gesture, expects normal friendly relations with China. Why does not New Delhi move beyond humanitarianism, claims Tibet back from Chinese and restore its independence?

Let us recall that the British had maintained Tibet as buffer state between India and China. Jawaharlal Nehru gave away Tibet to Chinese without any reciprocal obligations. Mind you, along with Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh is being claimed by China. Second, Taiwan was given the Security Council membership, which was then offered to India. Nehru not only rejected the

offer, but pleaded that it should be given to China. It is time to correct those mistakes, join other countries in declaring Taiwan's sovereignty and restoration of Tibetan independence. Should New Delhi not begin to issue stapled visa to people from Chinese occupied Tibet?

Third, the Chinese imperial project of OBOR, is passing through PoK, close to the Indian borders. Should India not tell the Chinese that PoK is disputed territory, a part of Jammu & Kashmir, that had joined India through the Treaty of Accession, signed by the then King and the Kashmir Assembly. Pakistan has been occupying it by force and illegally, and China should back off. New Delhi should note that European Union is considering vetoing Italy's intent to participate in OBOR project. Also, that the United States has raised objection to Americans not being allowed to visit autonomous region of Tibet. How does India not see the Chinese game plan?

It is true that India cannot match Chinese economic and military might. It is also true that Russia leans on China to counter USA. Given the Russian economic situation, it will gravitate further towards China. Similarly, India needs to lean on the United States to checkmate the Chinese. India has no other option. New Delhi's attempt to mollify Russians by buying S-400s from them, even in the face of US sanctions, is shooting in the dark, not a smart move.

The present Government's Pakistan obsession and non-innovative approach to Kashmir are compounding the confusion. The Government's failure or refusal to see the principal player in aggravating India's woes is China, tacitly backed by Russia. New Delhi also fails to see the other protective tent provided by the United States vis-a-vis China is decidedly an economic power, not yet a political power, or not as mighty a military power as USA. So it has used its economic might to weigh in on its international relations. As a trading power, China is ever so hungry for markets. India is growing to be the biggest market in the world. Is New Delhi even mildly threatening to ban Chinese exports? That should hurt China. Again, US is imposing tariffs on Chinese exports. Can India not do the same? It has done so with Pakistan. Let us remember that Chinese follow Sun Tzu's 'the art of war'. According to Chapter 4, in the Book, it teaches how to create and recognize strategic opportunities and deny opportunities to the opponent. Secondly, create a war-like situation without actually engaging and give the opponent a fait accompli. By raking up non-issues like Arunachal Pradesh, Beijing seeks to legitimize its claim. Maybe, Beijing is also following the formulae of Goebbels truth, a lie often repeated becomes true.

Ironically, many of India's China experts are Chinese supporters too. How many scholars Government is supporting to study China, its strategy, attitude and behavior? The Government tends to rely on the expertise of its bureaucrats, which is limited and stale. They are not capable of 'out of box' thinking. It is the diplomats who led Modi to have that unscheduled agenda-less meeting with Xi-Jinping, which I call stroll-and-swing diplomacy as both leaders romantically strolled around a lake, swung merrily in a park. What did we achieve, except showing that we are genuflecting before the Chinese? It is time we stop being delusional on Chinese; make an accurate assessment of our comparative strengths and weaknesses, and treat it as our principal target, draw the battle lines, make necessary alliances and rebut every false claim it makes. In our minds, we must decide that it is all-out diplomatic slugfest with China. We will have to up our game to build our economy, reduce our spending on military, by making strategic alliances that will cover our security. Beware China, India comes calling.---INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

## Make bus service mandatory for Shillong schools

Editor,

As the school season begins, Shillong is choked with traffic. The ordeal on roads begins from around 7.30 am in the morning. There is a slight respite around midday and soon from around 12.30 till 3 pm in the afternoon the roads are choked with hundreds of vehicles to pick up the wards from various schools and invariably each week day becomes predictably slow, stressed, clumsy and inescapably distressing. Shillong is known for its schools. Some of the most reputed and premium schools have glorious history and earned enviable academic esteem over the years but quite surprisingly most of these schools have no bus service for the students. Many guardians from far flung areas, way beyond the municipal area of Shillong, put their kids in these schools and they are compelled to commute every weekday to the city and back after picking up their wards. This exercise of dropping and picking up children

every day is quite taxing and stressful for the guardians as they invest their time and money and also undergo physical exertion. The entire ordeal can be drastically reduced by the schools itself by simply introducing bus services for the students.

In the premium school district of Shillong around Laitumkhrah, Dhankheti, Fire Brigade up to Nongthymmai, Nongmynsong road etc. the Traffic Police is ever engaged in the eternal exercise of inventing new tricks to control traffic through endless permutations and combinations by periodically changing one-way, no entry points, no parking areas and the like on a rotational basis to finally end up clueless about how to regulate the menace.

Each one of these premier schools have on an average between six hundred to one thousand or more students. Even if fifty percent of students come in their vehicles- four wheeler and two wheelers- each school causes not less than two hundred to five hundred additional vehicles to come on the road on every week day at about the same hour. One

can imagine the volume of vehicles that are forced to be on the road for the simple reason that the most prestigious schools are least bothered to introduce efficient bus service for the students which the schools can easily afford to. By not introducing bus services the schools are not only forcing avoidable wastage of resources, time and pressure on public assets like roads; they are also responsible for inflicting the highest possible damage to the delicate environment of the city which is not only detrimental to the ecology but also causing major health hazards on a daily basis. Now the common refrain is that the guardians should take public transport rather than use their private vehicles. In Shillong public transport service is inefficient and mostly in the form of local taxis which are not always feasible because of the high fares. Shared taxis are not easy to find during the rush hour. Besides, working parents mostly make it a single trip to their working places via the schools. In fact, lack of bus services has also affected the work efficiency of working parents in their respective places of work because a

*“Life is not a spectacle or feast; it is a predicament.”*

--- George Santayana

## The Shillong Times

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### Faint hope at UN

THERE, again, is some buzz in the United Nations in matters linked to tackling global terror and neutralizing the lethality of such networks. The fact that several of them are based out of Pakistan gives India some hope that the world community would act in meaningful ways after a drag of many years - while India bled almost regularly in Kashmir and elsewhere. A French-sponsored resolution passed at the Security Council Friday asked member nations to step up the fight against terror financing and introduce laws that will make such actions a serious crime. It is notable that those violating the UN writ can face sanctions. At the same time, too much hope need not be pinned on this, just as several moves by the world body in the past did not lead to meaningful efforts in implementation of decisions. Also notable is the fact that a US-sponsored resolution against Pakistan-based terror outfits like Jaish e Muhammed has been in the works at UN, while chances are that China could again use its veto power to thwart any effort to nail the merchants of death like Masood Azhar or Hafiz Sayeed. This resolution's progress in the UN is also being closely watched here.

India has rightly stressed the point, through its representative Syed Akbaruddin, that the proof of the pudding is in its eating - meaning, UN should go beyond passing of resolutions and insist on member countries for their effective implementation. The UN body, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), is vested with authority to bring on line as many as 50 countries to pass laws that would stall attempts by any agency to finance terror outfits like Jaish. Even granted that this will have some impact, the fact remains that this too will be a long drawn-out process. India need not put its faith on such UN-inspired actions which might or might not produce results even in the long term. So far, India's has been a soft approach vis-a-vis dealing with a rogue nation like Pakistan, where the political and military establishments are covertly and overtly backing terror groups in its soil which claim to uphold the cause of Kashmiris. India's latest presentation of a dossier vis-a-vis the Pulwama suicide attack is proof of the futility of New Delhi's approaches in this connection. Pakistan dismissed it as “no proof”, as it had declared in relation to Pathankot and Uri probes as well. At the minimum, India cannot fool around with itself, drag matters, and simply soft-pedal its responses.

# Watchdog-Cum-Guardian Role of Media in Polls

By Dr. S. Saraswathi

The Election Commission has announced that social media companies will also follow the Model Code of Conduct ahead of General elections. A Voluntary Code of Ethics for General Elections 2019 has been agreed to between the EC on one side and the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) on the other. Several media companies including Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Google, Sharechat, and Tiktok were represented in this agreement intended to evolve a mechanism for prevention of abuse of social media platforms in the election period. Whether this will help to enhance the integrity and transparency of the electoral process as stated in the preamble of the code is a big suspense.

A new phase in electioneering is being witnessed today with increasing use of interactive and digital media along with conventional media that is strong and presently irreplaceable in India. Websites, e-mails, text messages, digital campaigning and social media are in everyday use in election propaganda. Political parties get substantial support for political mobilisation from subscribers in social media.

Introduced in Indian elections in 2014 as an important campaigning aid, social media this time is a primary tool. Election management has indeed become a special branch of management studies in which application of social media is an important area. Within a short time, social media has proved that it can bring both advantages and disadvantages to democratic elections depending on the purpose and ability of users from creators to consumers of messages. Barring left parties, which are banking mainly on the support of working classes, all others are using social media as a main channel for political discourse.

Under this agreement, the EC can notify relevant social media platforms of potential violation of Section 126 of the Representation of People Act and other applicable electoral laws. Three-hour time limit is given to them to remove objectionable

contents. This code is coming into effect immediately. Election advertisements featuring names of persons and parties must carry the certification issued by the EC.

Users may have to sign a commitment not to misuse the medium for political purposes or propaganda. They should also be made aware of half truths and fake news circulating through social media and warned against being misled by instant messaging.

The EC wants the social media platforms to voluntarily undertake information education and communication for their users about “unlawful conduct during election” particularly during prohibited 48 hours before polling. Use of SMS and WhatsApp as part of electioneering should also stop. In effect, social media companies must operate with accountability like any news media.

Recognised as the fourth estate of democracy and the most accessible forum of public opinion, the role of media is acknowledged in all societies based on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Now, it can be said that the fifth estate of networked bloggers offers wider role for the audience articulating important news, circulating individual views on public issues, and generating debates. They change private conversations into public debates. Unlike radio and television, social media promotes dialogues and serve as platforms. Therefore, there is much speculation about the impact of social media on the outcome of election. There is a general notion that the young, particularly first time voters, who constitute the biggest segment of social media users to gather news, are likely to get addicted to this media and fall victims.

The development is amazing and unbelievable. Opinions and criticisms that are publicly ridiculed, disproved and discarded in face to face interaction can still be circulated through social media.

However, mainstream

media news has not declined in India despite the growth of the social media. Statements and opinions posted on online can go viral almost instantly giving no time for rebuttal or challenge. Whether good or bad, the message reaches the audience and starts producing the impact as the receiver getting the message through a most sophisticated instrument tends to accept it without verification. During elections, it is being watched with great interest as if it is the sole and all-powerful transmitter of information.

Hence, the competition for grabbing media space, attention, and time is growing minute by minute and so also corresponding attempts to control media and regulate its functioning. Mediated democracy is a new term to denote political deliberations through the media. It goes on in all Indian languages.

Exploitation of the television media has also intensified due to privatisation, commercialisation, and political ownership and/or political support, which makes the TV extremely important communication media in election. Sensationalism, sponsorship, and paid news are part of TV programmes that can influence the voters' mind. SMS and phone-ins have been part of discussions in TV channels and magazines.

With the expansion of the overreach of the media, both electronic and print, poll surveys have become a regular feature before elections in the past two decades in India. Some media houses themselves are involved in conducting and releasing results of opinion polls and exit polls. As these are likely to influence voting, the EC has prohibited publishing the results of any poll survey between the date of election notification and the completion of poll in all phases. In 1996, then leader of the DMK, Karunanidhi, acknowledged openly that his landslide victory in the Assembly election was due to CMS pre-poll survey results.

Not all pre-poll survey results get into news media. Some newspapers

are reluctant to sponsor or publish pre-poll survey findings. It is said that some results are not published if they are not favourable to the sponsors or consistent with the stand of the newspaper. However, pre-poll surveys, on the whole, have not earned reputation for influencing effectively agenda setting or voting pattern.

Electoral democracy is nearly impossible today without an effective and vigilant media. Elections are not just voting and selecting representatives of the people, but denote a participatory process open to the public in democracies. Participation is meaningless without authentic and timely information or without meaningful and free dialogue. Transparency and accountability are important for authenticity.

Countries that have gone through democratic transition in recent decades have some special regard for the media. But, they are also afraid of media exposures that have led to downfall of regimes and leaders.

At the same time, what has come to be known as infotainment - a combination of information and entertainment - cuts into serious political debates. It is spreading fast with expansion of the social media. By providing more entertainment than information, it is exploitative of the gullibility of the unsuspecting public.

While the media needs to be watched against intrusion of fake news and false propaganda, it has to function as watchdog of political parties and electoral processes to prevent corrupt practices. It is burdened with immense responsibility. During elections, its true nature comes out.

This watchdog, the media, watching the activities of all actors in an election to guard democracy, also needs a watchdog to regulate its role and prevent its surrender to temptations. Best regulation seems to be self-regulation with peer superintendence. - INFA

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

# The Kraken of Meghalaya

By Ininaki N Lyngdoh

The Supreme Court ruling of August 31st, 2018 states that the Scheduled castes and tribes can avail benefit of reservation only in their home state. I would like to bring to the notice of all that as per the ruling mentioned above, a person belonging to a Scheduled caste or tribe in one state cannot be deemed to be a Scheduled caste or tribe in any other state to which he migrates for the purpose of employment or education.

In a State like Meghalaya with a low literacy rate when compared to the rest of India and the neighbouring states like Mizoram and Assam, how is it that we the people of Meghalaya are so engrossed with our own lives that we refuse to open our eyes and see what is actually happening. Ignorance is not bliss in our case. I would like to bring to the notice of all that for the past 30 years since the birth

without proper research. Rather than naming a few, I would like to request you to judge for yourselves if my facts are baseless, be it from the medical lists of quota students or from the recent list of employments in government offices. My fellow men and women, I am not discriminating against any one. However, I am simply bringing to light what is happening right before our eyes which is a basic right given to us with one hand and taken away by the other. Can a state such as Meghalaya, sustain not only itself but those from other states and tribes from another country altogether? Are we not depriving ourselves and our future generations of something that is rightfully ours? Or do we patiently wait for the day when we become minorities in our state? I am speaking of a dark battle that lies ahead of us, unless we strike

**A similar report was published by the Shillong Times in November 23rd 2018, whereby the KHADC had passed a Bill regarding the changes that should be made in the Tribal List of Meghalaya in which only the indigenous inhabitants of Meghalaya have legitimate right to reservation. Pressing on with this matter and with the new Council members in place I would like to put forth another point of interest, which is that the people belonging to the Khasi and Jaintia tribes are not recognised as Schedule tribes in other states of North East India. We speak of protecting our future generations from illegal immigration, but little do we realise the problem at hand.**

of our State, in our public offices and in educational opportunities reservation is given to tribes and castes belonging to states other than Meghalaya. With regards to The Supreme Court ruling of August 2018, I would like to put forward a question to the original inhabitants of Meghalaya. Are we right in giving reservations to these tribes and castes who are not only exercising their reservation in their own state but also in ours?

A similar report was published by the Shillong Times in November 23rd 2018, whereby the KHADC had passed a Bill regarding the changes that should be made in the Tribal List of Meghalaya in which only the indigenous inhabitants of Meghalaya have legitimate right to reservation. Pressing on with this matter and with the new Council members in place I would like to put forth another point of interest, which is that the people belonging to the Khasi and Jaintia tribes are not recognised as Schedule tribes in other states of North East India. We speak of protecting our future generations from illegal immigration, but little do we realise the problem at hand. We deprive our youth of educational and occupational opportunities while we generously provide for those from states that do not reciprocate the same for us. Are they threatened by us? If so, should we not react to them in the same way? How can we speak of protection when our own people cannot attain their own rights in their home state?

The statements are not

the iron while it is still hot. We demand protection, and we are willing to fight for it. Yet no sooner have we started the fire, than we water the flames and the smoke burns our eyes. We hear of excuses rather than promises, distant visions rather than missions in every political aspect. What of my future as a youth? The Kraken of Atlanta is not far from a state trying to devour itself and its “indigenous inhabitants”. The vivid picture I am painting is a harsh truth, that unless we wake up from slumber, our future is bleak. This is but one of the many hurdles that are laid before us and many more are still to be tackled. However, in my opinion, the fact that we recognise those tribes and castes in our state, while we are not in theirs, is unacceptable.

Yet, all this is nothing new to us and if changes are to be made, it has to be in Parliament. Therefore, I request our vibrant and zealous leaders and the indigenous inhabitants of the beautiful state of Meghalaya not to overlook this matter and let history repeat itself. We fight and fight, yet the results are always futile. We have none but ourselves to blame, be it from the ignorant to the backseat drivers to the opportunists. Are we going to sit within the four walls and wait for others, after all, we are infamous for our NIMBY syndrome (Not In My Backyard) because it is not happening to many of us. The blinder has scarred our vision of the harm that is to come upon us. This I can assure you that if it does not hurt you today, it will hurt you tomorrow.

### TO THE EDITOR

#### School buses imperative

will help in solving traffic jams to a considerable extent

Yours etc.,  
Avanti Mary Jyrwa,  
Via email

#### Church's statement

Editor,  
Apropos the report, "Church Cautions against sale of votes" (ST March 29,2019) I am very glad that the church has come out from its comfort zone to openly speak out against the evil perpetrated by the politics of the day. I am also gratified that the Church has asked the MPs of North East to be united in one voice to take up issues of the region unitedly for the overall growth of the region. It has also advised them what to do with regards to many other areas of concern which they know and are fully aware of. But I am very disappointed that the Church has failed to exhort voters of the region as to what type of leaders and candidates to vote for. This is very important because the polling date is knocking at our door and voters need advice and guidance from

powerful organs like the church.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via Email.

#### Rahul's final assault on poverty

Editor,  
While unveiling the centre-piece of the Congress party's manifesto for the up-coming general elections, Rahul Gandhi on March 25 last pledged that the poorest 5 crore families or 25 crore people of the country will directly get assistance of Rs 72,000 per annum in the bank accounts of their wives under the Congress's proposed Minimum Income Guarantee Scheme. Rahul Gandhi described the proposal as a “final assault on poverty in the 21st century and promised 20 percent poorest families will be directly given Rs. 72,000 annually by the central government if his party is voted to power.

However, the Congress party president has not clarified how this 25 crore poorest people would be

identified and picked up from various states & UTs. Has the Congress party made a population survey to identify the poorest 5 crore families/ 25 crore people? Nor has the Congress president indicated what percentage (pro-rata basis) from among the rural poorest of 73% & urban poorest of 27% of the total Indian population would be chosen. In a country of 130/137 crore (likely to be firmed-up as 1.37 billion in 2019) hardly about 18-19% of the population would get the amount. This is an open declaration of another form of dole/freebie in the name of MIGS-“Nyay” scheme for the poor and is an exposure of hidden agenda, included in the election manifesto, and constitutes breach of election code of conduct after declaration of the election schedule by the Election Commission of India.

Considering the past record of promising the moon to win elections the Congress party has attained the zenith of infamy for their freak/fake promises and pledges only on the eve of elections

invariably during their inept rule of seven decades (including ten years of UPA rein up to 2014) of the country. But the people of India are well aware of their failures to implement pre-poll promises that are on record. The cumulative effect of growth of educated unemployment of the present-day youth which cannot be solved by wielding the magic-wand in the twinkling of an eye, is a glaring example.

Rahul Gandhi's announced scheme of 20 per cent families belonging to the poorest category will be given Rs. 72, 000 each annually as minimum income will bust the fiscal discipline, create strong incentives against work culture and will never be implemented. This, if at all implemented, would also affect the work culture and create a group of idle and work-averse population who may be further exploited as an additional “vote-bank”.

Recently in a TV channel interview with journalist Arnab Goswami, Rahul Gandhi was seen fumbling while answering questions and had admitted that he had neither been to

Cambridge nor to Harvard University ever. It is not known whether Rahul Gandhi, the erudite scholar, had studied economics in London School of Economics or any other University of Germany or France.

About the Rafale Defence deal Rahul Gandhi appears to be unaware of the basic concepts and fundamentals of price escalation factor (at least 10% per year from 2001) and the technological improvement and sophistication of the current version of the latest Rafale Aircraft model. False propaganda ensuing from lack of scientific and technical knowledge, of course, is natural for a dynastic scion aspiring for the post of Prime Minister and hailing from a family which has not known to have contributed an engineer or a technologist or an economist so far.

Yours etc.,  
Samares Bandyopadhyay,  
Advocate, Kolkata High Court

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# Cruelty in each sip

Animal rights violation is reason enough to stay away from this rare brew of coffee

Dr Anjana Kannankara

The name Kopi Luwak ignites some intrigue in the minds of those who are not familiar with it. Well, it is the rarest and most expensive coffee available in the world; may be popularly known in a not-so attractive name 'cat-poop coffee'. However, it is not without ample reason that Kopi Luwak is frequently called the rarest and most-expensive gourmet coffee in the world, with a single pound of it selling for hundreds of US dollars.

But what is Kopi Luwak? Kopi luwak, or civet coffee, is coffee made from undigested or partially digested beans of coffee cherries, eaten and defecated by the Asian palm civet. Fermentation occurs as the cherries pass through a civet's intestines, and after being defecated with other faecal matter, they are collected for processing.

The droppings after collection is washed and the beans separated from them, cleaned and dried. The beans are then roasted and powdered before brewing. While the coffee can be prepared in a regular manner, it is advised to avoid milk and sugar to experience the real legendary taste.

The coffee bean in this form was first discovered and collected by native farmers in Indonesia during the colonial period of the 19th century, when the Dutch forbade local workers from harvesting coffee for their own use.

The lovers of the coffee claim that it has a smooth nutty and earthy flavour devoid of bitterness usually associated with the brew. The enzymes in the digestive tract of the animal render the beans softer giving it a unique taste, aroma and body. But not all coffee lovers agree; some describe this as the worst coffee ever dismissing the hype as overrated.

However, one cannot stop wondering if the ridiculousness of consuming something defecated can alter the preconceived notions of what tastes good!

## Authentic or fake

The beans obtained from civets in natural habitats are undoubtedly authentic which in no way harm the animal but it is debatable if caged civets can produce the same quality. Also, the high demand has led to several similar looking items cropping up in the market which has never ever been near a civet cat! The price is exorbitant ranging anywhere from \$35 to \$600 for a cup served at regular coffee shops. The fact that there is a market for anything highlighted as the best, garners many takers for the product irrespective of the price.



## PRECIOUS DRINK

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► But not all coffee lovers agree; some describe this as the worst coffee ever dismissing the hype as overrated

► The fact that there is a market for anything highlighted as the best, garners many takers for the product irrespective of the price. Animal rights are also violated in the process of making this brew



## Violation of animal rights

In the words of Tony Wild of 'The Guardian', "The naturally shy and solitary nocturnal creatures suffer greatly from the stress

of being caged in proximity to other luwaks, and the unnatural emphasis on coffee cherries in their diet causes other health problems too; they fight among themselves, gnaw off their own legs, start passing blood in their seats, and frequently die."

Ever since the demand has risen enormously, selfish farmers stopped worrying about the natural cultivation of the product and rather looked for ways to yield maximum profit. They began caging large number of civets and started to exclusively feed them coffee

beans. The animals are battery-caged and force-fed coffee cherries all day, regularly to enhance their business.

High-end pricing turned them to heartlessly enslaving civet cats for kopi luwak. Hundreds of these animals can be caged together where they fight or gnaw at their own limbs due to mental distress. Many farmers are uneducated on how to care for their animals and ignore when many succumb to illness and death. In a video released by PETA, filmed secretly in civet cages, the hapless animals are seen to bob and sway frantically, scratching or hurting themselves and run around in circles as a result of stress induced neurotic conditions.

Farmed civets are kept many a time in small wooden cells way different from their natural habitat. The animals are thrown to severe trauma of isolation, not even having enough space to live even leading to the beans being literally tainted by stress. Due to overfeeding of unripe coffee cherries while captive, the civets become ill. It is evidenced by bloody feces; however, once bleeding occurs, it is often too late to save the creatures. Those among us who have not lost the last trace of humanity would naturally raise the question — is it really worth the cruelty?

(The author is Director, TGL Foundation)

Photos: Google Images

# You can be independent

By Ranjan K Baruah

In the previous editions, we have published about few options for commerce students. In today's edition, we will publish few more options related to financial planning or making strategy or providing ideas related to different investment that can be taken up by commerce graduates.

**Stock Broker:** A stockbroker, share broker, registered representative, trading representative, or more broadly, an investment broker, investment advisor, financial advisor, wealth manager or investment professional is a regulated professional individual, usually associated with a brokerage firm, broker-dealer, or registered investment advisor. This is one of the easiest options for commerce graduates and they can even work independently. This term may be different in different countries so one should not be confused with different terms for the same kind of job.

**Insurance:** Insurance is a means of protection from financial loss. It is a form of risk management, primarily used to hedge against the risk of a contingent or uncertain loss. An entity that provides insurance is known as an insurer, insurance company, insurance carrier or underwriter.

A person who buys insurance is known as an insured or a policyholder. The transaction involves the insured assuming a guaranteed and known relatively small loss in the form of payment to the insurer in exchange for the insurer's promise to compensate the insured

in the event of a covered loss. The loss may or may not be financial but it must be reducible to financial terms. There are different job opportunities in the field of insurance but the common is becoming an insurance agent or advisor or consultant. It is easy

for the commerce graduates to become a part of the insurance company or corporate.

## Updates:

**NLU Entrance:** National Law University, Delhi, will, conduct All India Law Entrance Test on May 5 for admission into various courses. Aspirants may apply for the entrance by April 8.

**CLAT:** Common Law Admission Test (CLAT) is a non-statutory body created under an MoU for the convenience of the students seeking admission to various National Law Universities in the country. An entrance test is conducted to provide a list of candidates on the basis of 'merit-cum-preference' to each University for admission to their UG/PG programmes, as per the eligibility, reservation and other criteria laid down under the respective statutes of the participating universities. Last date of submission of online applications is March 31. Online examination is on May 12.

**Taiwan Governments Scholarships:** The Government of Taiwan is offering 45 scholarships to Indian students for pursuing either Master or PhD in universities of Taiwan under 2019-20 Taiwan Scholarship programme and some short-term scholarships to study Mandarin language in Taiwan under 'Huayu Enrichment Scholarships 2019-2020'. Last date for sending applications to the Taiwan embassy based in New Delhi is March 31.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer, academic consultant and strategic planner and can be reached at bkranjank@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

# Coping with violence



**Munni Khata is a victim of domestic violence. She was assaulted everyday for demanding her rights as a wife. The 25-year-old woman, who is originally from Bihar, shared her experience of dealing with violence at home. Munni got married at the age of 23 and ever since, had been a victim of physical and psychological assault. As the torture turned unbearable Munni left her husband's house at Khanpur in Uttar Pradesh and returned to her house in Delhi. Her husband followed her to Delhi as well and after a few days convinced her to return to Khanpur. The torture continued even after Munni conceived. For three years, she lived with a demon in house and then left for Delhi again, this time with her six-month-old son. In Delhi, she discovered Mahila Panchayat in Dakshinipuri, an organisation for women empowerment. For the past three months, Munni has been fighting her case with the help of the panchayat. Her case has recently been sent to the court and is now under evaluation.**

(Text and photo contributed by Poulomi Ghosh, student of Mass Media at St Anthony's College)

## Felling of trees for cremation affecting environment

# Cow dung log is eco-friendly alternative

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Lakhs of people die in India every day. The Muslims bury their dead. The Hindus burn theirs. Conventionally, firewood, electricity or LG gas is used to burn human bodies all over the world. But there is no more 'waste' wood left to burn.

In Delhi they have found a unique solution. The government gardeners pretend they are going to "trim" the existing trees. They lop off most of the large branches (often killing the tree) and sell them to Nigambodh ghat. The profit is given to the whole department — much like the traffic police share their bribes with the entire thana.

In rural India, a death in the village means a tree is cut down, and the most common victims are mango trees. So wild mangoes are disappearing and with them goes the entire pickle industry. It takes about 600 kg of wood to burn one body. The cost to the survivor is above Rs 15,000 or more. The act itself of cutting a tree is illegal, but who cares when a parent needs to be cremated.

A separate problem is the cow that has stopped giving milk. The farmer does not want to sell her to the butchers, but he does. Or leaves her on the road to fend for

herself. She wanders into the fields and is beaten to death with lathis. Or her legs are cut viciously by the barbed wire that most farmers use illegally. Hundreds of terribly wounded cows come to my hospital in Bareilly every day, their skin stripped off their thighs and their bones exposed.

Gaushalas are few and far between. And most of them are prison cells for this gentle animal, who often starves to death in the gaushala itself.

There is no proper management of any gaushala. No doctors, and often the owners show the same disdain towards the milkless cow that her previous owners did.

Here is a business solution to both problems. We need to change our attitude towards the cow. Milk is not the most important part of the cow, it is her dung. This dung should be used in the cremation grounds. For Hindus, the cow is sacred and so using cow dung, instead of wood, should not pose a problem.

There is a machine for making cow dung logs. My gaushala in Delhi has bought one two years ago and we sell the logs to Nigambodh Ghat. Even though we are not regular, because we are far too busy with actually saving cows, we earn Rs 60,000 a month. It is a fraction of what Nigambodh needs: they could absorb a hundred times that amount.

Cow dung logs cost less.

There was an optical problem till recently, since people did not want to burn their relatives with round Kandas/Uapalas. But now they are being made into long logs by this machine that makes them with minimum manual intervention. While putting fresh cowdung into the machine we also put a little fragrant "havan samagri".

The cowdung log making ma-



chine is very reasonably priced : between Rs 25,000 - 35,000.

A combination of dung and straw ( or any aggro waste - harvested crop residues) is fed into the hopper of the machine. A screw mechanism is provided in the machine which helps in mixing the raw materials

thoroughly, compressing them and extruding them out. There are different moulds to make different log sizes. The logs are then put in the sunlight to dry out the moisture, making them hard and sturdy. The machine can be operated on electricity, one horse power motor, or even manually. It is easy to operate, requires little maintenance and no hard labour. Even women can operate it efficiently.

A cylindrical hole in the centre is provided to facilitate easy drying and efficient combustion. The machines available are capable of making one log per minute of 3 in. by 3 in. and 3 feet long. Logs can also be cut into small pieces for use in choolas and havans. The slurry from biogas units can also be used for making logs, by mixing it with straw of any harvest residues.

Almost every village in India has a cremation ground. Every town certainly has two. If someone were to take a contract to supply the logs to them, they could earn lakhs for the gaushala and for themselves. Cows would stop dying of starvation and be treated with more respect.

Cowdung can also solve another very important problem. The trees of India are supposed to be planted by the forest department. They get crores of rupees every year to grow trees and then to plant them. Their success rate - according to their own figures - is 2 per cent!!

One of the reasons (apart from

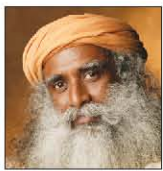
the fact that they never grow plants in their nurseries, and pinch the money!) is because they grow the seedlings in thick black plastic bags which they buy for Rs 4 each. This is expensive, but, even worse, these plants are usually planted along with the plastic by careless forest labour, resulting in 100% mortality. Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh supposedly planted 1 crore trees each last year. Less than a few hundred have survived. Think of the waste of your tax money.

Another machine by the same maker exists, to make cow dung flowerpots of different sizes. These can be offered commercially and sold to the forest department for their nurseries, and to private nurseries. The pots give nutrition to the plants, withstand the rain and watering and can be planted in the soil along with their plants. We would, have a dramatic increase in trees and reverse climate change. Every state government should change their policy, so, if you are reading this, please cut it out and send it to the CMs and Forest secretaries. (To tell you the truth, I tried with one state. The CM agreed. I sent the machine. The local forest officers said it didn't work. It turned out that the plastic sellers pay them a rupee per bag).

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

# Should I have a child?

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



Today, casually having a child is quite irresponsible because though people think there are many problems in the world, essentially, the fundamental problem is too many human beings on the planet. 7.3 billion people is the highest number of human beings ever on this little planet. Just 30 years ago, it was about 4 billion. The UN is predicting that by 2050, we will be 9.2 or 9.4 billion. There are too many human beings and not enough other life – plant and animal.

There is no need to produce one more child just like that. You can always adopt one. It is no longer about your individual choices. The individual choices we are making are killing the planet, and it makes a big difference in the way the rest of humanity lives. One need not have children for social reasons or for some other compulsions. A child is not a plaything for you to produce just to play around with for a few years. It is another life just like you and me.

Fundamentally, bearing a child has become such a big experience in people's lives because only by bearing a child can most people know a certain depth of involvement and inclusion with life. With nothing else are they so deeply involved. They are incapable of being deeply involved with the life around them. Their only capability is to be involved with a child, because a child does not have so much of a personality when it comes into your hands.

Another thing is because you have so much of identification with the physical body, something that comes out of your body is definitely yours. You may say, "My house is mine," but you know you can lose it. You may say, "This property is mine," but you may lose it. But this comes out of your biological body and you cannot deny it. Even if your child denies it, you still know they are anyway yours. So it is a sure-fire extension of yourself.

People say they bear a child out of love, not out of compulsion. When

they say, "Love for their child," where did they get love for their unborn child when they have no love for life around them? So it is a compulsion. When I say "compulsion," the compulsions need not necessarily be just physical. They can be psychological and emotional. There is a need to extend yourself.

Most people want to have children because they want an extension of themselves. They want to leave something behind when they go. Children are their greatest property. That is the only way they know involvement. Otherwise, they are incapable of being involved. Why, especially for a woman, bearing a child has become such a big experience is because of her involvement. Very few people can involve themselves to that extent even in their love affairs. Even there, the involvement is because bodies touch. Because their identification is with the physical body, the only way they know to involve themselves is by opening their body. Only when a person rises to another level of experience, his involvement with something else or someone else goes to great depths without physical involvement, because his identification with the body is receding. Identification with the other dimension of yourself is building momentum.

## Most people want children as they want an extension of themselves

If you have never tasted life, by bearing a child you are getting involved with life. But if you know how to involve yourself with everything around you, you will see a child is not a compulsion anymore.

Would it not be very beautiful if human beings conceived consciously, because it is needed for the human race rather than out of their own physical compulsions? Is it not in many ways an indignity to the person who is born that he is born out of your compulsions, not out of your consciousness? Would it not be so much more beautiful if they created this very consciously, that this being is needed for human life to happen and they produce it with that consciousness.

*(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan in 2017 for exceptional and distinguished service)*

# Importance of Panchayati Raj

By Sauro Dasgupta

It's not possible for the Centre to carry out the responsibilities of the provinces from a particular location. Therefore, the powers have been divided into three levels — the Centre, the State and the local levels. The local government is the grassroots level of the government and is very important for decentralisation of power. As India is a vast country, devolution of power at the local level would be a long-term solution to the problems of the people.

In India "local self government" refers to the grassroots governance through the Panchayat Raj Institutions at the local rural level and Municipalities and Municipal Corporations in towns and cities.

In ancient India, kingdoms rose and fell, despite which the systems of local self government, i.e. the Panchayats continued to exist for a long period of time till the advent of the British in India, who abolished the Panchayats and set up the district and local boards as units of local self government for the effective administration of the Indian countryside.

The entire rural government was brought under district level, entrusted to a district collector, an Indian Civil Service officer, who was made responsible for the good governance in the country. The provincial governments had absolute control over the district administration. After attaining independence, the Indian leaders tried to establish the dream of "local self government" or "Gram Swarajya" by reorienting the nature of the District administration. Several projects were launched to promote local self government.

'The Community Development Programme' was launched in 1952 and was aimed at carrying out integrated rural development work. The network of administrative machinery was created quite strongly to initiate de-

velopment all over India. The administrative machinery in every district comprised the block development officers (BDOs), the executive officers (EOs) and village level workers.

An informal three-tier Panchayat System was set up in 1959 in consonance with the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee.

In December 1977, the Janta government appointed a

committee on Panchayati Raj institutions under the chairmanship of Ashoka Mehta. The committee submitted its report in August 1978 and made 132 recommendations to revive and strengthen the declining Panchayati Raj system in the country, which caused Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal to pass new laws on the same.

The next major change in the Panchayat system of India came in the form of the passage of the Panchayati Raj Act (73rd Constitutional Amendment) in 1992. A key motivation of this act was the belief that local governments may be better placed than centrally appointed bureaucrats to identify and respond to the needs of the village. Hence, this act was an important part of India's move towards decentralisation.

Despite many successes it is a serious problem that the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions do not operate as functional

public participation but as the key administrative and technical positions are manned by IAS officers who are under the control of state governments and hardly care for the local people.

There is a lack of proper coordination and cooperation between the Panchayat officers like the BDOs and the district collectors. District officials are approached by MPs and MLAs and pres-

women and minorities have no role in the functioning of the Panchayats.

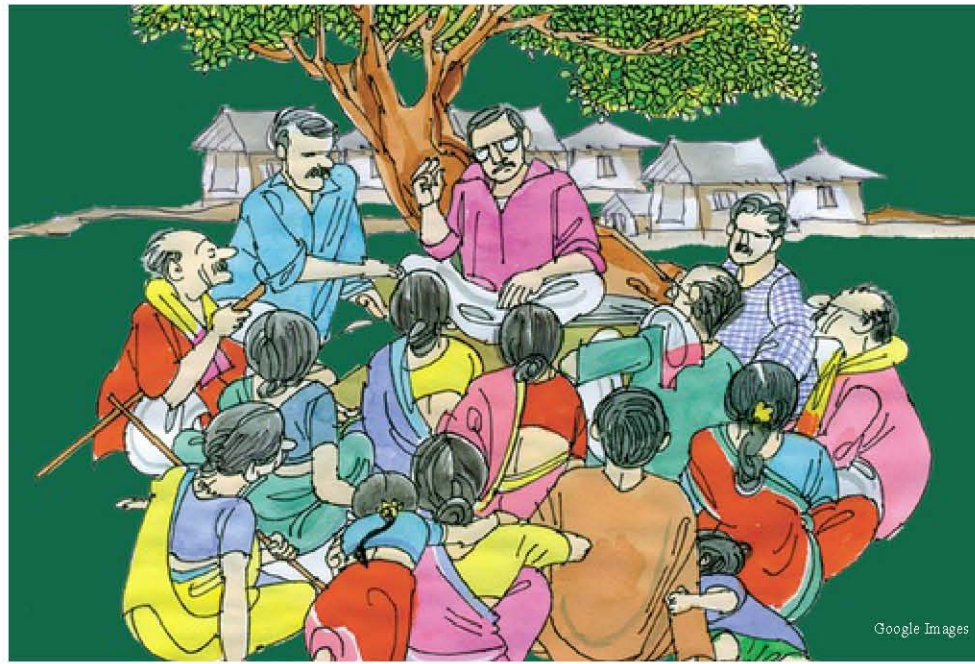
However, since the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act gave some reservation to these people, especially women, men forced their female family members to contest the Panchayat polls, though they hardly have a role in the Panchayats. It has been observed that the women members are ignored and harassed. In the case of a conflict between upper caste people and the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, the Panchayats invariably rule in favour of the former and the latter are tortured or killed, especially in North India and West Bengal.

There is an urgent need to ameliorate these problems. Rural India need forward looking leaders to rein in Panchayats in their hands. Local elections must be fought on a non-partisan basis. They should receive more finance to do their work well. Political parties should not be allowed to seize power in Panchayats and grossly inefficient and corrupt people should be brought to the book. A proper compromise between centralisation and decentralisation should be made.

The Panchayats should conduct themselves like legislatures and their activities should be controlled and supervised. Villagers should be educated and Panchayat members should be properly trained. These steps will enable us to get rid of the maladies affecting the Panchayats in the long run.

The system of administering a large country like India with a teeming population, comprising illiterate and inadequately educated people from the grassroots level under the Panchayati Raj system, has caused wonder which overwhelmed even the foreign dignitaries, who visited India to have a glimpse of the country's administration at the lowest tier. They profusely applauded this globally unparalleled administrative echelon and unhesitatingly prescribed such a system for any developing and underdeveloped country of the world to have a firm basis of administration for the well being and uplift of its population.

*(The author is a student of International Relations at Jadavpur University, Kolkata)*



freedom to direct and implement programmes which must be planned centralised and have great drive. The blending of these functions has questioned the autonomy of the Panchayats, almost converting them into the agents of the state governments, which is against their key principles.

The functions of the rural local self governments overlap, causing confusion shifting of responsibilities and duplication of efforts. The Panchayats' powers and authority are too limited for them to become Institutions of self government in reality. They have no discretionary powers. Inadequate finance is a crucial problem of the Panchayats.

A lot of money is required for developmental activities, though the sources of income of the Panchayats are very limited. The grants received by them are inadequate. A general reluctance has been observed among them to collect funds through taxes for fear of losing public popularity.

The Panchayats were introduced to provide effective

committee on Panchayati Raj institutions under the chairmanship of Ashoka Mehta. The committee submitted its report in August 1978 and made 132 recommendations to revive and strengthen the declining Panchayati Raj system in the country, which caused Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal to pass new laws on the same.

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public participation but as the key administrative and technical positions are manned by IAS officers who are under the control of state governments and hardly care for the local people.

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 31, 2019

New beginnings are in store as Venus conjunct Saturn on your solar return chart. Efforts for a job change or switchover can be stepped up. Contacts pave the way for future activities. You may have to travel on short notice. You feel secure financially but need to curb wasteful and unnecessary spending. Family life will be fantastic you can look forward to home renovation or even a change of residence. You enjoy the changes made in your lifestyle. If involved in social work or political activities then you take centre stage. Marriage or a romance is also on the cards.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

This phase brings mixed results. You are able to find a healthy balance between work and home. Relationships and partnerships benefit from expansive, warm energy, or successful new ones are entered into in this period. You are likely to benefit through marriage, business partnerships and negotiations. You need to negotiate with more care than before. You may find yourself taking on the role of consultant or advisor. Good publicity may come your way. If your work takes you before the public, you can safely expect popularity.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

You would have an excellent aptitude for understanding the fine arts; especially activities related to dance, music and singing. You are more productive with a responsible outlook. Although you have a desire to make contacts, you are now rather pre-occupied with learning or producing. You will have ideally gained a greater depth of understanding, having focused on information and communication that you really can use to feel more effective in the world. You maintain harmonious relations in friendship and love.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

This is a phase that brings fortune, trips, creativity and communication. Plenty of social activities also figure at this time. A strong mental connection with a loved one is likely. You might meet a partner through learning avenues. A tendency to think too much and to focus on serious or even negative issues should be watched. The skills you are working so hard on will be valuable in the coming weeks. Work could involve more counseling or collaborating with a partner. This is a favorable time to reach out for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. You may redecorate your house as you bring new furniture, soft furnishings and decorative items.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

This phase brings new beginnings, whether this means a fresh start in existing relationships or new ones altogether. Power struggles are possible in close personal relationships. Your relationships tend to have distinct themes revolving around personal power, domination, jealousy, manipulation, or self-will. Study business offers and professional opportunities in detail before rejecting or accepting them. You are especially fond of higher studies, children and spirituality. It is a time when you need to let go of things that no longer serve their purpose, and hold on to things that have a future.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

The planetary configuration would help to boost your morale and self-confidence as you meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues. Sharing daily events and goings-on with one another gives you much pleasure. This can also suggest a real learning experience with someone with whom you can share ideas and come to a better understanding of how you define yourself. Partnering with a co-worker, or working with a partner, could also figure strongly.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

This period brings commercial transactions and business deals to the forefront. Money matters take priority, as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. You would

have cordial relations with colleagues and friends and have an enjoyable time in interacting and conversing with your loved ones. Life picks up pace considerably, and you feel like you can move mountains; and you probably can. This is the time to go after what you want. It is easier than usual to be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

Love, romance and excitement in personal relations would be highlighted. Intimate personal relations and business partnerships are likely to get closer and limited relationships are likely to fall apart. It is right to make important decisions. Relationships would move to a completely new level for you. You will form a partnership that either leads to marriage or is otherwise significant. Opportunities for fun and romance are particularly strong. You have tremendous energy at your disposal.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

You would exhibit mastery in your field of activities during this phase. You achieve goals and targets on time. This is an exceptionally exciting time as professional and business opportunities are offered to you at this time. Your communications, presentations and style brings you closer to people who matter to you as you make a favourable impression on them. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities in these areas of life. You might also spend a lot of time in physical activities like sports and games.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

You are emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental with your family and relations. If you do get a chance to travel, which could come up quite unexpectedly, unusual, eye-opening experiences may be in store for you. The people that you meet tend to stir you into new ways of thinking. You are more inclined towards a personal philosophy that is traditional now. You may encounter some challenges regarding shared finances or property.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

Issues of shared resources, shares and possessions are featured this week. Take charge of your life by taking the necessary steps to make yourself feel secure—on solid financial ground. You have more work and you may be offered a leadership role in your organization. This is a phase of professional stability and good financial returns. You are called upon to take a stand. If you continue to tend to your partner's comfort levels while ignoring your own, feelings of resentment and neglect can affect your relationship.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

You would get mixed results this week. You would initiate a current of forceful energy to achieve success in an important venture. Finances are a serious matter for you, and you could take pleasure in building your resources and analyzing your cash flow. There is a fine line between financial discipline and worrying excessively about financial details. You tackle domestic and work related issues and handle all these issues successfully. Surprises surrounding personal matters, shared finances and resources and financial support may be in store.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

This phase brings cooperation and harmony professionally and enhances your reputation and public standing. You would find more joy in your daily routines. Although work can be rather hectic at times, you tend to enjoy taking care of all the details. A move towards working out of the home is likely for many of you. If you have been trying to land a dream job, this is more likely to occur now. Get in touch with what feels most comfortable for you, and the intimacy level in your relationship will step up. Avoid over-analyzing your relationships, or treating them more like businesses.

# 'Salman Khan gives time, energy in launching actors'

Superstar Salman Khan is launching debutant Zaheer Iqbal in his own co-produced film Notebook. In the promotional journey of the film, Iqbal shared how Khan helped him in getting launched in the Hindi film industry. IBNS-TWF brings excerpts:



**What kind of response are you getting after the trailer launch?**

Everyone is saying the trailer shows the film is content-based. All are praising the cinematography. People are also saying I don't look like newcomers which is a big compliment.

**How do you feel that you are making debut in Salman Khan's film?**

Obviously it feels great that Salman sir is launching us. It is a dream come true for anybody. More than that the amount of time and energy he gives in launching an actor is admirable. His time is precious but he spent hours for the film. It is a great feeling that Salman sir is launching me.

**Tell us about your experience on the first day when Salman Khan told you about your launch.**

It was at my sister's wedding. I was dancing and then I got off the stage. He (Salman Khan) was telling me about the film. Then he had called me to work on my body. Initially I couldn't believe my ears. I literally had to confirm it (offer) from others who had heard it (smiles). I was hearing his dialogues for some days even.

**How was the preparation for the launch?**

I was introduced to a gym trainer by

was made to train in different forms of dances as well as actions and also brushing up skills in horse-riding. I was then training for eight hours a day. But when Nitin sir (Nitin Kakkar, director) came on board, I had to deconstruct everything because my character is not like the one who is so outgoing. Then I had a much-needed workshop for four months. The workshop really helped me.

**Do you remember the first shot? How was it?**

My first shot was walking into a house and pushing a door. It was a high-speed shot. I'm grateful that my first shot was such because I love high-speed shots.

Often we remain unsure about films because success in the industry is uncertain. But after giving my first shot, I realised this is my area. It was a memorable day for me.

