

"The learning process is something you can incite, literally incite, like a riot."

— Audre Lorde

The Shillong Times

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Provocative Statements Unwarranted

AT a time when tempers are running high post the violent attack on innocent bystanders by members of the FKJGP during their unemployment rally, a woman BJP office bearer from Bengal is adding fuel to the fire by raising the slogan, "Boycott Meghalaya." Playing politics with an issue that can lead to further conflagration is not acceptable and this has to be conveyed to the lady by BJP karyakartas from Meghalaya. One can understand that there is a community solidarity and a desire to speak up for the victimised but inciting violence against the people of Meghalaya who are working and/or studying outside the state is nothing but vendetta. And why should anyone from Bengal, where political violence is endemic and where the attackers and victims are members of the same community, be hyper-ventilated about events in Meghalaya? Trouble mongering is uncalled for and the BJP member from West Bengal should be told to pull down the provocative video.

Having said that, the silence from the MDA Government especially the Home Minister and Chief Minister is stunning. Are these two gentlemen going to take action against the wrongdoers? Will those perpetrators of violence be rounded up or will they escape the arms of the law yet again? Too many cases of murder, arson and targeted violence have just been buried under police files. It's almost as if the Meghalaya Police has never been trained to tackle what is the most common problem in Meghalaya – communal violence. And sadly, no one is held accountable for this decrepit policing. No heads have ever rolled for non-performance. Policing is done in such a lackadaisical manner that the lawless elements already know they can get away with murder.

While the police are doing their best to apprehend the drug mafia and that merits appreciation, drugs are not the only law and order challenge. The challenge is to maintain the rule of law at all times. When non-tribal maintenance staff of companies from outside who visit the Welsh Mission Hospital to repair hospital machinery are beaten up and the attackers gets away, it speaks very poorly of the police force. Meghalaya Police has in the past dealt very astutely with militancy under capable and effective Home Ministers like Late TH Rangad and RG Lyngdoh. After them the Police Force has just gone awry and the degeneration is most visible in these 4.10 years of the MDA rule. The public must seek accountability from the Government but especially from the Home Minister. He has to answer for the dismal performance of the Police force under his watch. Enough of lame excuses!

Letters to the Editor

Response to Rakhee Mitra: Stop your divisive politics

The recent video that made the rounds on social media of a certain Ms. Rakhi Mitra, Mahila Morcha, BJP, West Bengal and Social Activist reeks of arrogance and racist undertones. While we condemn the violence at the rally, Ms Rakhi in her video has very clearly exposed in her opening statement itself what she and her ilk thinks of the Northeast in general and Meghalaya in particular, that whereas the rest of her "countrymen" are enjoying their weekend, her "brothers and sisters" in Shillong are getting beaten up by the "tribals". It is evident that she herself harbours sentiments of divisiveness as she continues to hurl a slew of other inappropriate and derogatory generalisations.

As a "Social Activist" and one belonging to the National ruling party, the BJP to boot, she has openly issued what sounds like a veiled threat, wherein she hypothesizes a situation where citizens belonging to this state are chased out from other parts of the country back to their "hole". Clearly, Ms Rakhi has been fed half-baked stories and untruths and, in her mind, she has painted the North East and Shillong in particular as a place of complete intolerance. With comments like these, how is she any different from

the thugs and goons on the street driven by the same mentality. We expect an activist and especially one belonging to a National party to exercise more control and restraint while putting across her sentiments. Citizens of Shillong have time and again condemned and spoken out against atrocities towards any section of people, not only in this state but those happening across the country. We are as much citizens of this country and we are appalled at your divisive rhetoric in the name of condemning the incident on October 28, 2022. We would like to appeal to our fellow countrymen not to paint us all with the same brush for we are more than what the media conveniently chooses to air of us on their news channels.

Yours etc
Balaki Tariatang
Shillong

Enough of lawlessness

Editor, So much has already been expressed by many on the mindless mayhem unleashed by hoodlums on defenceless people in Shillong, on Friday last and yet we have learned nothing from such ugly communal encounters which have occurred periodically in the past. The authorities who were lackadaisical in their approach to the entire bigoted savage attacks must be held accountable and justice must be meted out to the victims.

During this entire tenure

This essay is dedicated to all Bengalis ever killed in pogroms in the northeast.

While nobody can literally be an identity, we each experience ourselves as a mosaic of identities – that is, until we get to know ourselves better. In the northeast, the linguistic identity has always been pronounced. In my kindergarten class in Shillong, children would ask, "What language are you?" instead of "What language do you speak?" Although superfluous in the ultimate, identities matter historically. In post-independent India, the Bengali identity has been particularly striking.

To be a Bengali has been both a boon and a bane. Given the illustrious history of Bengal and its innumerable contributions to the cultural tapestry of India, the Bengali identity has been a boon. We are spread between two nations – India and Bangladesh. Like other Indian languages, Bengali comes in many dialects. Bengal has contributed great stalwarts, both intellectual and spiritual. Some of the greatest luminaries of the twentieth-century have come from Bengal, which has produced not only writers, poets, dramatists, artists, musicians, historians, scientists, and thinkers, but also saints and savants. Yet I contest the stereotype that Bengalis are inherently intelligent. Because intelligence comes from virtue and closeness to God – not from an identity. Bengal has also produced numberless freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the freedom movement. Some of the greatest revolutionaries of post-independent India hail from Bengal. The Bengali culture is therefore rich intellectually, politically, and artistically. But more importantly, it is rich morally and spiritually. Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Tagore are only a few in Wikipedia's long list of illustrious Bengalis. All this despite the trials Bengal has undergone. Having survived not just the Bengal famine, but the partition of India and many other tribulations, Bengalis are a resilient people.

From the Bramho Samaj of yore, to the Baul and Bhakti traditions, Bengal has produced myriad religious expressions, including the highest flights of mysticism that have attracted both Hindus and Muslims. Bengal's poets include poet-seers, who have unlocked to the mysteries of mysticism. Bengal is also known for its uniquely rich traditions of goddess worship. From the great Durga, to the dark Mother Kali (representing the benign and the terrible), we have a large pantheon of goddesses. Per-

haps a result of this rich tradition, the feminine ideal in Bengal has always been that of motherhood. Elderly women sometimes express a beautiful spiritual motherhood towards not only humans, but also animals.

Our elaborate and healthy cuisine is served in a logical order (from the standpoint of digestion). My beloved grandmother would cook sumptuous feasts that began with simple greens and bitter foods, followed by dal, hors d'oeuvres, vegetables, and the proverbial fish curry, and ended with chutney and dessert. Bengal is well known for its variety of desserts.

The landscape of West Bengal is beautiful and varied – from seascapes on the shore of the Bay of Bengal to the hills and mountains of Darjeeling. On a train trip through the countryside, the swirling paddy fields exude tranquility. Like the poor elsewhere in India, poor villagers in Bengal can be spiritually sophisticated. Despite their destitution, they are hospitable. Although not xenophobic, rural Bengalis are not necessarily friendly. They can be surly on the first encounter. But once the ice thaws, poor Bengalis can be hospitable. During my last visit, a humble sweeper's wife mothered me, bemoaning the mosquito bites on my face. She was upset that I had not been provided a mosquito net! That the poor in Bengal and India still have so much love in their hearts, despite their sufferings, speaks volumes for the resilience and glory of human nature.

To sum up, the Bengali culture accommodates variety within a broad and loose unity that is rarely xenophobic. One reason for this catholicity may be the healthy universality embedded in Bengal's unique particularity. This means, the Bengali culture is cosmopolitan, without forfeiting uniqueness. Unlike the suffocating oneness born of xenophobic communalism, Bengal's unity is deeply pluralistic – almost too much.

The excessive idealism of the Left perhaps destroyed brotherhood among Bengalis, even as it united us with the larger world. Hindu Bengali society may be divided by caste. But the Bengali culture unites, through art, cuisine, language, religion, pujas, shared moral values, etc., while leaving enough room for dissent and differences. Contrary to the stereotype that Bengalis are clannish, I have always known us to be fractious, argumentative, and quarrelsome. If anything, we fight among ourselves. Historically, violence in Bengal

has been political and economic – not xenophobic.

The only forms of Bengali xenophobia are relatively benign. First, Kolkata Bengalis regard those outside Bengal (leave alone the diaspora) as "foreigners." Never ever has this mild intra-Bengali xenophobia degenerated to violence against the perceived outsider. At best antiquated, this chauvinism is, at worst, conceit that is easily checked. Never has it degenerated to the violent xenophobia characteristic of the northeast. Second, the political party, "Amra Bangali," which arose as a defensive measure, spurred by anti-Bengali violence in the northeast, comes with the potential for xenophobia, given its demand for a separate Bangladesh. It has opposed the bid for Gorkhaland. Third, of late, xenophobia against non-Bengalis has been on the rise in West Bengal. But thankfully, none of this has erupted in pogroms of the kind Bengalis have faced in the northeast.

In my experience, it has always been a boon to be a Bengali, because it is difficult not to take reasonable pride in such a rich heritage – a perspective to be distinguished from the anachronistic pride Bengalis often take in their former glory. But in post-independent India, the Bengali identity has declined to a bane that eclipses the boon it bestows. That the Rohingyas, described by the UN as "one of the world's most persecuted minorities," are Bengalis, should not surprise us, for we too are a persecuted people. Despite Bengal's illustrious heritage and enormous contributions to pre and post-independent India, Bengalis have been persecuted, especially in the northeast, but also in the north. Instead of expressing gratitude for Bengal's enormous contributions to the freedom movement, especially its back-breaking trauma of the partition – anti-Bengali Indians have persecuted Bengalis with prejudice, hatred, violence, and xenophobia. The recent furor against Bengali speaking Miya Muslims in Assam is only the latest symptom of a long-smoldering problem.

I have long tried to understand this anti-Bengali prejudice, but in vain. It is hardly the fault of the Bengali if the British used him to administer other parts of India. Moreover, anti-Bengali prejudice has often morphed from mere bias (which can be ignored) to virulent violence, which should never be tolerated. I could understand (without justifying), if Bengalis had

first persecuted Khasis, Assamese, and other anti-Bengali Indians with violence. But this is not the case.

What is the underlying cause? Is it toxic envy and resentment of a remarkable culture? Or, is it disdain for the suffering Bengali, so wronged by history? Or a bit of both? Partition broke the confidence of the Bengali people, leaving them diffident, fearful, and impoverished. Even the aftermath of partition cast a long shadow that lingered for decades. If indeed anti-Bengali prejudice is spurred by disdain for the suffering Bengali, it is a sadistic evil that can only hurt those who engage in it.

Sadly, the history of the northeast bears ample testimony to such evil – from Bongal Kheda (1960 onwards) and the Goreswar massacre (1960), to the North Kamrup violence (1980), Khoirabari massacre (1983), Silapathar massacre (1983), and Nellie massacre (1983). In the Silapathar massacre, more than 1000 people were killed in clashes, with eyewitnesses reporting babies being snatched from their mother's arms and thrown into the fire. In the Nellie massacre, AASU (All Assam Students Union) unleashed a pogrom on February 18, 1983, attacking Bengali Muslim peasants in 14 villages. According to unofficial sources, more than 10,000 people died. According to official sources this figure is 2,191. The fact that not a single culprit was prosecuted or punished, thanks to the 1985 Assam Accord, shows how lawless and unjust identity politics can be in the northeast. Bengalis may have lost their lives, but their killers lost their souls, poisoning their own societies by their presence. Where is the atonement for such unprovoked sadism?

Who can resolve this macabre prejudice against Bengalis? The solution should come from two groups – the youth of the northeast and the wise. Smelling the winds of change, the youth should educate their elders that the future lies in growing cosmopolitanism and globalism, with identity politics and perhaps even the nation state, historically obsolete. The wise should atone, educate, and transform their societies, recognizing that savage unprovoked violence against innocent unarmed people boomerangs back with full vengeance – taking the form of cultural toxins that destroy their societies from within. Such destruction is far more catastrophic than the demographic extinction the xenophobe fears in his extreme paranoia, hatred, and ignorance.

Chief and the Home Minister reply? I wish to ask why is there so much hatred? "The innocent people on the streets were assaulted for no fault of theirs and not a single arrests has been made as yet. Where is the justice? Who do we report to? Where do we go for justice?"

Is this, 'Azadi Ki Amrit Mohatso'v' that India is celebrating?

Yours etc.,
—Anjan Kumar Das,
Shillong 6.

Privatisation of Festivals

Editor, The Government should no longer support these so-called Festivals which are all in the name of tourism promotion and attraction. These festivals benefit only a handful of individuals and few Department Officials of the Govt of Meghalaya. I witnessed the recently concluded so-called the two days 'Tri Hills Festival' at the State Central Library where food stalls sold their items at extravagant prices. People had to spend Rs 180 for a single piece of "Putharo" and 3 spoons of "Dohjem" which would have cost Rs 30 to Rs 40 on all normal days. What I am trying to say is that the Organising Government Dept should monitor the rates of each and every item as the stall owners are just looting the public all in the name of indigenous food and what not. The festival was for a good cause though as the art exhibition, music was there to be enjoyed and

appreciated by the public. But again, how much did the Government had to actually spend for this spectacle? Well that's a very difficult question.

The School Teachers have had to fight for their livelihood by protesting in the streets for days while this Government turns a blind eye to their plight. The youth are unemployed and frustrated, roads are full of potholes etc. So, I feel that the Government should set their priorities right first. Whether to help the teachers, the youths of the State, improve road conditions in rural and urban areas or organise and spend crores of rupees for some 2 or 3 day festival. The Cherry Blossom Festival is another upcoming festival where crores of money will be spent to satisfy a few greedy individuals.

I feel the public should wake up and boycott all these Government financed festivals and should instead support the privatisation of these so-called new and happening festivals of the State. Crores of rupees will be saved by the Government. In fact the Government will also earn some revenue. After privatisation, the stall owner can sell his a single piece of "Putharo" and 3 spoons of "Dohjem" for Rs 500...I won't complain.

Yours etc.,
Daminot C Swer
Via email

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EPFO payroll data reveals sharp fall in formal job creation

Labour market deteriorates despite economic recovery

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

The provisional payroll data of EPFO released in October 2022 reveals that formal job creation in August sharply dropped by 7 per cent compared to a month earlier in July, though the government press release preferred to claim that the organisation added 16.94 lakh net members, which was an increase of 14.40 per cent as compared to the corresponding month during last year in 2021.

Modi government's claim was aimed shrewdly to veil the present ground realities in the labour market in which formal salaried jobs with certain level of social security are diminishing. The companies in organised sector have increasingly been cutting jobs and resorting to outsourcing, which is also reflected in the latest EPFO data. The government's comparison shows increase because of the low employment level last year when numerous workplaces were just closed or under strict containment measures imposed during second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. August 2021 was the time when the market has just started recovering.

The EPFO data shows that net job addition in August 2022 declined to 16.94 lakh from 18.2 lakh in July, while it stood at 18.3 lakh in June. It means sharp fall in formal job creation in the third consecutive month since June. It is in contrast with Modi government's claim that they are working hard for quality regular and formal job creation in the country. It was also the month of June when PM Modi announced that they would give jobs to 10 lakh people in government sector in 18 months. By October this month they have distributed 75,000 jobs in a "Rojgar Mela" recently while formal job creation declined sharply month after month.

Of the total 16.94 lakh members added during August 2022, the EPFO data shows, that around 9.87 lakh new members have come under the ambit of EPFO for the first time. Out of 9.87 lakh new members added, approximately only 58.32 per cent are from the age-group of 18-25 years of age. This age-group signifies a crucial stage for an individual's potential in terms of earning capacity and joining organized workforce in large numbers following their education.

The data shows that during the month, approximately 7.07 lakh net members exited but rejoined EPFO by changing their jobs within the establishments covered by EPFO and opted to transfer their funds from previous PF account to the current account instead of submitting claims for final settlement. This may be attributed to various e-initiatives taken by EPFO for seamless and uninterrupted service delivery. However, the exit of such a large number of regular employees is a matter of concern, since it underscores the continued volatility in the labour market.

Gender-wise analysis of payroll data indicates that enrolment of net female members has been only 3.63 lakh in August, 2022. Year-on-year comparison of enrolment data shows that net membership of females in organized workforce has

increased by 22.60 per cent in August, 2022 compared to the net female membership during previous year in August, 2021. However, the level of female participation is still very low in comparison to male participation in the workforce. Moreover, comparison with last year is misleading, since that was the time of the second wave of the pandemic.

State-wise payroll figures highlight that month-on-month growing trend in net member addition was observed in states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar etc. During the month, the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Gujarat and Delhi continue to remain in the lead by adding approximately 11.25 lakh net members during the month, which is 66.44 per cent of total net payroll addition across all age groups. The data show that labour market recovery is concentrated in only few states of the country while the majority are still waiting for formal sector jobs availability.

The classification of industry-wise payroll data indicates that mainly two categories i.e. 'Expert services' (consisting of manpower agencies, private security agencies and small contractors etc.) and 'Trading-Commercial establishments' constitute 47.03 per cent of total member addition during the month. Comparing industry-wise data with that of the previous month, higher enrolments have been noticed in industries namely, 'Electrical, Mechanical or General Engineering Products', 'Electronic Media Companies in Private Sector', 'University', 'Financing Establishment' etc. It also indicates uneven sectorwise recovery, in which most of the sectors are lagging behind.

The data from Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) also show similar falling trend in formal jobs. In August 2022, only 1.46 lakh subscribers were added under this scheme compared to 1.59 lakh in July. It was a decline of 8 per cent in a month. In June, there was an addition of 1.56 lakh and in May it was 1.51.

There was also decline in the new National Pension Scheme (NPS). In August new additions were 65,543 as against 66,014 in July.

The decline in formal sector job creation despite the economic recovery shows that the economic recovery is not working for the workforce, and the present conditions in the labour market is further pushing informalisation of jobs, which are mostly vulnerable. October is ending with an unemployment rate of about 8 per cent, as against 6.43 per cent in September according to CMIE data.

It indicates tough times ahead for job seekers in general, and formal job seekers in particular. Labour market metrics in October are significantly poorer than in September. LPR remains under 40 per cent and an employment rate in the range of 35-36 per cent. There is no sign of improvement in the labour market despite the RBI's claim of accelerated economic recovery in the coming months, since such a growth creates wealth but not enough jobs. India urgently needs course correction. (IPA Service)

"No matter the circumstances that you may be going through, just push through it."

— Ray Lewis

The Shillong Times

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Double-engine disaster

PREDICTABLY, there's no egg yet on the face of the movers and shakers of Gujarat over the epic collapse of a suspension bridge in Morbi, the largely frequented tourism centre. They are putting on a brave front. There were no resignations but a few arrests. Around 140 holiday-makers were killed in the mishap on Sunday evening while around 200 others present on the bridge had a providential escape. The actual reasons for the collapse would be investigated, but nothing goes to show the guilty would be punished. The nexus between politicians, contractors, engineers and bureaucrats is massive and not limited to Gujarat. Between them, they take cuts, protect each other and generally remain untouched.

The cited reasons for the bridge collapse were many. For one, the company that took the 2-crore contract for repair and maintenance of the 145-year-old bridge allegedly did not have the expertise to handle such work. The ropes on which the bridge was hanging were "not changed" despite their wear and tear. Likely, the saved money was shared and pocketed. The bridge was reportedly having a capacity to carry only 150 persons while over 400 people had thronged it in the post-Diwali revelry. There was no signboard at the ticket counter limiting the number of visitors to the bridge. Nor was such a rule enforced. The bridge, after a six-month maintenance, was reopened five days before the mishap without obtaining a fitness certificate from the official agency. Clearly, those put in the seats of governance were nonchalant.

Curiously, since the year 2000, almost all the major bridge collapses around the world have taken place in India. A flyover collapse in Kolkata killed 27 and injured over 80 in 2016. The same year, 28 persons died in the collapse of a 100-year-old bridge over Savitri river in Maharashtra. A cable bridge collapse in Surat killing 10 persons in June, 2014. Some 48 persons were killed in the Kota Chambal bridge collapse in Rajasthan in 2009. The Veligonda rail overbridge in Andhra Pradesh was washed away in the floods in 2005, killing 114 persons. There were 130 deaths in the collapse of the Rafiganj rail bridge in 2002 due to suspected sabotage. A rail bridge mishap killed 60 in Kerala in 2001. Life went on as usual after these mishaps and no one in responsible positions was punished. Inquiry reports made after many years only gathered dust. Unlike in the royal era, as governments change, the past is forgotten. Notably, Gujarat's "double engine" government patronised by PM Modi too could not prevent such disasters.

Should not the slogan 'In our own land we do as we wish' be banned?

By Albert Thyrnang

In every protest and rally the slogan "Ha ri lajong katba mon" ('In our own land we do as we wish') rents the air. The atmosphere is usually intimidating to the police and other people. It spreads hate for people of other communities. It often leads to violence against 'dkhars'. This was what happened during the Federation of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Peoples' (FKJGP) rally in Shillong on October 28. The flag bearing 'rallyists' looked menacing in masks. As they marched through the streets they shouted their favourite slogan. As it turned out the rally turned violent! Supposedly members of the FKJGP assaulted innocent passers-by and vandalised vehicles. In viral videos two wheeler riders were kicked and punched and pedestrians pushed and beaten with flag poles in Police Bazaar and Dhankheti areas. Frightened shopkeepers hurriedly downed their shutters. Non-tribals were the obvious targets; many injured including two journalists. The city was gripped with panic due to the barbaric actions of the rallyists.

This is not the first time that the "Ha ri lajong katba mon" slogan preceded violence. In April 2013 the Khasi Students' Union on their 35th foundation day procession ended up unleashing violence in the city and vandalism of commercial establishments in Laitumkhrah areas. Innocent non-tribals were again the victims. The other day's so-called march against unemployment ended up pretty much the same way.

The police were found wanting. Were they outnumbered or were insufficient number of personnel deployed? At the protest of a single lady activist many armed forces surrounded her. When teachers protested, the law enforcers were present in full strength. Tear gas was also used. But when a massive rally took place innocent citizens were left unprotected.

The slogan 'In our own land we do as we please' is devoid of relevance. It is utopian to think that we can do what we wish in Khasi Jaintia Hills. Pressure groups and the slogan shouters themselves know it too well. There are many don'ts at the state, village and locality levels. Schools and institutions have their own rules. Groups and associations have their rule-books. Certainly they won't tolerate members breaking them. Many of the pressure group members have children. Surely they won't permit their children to do what they want in their own

homes. Then why shout the slogan in the streets?

The slogan does not evoke a love for the 'Motherland'. Love for the 'Jaitbynriew' (Khasi race) does not mean we can do what we wish. The slogan promotes hate and intolerance towards other people. Love for our own people and land does not mean we perpetrate violence against others. The government could consider banning the slogan because it arouses a dangerous emotion especially in the young. But, of course, a ban is not the answer. What is needed is the change of mentality. Ban it from our thought processes. Unemployment or any other issue cannot be solved by shouting 'Ha ri lajong katba mon.' No problem is tackled by violence. There will never be a time when we can do what we want anywhere.

Unemployment is a huge problem. It is strange that the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), 2022 ranked Meghalaya the third state with least (1.8%) unemployment rate behind only Telangana and Gujarat. The figures are clearly manipulated. The government is happy. But why no hue and cry was made by the pressure groups? Why no one challenged as to where and how the data was arrived at?

Pressure groups are accused of not being serious at tackling the root cause of unemployment. They shy away from going after nepotism, favouritism and corruption. They are not for a transparent system in selection of job applicants. They are not for a completely merit based mechanism. It is common knowledge that since the inception of the state, corruption has been an accepted norm. Allegedly, for MPSC posts candidates have to pay up 40 - 50 lakhs. For lower posts figures run into 10-15 lakhs.

The complaint is often that at personal interviews the least deserved candidates are chosen. For any post, ministers, MLAs, higher ranking officers have their own candidates. Candidates pay huge sums to whoever they think can influence the results in their favour. Merit is the least required criterion. No one knows what happens at the interview room. Deserving candidates without money or influence don't stand a chance. They can't even complain because they have to enter the room empty handed. They have no proof. Even mobiles are not permitted inside. Why no pressure group demands

that the government devises a transparent mechanism for job selections? Why not insist that interviews be conducted on camera? This is the only way forward. Interviewers do not fear God while accepting bribes, irrespective of whether they are good Christians. Their only fear is if they are caught because that brings shame to them and their families.

The KSU president was heard saying in a speech two years ago of how numerous candidates complained about being asked to pay lakhs of rupees by interviewers. Since they don't have the money they fail to secure their dream jobs. The KSU leader did talk about the need for a fair mechanism but after that why has nothing been done in this regard? So, there is no point in complaining that youth are frustrated. Frustration of youth can end only when there is a fair and transparent system. Pressure groups have to compel the government to put in place this mechanism. Rallies and protests will achieve nothing.

In one of the press conferences RTI activist, Dispersing Rancee informed that through RTI he found that there are more than 8000 vacancies in the various government departments. As per request, he happily submitted the documents to the KSU to follow up in unearthing as to why the government has not taken steps to fill up the posts and if there is anything fishy. However, he is disappointed that the organisation has not shown any interest in following up the case. Why this non-seriousness? Is it because of the lack of credibility?

Pressure groups provide political leadership. Many leaders of pressure groups become public representatives. The present Meghalaya Rajya Sabha member was a pressure group leader. At present there are many MLAs and MDCs who were once impatient group leaders. A present minister who was a pressure group leader earlier is accused of illegal appointments in MUDA which the government later regularised. As pressure group leaders they 'fight' for public issues but when they become representatives they perpetuate nepotism, favouritism and corruption. Youth should vent their anger at the political class and not at non-tribals.

Corruption is linked to unemployment and vice versa. But no pressure group talks about this disease. The corruption from illegal coal

fields to the its destination in Guwahati or Bangladesh escape the scrutiny of the boisterous pressure groups. Crores of rupees slips the state's exchequer into the pockets of businessmen-politicians, police and civil officials because there is no vigilante group. The editor of this paper often laments that there is no anti-corruption group and no anti-corruption agitation in the state.

According to information FKJGP was going in the right direction in the fight against unemployment and corruption but a few black sheep sabotaged it. The 'sabotagers' are narrow minded individuals who limit their world within their immediate environment. Now we fear repercussions against Meghalayans outside the state. Who is responsible if there is a backlash? After the suo moto FIRs the perpetrators must be punished for harming innocent humans and for tarnishing the state's image.

Among the political class only Shillong East MLA Ampareen Lyngdoh and BJP legislator, AL Hek have condemned the FKJGP violence. Lyngdoh has come out because the incident took place in her constituency. Hek has criticised the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma and his government because he is no more a minister in the MDA government. After a stoic silence, the Chief Minister spoke after four days. The Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong merely appealed to leaders of agitating groups to control their members. There was no firm commitment for stern action against the culprits. Strangely, Home Minister, Lakmen Rymbui too has nothing to say, thus far. No minister or public representative has expressed shock at the Friday violence. Opposition Leader, Mukul Sangma has stated that the violence is a warning sign to the present government.

The notion is that this is an election year and no politician or party wants to offend a pressure group. This is precisely why the state acutely lacks leadership. The situation in August last year in the aftermath of the killing of the former HNLC chairman, Cheristfield Thangkiew is repeated. Responsible persons who run the state keep mum against violence for fear of losing an election. There is a politician-pressure group nexus in the state. Allegedly the agitation against the boundary MOU was sponsored by a party. Who funded the huge rally of the FKJGP recently? Hate will continue to thrive for considerations, political and otherwise.

Time to stabilise Indian Rupee to make it a global currency Speculative exchange risk is worth taking at the current stage

By Nantoo Banerjee

Reserve Bank Deputy Governor T Ravi Sankar is absolutely right to say that there is no alternative to the internationalisation of the Indian Rupee (INR) despite the domestic monetary challenges it will pose. The use of INR in cross-border transactions is expected to mitigate currency risks for Indian business. It will reduce the need for holding large foreign exchange (forex) reserves. At the same time, a globally exchangeable INR will make India less vulnerable to external trade and financial shocks while it will add to the bargaining power of Indian businesses. "Internationalisation (of INR) will make monetary policy more challenging, but compromising on growth is not an optimal choice," Ravi Sankar said.

However, the RBI deputy governor did not explain what is holding India back in making INR an acceptable currency for global transactions. Only last month, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected India as the world's fifth largest economy, overtaking the United Kingdom (UK). The country's GDP is now behind only the United States (US), China, Japan and Germany. A decade back, India was ranked 11th among the large economies while the UK was at the fifth position. Even smaller economies such as Mexico and New Zealand have placed their respective national currencies as global trading currencies.

India is among the world's top 13 importers and exporters. And, yet its currency remains soft, struggling to maintain its value in relation to other currencies with its low demand in the forex markets. Global hard currencies rarely depreciate suddenly or fluctuate greatly in value. The world's major trading currencies are: US Dollar, Euro, Japanese Yen (JPY), British Pound Sterling (GBP), Australian Dollar (AUD), Canadian Dollar (CAD), Swiss Franc (CHF), Chinese Yuan (Renminbi; CNY), Swedish Krona (SEK), New Zealand Dollar (NZD), and Mexican Peso (MXN). The US\$ and Euro are the world's most preferred foreign currencies.

A major trading currency is also linked with the nature and volume of foreign trade of a country, its trade and current account balance. The latter stands for the trade balance plus net factor income such as interest and dividends from the country's investments abroad, earnings from services, freight and insurance from international trade and workers' remittances. While India is one of the world's major importing countries along with the US, China, Germany, Japan, the UK, the Netherlands, France, Hong Kong, South Korea, Italy and Mexico, its export ranking stands well below at 13th. The country has been near constantly running high trade and current account deficits although in terms of current account balance as a percentage of GDP, India fares well compared with several advanced economies, including the US and UK.

In 2020-21, the current account balance to GDP ratio in India was one percent. This was an increase from about negative one percent in the previous fiscal. India's current account to GDP ratio is, however, expected to reach -2.60 percent by the end of this year, according to Trading Economics global macro models and analysts. India must try to improve its current account balance

to GDP ratio. And, this can be done through some changes in its export-import policy, increased domestic production, stronger insurance facility, more imports on f.o.b and exports on c.i.f basis. India has fared extremely well in receiving foreign remittances. Last year, the country received US\$ 87 billion in remittances, the highest among countries and way ahead of other major receivers such as China and Mexico.

Despite continuing devaluation of Rupee vis a vis US\$, INR still holds well relative to peers when its performance is compared since the beginning of the fiscal 2022-23. INR depreciated around eight percent. The demand of US\$, the world's most preferred currency, rose due to a combination of rising global inflation, geopolitical instability and the consequent risk-off sentiments. Both emerging and developed market economies have been under pressure from the rising strength of US\$. Even currencies such as Euro, Pound Sterling, Yen, South Korean Won, Thai Baht and Chinese Renminbi are down between 14 and 20 percent. In comparison, INR looks more stable though its long term stability still remains a question because of its rising dependence on imports, growing trade deficits and focus on foreign hot money flow to artificially pep up RBI's forex reserves and stock indices.

A strong emphasis on domestic manufacturing is bound to improve INR's stability. China has set the best example in this space. Around 95 percent of China's exports in 2021 were concentrated in manufactured goods. Machinery and vehicles were the largest group (48 percent), followed by other manufactured products (39 percent) and chemicals (eight percent). China's largest imports were also in machinery and vehicles (38 percent of total imports) followed by raw materials (16 percent), other manufactured products (14 percent), energy (13 percent) and chemicals (10 percent). While energy tops India's import basket, followed by electronics and gold, machinery and raw materials for manufacturing stand rather lowly. A focus on domestic manufacturing and export of manufactured products will have a substantially positive impact on its export-import trade and consequently on the strength of its currency. And, a better inflation control will further help stabilise INR.

Finally, it may be worth taking a speculative risk of monetary challenges that may be linked with the internationalisation of INR. To transform INR into an international currency, RBI and the government must work together to stabilise the value of Rupee. That is very important, for now. If rupee is used for international trade and monetary transactions by interested countries and forex traders around the world, it will help reduce India's trade deficit and strengthen its position in the world market. RBI has, in a circular on July 11, has permitted international trade settlement in INR. It also permitted trading partner nations to invest "surplus balance" in government securities. This is certainly an encouraging step for converting INR as a global and reserve currency. Conversion of any currency into forex always involves a speculative risk. To make INR a global currency, the risk is worth taking. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Police scam exposed by whistle-blowers

Editor,
The case of corruption in Police Department that included subversion of the system, misappropriation, and submission of false certificates in the administrative department has raised many eyebrows. How such sleaze came about again raises questions that are not very difficult to answer. Perhaps the system is also to be blamed for it hardly keeps a tab on the function and accountability of the concerned officers. It is good and in the interest of the state that the case has been taken by competent watchdogs. Hope they will not compromise on the rules of law. What one feels strongly is that this scam should be taken as a lesson for us all to learn from. Who can guarantee that other departments are not affected by similar kinds of unscrupulous practices? They also run on motors, which are recorded in the accounts book but not on the road. How can we expect good service if the authorities concerned easily deviate from the set rules and regulations? Is this not a serious threat to

democratic values? Kudos to a few upright whistle-blowers and media, or else this scam would have been easily buried in the shroud of silence.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gawai,
Shillong

Why conduct NEHU interviews in Guwahati?

Editor,
Recently NEHU conducted an interview for the post of Controller of Examinations, University Engineer and Librarian on October 19, 2022 at the NEHU Guest House, Guwahati. The question here is what is the logic of holding the interview at NEHU Guest House, Guwahati? On any parameter (s) is it not more convenient to hold such interviews in the beautiful NEHU campus at Umshing, Shillong? Forty years ago interviews were held in Delhi and other places because communication bottlenecks but at present with better communication, there is no excuse for NEHU to hold interviews anywhere other than its own permanent campus.

The very fact that the interviews for the above posts

were not held in the University Campus at Umshing, Shillong raises suspicions of something underhand. Is this how the present Vice Chancellor Prof. P.S.Shukla wants to run NEHU? Will interviews next be held in Delhi? Will NEHU itself be run from Delhi sooner than later?

Yours etc.,
Dr Omarlin Kyndiah
Via email?

Incompetent Police and Administration

Editor,
The violence that engulfed the city on October 28 is a wakeup call for the people of the state regarding the incompetent police force and administration. Although, many renowned personalities have highlighted the sick mentality of those who attacked innocent pedestrians, it is very important to emphasize the role played by the state police machinery and administration during this particular event.

It was surprising to see many innocent people being beaten up while police personnel were standing right there doing nothing. This makes the general public wonder about the existence and the role of the police

force in the state. The video-graphic evidences show that the policemen present at the spot did little to stop the attackers. Newspaper reports have mentioned the cluelessness of the Chief Minister as to why the police did not take any action. That, however, is alright because we, the public, are well equipped to answer him when we will be asked to vote in the upcoming elections. The Chief Minister must remember that it is a matter of grave concern for the general public who are worried about the state's future and that they have given up their hopes in the State Police. Dealing with such a serious event in a frivolous manner would prove to be disastrous for the future of the state.

Yours etc.,
P. Bhattacharya
Via email

Why the change in MPSC syllabus

Editor,
The recent changes in the syllabus of exams conducted by MPSC is rather suspicious. Firstly, the syllabus for combined Junior Duty post exam which was held on 22nd October 2022 includes only ENGLISH AND GENERAL AWARENESS. I fail

to understand as to how for an officer's post of LEVEL 15, there isn't any arithmetic or quantitative aptitude included.

Secondly, the syllabus for LDA secretariat 2020 which was held on 29th October 2022 includes ENGLISH for 150 marks and GENERAL AWARENESS & APTITUDE for 150 marks. But during the actual exam no quantitative aptitude questions were seen but only reasoning ability.

For both of the exams the level of the question papers was somewhat easy.

This is rather questionable compared to the number of candidates who appeared for the exam which is around 15000 plus.

This raises some concerns for the youth.

Because, if we go according to the syllabus of Central exams. The main subjects would be

1. General English
2. General awareness
3. Quantitative aptitude
4. Reasoning ability

So Why did the MPSC make such sudden changes? Is it because the previous syllabus was too tough for the children or relatives of the members in the MPSC? Maybe they wanted to make it easier for them. I cannot fathom as to how Arithmetic or basic Mathematics were not included in these exams. I think even LDA's require

some basic Mathematics.

Whatever maybe the reason, I just feel like it's an injustice to the people who have prepared well for the past few months; those who have even attended coaching classes and especially those who have referred to previous years syllabus or pattern of questions. MPSC exams are so unpredictable and very tough to prepare because there is no specific pattern, no detailed syllabus is provided unlike central exams.

Just to enlighten people. Previously, the subjects for LDA secretariat exams were as follows.

1. General English-100 marks
2. General knowledge & aptitude - 150 marks
3. Arithmetic - 100 marks

For so long we have seen that the recruitment process conducted by MPSC is never transparent. The syllabus is never clear and also the marks secured during the exams are never disclosed, leaving room for nepotism. When will things ever change?

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

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

*"You must be the change you wish
to see in the world."*

— Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times

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Better police-media interface needed
POLICE media interface is a troubled one at the best of times. Whenever there is a law and order related incident, Meghalaya Police tend to go on mute. Neither the District SPs nor the higher-ups are ready to give information on a need to know basis. The media are kept guessing on issues that the public need to know. After all the prime role of the police is crime detection and prevention and to safeguard the lives and properties of the public. True the police have to act under huge constraints but there is also the baggage of a closed police organization which has come down since the British rule where police were expected to protect the rulers. The ruled deserved no protection. That this legacy continues in a modern democracy – a free country which the colonisers had left 75 years ago, is disheartening. Why is everything that happens within the ambit of the police considered 'official secrets' that must be guarded with their lives?

Recently, at the police-media interface held at the DGP's office there was a free and frank discussion about police briefings by key officials who also have a fair idea of how media operates. Following that conversation, unfortunately nothing has improved. District police officials remain reticent and are guarded about information sharing. But the Police Department cannot shy away from sharing information with the media which is the voice of the public – the messenger. The public has the right to know especially in this age of information flow via technology. The only way to remedy and refine this tenuous police-public relation is to improve disclosure of appropriate information from the police to the public. This requires cooperation and mutual understanding between the police and the media since both perform vital roles in a democratic society, with the common objective of serving the general public. Hence police and media need not have an adversarial relationship.

Just as the police is quick at disseminating news about drug hauls and arrests of the drug mafia, there should be a similar alacrity in sharing other crime news as well. Unless the media and law enforcers learn to trust one another and work together the public would not know what is going on and also how to assist the law enforcers in their arduous task of keeping the law. The media on its part should understand the legal aspects of policing, especially not to probe into matters at a time when investigation is going on and any leakage of information might hamper the investigation process. A happy balance is needed and police in the higher rungs should know the importance of communication skills and learn that art if they do not already know it. Most often the information that leads to successfully helping citizens most often comes from another citizen. A good cop knows how to communicate in order to achieve his/her ends.

The protest rally against unemployment and nepotism went horribly wrong as innocent passers-by and even journalist were mercilessly beaten up. Let me place on record the vehement condemnation against mob violence perpetrated by vested interests who care less about unemployment and the destitute. I also join others in condemning the insensitivity of the Deputy Chief Minister who made a casual appeal to leaders of the organizing group to control their own "boys." Let me tell you that many protests will happen post 2023, however it is the essential duty of the State to ensure that law and order prevails and that the lives and properties of people are protected. I also call upon the leaders of the Federation of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo People that apology is not enough but to call out on those "boys" and hand them over to the law.

The following morning after the mayhem I got a call from a friend working outside the State who told me that his friends in the mainland India had misconstrued it as the protest rally led by a workers' party and that the aggrieved workers had beaten up their employers wherever they could find them. Unfortunately, it was just a bad day for Laitumkhrah and Shillong, as the raging fire in the Laitumkhrah market nearly destroyed the entire market at dawn and mob violence at noon, both causing distress and humongous economic loss amounting to crores of rupees together.

Unemployment is real, but it cannot be addressed in isolation as it is interconnected with politics and economics. In fact, Meghalaya is nearing a poverty trapped situation akin to the Latin American Countries in the 1980s. Talking about employment in Meghalaya the first thing which crosses everyone's mind is Government jobs and reservation policy. It must be noted that today Government sector cannot generate more than 15% of employment and as per reservation policy, 80% jobs are distributed exclusively amongst the indigenous people of the State. The remaining 20% goes to OBCs and general category respectively. Thus, in Government sector tribals of Meghalaya are competing among themselves and no outsider or even permanent non-tribal resident are able to steal the jobs.

The bulk of jobs and employment opportunities in the State lie in the private

sector. The employment and economic growth of the State can be understood in terms of economic rights and economic production. In Meghalaya one economic production on a large scale is rule out. The State is too small to push for big industry. Primarily, private sector in Meghalaya includes small and medium scale factory, like bakery, embroidery, tailoring, jam and wine making, government and private contractors who build roads, bridges and buildings. Besides, there are service providers, traders, transporters and suppliers of different hues who barely survive in the market. There are also franchisees of various brands and start-ups, but they are yet to settle down and have not been able to create sufficient job opportunities so far.

Entrepreneurship is still a distant dream due to lack of support system. However, I applaud a few entrepreneurs whose untiring efforts have generated not just employment but also contributed to the GDP. As a result of the single window policy in 1997 several cement plants and coke factories were established. But these industries should be asked as to how many jobs and quality employment opportunities they have provided for the local youths in the past twenty-five years? While we are raging against unemployment, a big lobby to privatise and hand over the Mawmluh Cherra Cement Limited (MCCL) to a private business entity from outside the State is on. The editorial of Shillong Times had stated that, Mr. Wailad-miki Shylla, the Chairman of MCCL will be visiting Kolkata to check out on the Bhavika Commercial Private Limited before signing an agreement to run and manage the MCCL. The Mawmluh Cherra Cement Limited the jewel, the pliang ja (food plate) and the pride of Sohra and Meghalaya is now dressed up for sale. It is accepted that the MCCL is struggling with low production and management deficit for decades now. But what does this hand over entail? How many more jobs will be laid off? Hence, will there be more quality job and employment opportunities created in the future?

The survey on jobs and employment conducted by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy 2022 had shown that unemployment in Meghalaya was the lowest with 2% followed by Maha-

rashtira 2.2% and Gujarat and Odisha 2.6% each. Despite the low unemployment rate, employment opportunities in Meghalaya are fluctuating and also there is enough reason to doubt that there are lesser quality jobs in the State. In Meghalaya the issue is not just unemployment, but there is also an under-employment, which means that even if one has a job, he or she is underpaid or is being paid below the living wages. The possibility of being fired or laid off or remaining jobless for months or years is high. Moreover, employers, especially in the private sector, are openly flouting labour laws and exploiting the gullible workers to the hilt. The workers in Meghalaya are badly treated and no respect shown for their rights and entitlements. From security guards to contractual workers to myriad employees appointed via labour contractors are being exploited and are denied their rights to living wages, leave entitlements and are forced to pay a certain amount as commission to the contractor.

I reiterate that unemployment is real and it is a major issue causing several societal ailments like drug menace, prostitution and worst is the job for sex problem, thugery and alcoholism etc. Is it true that the "other" or the so called "outsiders" are stealing away our jobs and employment opportunities? Let us do some fact check and introspection- According to 2011 census, 61.25% of the population in Shillong Urban Agglomeration are tribals. About 95% of seats in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly are reserved and this clearly implies that tribals of Meghalaya have absolute control on political and economic matters as well. Then, 80% of jobs in Government sector are under reservation. Nearly 90% of the territory in the State falls under the Sixth Schedule and is governed by traditional institutions. Also, there is the Land Regulation Act of 1971 which disqualifies non indigenous people from owning land in the State. Nonetheless this law is being diluted and no one seems to care about its dilution and the increasing landlessness among the tribals of the State.

Now that I have decided to throw my hat in the electoral ring let me share with you a story. For more than three months I have been on the ground campaigning door to door and person to

person I can tell you that the State is losing big time. I met innumerable youths across communities who are working in different cities outside Meghalaya. In such cases the State is not only losing their skills or talents but it is also losing in economic terms as these youths are contributing to the GDP of the city they are living in. The reality of unemployment is also evident from the fact that out of ten families I visited on a day, about 3 to 4 households are having daughters or sons who are jobless and are still depending on their retiree parents. It is pathetic and alarming!

What is the solution? Well beating and targeting the "other" or "outsiders" for stealing away our jobs is never the solution. Transparency and accountability in job appointments is vital. Creating jobs and employment opportunities is also the responsibility of the State and it is the primary duty of the State to provide or facilitate robust support system to entrepreneurs and start ups in a fair and just manner. Enhancing the skills of local youths is crucial, but excepting the Don Bosco Institute Shillong, firms from outside the State are being engaged in skill development programmes and how will they impart training on fields that require indigenous knowledge? Regulation and proper implementation of labour laws, and especially the inter-state migrant workers regulation is essential with due diligence to labour's rights.

Let me conclude with these words:

*Unemployment is real
and sharply rising
Also, the frustration.
Rally was organised.
Some came in SUVs,
Some came in shared taxis
Many came in buses;
To air their voices,
Some came prepared,
creating chaos and mayhem.
Just to divert attention,
From the real issues of
corruption and failures,
The innocents were beaten
while the police
looked away
They look away, Ministers
and MLAs!
They look away from
violence
They look away from
unemployment
Sadly, the movement
will die before it began
Because we fail to
understand the thing
Thus, exploiters and
creators of unemployment
are celebrating
As they succeeded
in creating the mayhem.*

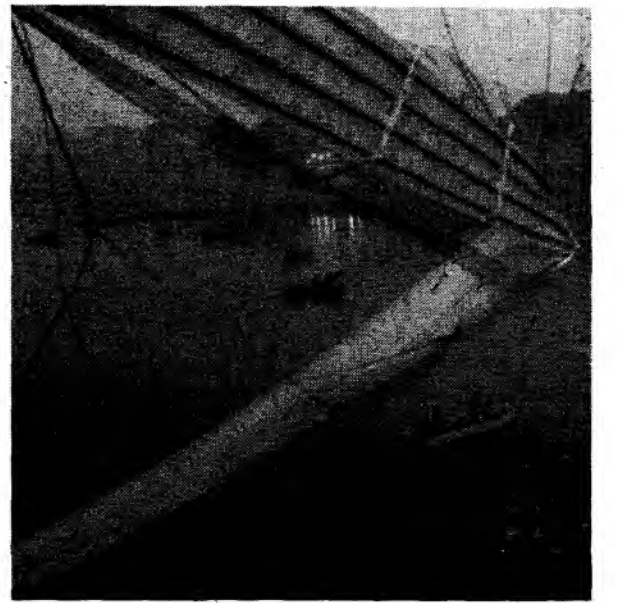
Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

Developments following Morbi bridge collapse take bizarre turn Doubtful if real culprits and their connections will be probed

By Sushil Kutty

Funny things have been happening in Morbi Gujarat where a 143-year-old suspension bridge collapsed under the weight of its own expectations, killing 135 including 50 children. If the bridge was brought down by criminal negligence, nobody seems bothered, least of all the state government.

The bridge collapse reeked of fraud and cash exchanges. There are some very scared people out there in Morbi, Gujarat; people who pocketed money and now must be losing lousily earned sleep. But no need to actually worry, because post the fall of the bridge, 'Operation Bridge Cover-up'



In Gujarat under the pall of gloom on the banks of River Machchhu, there appears to be no hurry to get to the truth. Social media is full of the story that one-third of the estimated 300 people on the bridge on the fateful day were there for the fun of kicking and swinging the cables holding the bridge over the Machchhu.

Some of the cables snapped and fell, and the bridge came tumbling after. The nursery rhyme, "nothing more! There shouldn't have been 300 people on the bridge. Some estimates put it at 500! With that kind of load, the bridge couldn't have held still, and if the cables snapped, it was not the bridge's fault. The bridge had undergone repairs recently, and was reopened for crossings only the day before.

The man who reopened the bridge is now on the run, the topmost executive of the firm 'Oreva', which had won the contract to "run" the bridge and make money while doing that like any profitable enterprise. The 'Oreva' of the Ajanta Group had allegedly further "sublet" the contract, like many do with impunity.

Like said, funny things have been happening in Morbi, morbidly funny things, fit for any edition of the 'Gallows Jokes'. But it was not funny that the man-made tragedy was the worst nightmare the Gujarat government, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, could have ordered for an after-dinner siesta.

Funnier still that Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to visit Morbi and the local administration was fit to be tied. Ground Zero had shifted from collapsed bridge to down-to-the heels Morbi Civil Hospital. So, the hospital got the quickest overnight makeover in its living history and Modi didn't have to step over castaway bandages, and leftover syringes.

If only half such enterprise had been devoted to the hanging bridge with its British hangover, its maintenance and its running, the 135 happiness hunters wouldn't have died. And it wouldn't have looked like the Gujarat government was doing everything to save the hides of Oreva executives, and of those who run the Morbi municipality; perhaps to save politicians; BJP state ministers, and those who awarded the contract to Oreva.

is in full swing and unlike the swinging suspension bridge, this operation will not fail and fall.

That the FIR doesn't name anyone is just the tip of the iceberg. The fact that 'sabotage' is one of the points of inquiry opens a route to redemption. Being Gujarat is guaranteed to be smarter than any other 'being' on the planet. The Gujarat has a way about him that is seldom seen in one who is non-Gujarati.

Don't forget Gandhi, Patel, Modi and Amit Shah. Gautam Adani and Amabani, Nirav and Choksi. All of them Gujarati. People who get things accomplished far better than other people. It can be safely said that more than 75 percent of the 'India story', and 99 percent of the 'New India story', was written by the Gujarati.

Not funnily enough, the Morbi bridge collapse and the deaths visited on unsuspecting families makes people think. Like the Congress leader said, "God's message to Modi ji". What could that message be? Can't be anything else other than "buddy, your time is up!"

How many years has Modi had Gujarat in his thrall, 27 years? It cannot be possible that the people of Gujarat do not want change, wish for an end to having Modi directing their lives like there was nobody better Gujarati than Modi Gujarati! They must surely be tired by now, after 27 years of hearing "Mitron", or do they want more "Mitron" than they already have.

Perhaps, the Gujarati hasn't got tired of "Mitron", not yet. Modi's hold over the Gujarati is hypnotic, settled deep in the Gujarati psyche, entrenched and self-sustaining. Even painful Morbi bridges don't break the link. Modi has the Gujarati hook, line and sinker. Nothing, not even the pain of death can undo Modi.

And Modi appears to be taking the bridge collapse and the 135 deaths in his stride, behaving as if nothing that happened was out of the ordinary. But then, that's how it has been, right from the beginning, right from 2002. Modi has Gujarat hanging to his every word, and action. The fact that there are no names in the FIR should not surprise anyone. Gujarat under Modi's thrall has been zombie-like. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

"Elections are coming and you have started your own tamasha"

Editor,
Those are very perceptive words from a certain Rakhi Mitra of West Bengal, who also identifies herself as a BJP representative and an activist. Elections are coming indeed and everyone is adorning their own motley attire of disguised altruism. The needs of the people, "our people", are placed under a magnifying glass. We are for the people. Our people.

This is exactly the sentiment expressed by Ms Mitra in her seven-minute video about the recent protest in the state regarding the status of unemployment. Mitra has taken it upon herself to highlight the racism in the state that has been ongoing for "forty years" against the "dakhars." She highlights a very important issue of conflict and communal tension that has been going on for many years in the State. Of course, this happens only in the State of Meghalaya. One will never forget all those days one walked the streets of Park Circus in Kolkata and seeing men in their middle age pull out their private parts in front of you. Oh, and let's not forget the occasional grabbing of young girls' breasts on their way to college and the favourite

name-calling of "chinky" and god knows what else being uttered in a language unfamiliar to one. Never mind that! Racism only ever happens in Shillong or the "Northeast" to use a more convenient term for people. I agree completely that racism is an ugly monster that hurts and divides people. But what will I, a so-called "sane Khasi", know about it?

Coming back to the issue of unemployment, the root of all evil. Mitra has provided the answer to the problem! Khasis are unemployed because they are "unemployable" and are content to live in "that well of ours". Who doesn't like to live in a cold, dark, well right? There is unemployment and yet we get "easy money" to spend on drugs and alcohol. A profound observation indeed! This is how all Khasis in particular and the "Northeast" in general love to spend their time and money. We are savages. We have always been savages. A tourist would know better. Of course! The lovely pictures on her phone tell the complete story of the lives of our people. Listen to her. She knows best. She knows the inner workings of the state and the problems that plague the society. She pays us after all with her generous contributions through her occasional visits.

So there, all the Indian brothers and sisters, this is Shillong for you. We use foul language, we are drug addicts, we are savages who

live in wells. Dear Indian brothers and sisters, Ms Mitra has singularly decided to be your spokesperson and wield the authority of Bharat Mata and has suggested for you to start a movement to "throw us out" because clearly, we are not part of India. What do you do then? She, of course, speaks with goodwill whilst proudly outlining her objectives through her political affiliation, clearly there is no hidden "Tamasha" there.

Yours etc.,
Lusaka Blah
Shillong-6

Let not history repeat itself

Editor,
The FKJGP rally on October 28 last was marred by scenes of bashing up of innocent non-tribal people. Thirty years have passed since the era of violence and calm and peace has been prevailing in our state. And so far during those turbulent times, we the people of Meghalaya have been lucky enough not to be dealt with a tit for tat from the people of other states many of our sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts are living either as students or office employees. The reason is because the majority of people in our country are peace loving and shun vengeance.

Please, let history not repeat itself because if we do so there is no guarantee that our people in other states are not going to be targeted. Social media after all is a

great equaliser.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah
Nongkrem

May harmony prevail

Editor,
I am writing to express my solidarity with those non-tribal "outsiders" who were attacked and injured by masked protestors on Oct 28, during the FKJGP anti-unemployment rally. It is sad that the police did not intervene like they should have. But it has also been heartening to read the many letters (in your esteemed newspaper) protesting this violence. Several of these exemplary letters are from Khasi citizens. This goes to show that conscience is still alive in Meghalaya.

Unemployment will not go away through unjustified and reckless violence against those perceived as outsiders. The class tensions caused by capitalism do not disappear through violence. Capitalism is a strange beast that may be exploitative and destructive at the macro-level, but can be an engine of economic growth at the micro-level. One can protest capitalism and yet appreciate the free-enterprise model and the power of technology.

For young people to be employable, they must, at the very least, be ethical, disciplined, and qualified. No employer hires a lawless hooligan. Besides job skills, youth today also need

strong entrepreneurial skills, professional training, and a spirit of service. They need an infrastructure conducive to economic growth. This includes the servicing of easy loans. None of this is possible without the basics of law and order.

I hope fervently that the injured make a speedy recovery and that intercommunity peace and harmony are restored.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

Demand for creating C&RD Block justified

Editor,
Recently a delegation of leaders from Warsan Lyngdoh, Phlangdiloil and Umdohlan areas under South West Khasi Hills District, which is one of the most under-developed Districts of Meghalaya, met Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, demanding that a Community and Rural Development Block be set up at Umdohlan or Wakhaji Village. The demand is perfectly justified in all respects. In fact, several villages under this land-locked geographical areas comprising of upland Langrin Syiemship, War San Lyngdoh of Nongstoin Syiemship and the Western Sector of Nobosohphoh Syiemship, are all, geographically, distant from

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Senior Journalist i
Shillong-2

Nongstoin, Mawkyrwat and Ranikor Blocks. As a matter of fact, the average distance by the worst M.P Road in Meghalaya from the existing mentioned CRD blocks is not less than 70 kms. Moreover, these areas are isolated and have remained totally neglected in every aspect for the last 50 years of Meghalaya's statehood. The other demands for setting up of C&RD Blocks are at Rambrai village (which has been a long demand), Langja village (under Muliang sector), Umdang village (under Ri Lynggam) and at Maw-wei Village (which is also the most neglected area in Meghalaya). These demands are not only justified but also ought to be given top-most priority and should be executed immediately by the MDA government under the leadership of Conrad Sangma. Otherwise, the MDA may miss the opportunity of reaping the rich electoral dividends in 2023. In fact, these Blocks should have been created before the creation of the Districts during the MUA regime under the stewardship of Dr Mukul Sangma.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Senior Journalist i
Shillong-2

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"For greed all nature is too little."

— Lucius Annaeus

The Shillong Times

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Interceptor success

IT'S a matter of great credit to India that this week it successfully tested the AD-1 interceptor missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). One of the two interceptor missiles of DRDO's Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) System, this is capable of thwarting hits from China's and Pakistan's long-range missiles upto a 200km range. The credit is on two fronts, namely that this will boost India's national security mechanisms in a remarkable way and that the nation's own premier defence research establishment has developed this system, even granting that there might be some adaptations from technology developed by other nations.

India is making major strides of late in development, manufacture, use and marketing of defence technology. It recorded a major leap in defence item exports from negligible levels in the past to a record Rs 13,000 crore in the last financial year and hopes to raise this level progressively to Rs 17,000 crore this fiscal. These are not high figures compared to the defence item/tech exports by big nations in the West or Russia. But, thanks majorly to the Make In India initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there have been major strides in this money-spinning sector in recent years. Alongside, satellites made in India by ISRO and its units are now being sold to several nations and/or their launches are done by India via its technical prowess. All these are recent developments, in tune with the new strides in technology worldwide. Notably, India is still among the major importer/purchaser of defence ware, be it from the West or from Russia. The huge commissions in defence deals are well-documented and they got exposed for the first time in the 1980s as the Bofors bribe scandal erupted during the term of Indira Gandhi. Clearly, this lure was one reason why India, for seven decades after its independence, did not venture in any significant way to the defence equipment manufacturing field. During Jawaharlal Nehru's time, the Heavy Vehicles Factory manufacturing fighter tanks was started in Chennai and an ordnance factory in Jabalpur. There was no further momentum even as technologies for warfare changed majorly. It is in this backdrop that Modi's Make India now seeks to make a difference — a major difference at that.

Wars are now fought in the skies with missiles and the like, as was evident in the Iraq war and now in Ukraine. The land army, or soldiers on the ground, plays an all-important role, but wars are won or lost mostly by hits from the skies. Missile interceptor systems, thus, have great significance.

What ails Meghalaya Police and what's the remedy...

By Patricia Mukhim

It is a travesty that the Police in this country still follow the Indian Police Act, 1860. No amount of push for reforms have succeeded. Hence the police continue to remain adversarial to the people and serve the political class with servility. Recently the country observed the birth anniversary of its first Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel commonly known as the Iron man of India. Speaking about the Police at a time when India had just emerged as a fledgling nation, Sardar Patel said "It is the responsibility of the police to maintain the prestige of government and to protect the honour of citizens. It is not good enough if you only detect crime and bring offenders to book." He further stated that the police must also try to win the affection of the people for they are no longer the ruled but the rulers. Such was the vision of this statesman. Alas! The political class has never allowed Sardar Patel's vision to materialise. The colonial legacy remains embedded deep inside the police psyche even today. This is evident from the body language of the police and their mannerisms when dealing with ordinary citizens. It is when they speak to their political bosses that they become supine and tame.

Since Independence several Commissions have been formed to bring about police reforms. The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) has pushed for police reforms but the resistance to any kind of change remains the only constant in the police force. Even the Supreme Court directives following a petition by former DGP, Prakash Singh remain on paper only. The State Security Commissions if in place functions in the breach.

In Meghalaya, a Police Reforms Committee was set up by former Home Minister (Late) RG Lyngdoh. Substantive recommendations were made by the Committee of which this writer was a member. But the next government that came in hardly gave any importance to the recommendations. It has remained

a paper tiger. Police prefer to function rather loosely and there are too few to point out these functional problems. For instance, transfer of policemen within districts is the brief of the Superintendent of Police (SP); transfers within the range is that of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) and within the state that of the Director General of Police. But this protocol has hardly been followed. Constables and officers are posted and transferred according to political convenience and it happens when a particular officer executes his/her duty according to the rule book. In Meghalaya in the past four years the most pliable officers and men who would safeguard the illegal transportation of coal from all the coal mining areas of the state were given choice postings. They had to simply close their eyes to the crime committed day in and day out under their noses. Meghalaya might as well not have a police force rather than have one that is indulging in daylight crime. For, it is not possible under any circumstances for coal trucks by the hundreds to ply when coal mining had come to a stop in 2014 and the coal already mined had been transported. The very fact that the Ksan mining tragedy happened in November 2018 is a enough evidence that mining was happening despite the ban. But other than the media no one really bothered to blow the whistle. Too many people had a stake in illegal coal mining and it goes right up to the police and political echelons.

In the police there are also attachments where police are brought from one district to another for emergency law and order purposes only. In Meghalaya the attachment happens regularly for those who have political godfathers. Hence such police officials serve in one district even while they draw their salaries from another district. And as far as transfers and postings of cops is concerned it happens in a very arbitrary manner leading to heartburns

among those that cannot pull strings or pay money to affect a transfer.

Very few police officers, and mainly those drawn from the IPS actually stand on their idealism. What happens is that IPS officers coming from other states are distrusted by local politicians for they will generally not carry out the bidding of the politicians. Politicians see police as a tool to be used to serve their purpose; not to serve the country and people which is the vow that a police officer swears by. This is visible in Meghalaya where IPS officers are posted to the periphery while the state service officers who earn their IPS because of seniority are all posted within the state capital. Naturally, beyond a point, IPS officers also feel that if they cannot beat the system they might as well join it; become pliant and do the politician's bidding.

The tragedy there is that the police is a hierarchy. Senior officers who get their command from politicians will tell their subordinate officers to carry out the dictat and the subordinate officer will tell the constable and so on.

Mr Shashi Kant former DGP Punjab stated in an article that police forces in some states have been politicised to the point that Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors can pull strings to get supervisory officers of their choice. Naturally the supervisory officers dance to the tune of their subordinates. And if we dig deeper we will discover that those subordinates work as henchmen of politicians. It is no surprise therefore that politicians prefer state cadre officers to hold important posts.

The Meghalaya Police fell from grace when the SF-10 an elite force trained to tackle insurgency abandoned their posts on August 15, 2021 and allowed protestors who took out a procession to protest the killing of Cheristerfield Thangkhiaw (former general secretary of the HNLC in a police encounter), to take away their weapons. The

State Chief Minister made it worse by telling those gun-snatchers to return them quietly and no action would be taken against them. I don't recall any such thing happening anywhere in the country. Snatching weapons from a policeman is punishable under the IPC because it amounts to obstruction of a public servant from discharging his duty. Things have been further compounded when a tainted cop, who is also physically and medically unfit and has never been in a single operation, is posted as the Commandant of the elite force SF-10 that is meant to be used in operations. It would appear that the political establishment wants to disable the SF-10 completely.

That there has been corruption in the Meghalaya Police in the past is de rigueur. This time however, the scale of the corruption was such that it was bound to blow up on the face of the person who committed it. But did the officer concerned operate as a lone ranger? Was there no one that aided and abetted in the crimes that have surfaced thus far? That all the scheming for purchase of SUVs happened in the Police Headquarters (PHQ) and that a motor dealer is regularly seen frequenting the PHQ is perhaps just the tip of the iceberg.

Those in the know say that if a vehicle is required by an SP of a district, the AIG (Administration) would purchase a new vehicle but allot an old one for the district on all kinds of pretexts.

Much has been written about how the police were caught unawares on October 28 when the melee happened - when a protest rally was marching through town. These are all signs of a demoralised police force. It is not the purpose of this article to castigate the entire police force for that would be patently unfair. It is because some cops are still tied to their idealism that policing is not in the pits as yet. We can only hope that the arrest of a bad apple that has crippled the moral fibre of the State Police will send a crisp message that corruption within the police ranks will not be tolerated.

Time to consider setting up of a competition commission for elections

Ruling parties abuse their position using tax-payers' money to buy votes

By K Raveendran

With a new round of assembly elections, including that of Gujarat, round the corner, the freebies issue has occupied the centre-stage of political discourse. The matter is now before the Supreme Court, which has favoured an early hearing of a PIL in this connection by a larger 3-member bench. The court's approach shows the extent to which it gives importance to underlying considerations.

The PIL filed by BJP-affiliated lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay seeks to restrain political parties making fancy promises during election times without ever bothering the financial implications of such unsustainable freebies. The petition is obviously inspired by Prime Minister Modi's lament about 'revani culture' being practised by political parties to catch votes, which he said had very dangerous implications for the country.

Modi's immediate provocation was the promise by Arvind Kejriwal's Aam

null and void.

While the petitioner lost the case, his plea had raised substantive points that had serious implications for the people of the state. He argued that the expenditure incurred from the state exchequer to fulfil the election promise was 'unauthorized, impermissible and ultra vires' of the constitution. He also questioned the government's 'eccentric principles of socialistic philanthropy'.

The Supreme Court for sure will examine the propriety and possibility of an expert body under it to deal with the issue of freebies. But it remains to be seen if such a body will have a limited mandate of looking at the specific complaints referred to it in the present case or whether it will have any kind of permanency.

Perhaps, it is a fit case for the Supreme Court to recommend the setting up of a Competition Commission for Elections as a constitutional body, similar to the Election



Aadmi Party that, if voted to power, it would provide free electricity to farmers in Gujarat after a similar promise worked wonders in Punjab, enabling the party, once considered a rank outsider, to walk away with a highly impressive win in the assembly elections. Modi is very much conscious about the risk of the gambit working in his home state, which would be a terrible loss of face for both himself and his party.

The Supreme Court had outlined three main points for detailed examination while considering the petition. These included the scope of judicial intervention in the matter, the enforceability of the court's order in this regard, if at all there is one, and the possibility of constituting an expert body by the court to decide whether the political parties are playing ball.

The existing guidance on the issue is the judgment in what is known as the Subramaniam Balaji case, in which the court decided that the promise by DMK in its 2006 assembly election manifesto of distributing free colour television set for each household if voted to power did not amount to corrupt practice as defined under the Representation of Peoples Act. DMK, which was in the opposition, while making the promise, won the election and formed the government under M Karunanidhi. This prompted a voter to approach the Election Commission and the courts seeking declaration of the election as

Commission, to ensure that political parties stick to acceptable practices in terms of making promises to lure voters. Such a body can also ensure that ruling parties do not abuse their position to prolong their rule by using tax-payers' money to launch irresponsible freebies to keep voters happy, which will have very serious implications for the people in the long run. This is an issue that will engage increasing attention in the days to come, especially when technology is becoming an enabler and people have better means to keep a watch on how their governments are performing. It has been clear that the Election Commission is neither in a position to look at these issues nor inclined to consider whenever such instances are brought to its notice. There are a number of issues that are important to ensure elections are free and fair, which are, however, overlooked by the Election Commission. So there will be no dichotomy between the Competition Commission and the Election Commission, with the latter involved more with the organizational conduct of elections, which by itself is an onerous task. On the other hand, the Competition Commission can deal with ethical issues as well as matters of financial prudence and that every party, irrespective of whether in power or out of it, functions within the competition parameters to ensure level-playing field for all players alike. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Traffic jam at NEIGRIHMS: Need for a fly-over

Editor,

With time we witness more and more traffic on the road leading to NEIGRIHMS. The worst traffic congestion takes place at the main gate of NEIGRIHMS where everyday one witnesses layers of traffic. Each time I pass that way, I am caught up in a jam, partly due to the heavy traffic and partly also due to the flouting of traffic rules by taxis and the red vehicles drivers. With the coming of the state legislative assembly and many government offices to this area, the traffic situation will definitely worsen. As a short term solution, I would earnestly request the traffic police department to station traffic police personnel at NEIGRIHMS so as to regulate the traffic and reduce congestion. However, as a long term solution I would suggest that a fly-over be constructed so that those who pass by NEIGRIHMS may do so through the fly-over while those who intend to go to NEIGRIHMS could take the road below.

I hope the government which is so intent on completing the assembly building would take serious cognizance of this existential problem as well. Now is the right time to think of constructing a fly-over as there are still not many houses by the roadside as yet. I am sure many citizens, especially those who live in the suburbs of the city beyond NEIGRIHMS, would support my suggestion. But let us wait and see if the Government would heed such pleas from

well-meaning citizens. Actually, it was a great lack of foresight on the part of the government not to have constructed a four-lane road in this area knowing that the extension of the city is towards this region. The two-lane road which has been recently made, is well done and worthy of appreciation. It has immensely eased the commuters on this stretch of road. Yet how long will this comfort last, as the traffic is growing at an unbelievable pace? In my reckoning, five years from now, the traffic snarls on this road would be as bad as Police Bazaar if not worse. This speaks volumes of the lack of vision and planning on the part of the government. It is not late yet, if the government takes action right now.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,
Via email

Disabling YouTube comments

Editor,

Through your daily esteemed daily I would like to make a request to ALL LOCAL CHANNELS that air their news coverage and footage on YouTube to 'turn off' the comments section in order to do away with hatred, racist remarks and even vulgar comments. Because of those comments kids and young people learn to adapt to negativity very quickly. We learn that these negative comments are mostly from the highly illiterate people and school drop outs who more often than not bring shame rather than pride to our society as a whole. For a response, for a fight, for an argument, people just like to spew hate on other

people because it's easy to do it on an online platform. Those people just use online commenting platforms to bring other people down; a particular society down instead of not even paying attention to them. You have all kinds of sick people such as obsessive fanboys/haters, racists, sexists, political and religious extremists, obsessive nationalists/jingoists, and just all kinds of generally obnoxious, abhorrent, and idiotic people. The world is watching and judging us through these YouTube comments and I must say that the best thing we can do is to at least curb this menace by disabling the comments section in tough times like these that the State is passing through.

Yours etc.,
A concerned citizen.
(Name withheld on request)

Continued plight of pedestrians

Editor,

Much has been written about traffic jams in and around Shillong City and yet there seems to be no solution to this issue. The Hight Court not so long ago passed an order that all vendors and hawkers are to be removed from public spaces especially pavements within ten days and the District Administration was supposed to implement this in collaboration with heads of localities.

Sadly, on the ground things have not changed at all especially in Laikukhrah, a locality with many schools within its boundaries. So, can someone please explain what is the difference between a car that is parked on the road side and

a vendor/hawker squatting in that same space all day? Accidents have happened where people have lost their lives or have suffered serious injuries.

If there is to be less cars on the road then why not encourage walking by making life easier for pedestrians? People who walk have no space to do so. I would request the so called VIPs to walk on our pavements holding an umbrella in one hand and a shopping bag in the other to know exactly what a pedestrian has to go through or sit in a wheelchair for that matter.

For it is only when the shoe is on the other foot they might perhaps understand.

Yours etc.,
Christine Nonghuloo,
Via email

Of ulterior motives

Editor,

Apropos of the letter by Dr Omarin Kyndiah, "Why NEHU conducted interview in Guwahati" (ST November 2, 2022), I to express my deep concern on the matter. That a University which is fully developed in terms of infrastructure has to locate a venue away from the State to conduct interviews for its faculty and other official posts is nothing but a joke. The present Vice Chancellor must clarify publicly as to what is the justification of holding interviews for vacancies in Guwahati. It's appears that under the present VC NEHU in future is going to be administered from BJP and RSS offices. The people of the State of Meghalaya demand that the interview conducted in Guwahati on October 19 be scrapped and fresh interviews be conducted in the NEHU permanent

campus.

Yours etc.,
Marbianglang K. Rymbai,
Via email

Peculiar change in MPSC exam

Editor,

Apropos of the letter "Why the change in MPSC syllabus" (ST Nov 2, 2022), it is interesting, and also a healthy indicator, to see the enthusiasm and the public participation in trying to enforce transparent governance in every department of the Government of Meghalaya as can be substantiated from various developments such as RTI, protests, etc. As said by the famous Greek philosopher Plato, "if you don't take interest in the affairs of the government you are doomed to live under the rule of fools."

But let me provide a perspective through a fiction in relevance to the aforementioned letter: There are 10 rooms with each consisting of 100 people. In each only 5 people will be able to get outside of a room that they are confined in, provided they solve puzzles to find the key patterns. Each room has the same key pattern. Now, in the first few rooms, a group of six or seven serious persons amongst the 100 in each room were finding that it wasn't a walk in the park to find the key patterns but after gruelling attempts they were able to successfully crack the code. In the next few rooms, groups of serious persons also did struggle but with lesser labour than the previous ones as they have learned that the key follows a certain pattern. The last 2 or 3 rooms, after they worked hard and smart, more than

twenty people were able to crack the code in lesser time and investing lesser energy, making it difficult for the organizers to decide who the five people from among the 100 should be let out.

Now let us turn back to the MPSC general exams; according to my personal understanding and assumption, MPSC has learned that the pattern they are implementing in conducting the exams has become redundant as most people and the coaching institutes have "cracked the code" of MPSC exams. And in the name of guidance most of these coaching institutes are leeching money off desperate people. However, this letter is not about this contentious point. My point, in this letter, is that MPSC is trying to improvise the manner of conducting exams so as to raise the level of competition but it didn't come without obscurity. Suggestions are that there should be a committee of experts from diverse fields to examine the requirements of each job role so as to streamline the process and ensure efficiency both in recruitment to certain posts, so that suitable people are recruited, as well as in performing the duties when recruited to certain posts. But also this has to be done with maximum transparency. Invoking RTI clauses to hide the process and its elements cannot be an excuse for the MPSC body to indulge in any nefarious activities while recruiting people to the public services.

(Views are personal).
Yours etc.,
Kevin M Shangpliang,
Via email

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"One of the truest tests of integrity is its blunt refusal to be compromised."

— Chinua Achebe

The Shillong Times

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KHADC imbroglio

ALLEGATIONS by Members of the Opposition in the Khasi Hills District Council that money is demanded for issuing trade licences to different companies executing road projects in the state, has raised the decibel levels in the Council with the EM Trade going so far as to bang the table. It is good that this matter has surfaced since there have been similar allegations in the past too that unless money changes hands trading licenses are not forthcoming. The larger question as far as all the autonomous councils are concerned is also about their lack of transparency in book-keeping considering they levy different taxes from different markets and forest products that are exported outside the State. The income and expenditure of the Councils have been a constant tug of war even with the Accountant General's office as they have failed to audit their accounts regularly.

The District Councils don't occupy much media space because of their ability to keep below the radar and maintain a low profile. Their sources of income are mainly from Government grants and their own taxations. Other than coming up with some outrageous bills once in while with the intent of painting women in a corner by accusing them of conniving to part away with tribal land, when they marry a non-tribal man, the Councils are not known to come up with any progressive legislation to prepare young minds to embrace the world of cut-throat competition. In fact, the Councils are not known to take up any activities that promote cultural sensitivities in an age where culture, tradition and modernity interface, often in a competitive way instead of the melting pot model. An institution with this deeply exclusivist mindset in this post-modernist age needs to introspect about its own existence and objectives; to be extrospective and not to look at the outside world as an existential threat.

What's perhaps most unfortunate is that the elected Council members themselves don't engage enough with the larger ambit of the Sixth Schedule and how it interfaces with modern constitutional governance even while carrying forward tradition and the institutions that have evolved from such traditions. If money making is all that the Councils are interested in then the faith reposed on them is futile. The Councils should be engaging with other similar institutions in the neighbouring states where the Sixth Schedule is working better and in a more participatory manner and carrying people along with them. If the Councils no longer serve the public good and are there only to regulate trading by non-tribals then there is need to discuss their merits when most of what they do run parallel to what the State Government does.

The on-going exercise by IIM Shillong to craft a road map for addressing Shillong's insurmountable traffic management problem is a welcome initiative. IIMs enjoy an impeccable reputation and, as such, it is legitimate to expect that this premier management institution which draws sharp young minds from far and wide, should come up with innovative and plausible ways out for containing this hellish experience on the cramped roads that citizens suffer ad nauseam. What the IIM is going to prescribe is anybody's guess, but let's be clear that nobody has a magic wand to shoo away traffic woes. It would be naïve not to acknowledge that there is no easy fix. What was a manageable problem initially has assumed an ugly and annoying proportion today. The deplorable traffic scene of Shillong is a sad commentary on those who have successively governed the state for the last fifty years without sparing any thought for its citizens.

It's not that the issue was never flagged. Assembly proceedings are replete with debates on the burning issue. Seldom has the Opposition missed an opportunity to castigate the Treasury for its inability to tackle the issue. Ironically, when the Opposition is at the helm and roles change, predictably the saga gets repeated like a parrot cry. The truth is that no government in the last half a century ever tried to address the problem on a top priority basis. The palpable indifference of the political class over the decades has brought the situation to breaking point. Today, the citizens find themselves in dire straits with little or no immediate hope of relief.

Not that there was no attempt ever. Way back in 1985, the first ever unofficial initiative came from the Rotary Club of Shillong. A day-long symposium was attended by various stakeholders, including relevant government agencies like the Police. The participants were clear in their minds about what needed to be done. Among the many recommendations, the symposium had urged for creation of bye-lanes and by-passes to downtown Shillong to take the traffic load off the arterial roads; augmentation of parking space and the like. The papers submitted to the government simply gathered dust in the secretariat and precious little happened since there was neither any follow up nor any public pressure brought on the government. However, around that period I recall when Grosswell Myliemgap was the Transport Minister, the government had

Shillong's traffic blues:

Citizens need to push politicians for remedy

By Manas Chaudhuri

taken a proactive decision to put a moratorium on issuing fresh taxi permits. The underlying thought then was that the roads of Shillong were hardly equipped to handle such a large volume of traffic. To put a cap on the number of taxis was one easy step. Sadly, subsequent governments completely ignored the decision and fell for cheap vote-centric temptation to upturn the decision.

In 2008, the short-lasting coalition headed by Don Kuper Roy made another attempt to take a closer look at the issue at hand. Entire cabinet, civil and police top brass were huddled in the secretariat conference room. Everybody felt that something needed to be done for reducing vehicular traffic in the capital. The exercise was too superficial and very little came out of it. There was neither any white paper on the traffic scene nor was there any concrete proposal to push for radical reforms. Towards the end, as everybody was groping for some ground action, an IG level police official came up with the innovative idea of making a small beginning by introducing odd and even system of plying of local taxis. Everybody latched on to the proposal happy in the thought that at least something is better than nothing! Accordingly, it was decided to issue an official press release notifying the government decision. All the local dailies reported this "path breaking" measure to contain the burgeoning traffic curse. But then, one day later, the most bizarre thing happened. Deputy Chief Minister Hoping Stone Lyngdoh, who was in-charge of Home and duly present at the meeting, issued a damning statement that he was not a party to this decision.

Apparently, the taxi owners' body met him to express their displeasure with the thought of introduction of odd-even system, and he merrily capitulated. With a tenuous majority for the government then, nobody dared question Lyngdoh. That marked the end of state government's feeble bid to ease the problems of motorists!

In the beginning
The roads of Shillong were never meant to cater to today's deluge of automobiles. In the last century, roads in Shillong, have by and large remained the same—narrow and ill-suited for handling the large vehicular traffic of today. During this period, especially since the creation of Meghalaya, automobiles have been hitting the roads by the hundreds every month. According to the statistics of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, in

2019, there were 3.66 lakh automobiles registered in Meghalaya. It will be safe to surmise that three-fourths of these automobiles relate to East Khasi Hills. Add to this the floating automobiles that ply from the rural areas and outside the state. And then, we have the automobiles of the Defence and paramilitary forces in and around Shillong. The enormity of the problem is terrifying as the roads are increasingly getting cramped. Driving through the town today is a nightmare, complain most motorists. What used to take a mere 15 minutes a few years ago, may take as much as 90 minutes today. The traffic snarls of Shillong are ubiquitous and everyone is prepared to accept the inevitability of the situation. They may gnash their teeth in revulsion but are unable to bare their teeth to the authorities. It's a supine, helpless surrender!

No easy fix
Keeping in mind that Shillong is a hill station - not a city - let us not deceive ourselves into comparing Shillong to Guwahati where construction of flyovers and road widening are normal and every citizen is prepared to put up as an accepted part of life. Clearly, Shillong has to work within its own physical and political limitations. A few years ago, the Government had talked about having flyovers from Motphran to Secretariat hill. It's a heaven's blessing that such a monstrous edifice never became a reality. The concept of flyovers is totally repugnant to the contours of this verdant plateau. We need to rely on our own ingenuity to come out of the mess.

I believe that we are in a desperate situation which warrants desperate measures. In this context, I am tempted to offer my own short-term and long-term suggestions for easing the traffic woes of the citizens. Here's what I believe can help the situation tangibly:

1. Regulate the sale of automobiles: As in Singapore no one should be allowed to buy cars off the showrooms without government authorisation. A regulating authority should be put in place to check, inter alia, whether the family already possesses cars or not, whether there is parking facility or not before permitting new automobiles to hit the roads. In any case, there has to be a cap on the number of automobiles for each family. According to one unofficial estimate, Shillong has been adding at least 500 new vehicles every month. Adding 6000 new cars on an annual basis is putting that much more congestion on the roads.

2. Introduce Odd-Even system for all vehicles across the board. Even the government vehicles should not be spared. Didn't it work wonders during the pandemic related lockdown?

3. Cull the old vehicles that are 15 years old and put a ban on their plying on the roads in the town.

4. Create dedicated tracks for walkers around the town to encourage people to walk. The town's diameter will be no more than five to seven kms. It's not a huge ask by any means.

5. Call meetings of all stakeholders at various levels for creating public opinion on a bottom up approach to be prepared to make sacrifices for the common good. Let the people themselves suggest what needs to be done for ease of living.

6. Create and deploy an SOT like satrap for enforcing traffic regulations throughout the town unsparingly. Few really seem to care for the poor traffic cop's authority these days. We need a stringent mechanism in place if the system has to work.

7. Acquire land for widening of roads on a war footing. All these years the government has been pussy footing on this score. Time is up for such strange nonchalance. There has to be a business-like approach.

8. Utilise Smart City initiative to plough in funds specifically for addressing the infrastructure deficiency.

The list is surely not exhaustive. Much more needs to be done, provided there is a collective will. This is our town and our life. We need to take ownership of both We cannot leave it all to the comundrum called Government. Obviously, there has to be huge dose of public cooperation and patience, not to speak of an unbending political will. With the politicians on election mode, expect little to happen in the next few months. Even if the IIM course correction measures are brilliant and out of the box, make no mistake, we still need a government to make it happen. The million-dollar question is: Will the new government rise to the occasion? To me the answer lies squarely with the citizens who should make up their minds what kind of life people aspire to live. If they resolve to push the politicians hard, maybe there is a hope. It's election time which is also an opportunity. The least every citizen can do is question every vote-seeking election candidate about their take on the road blues in Shillong. Sensitise them. Make a deal on this issue. Maybe then we could turn a new leaf!

(The author can be reached at: manas9chaudhuri@gmail.com)

Violence-its self-defeating nature

By D. V. Kumar

The recent violence on innocent targeted people which happened on the 28th of October, 2022 in Shillong following a rally for employment shocked the conscience of every Meghalayan and legitimately so. Two visuals from that day struck me the most. The first one was about a child standing on a scooter when the violence was happening right in front of him or her who must have asked his or her parents what it was all about which the parents must have found it extremely difficult to answer. The second one was about an injured young boy (non-tribal) being shifted into a vehicle and a couple of local (tribal) boys almost guarding him so that no further attacks took place on him with many from the nearby rally looking almost sympathetically at the injured boy. These two visuals convey two different kinds of epistemic importance. The first visual gives us a warning that we need to be more responsible when are voicing our protest on any issue as children of the most impressionable age are also present in public spaces. We certainly do not want them to grow up with a violent image of their society.

The second visual (that of a boy being shifted into a vehicle) underlines the essential humanity of people who were present there and indicates, may be things are not that bad in Meghalaya. This visual along with condemnations of violence pouring in from many prominent civil society organisations, leaders of some political parties, well-known public personalities, religious organisations points to the fact that there is a strong civil society culture here and hopefully this would go a long way in undoing some of the damage caused to the image of Meghalaya as a peaceful state. Violence of the kind which happened is politically and economically self-defeating. It is politically self-defeating because it casts serious doubts about the health of our democratic polity which allows expression of legitimate demands and protests. Such incidents have given an opportunity for raising unreasonable and irresponsible demands such as calling for imposition of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) in Meghalaya and 'boycott of Meghalaya'. Clearly such demands further vitiate the atmosphere.

It is also economically self-defeating because it does not address serious economic issues such as unemployment in a systematic manner. The issue of unemployment is a structural issue and it needs structural solutions. Instead of trying to find structural solutions to the problem, such violence actually makes it more difficult to find one. For example, in the context of Meghalaya, tourism is one of the major structural issues which needs to be factored in to tackle the problem of unemployment. Violent incidents such as the recent one negatively impact tourism. Its negative fallout has already been felt as the autumn festival which is a huge tourist attraction suffered because, as per the newspaper reports, many have cancelled their tickets. Not only that many who would have wanted to visit Meghalaya on the following days which happened to be Saturday and Sunday would have cancelled their plans as well following the violence.

The unemployment situation in the entire country is quite depressing. As per available reports, India's labour market shrunk substantially resulting in an increase of a large number of unemployed. Clearly, the situation is not better in Meghalaya

and requires concerted attempts of all concerned to tackle the problem of unemployment. Private initiative too plays a vital role in providing for good job opportunities. But that would come in only when there is a conducive social, political and economic atmosphere. It therefore becomes quite essential on the part of both government and civil society organisations to create such an atmosphere of trust and harmony. Experts argue that wherever investment climate which includes social, economic and political aspects (literacy rate, life expectancy, sound banking facilities, well-developed irrigation facilities, enabling government policies, political will and very importantly socially harmonious environment etc.) is good, such states have developed better than others. Examples of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telengana, Punjab etc. are usually given in this regard.

The real adversary of development in the north-east is certainly not the innocent people walking on the streets of Meghalaya. The real adversary is the history of social, cultural and political marginalisation that societies in the north-east suffered from, a history the various ethnic movements (MNF in Mizoram, for example) tried to overcome. It would not be an exaggeration to say that they have been successful to a great extent as they have been able to acquire reasonable amount of political (statehood), economic (independent sources of revenue, however meagre they are) and cultural (learning one's own language in schools, for example) autonomy. This however does not mean that they are completely free from the structures of marginalisation. They continue to feel neglected and discriminated against as developmental policies and programmes are formulated without taking into account their sensitivities and aspirations and adequate employment opportunities have not been created. Their sense of discrimination and frustration gets accentuated by measures such as CAA and NRC. It should, however, be remembered that they are legitimate and democratic channels of protest available which they can use to express their sense of injustice. Inflicting physical harm on hapless and innocent people will certainly not solve the problems and in fact may prove to be counter-productive.

One of the defining moral principles of a democratic polity is its ability to ensure that minorities-religious, linguistic, ethnic-fulfil their socio-economic and political aspirations unhindered. The moral stature of a democratic polity would suffer immensely if minorities, wherever they are located, are subjected to attacks-physical or conceptual. The health of democracy is usually judged by some formalistic aspects such as frequent holding of elections rather than substantive ones such as how well it protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of people. The sagacity of our Constitution makers needs to be recognised in this context for conceiving a democratic, inclusive and liberal India which through various constitutional provisions makes it a welcoming polity for different kinds of minorities in India. In my understanding, the Constitution of India should be seen as a very powerful moral document as it emphasises the moral and legal equality of every citizen in India.

Legitimate channels of expressing our sense of injustice are available within the Constitutional framework.

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

Letters to the Editor

Rijiju's hypocritical statement!

Editor,
On October 22nd last when the Union Minister for Law & Justice Kiren Rijiju visited Shillong he was asked on the status of implementation of ILP in Meghalaya. He curtly and evasively responded that this specific issue warrants a special brainstorm exercise. He, instead, underlined the fact that the Modi government is steadfastly pursuing a positive outreach policy for the unexceptionable holistic welfare of the people of the North-East and that one of them is to completely re-vamp the redundant impediments like the ILP, clamped by the colonial administrators. This reminds me of another dyed in the wool saffron representative of the city A L Hek who on October 28, 2019 asserted that, "ILP implementation is not as easy as plucking a fruit," while defending the saffron government to the hilt. If Rijiju has so self-

assuredly opined that ILP could become a bottleneck to progress then he ought to, in the first place, push for the roll-back of ILP from his own State of Arunachal Pradesh then he may see the hullabaloo of the students' union of his State who have been raising the Chakma problems eternally. Most of the Arunachalis would be baying for his blood or that of anyone who dares to dispense with the extant ILP prevalent in their State. It may be recalled that in one of my letters which appeared in these very columns captioned 'Why ILP for Manipur and not Meghalaya?' (ST March 4, 2020), I had elaborately recounted the Machiavellian maneuvers of the NDA led Government to endorse ILP gift on a platter to Manipur but oddly denied the same to Meghalaya! Coincidentally, such a contentious enactment was done close on the heels of Parliament passing of the CAA; further, Manipur was perchance granted ILP on the hindsight of being fully aware that Manipuris are inexorable in their resolute

determination and are ready to lay down their lives for justice as exemplified in their demonstrations when Manipur's hill-districts were alleged to be incorporated into Nagaland. To top it all, Amit Shah knew that CAA would never be accepted by the Manipuris without a deterrent ILP.

Additionally, at this juncture, the Modi government was also obliquely copy-cattling the much maligned colonial policy of divide and rule in the North-East. Hence, hypocrisy is there for all to see!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

Live and let live!

Editor,
On October 28 last the FKJGP took out a rally to protest against unemployment. Unemployment is a problem that creates a lot of agony, frustration and trauma in people especially the minds of the educated youths. Unemployment is

indeed a menace that must be addressed very seriously by the government.

One completely agrees with Albert Thyrniang in his write-up; "Should not the slogan 'In our own land we do as we wish' be banned" when he says that the leaders of the pressure groups are not taking crucial matters and concerns in all seriousness by going deep into the route of corruption, nepotism and favouritism. There has always been a lack of transparency in job interviews whereby these leaders and more often their relatives and family members are usually the ones selected for the posts irrespective of whether they are fit or otherwise.

On that fateful day, the FKJGP, a federation that comprises the three tribes of the state, turned violent and ugly. The videos and images that went viral in social media puts the three tribes to shame. Those at the rally appeared to be young men in all their vigour and strength. One fails to understand as to what was the need to take up a rally wearing masks, now that COVID protocols are more relaxed unless

they had ulterior motives of violence.

Over the years, since the 1970s when agitations took place in the state, many lives were lost. Social media then was far from existence. Today, any and every small incident, good or bad, spreads like wild fire. It takes but a few seconds for the world to get information about the happenings in and around the world. That day, what the local youths did reached every nook and corner of the world. The veracity of this can be seen in the numerous comments made on the videos and images on Facebook, Instagram, etc. And why not? This sort of hooliganism is unacceptable in any sane society. What could be the joy achieved out of such a show of hooliganism? Bashing non-tribals, vandalising vehicles was no act of sanity. Our state is not only a beautiful place but a place with equally beautiful people. But for such acts or tyranny of a few, we have earned the despise of our fellow countrymen and onlookers across the globe. If unemployment was the cause that made the pressure groups take up

the rally, did they achieve anything concrete and substantial after disrupting the peace and tranquility?

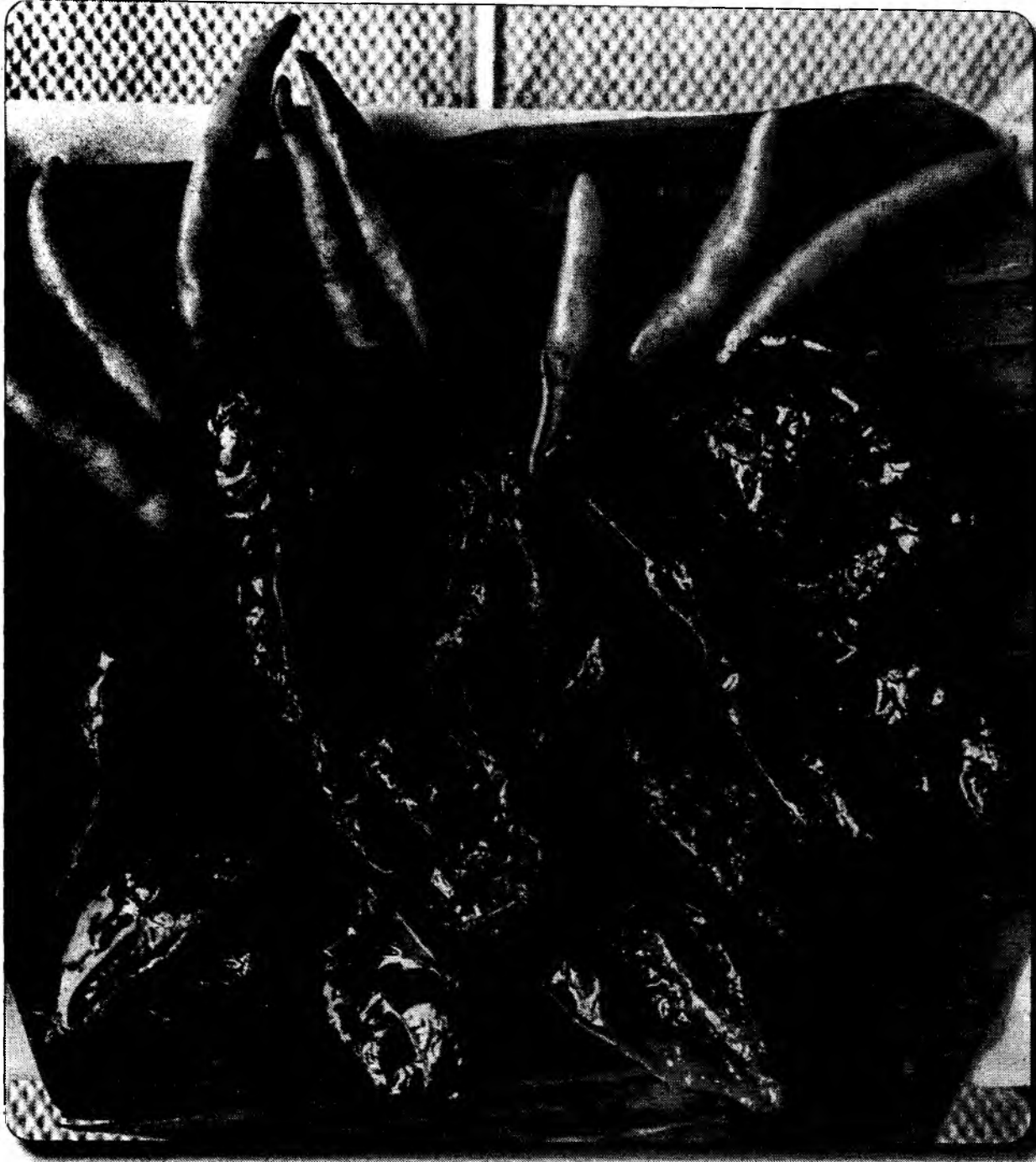
If the FKJGP triggered fear and panic the police failed us miserably. Teachers were manhandled during their protest march to the Secretariat but not the perturbed youths. Why was the Police Department docile and submissive on that particular day when they are actually the protectors of the law?

Life is a gift that is too short to be lived in hatred, anger, pride, enmity, envy, killing, murder. We come into this world with just this knowledge that one day we will have to go back to a place unknown. What route would that be is not truly known to us but certainly what route and path to take is in our hands.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

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

Why some people like it hot: The science of spiciness



Spiciness, or its perception, occurs in most cuisines worldwide. The chilli pepper of the genus *Capsicum* (family Solanaceae) is one of the world's most widely used spices, found in thousands of recipes and sometimes eaten as a stand-alone dish. One in every four people on the planet currently eats chillies on a daily basis.

The research on chilli peppers and spiciness represents an outstanding example of multidisciplinary science. Several researchers in the last decades have provided information and curiosities about this most unique and desirable oral sensation.

A brief history

Chilli peppers were unknown to much of the world until Christopher Columbus made his way to the New World in 1492. Several origin theories flagged different parts of South America as "the" spot where chillies came from.

A phylogenetic analysis found that they are native to an area along the Andes of western to northwestern South America. These ancestral wild *Capsicum* were "small red, round, berry-like fruits."

The earliest evidence of domestication dates back to 6,000 years ago in Mexico or northern Central

America. Chilli peppers were introduced into Europe in the 16th century.

Currently, there are five domesticated chilli peppers species.

The five domesticated species are *Capsicum annuum*, *C. chinense*, *C. frutescens*, *C. baccatum* and *C. pubescens*. The species with the most varieties is the *C. annuum*, which includes the New Mexican jalapeño and the bell pepper. The Habaneros and scotch bonnets instead belong to the *C. chinense*, while Tabasco peppers are *C. frutescens*. The South American ajis are *C. baccatum*, while the Peruvian rocoto and the Mexican Manzano are *C. pubescens*.

Nowadays, more than three million tons of chilli peppers are produced yearly for a global market that is well over US\$4 billion.

Why chilli burns?

Spiciness is a burning sensation caused by capsaicin in food. When we eat spicy food, capsaicin stimulates receptors in our mouth called TRPV1 receptors and triggers a reaction. The purpose of TRPV1 receptors is thermoreception — the detection of heat. This means they are supposed to deter us from consuming food that burns.

When TRPV1 receptors are acti-

vated by capsaicin, the sensation we experience is linked to the feeling of encountering something hot, near the boiling point of water.

However, this pain is nothing more than an illusory side effect of our confused neural receptors — there is nothing actually "hot" about spicy food.

Not all chillies are equal

Different degrees of spiciness exist according to the chilli you are eating. In 1912, pharmacist Wilbur Scoville created a scale to measure the pungency (spiciness) of chilli peppers. This scale, measured in Scoville Heat Units (SHU), is based on the capsaicinoid sensitivity experienced by people eating hot chillies.

On the standard Scoville heat scale, bell peppers (SHU=0) are on the bottom. Jalapeño peppers can range anywhere from 2,500 to 10,000. By comparison, Tabasco peppers are between 25,000 to 50,000 units, and habanero chilli ranges between 100,000 to 350,000.

The world's hottest pepper — the Carolina Reaper — goes all the way up to 2.2 million units. Bear spray — two per cent capsaicin — is advertised at 3.3 million units, and pure capsaicin hits 16 million at the

top of the Scoville scale.

Human pleasure

Psychologist Paul Bloom writes: "Philosophers have often looked for the defining feature of humans — language, rationality, culture and so on. I'd stick with this: Man is the only animal that likes Tabasco sauce."

Bloom was right. There is not a single animal that enjoys hot pepper, but we are not the only animal species eating chillies. Mammals, like mice and squirrels, share the same spicy food receptors humans have, and they tend to avoid hot peppers as food sources.

Birds eat hot peppers — but they can't actually feel the heat. Birds have different receptors from humans and are biologically unable to register the effects of capsaicin.

Explaining the reason for the evolution of capsaicin is not that easy. Some argue that it is an adaptation to select birds to eat chilli fruits. Birds don't chew or digest seeds like rodents, and they transport them far away.

Other studies have suggested that capsaicin is also an effective deterrent against the attack of parasitic fungi, and the heat sensation in mammals is a side effect.

Some experts argue that humans like chillies because they are good for us. They have some beneficial effects on human health. They reduce blood pressure and may have some antimicrobial effects. The pain of chillies can even overwhelm and help manage other pains.

Another hypothesis can be described as benign masochism. Psychologist Paul Rozin suggests that there's a sort of thrill similar to the fun of riding a roller coaster. In an interview, he explained: "Mind over body. My body thinks I'm in trouble, but I know I'm not."

Reducing the burn

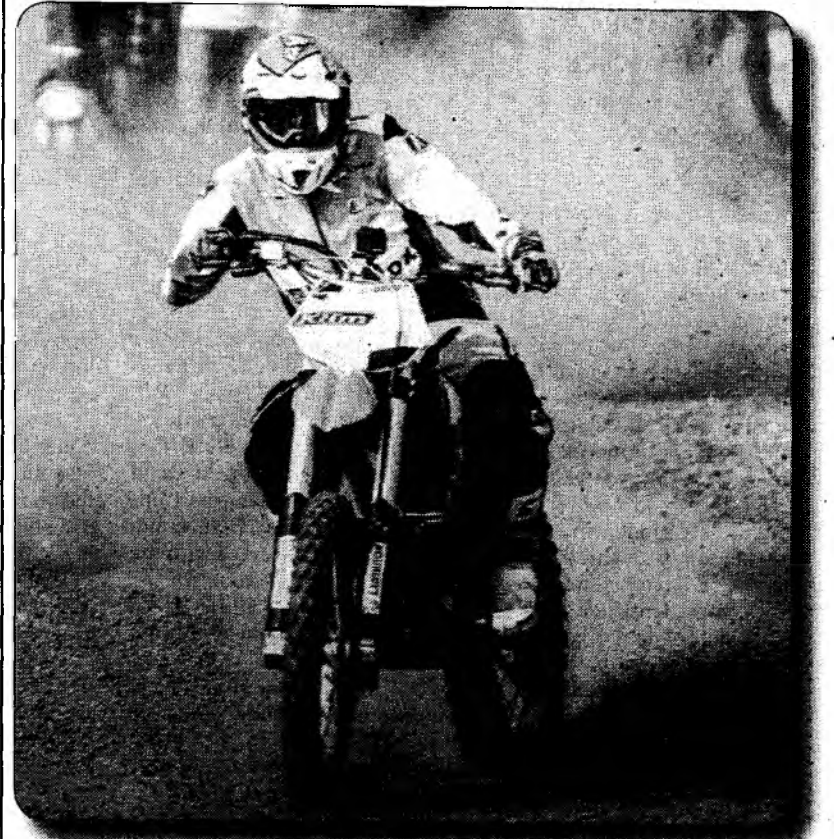
What happens when a food is too hot to handle? The ability of several common beverages to put out the fire, or reduce the oral burn from capsaicin, has been tested.

With capsaicin, a glass of water will be ineffective because capsaicin is hydrophobic — the molecule does not bond with water. Although it needs to be thoroughly proven, ethanol in a cold beer might even increase the burn perception.

Beverages with a significant amount of sugar can help because activating the taste of sweetness basically confounds our brain. Too much stimuli to handle will reduce the pungency of chillies.

A glass of milk, a few spoons of yogurt or ice cream will calm the burning sensation. These products are usually sweet, but there's more: casein — the primary protein in cow's milk — attracts capsaicin molecules. Casein molecules surround the capsaicin molecules and wash them away, in the same way that soap washes away grease. So the next time you want to try a new hot sauce or spicy dish, do not forget to order a glass of milk. (*The Conversation*)

India Bike Week returns to Goa



Asia's largest bike festival India Bike Week 2022, in association with PETRONAS Sprinta is all set to offer larger-than-life experiences with this year's special attractions - 5 different race tracks, Wheelie Training, Biker's Mart (Indoor & Outdoor Expo), Big Trip sessions, Ladakh Tent, the Club Village, Jameson's Howling Dog Bar, and others.

The 'Ride to IBW' is only the start to an adventurous journey that starts with riding to Goa and converges into a slew of events that aren't for the faint-hearted and entices the free spirit of brave heart riders.

Races & Rides: IBW 2022 will have five tracks and races for all moto enthusiasts - whether you are a Moto Cross fan or a Big ADV rider, there is a track for every rider and motorcycle. EAT is co-hosting the Hill Climb, where the fastest one up a hill wins the race, and the Mud Rush - a fun dash across loose sand and a few crazy twists and turns. At the IBW Flat Track, the bikers ride, slide, and race, using their skill of balancing man and machine around an oval dirt track.

The Adventure Flow Track is an obstacle course designed for ADV bikes while the Dirt Dash is the place to test one's mastery over dirt and slush. All winners will get trophies, certificates, cash prizes, and exciting motoring accessories. For those who want to learn a few skills from the absolute masters of dirt, there is a wide variety of track sessions to sign up for. Vishakh from BAR Academy will conduct 1 hour Enduro sessions to master the gnarly hill trail. Nelly from ProDirt Adventure, Motofarm & FMAE Motopark will coach people on 3 other tracks - Adventure Track, Flow track, and the Dirt Dash for Moto Cross and dirt enthusiasts.

These tracks are expected to give the curious a glimpse into the wild world of dirt riding and explore the limits for themselves and their own machines.

The ongoing IBW Chai Pakoda Rides presented by PETRONAS Sprinta is a platform to ride, connect and celebrate with the biking community around the country.

It is hosted on Sunday mornings across 30 cities pan India, with the idea of meeting like-minded people over a short breakfast ride and hopefully forging new friendships within the motorcycling community.

The IBW team hopes these rides will encourage the community to get on their bikes for the annual Great Migration to Goa and make full use of the RIDE TO IBW support system in partnership with KoGo, going live on November 20.

The biggest motorcycle brands such as KTM, BMW Motorrad, Harley-Davidson, etc have confirmed their participation as well.

Ladakh Tent: People and institutions who have built the subculture of motorcycling over the last 2 decades, and who hold the legacy of the Indian moto scene are the Moto League 2022. These motorcycling stalwarts will host conversations with biker cafes, the original motorcycling clubs, and adventure bike trip organizers. The Ladakh Tent will be a cozy corner featuring the Rodcast Tent, Beer Garden, Jameson Black Barrel Bar, a vinyl collection, singer-songwriters, and Open Mic sessions from the community. For

the first time, Shirshendu Banerjee (Shandy), India's only International Award Winning podcaster on motorcycling - The Biker Radio Rodcast - will record live at IBW 2022. Shandy will interview iconic riders, travellers, and builders at the Rodcast Tent. It will be an opportunity for the biker community to see Shandy Live while he creates his famous Podcasts.

IBW People: The festival is calling the community to reach out and tell their own uniquely individual stories at IBW. Jameson Connect at Howling Dog Bar will feature a Motography Show by riders followed by a Mod Bike Show, a platform to display and talk about custom-built machines. Personalities like Murtaza Junaid, Yogi Chabaria, Marco Rosetto Founder Mini GP India, Shardul Sharma India's first participant to the Red Bull Romaniacs, and others will come together and share their stories, experiences & passion for riding at various sessions. Potential moto artists can get a chance to showcase their art or collaborate to co-create IBW Merchandise. This year, the Collectors' Corner will showcase the amazing superbike collection by JS Films and has scheduled a Fan Meet at IBW 2022. Biker cafes such as Throttle Shrottle, Trip Machine, & Super Chai continue to be our key partners in the IBW 2022.

Music Bonanza: India Bike Week is a celebration for all who have a mutual love for food, music, exploration, and adventure. Music lovers won't be disappointed with this year's performances. The artist line-up is Lagori & Teri Miko as headline acts, Easy Wanderlings & DJ Mojo Jo Jo on the Main Stage, DJ Unnayaana & Uday Benegal for Ladakh Tent, and DJ Ayesha Pramanik for the Jameson Howling Dog Bar. IBW 2022 will host Red Bull's freestyle performers like rappers, MCs, BMX stunters, and break dancers.

Food Festival: The Big Forkers Meat Fest by Jameson: IBW 2022 has something to offer for everyone. Bikers have a special place for barbecues, so this year's special attraction is "The Big Forkers Meat Fest", a section dedicated to the art of curing, grilling, smoking, and barbecuing meats in India. From Goan Chorizo to whole hog roasts, spit roasts, fire & meat displays, churrascarias, tawa, and tandoor from the best pit masters from across the county - Chef Aal (Nagaland), Chef Arjun Sikdar (Goa) Chef Geoff (Canada), Chef Oneal (Kochi) and Chef Chris (Goa). The Eat Street will feature 10 other local Goan caterers and food trucks featuring typical IBW staples on their menu.

IBW Ride-outs: IBW supports the community with its Ride to IBW digital support system, Kayakin' Rides with Sahasea, Secret Trails ride with the Goa Motorcycling Club to explore the hidden gems of Goa and Flavours of Goa ride with Chef Marlon, after parties and brunches. Each of these will have exciting activities for participants to be immersed in the wild experience that IBW is synonymous with and offer a chance to reconnect with a community that shares the same DNA.

The registration for the races and sessions is live now on register. indiabikeweek.in. (*ANSLife*)

Face your fears

Ever stood on the edge, facing your fears, only to dive into a beautiful abyss amidst the serenity of nature? Bungee jumping is an activity that involves a person jumping from a formidable height while attached to a long rubber chord harnessed to the ankles. Yes, that leaves you whipped around by the elastic chord mid-air, upside down!

Face your fears

Jumping off the cantilever is not just facing the fear of heights but a lot of things in life. Gathering every ounce of courage to take the leap of faith will help you overcome every feeling of suppression. Bungee jumping is not for the faint of heart. You will have to be extra prepared mentally so that you do not panic. But getting it done will leave you with a once-in-a-lifetime memory. Face your fears and book this activity for your next vacation to overcome resentment. Rishikesh and Goa are said to be some of the best locations for bungee jumping.

Break away from the monotony:

There's a reason why adventure sports like Bungee jumping have been popular as off-site activities among multinational corporations: it increases productivity! A workforce that's been shaken out of the monotony of their routine, taken amidst nature, and been given the opportunity to undertake some self-exploration that adventure provides, only works better in the end with much higher output than before.

In fact, even IPS officers in India visit Bungee Jumping annually as part of confidence building. However never mistake thrill for danger. Select the best operator that has an exceptional safety record, the most professional practices, expert staff, and outstanding testimonials.

Make memories that last a lifetime!

Nothing lasts more than the memories you make while living life on the

edge. The breathtaking view and coming back with stories are exceptional in their own way. It is a personal achievement to take the proverbial leap of faith! Bragging the experience to loved ones and posting pictures on social media is the happiest after-effect of such journeys. Every time you watch a Bungee jumping video or see an image, your personal experience will come flooding back to you as if it was just done yesterday. The memory will be right up there with others and one off the bucket list.

India has only one company so far to be certified by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India to be operating Bungee jumps in the country- Jumpin Heights. Incidentally, they are also the only ones to set up fixed Bungee platforms amidst a natural landscape. They have two branches - one at Rishikesh and now in Goa. To the uninitiated, it may make no sense, but those who've tasted adventure know the thrill of adrenaline and the power of standing on the edge! (*ANSLife*)



How long can we actually live?

Every species, including our own, has an inherent lifespan that serves as a kind of upper limit on the average lifespan. According to one interpretation of lifespan, a population of, say, flies would congregate to the maximum achievable life expectancy that is inherent to this specific species of flies if it were maintained in ideal laboratory circumstances, cared for properly, and kept generally safe. The lifespan of all flies throughout history has been the same, regardless of location or period.

This indicates that biology offers more insightful information. There is an inherent rate of biological degradation for every species. Some species, like flies, experience this rate at a very high level and can only survive a short time; other species, like the bowhead whale, experience it at a much slower pace and can live for up to 200 years.

The average lifespan of humans is roughly 97 years. Although the theoretical limit for the human lifespan has not been exactly determined, a section of geneticists believes that it is around 150 years, while a niche of damage-repair scientists believe that there is no theoretical limit to the human lifespan if we manage to continuously eradicate repair as it is created.

This physiological limit is unaffected by increased healthcare services or global economic growth.

Why is there a set physiological limit?

It turns out that there is a limit to how frequently your cells can divide in order to keep you youthful and healthy. This restriction, known as the Hayflick limit, is determined by the physical length of telomeres, a unique cellular characteristic.

According to this notion, a normal human cell may only replicate and divide forty to sixty times until it can no longer divide and dies due to programmed cell death or apoptosis.

The Hayflick Limit hypothesis aided scientists in studying the im-



pacts of biological aging on human populations from embryonic development to death, including the consequences of shortened repeating DNA sequences called telomeres on the ends of chromosomes.

Telomeres are the chromosomal end caps. They serve to maintain chromosomes snugly wrapped in a nice, tidy bundle, preventing fraying and binding to all the other small things within your cells. Telomeres are a useful feature, but they have a drawback: each time a chromosome is replicated to form another cell, the cellular copying apparatus must remove a little portion of these end caps.

Telomeres shorten over time until they are no longer present, at which point the cell stops dividing and may eventually die. This is what happens as we get older. Our skin, for example, stops regenerating, we gain wrinkles, and our bones become brittle and fragile. We simply deteriorate.

The simple solution appears to

be to repair the telomeres such that they never shorten, thus generating an eternal spring of youth. In reality, there is an enzyme called telomerase that accomplishes precisely that. This enzyme does exist naturally in humans, but not in the most advantageous way.

But there is a huge discrepancy

Even though our cells have a limit to how many times they may divide, many of us will never reach that limit. There are several ways to die, and only a subset of them is caused by our cells approaching the end of their lives. Until approximately a century ago, infectious illnesses like TB and influenza killed most individuals well before their telomeres ran out. However, with two developments in medicine and sanitation, it is now uncommon to hear of individuals dying from these causes, and as a result, the average life has improved substantially.

People are able to endure illnesses and infections because of

improved health systems.

The compensation effect of mortality

The "compensation effect of mortality" refers to the relationship between lower mortality at younger ages and faster mortality increases as we approach the physiological limit. This is also related to a "compression of morbidity," which refers to the fact that we are now generally healthier at all ages.

For instance, compared to 1900-1924, Italian males' survival rates significantly increased between 1975 and 1999. As a result, the 80-year-old today, while substantially healthier than an 80-year-old 100 years ago, has a far greater rate of body disintegration in his or her later years. No matter how healthy we were when we were younger, the human species reaches its end of life between the ages of 90 and 95.

Overall advancements in healthcare systems make us all considerably healthier as children; but, the

compensatory impact of mortality assures that the better we are, the faster we will age in the end. Nature has endowed our species with an inherent rate of biological disintegration that will allow just a handful of us to survive above the age of 97.

Conclusion

So, biology says that the maximum human life expectancy is somewhere around 97 years, but there is a twist: Humans seem to be unusual. If the notion of constant lifespan were accurate for humans, we would witness a slowing of growth in more developed nations and a convergence across all areas; yet, life expectancy continues to rise.

More crucially, the survey shows that 100 years ago, the survival chance of Italian males to live another year was almost zero at roughly age 89; nevertheless, according to the theory of lifespan, it should have been nearly zero only at age 97, as it is now.

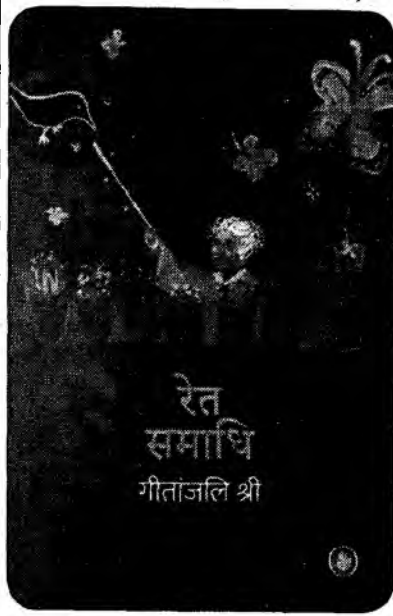
However, we typically do not reach the theoretical limit of how long we can live because we die prematurely of other diseases caused by damages caused by less-than-optimal life choices. People are now more likely to die prematurely from diseases such as cancer and heart disease.

While some of these early deaths are simply the result of bad luck or poor genetics, many are avoidable via good lifestyle choices. Most of us will live to a ripe old age if we do things like quit smoking, put down fried food, and use sunscreen.

In reality, in industrialized nations, life expectancy and lifespan are currently moving in tandem, whereas before 1970, life expectancy was converging to a fixed lifespan of roughly 89, as anticipated by theory.

We discovered a means to slow down the natural process of body deterioration, a truly astounding advance that no other species has accomplished. And who knows what else we could stumble along the journey? Perhaps one day we'll be able to safely harness the power of telomerase and never age. In other words, we could create our own lifespan! (LANSlife)

Piracy hits Ret. Samadhi



Even as a large number of pirated copies of International Booker awardee Geetanjali Shree's book *Ret Samadhi*, published by Rajkamal Prakashan was lately being sold through major online stores and retail outlets, the publisher had stopped the sale at an online marketplace and filed a police complaint. However, the pirated version is still available in retail and on 'footpath bookstalls'.

Ashok Maheshwari, MD, Rajkamal Prakashan says, "Between the period April and October, 55,011 copies of *Ret Samadhi* were sent to the market, out of which 35,200 copies were sold in a record five days. One can imagine the adverse impact of piracy on the publishing industry."

He added that India needed a strong regulatory ecosystem for reducing confusion about copyright infringement boundaries. (LANS)



Geetanjali Shree

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, NOVEMBER 6, 2022

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Sun on your solar return chart and it will give amazing benefits. You will make good progress in your career. Your business will also prosper and you will make good profits. You will also plan to start a new business venture in collaboration, association or partnership. People will be willing to invest their money in your projects. Your incomplete projects which were taking a long time to get finished will get completed. Your investments will reap you rich dividends. New job/business offers will come to you. Your bosses will be satisfied with your work/performance. You will reach the very top of your career and people will be jealous of your growth. Enemies and opponents will remain active but will be unable to harm you. You will enjoy wonderful understanding/bonding with your better half.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



Time will be wonderful. Your decisions will prove to be correct. You will apply your mind properly. A favorable court verdict in your favor is expected. You will be busy with your office work. You will also plan a major expansion in your business. You will remain popular among your colleagues. Your financial position will remain stable. First understand the things before taking a decision. You will have the power to understand situation and people properly. Some pleasant news will lift your spirits. Success in politics and media related work is indicated. You will get success from children's side. Your marital relations will be full of happiness and bliss.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



It will be wonderful week for you. You will meet an influential person who will help you to progress in your life. There will be continuous inflow of money. You will plan the things better now. The work will get done properly and it will bring long lasting benefits for you. You will have high hopes. Even people will have high expectations from you. You will look for a new job for yourself. It is right time to plan expansion in your business. You will be comfortable in your relationship with your partner. But be careful in financial dealings. Otherwise, you will get cheated. You will be on good terms with your bosses and colleagues. They will help you.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



You will enjoy a magnificent week. There is lot of delight and happiness for you in the days ahead. You will spend quality time with your family. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. You will get success in matters related to land and property. You will perform your job efficiently. You will also run your business well. Time and tide wait for none. No one understands this better than you. Hence you will take timely decisions. You will present yourself well before others. You will get unmet opportunities to rise in your work. Also invest in business strategically. Peace and harmony will prevail at home. Guests may arrive all of a sudden.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



Your obstacles will get removed and you will get great results in your work. You will be confident about yourself. You could also get promoted in your job. You will also pay your attention to your house. Cooperation of the elders will be there. You may get big order or some deal will be finalized. Your health will be good. In the family happy news may come. Marriage of a family member can get fixed. You will buy house hold items. Students will get positive examination results. You will plan to roam around to enjoy the winter season. You will have a great time with your friends. Your business will run well. You will go on a business trip.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



Your time will be well spent and peacefully. There will be harmony in family ties. Family members will respect each other. By understanding your responsibilities and duties intensely, you will fulfill them completely. You will enter a new phase in your life. Money inflow will be continuous. You will make good progress in your job/business. Government related tasks will be accomplished without any difficulty. You will get good business opportunities also. Those who are thinking of settling abroad can do so now. Time is very beneficial. The efforts you put in any work it will be completed. Your business will give good profits. You will meet top personalities.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



You will have gains in property dealings and business. Money inflow will be continuous. Time is perfectly suitable. You will make good progress in your job/business. You will get victory in court matters. You will not be afraid of any criticism and will perform your job well. Enemies and opponents will be unable to harm you. You will be on the path to enlightenment. You will

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



You will be full of business ideas. You will also be able to beat your professional opponents. Your interactions with your seniors and colleagues will increase. You will look towards a bright future ahead. You will also give time to your family and spend some pleasant moments with them. Husband and wife will have perfect bonding and will understand each other well. You will also pursue your interests like gardening, writing and reading. You will also make preparations for a festival at home. There is no need to worry about the future of your children. They will do well. A doubt that was there in your mind will get removed. You will back your instincts.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



Additional income will be created. You can be promoted in your job. You will also get lot of benefits. Do not waste your time in useless activities. Your lie could be caught in front of your seniors. Hence to avoid any unfavorable situation at your workplace work with dedication. Honesty should be your best policy. You can go on a tour for office work. You will be happy. Long distance travels can prove beneficial for you. You will take wise decisions relating to your home and career matters. You can grow in your job/business. You will be financially well off. Bonus benefits gifts etc. will be received. You will make plans to buy a new vehicle. Your seniors will be happy with your performance.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)



You will meet your loved ones. You will also attend a family function. Your financial situation will be stronger than before. You will devote equal time to your work and family. You will also look after your elders well. You will also receive their blessings. You could be promoted in your job. Additional responsibility may be given to you. By using your intellectual skills, you will be able to convince everyone with your talent. You will have the ability to take people along with you. You will be able to solve the problems encountered by you. You will be successful in love affairs. You will find yourself well placed in business matters. Your income will rise.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



You will be financially well off and will feel a lot more secure. You could get promoted in your job. Your business will also prosper and flourish. You will prove to be a good host. You will look after your guests well. You will also try to improve your work. You will take concrete steps for betterment of work and will be able to achieve maximum. You will also cooperate with friends. You will stay away from any controversy. You may receive a favorable news from somewhere. There will be peace and harmony in the house. You may start a new work. You could also fall in love with an unknown person. You will fulfill the work of philanthropy. You will get material comforts.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



You may receive some amazing results in your work. You will meet some VIP. He/she will impress you a lot. Your leadership qualities will get noticed. Your personality will also get reflected as a result. The equation is changing on your job front and you will be on the road to progress. You will care about your family and also look after them well. Your earnings will increase. You will make lot of new friends. Love birds will have a great time. Take all investment decisions carefully. You stand to make big gains and profits. Students will get success in exams. You will be able to discharge your professional duties and domestic responsibilities quite comfortably.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



You will be at your charming best and will leave a lasting impression on the people. Your prestige and reputation will swell. Even strangers will become your friends. You will make lot of money. You will work with lot of dedication and honesty. You will work with much tact and wisdom. You will accept your high level of talent and wisdom. You will be able to communicate with everyone well. You will have lot of name and fame. You will be satisfied with the way things are moving in the right direction. Love affairs will be successful. Love mates will have a great time. You will be financially well off. You will not neglect your family. Your siblings will give lot of respect.

Similarities between four of Shakespeare's plays and current UK political situation

The last few years in politics have gifted the keen observer many allusions to some of Shakespeare's best-loved works. From the *Midsummer Night's* (fever) Dream the electorate might think they are experiencing while looking on at parliament to *All's Well That Ends Well* (or is it?).

But more than surface references apply. Shakespeare's work provides insights into the nature of power and how it is exercised.

Shakespeare lived through politically tumultuous times. His playwriting career spanned the reign of two monarchs. The England of his plays was forming itself anew following the Wars of the Roses, which established the Tudor dynasty.

Recent political events could almost be ripped from the pages of these four plays.

Measure for Measure

Measure for Measure is about justice and exacting the proper punishment. Set in Italy, the play's population has, under the leadership of a morally lax Duke, fallen into sinful ways. Despairing of his whore-ridden, drink-loving populace, the Duke leaves the kingdom in the charge of his aide, Angelo, only to return disguised as a friar to observe his protégée's progress. Angelo sets about doling out punishment left, right and centre, but comes undone when his lust for a trainee nun overpowers his moral authority. The Duke swoops in at the last moment to restore order, but the audience is left wondering how he justified leaving in the first place.

What springs to mind here is ex-prime minister David Cameron leaving government in the aftermath of the EU referendum. His casual singing after having resigned seemed to betray a lack of care for the Brexit debacle. More recently, it reminds of another former prime minister, Boris Johnson, whose morally ambiguous premiership ended with a series of luxurious holidays as the kingdom crumbled.

King Lear

Throughout Johnson's scandal-

ridden time in office, King Lear's thought comes to mind.

King Lear's court is stacked with flatterers who provide no good counsel so that he can only hear what he wants. The parallels reached their height in the latest Tory leadership contest in which loyalists emerged from the woodwork to endorse Johnson's return. Such shows of devotion were for nought, however, as he decided not to run.

Lear is also a family psychodrama. He pits his daughters against each other, asking each to express how much they love him. When Cordelia doesn't do so satisfactorily, she is exiled and the kingdom is bequeathed to her sisters, who promptly oust their father.

The play's betrayal speaks directly to the endless infighting in the Tory party. What is, however, remarkable about this play, and distinctly absent in the Tory party, is the depth of remorse felt by Lear. Cast out of his castle, Lear experiences life as one of his subjects – reduced to a "bare forked animal" (or no different to an animal). In a scene that will have chilling resonance with the winter much of Britain currently faces due to rising food, mortgage and fuel costs, Lear repents having ignored his people:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are, That bide the pelting of this miserable storm, How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, Your looped and windowed raggedness defend you From seasons such as these? Oh, I have ta'en Too little care of this!

Anthony and Cleopatra

Anthony and Cleopatra might best befit the ill-fated and short-lived reign of Johnson's successor Liz Truss and her chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng.

From the opening scene, Anthony makes his lack of care for reality known. He dismisses messengers from Rome, declaring: "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch/Of the ranged empire fall! [...] Kingdoms

are clay."

If love comes at the expense of good leadership for Anthony and Cleopatra, Truss and Kwarteng's fatal flaw was their unbridled love of free market economics at the expense of reality.

But both Truss and Kwarteng might have taken note of the end of Shakespeare's tragedy in which Anthony and Cleopatra die in agony. Under Truss's short reign the economy tanked and so did her standing. Her sacking of Kwarteng, in what looked like an attempt to save her premiership, seems itself Shakespearean. It did not stop her from being forced to resign, making her the shortest-serving prime minister in British history. A painful end, to say the least.

The lesson from Anthony and Cleopatra, and Truss and Kwarteng, is what you idolise beyond all sense – be it another person or free markets – might just kill you.

Titus Andronicus

Shakespeare's plays often end with a restoration of order after a tussle for power. Richard III ends with the dawn of the Tudor age and, in *Macbeth*, the rightful heirs ascend the throne. For some, Truss's successor Rishi Sunak is seen as a "safe pair of hands".

But what feels more fitting to me is *Titus Andronicus*. In Shakespeare's bloodiest play, nobody emerges unscathed. Violence begets violence as the body count mounts and Romans, Goths and Aaron the Moor fight for supremacy. Unable to call a general election in the face of terrible polling and imminent difficult decisions on public spending, Sunak faces a daunting task. In the words of Shakespeare's Henry IV, "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown". While we might often focus on Shakespeare's main characters in analysing his drama – the Richards and Macbeths – now is a time to consider the collateral damage.

The Tory's ongoing psychodrama might resemble Elizabethan amusements but, unlike Shakespeare, the impacts are real. (*The Conversation*)

Dont give up. Obstacles can be overcome through strategy and learning.

—Hidetaka Miyazaki

The Shillong Times

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BJP retains support base

CLEARLY, the BJP has reasserted the upper hand in politics as it won four of the seven seats that went to the by-polls in six states. The party won four seats, across Haryana, UP, Bihar and Odisha while one seat each went to the Shiv Sena in Mumbai (Maharashtra), the RJD in Bihar and the TRS in Telangana. The BJP has reasons to cheer as, other than the isolated wins for regional parties, the party proved to have retained the people's trust overall. In fact, this is reflective of the current national political scenario wherein the BJP remains unassailable in the Hindi belt, which is where the decision on who should rule India is made.

The other parts of the country always account for fragmented verdicts also due to the sway of the regional outfits, be it in the south, north-east or even the eastern sector. Yet, in Odisha, the BJP won the single seat that was up for polls while it upstaged the Congress and emerged as a powerful force in Telangana. This, even as the TRS now grabbed the seat held by the Congress in the 2018 December assembly polls. In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP won a seat and proved its continued supremacy over the SP. In Bihar, the Lalu Yadav enterprise RJD won a seat even as the BJP managed to take the second seat up for polls there. Curiously, in the first assembly by-poll after the dramatic shift in power in Maharashtra from the Shiv Sena to the party's rebels and to the BJP, a by-poll in Mumbai city saw the parent Sena of Uddhav Thackeray winning the seat in what should come as a serious blow to the rebel faction led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. This has come as a huge morale boost to Thackeray as his party's legitimacy after the split in the Sena has been proven or reasserted. Shinde and the BJP should be equally shocked by this verdict as it could also be interpreted as the people's disapproval of the power games that the Sena rebels and the BJP jointly played in Maharashtra.

What also should not go unnoticed is that the Congress party could not make a mark in this round of by-polls and rather lost a seat in Telangana, even as Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra received good mass response across the southern states including Telangana. This has not translated into votes for the party even as it proved its democratic credentials yet again by holding a poll for the post of party chief at the national level. The impact of the Yatra might perhaps take time to visibly and positively result in electoral outcomes.

These days, we are witnessing the election fever across the state; posters, flags, meetings and even household visits by potential candidates. A few days back, an election candidate came to our home. After the initial introductions, I asked the candidate, what the manifesto of his party is? I asked whether the needs and rights of children have been included as part of his party's manifesto. Though minced between the lines, it was a definite no.

This got me thinking as why children are always an afterthought in the development agenda of the state. According to the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000, a child is a person who has not completed the age of 18 years. In Meghalaya, according to the Census 2011, children (0-18 years) constitute almost half (48.8%) of the population of the state. This population is quite evenly distributed across the age groups from 0 to 18 years. Many questions come to my mind. Are these children thriving in their own homes and communities? Is the state realizing the importance of this large section of the population? Is it investing enough to see the growth and development of children?

Reading the newspapers and reports, I can say that by and large, 'children' have been neglected. Policy makers have not seen the importance of investing in the lives of children. We see this neglect, evident in the area of education. Education has taken a back seat. We have all seen various reports highlighting the abysmal state of our school education. To reiterate, the state is the worst performer among all states in the country according to the Performance Grading Index of the Ministry of Education, Government of India. The poet, U Soso Tham in his famous poem, "Ki Mawlynnai" (translation -The Diamonds) writes about the strive for wisdom which I believe, one route to its attainment is through education. But how can our children especially in the rural areas be able to attain their goals, their diamonds when we do not provide them good quality education. According to Cleaveland (2014), he writes that good education has always resulted in better

'Children's wellbeing' Is it part of any Party Manifesto?

By Reuben G. Laloo

health outcomes, nutrition, improved productivity, economic growth and reduced poverty.

As we work among children in the urban and suburbs of Shillong, we see that there is an increasing trend of rural urban migration. Families hoping to get their children in better schools and seek out a living for themselves come to the city. Life in the urban is not as simple. Finding a government school near their place of stay is sometimes difficult. Many children below the age of 14 years opt to drop out of school. In a study on 'children at risk in Shillong' conducted by Reach Shillong Ministries (RSM) and the District Child Protection Unit in 2021, found that 23% of children are not in school, of which there are more males (25.6%) and who have dropped out. In the present context, there are organizations such as SPARK, RSM and others trying to reach to the out of school children (children who have dropped out or never enrolled) by partnering with Out of School Programme of state government.

The fallout of poor education is multiple. One of these, is teenage pregnancy or early marriage. Last week, I and my wife went to a village in West Jaintia Hills, where the church leaders had invited us to have sessions with adolescent boys and girls of a secondary school on the 'ill effects of teenage pregnancy'. One of the major reasons for early marriage, expressed by these young children is school dropout and no proper education from home. If a young child can understand the reason for early marriage is dropping out of school, let's invest in the education sector to see that children are not compelled to drop out of school. There are many reasons compelling children to drop out; the inability to access high school (the secondary school is not in the same village), financial constraints or low interest in studies. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy results in the continuation of the cycle of vulnerability and poverty. How will a 'young mother', who is a child herself with low educational attainment

be able to raise a child?

Other repercussions of children dropping out of school is the child's vulnerability to be in the wrong company and indulge in tobacco, alcohol and drugs at a young age. During the day, 25% of children are on their own with no adult supervision and 16% are already regular users of tobacco (RSM, 2021). The increasing trend of drug use among children is not only seen in the urban but rural as well. It is a dangerous trend and we need to find ways to help our kids; to prevent and also help those who have been addicted to substances.

Children are vulnerable. They can be easily misused and abused. At the same time, if proper investment is made in them in terms of time and resources, they are the bright stars of any home and community. Every child has distinct potential; they are ready, able and eager to learn new things. It is important to hone their skills and provide the right platforms for these children to grow and develop.

India has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (UNCRC) and has adopted the National Policy for Children in 2013. According to this policy, the key priorities for children's wellbeing are survival, health, nutrition, development, education, protection and participation as undeniable rights of every child. In February, 2020 the WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commission on child health and wellbeing called upon nation states, to renew their commitment towards ensuring the rights of the child are met and to enhance the wellbeing of children. These national commitments at international forums are meaningless, if these commitments do not percolate to the local levels, and actionable steps are taken.

In Meghalaya, there are several non-profit organizations working on various aspects towards the wellbeing of children. Today, with the leadership of the Bosco Integrated Development Society, a forum has been initiated known as the 'Child Friendly Shillong- Forum', where all organizations working with

children in the city are a part. Child Care groups have been initiated in different localities and even market places and this is hoped to enhance awareness on child rights and their issues are addressed proactively. The work of the non-profit sector is to complement and supplement the government in issues related to children but it will and should not take the place nor responsibility of the government.

As we are nearing the elections, I urge each political party to include "Children's Wellbeing" as a key priority of their election manifesto. However, the manifesto should not end with the elections, but different initiatives related to children's welfare be implemented post-elections. Despite the current situation that bring despair, I have hope that we will see a positive change in the next five years. Let us see that the government brings out a policy document on children and the rights of a child i.e. right to survival, right to development (education sector is improved), right to protection, right to participation is realised for all children in the state of Meghalaya.

In conclusion, the poem 'Children Learn What They Live' by Dorothy Law Nolte summarises the need and importance to mainstream children's issues at all levels of decision making.

If children live with criticism, They learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, They learn to fight.

If children live with ridicule, They learn to be shy.

If children live with shame, They learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, They learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, They learn to be patient.

If children live with praise, They learn to appreciate.

If children live with acceptance, They learn to love.

If children live with approval, They learn to like themselves.

If children live with honesty, They learn truthfulness.

If children live with security, They learn to have faith in themselves and others.

If children live with friendliness, They learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

Elaben Bhatt: A Life Lived for Women, Work and Peace

By Sudarshan Iyengar

Elaben Bhatt breathed her last on 2 November 2022 at the age of 89. She was quintessentially a Gandhian volunteer. She was a critical observer, careful analyst, and innovative constructive worker who designed and demonstrated a world where women tried successfully to build a non-violent, dignified and nurturing society.

She had to struggle hard to make space in the men's world of organised workers' unions. After graduating from Surat's MTB College, she obtained a degree in Law. She joined the Textile Labour Association (TLA) founded with the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi. She was inspired by Anasuyaben Sarabhai who worked with the textile labourers under Gandhiji's tutelage. Elaben joined as head of the women's wing of TLA. During her work, she realised that a large number of women were eking out a living as street vendors and were subject to Municipal and police excesses creating hurdles in carrying out their business. Then there were a host of poor women who worked as home-based workers. Elaben realised that the TLA could not give the status of a union to such working women. This led to the foundation in 1972 of the Self-Employed Women's Association, or SEWA which is now celebrating its Golden Jubilee. Today SEWA is a National Trade Union with around 2.1 million poor self-employed women workers as members in 18 States contributing to the strong informal economy of India. Elaben and her associates have always held that SEWA is a trade union and not a non-government organisation. The concept of women workers' right to work in good working conditions for a dignified livelihood is strongly asserted. SEWA's twin goals are full employment and self-reliance. It struggles for voice, visibility and viability. Elaben worked as the General Secretary for 24 years and from 1996 onwards SEWA has seen young and dynamic General Secretaries from among the women who had come together and organized it.

Elaben soon realised that the women workers needed small amounts of credit to run their enterprises and the lending market was highly exploitative. Under Elaben's leadership, young professional women founded the SEWA Cooperative Bank. It was a struggle to get recognition as a Bank from the Reserve Bank of India. SEWA's strength and the genuineness of the case led to amending the RBI rules. This is a rare feat for women workers in any country of the world. A humble and polite person, Elaben had nerves of steel. She connected with the women of the world. She founded 'Women's World Banking' with Esther Ocloo and Michaela Walsh in 1979 and was its Chairperson from 1980 to 1998. She also chaired Home Net, International Alliance of Street Vendors, and was a Board member of the Manchester-based Global Research Policy Network called Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WIEGO). She was bestowed with honorary degrees from various universities including an honorary Doctorate degree in Humane Letters from Harvard University in June 2001. She was honoured with many awards including the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1977 and at home with Padma Bhushan in 1986.

Elaben was a member of the Planning Commission in the 1980s. Her vision was big and encompassed humanity. She provided a novel interpretation of Gandhiji's Hind Swaraj. She had made a presentation to the UNDP before the Sustainable Development Goals appeared. She called it building a 100-mile community. Gandhiji's Hind Swaraj discussed a self-reliant rural society based on nonviolence and love. Elaben gave a modern meaning to it and coined a word for relating to the physical, social, economic, ecological and cultural environment within a radius of 100 miles and called it Anubandh, her word for correlation. She understood deeply the problem of food security, violence, starvation and ecological imbalance that governments and prestigious international agencies were grappling with. But she called for a firm grip on the ground around and building an active relationship with the world around where people lived. Self-reliance for basic necessities of life - food, clothing, shelter, education, health, banking and recreation all could be generated within 100 miles of one's habitat. The approach she suggested was to be ethical and holistic so that natural resources could be equitably distributed and labour was fairly rewarded. Addressing a national convention once she said, "While here, we must have a dialogue on building a nurturing economy in India. What we have in mind by 'nurturing' is: enhancing our daily life with nourishing food and better health. Ensuring we have the soil that nurtures the earth that nurtures the living beings, investing in the human mind that nurtures knowledge and technology, and promoting investments that nurture the neighbourhood and the next generation. We will deliberate on how to promote a nurturing finance that eliminates violence and inequalities and brings peace to the people, society and nature."

Elaben was appointed Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad and President of the Sabarmati Ashram Preservation and Memorial Trusts (SAPMT) known as Sabarmati Gandhii Ashram during the last decade of her life. She was reluctant to take up the Chancellorship as she was succeeding Gandhiji, Sardar Patel, Dr Rajendra Prasad, Morarji Desai and other prominent people, including her immediate predecessor, Narayan Desai. She had a dream for Gujarat Vidyapith. She envisioned a new avatar of the Vidyapith. In it, she wanted the Vidyapith to give up the run-of-the-mill route of higher education degree-distributing universities to an innovative centre for excellence in promoting Roti Pith, Khadi Pith, and Urja Pith. She wanted to educate the youth with the hands-on experience of producing food, and clothing with the help of sustainable and clean energy technologies. Had she lived longer, her vision would have had the chance of getting translated, gradually into reality. She wanted to free Gujarat Vidyapith from a government grant-receiving higher educational institution to a public-supported vibrant place for the youth of the country to learn to build a non-violent society based on her philosophy of Anubandh by co-relating the individual, society and nature.

As President of the Sabarmati Ashram, she envisioned a live memorial where most of the constructive activities that took place during Gandhiji's time could be revived. The Government of India and the Government of Gujarat came up with a grand plan to redevelop the Sabarmati Ashram precincts spending hundreds of crores and making it a world-class memorial. She was not happy with such a proposal.

As President of the Ashram, she wrote to the Government and said, "All efforts must be undertaken by the Sabarmati Ashram Redevelopment Project, both in terms of its planning and implementation would be consistent with the life and work of Gandhiji. It needs to ensure that this environment communicates to visitors Gandhiji's call for attention to the last person, his idea of simplicity, economy and frugality in all matters and his respect for nature and each one of our fellow beings."

Elaben's motto was Women, Work and Peace. She said, "In my experience, women are key to building community. When we invest in women's participation, we have an ally who wants a stable community and roots for her family. Each woman is not only a worker, but also a provider, a caretaker, an educator, a net-worker, and a vital forger of bonds in a community. Moreover, women's participation brings constructive, creative and sustainable solutions to the community. I consider women's participation and representation an integral part of building stable and peaceful communities." In Elaben's departure, the world has lost a wonderful global citizen who epitomised Gandhiji's nonviolent philosophy and built a non-violent society with women at the helm of affairs.

(Dr. Sudarshan Iyengar is a noted Gandhian economist and the former Vice Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad, a University founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Stop insulting students for dropping out of school

Editor,

I must say it's a great initiative taken by Sankardev College to organise a symposium on - "Political parties and political participation" which is much needed at this point of time. And we could see that at least 7 political parties were present in this event. Even though each representative of political parties had presented their own party's ideologies my attention was drawn to the representative of the NPP for his statement on the causes of unemployment and high dropouts rates in the state. He said that we cannot just blame the government but attributed both unemployment and the high school-dropout rates to the laziness of the youth. If government cannot be blamed for anything then what is it for? To put the blame on students and youths is completely illogical and a weak defence of the present Government.

For instance, students who want to pursue higher education, say even to complete Class 12 have to think of leaving their villages and locating themselves in the Shillong where all the good schools are. We must know that it's not an easy thing for those people to

leave their homes and come to Shillong. First they have to look for rented accommodation which would at the minimum costs Rs 3000. Then they have to pay the school fees and also spend on food and other necessities. This is what I have witnessed with many of my mates who came from some remote areas. For a family to have to shell out so much money for one person is beyond the capacity of most. Some of them try their best to support their children at great cost to themselves and sinking lower into poverty because they have to take loans. When the students get to know of his/her family's financial condition they get demotivated and are left with no choice except to drop out from their schools and colleges. Had the government provided better schools and colleges in some of these remote places many young people would have been able to pursue their higher studies. Girl students would have been able to study after Class X and this would have reduced teenage pregnancies. Unfortunately Government does not think of all this!

Hence from my point of view I must say that putting the blame on students for being lazy is not wise. Party allegiance and defending the Party and Government at all costs to the point of making lazy statements that school drop-out is due to laziness of students is outrageous.

People should not be obsessed with their parties, to deny every allegation made against their parties.

Yours etc.,
Aiban B Nongrum,
Via email

Current Relief provided by MPSC

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, we would like to appreciate MPSC's recent effort of changing the dated and partial syllabus of including Arithmetic (100 Marks) in almost all general Examination, in spite of including Quantitative aptitude (daughter, son, grandchild of Maths only) in General Awareness section.

By appropriately tweaking the syllabus (general exams); they are providing an equal opportunity for non-Mathematics/non-engineering/non-Science, background candidates to hope for competing such exams on an equal footing. Most candidates cannot afford coaching, tuitions; that too for posts that literally require Maths the least for the job!

Whether it's level 15 post or lower, anyone in a sound mind would definitely appreciate a future employee with good logical reasoning skills rather than ability to crunch numbers in a job post that is not mathematics-centric. Previous exams syllabus had

blindly given almost 50% weightage to Maths with Aptitude.

For those who complain that MPSC's general exams are now easier, we would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to them; start preparing for the interview, please!

Also, Central/ All India exams like UPSC CSE which allows any graduate to compete, has Paper 2 of Prelims with many Quantitative aptitude questions, but mind you, that paper is just a qualifying one!

P.S.- MPSC doesn't need to alter the syllabus (logically) to help their kith and kin (if they wish to) clear the exams; they could have just handed them the questions months before the exam; silly...

Yours etc,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Time to promote Snooker & Billiards

Editor,

It's encouraging to see the government supporting, felicitating and encouraging the athletes and deserving sports persons who have brought laurels for the state in various disciplines. Recently the CM had assured more cash prizes for ace athletes of Meghalaya. On this score I would like to bring to the attention of the MDA

Government's a discipline, which so far been neglected. I am referring to the games of Snooker & Billiards which has seen a significant following by many aficionados since the last 7-8 years.

In India, today, there are over two lakh members participating in this game. They are keen to learn, intern, mature and compete to win top tournaments. They are also looking at the involvement of the centralized board BSFI along the lines of state-level academies like the Bangalore Snooker Academy, Tamil Nadu Snooker Academy, the Karnataka State Board Association etc., which has catapulted the game into a different level.

As of today, Meghalaya too has approximately 100 active players (including women), of which about 10-15 players can easily be trained to compete and challenge the nation's best and exercise their skills at top tables across the country.

At present, there are barely any opportunities for Snooker & Billiards players to exercise and exhibit their calibre in both the disciplines. Introduction of the games to the "Meghalaya Games" syllabi is a welcome move. Some exceptionally talented players are looking forward to learning the game and performing better. A couple of club tournaments later, has seen the players develop their hitherto hidden skills and even women are participat-

ing and demonstrating their niche talents and adaptation to the game.

At this juncture what is needed are better coaching facilities so that the players are ready for national and international events. Being a player myself, I can vouch for the enthusiasm and interest of players, including the new ones who have participated in maiden tournaments. They are raring to go but the problem is that of paucity of snooker/billiards tables. At present, there are only 6-7 tables available at elite clubs where only members can play. It is time for the State Government to pitch in and set up a dedicated facility or academy where committed players can seriously invest time and energy to learn the game. This will enable them to participate in bigger national events.

Snooker & Billiards are definitely games where the entire Northeast, which has always produced outstanding talents should also major in and the time is now! Meghalaya can definitely be the trend-setter at least in this sport!

Yours etc.,
Priyankur Nandy (Anky)
Via email

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“Always do what you are afraid to do.”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXV No. 88 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2022

Education in disarray
THE ongoing interrogation into the state of education in Meghalaya reveals a sordid mess compounded by years of neglect of the sector. This has allowed politicians to turn education into a vote-winning political tool by disregarding merit in appointment of teachers; opening schools at places that were not viable thereby leading to a situation of a handful of students with more teachers all paid from the government treasury. Without regular inspection the schools remained largely closed as teachers did not attend to their duties or attended only when they were pleased to do so. Several schools are in a decrepit state and the roofs leaking so classes cannot be held during the monsoons. Schools lacked hygienic toilets and pushed students to defecate in the jungles nearby. There has been a consistent lack of political will to do anything to change the status quo.

In all of this the competence of the teachers has remained a grey area. When appointment to a teaching post is based on political string-pulling it can well be imagined what sort of teachers are educating the rural students who actually need greater attention and assistance even beyond school hours. All this would have surfaced if inspectors were regularly evaluating the educational outcomes in each school. Presently what is happening is that Government is paying for dismal education or no education. When students drop out of school, it is important to interview them and look for the reasons. Only when Government knows the crux of the problem will it be able to sort out the mess. Government must commission immediate study into the educational outcomes in the rural educational institutions of Meghalaya. The teachers and principals should be queried if they have done anything and gone out of their way to apply innovative learning methods to improve the performance of students. Or if the schools were functioning with a ‘business as usual’ attitude since salaries are being paid irrespective of the outcomes.

Private institutions usually function better because parents take active part and engage with the school management. In villages it should have been the responsibility of the village dorbars and the nokmas to oversee the functioning of schools. These village institutions should call a meeting of parents and heads of institutions to discuss the sorry state of affairs of education in their respective areas. Rural parents have no platform to air their views on any issue. The village dorbars/nokmas should call such meetings regularly so that parents can air their grievances and say what exactly their children are facing and why they prefer to drop out even at the primary level. It is time that Government turns its eyes to the rural areas of Meghalaya where governance has failed on all fronts be it roads, water supply, education, health, you name it..

Letters to the Editor

Children are the future, but do we care?

Editor,
The article by Reuben G. Laloo asks our leaders a compelling question, “Is Children’s Well-being Part of any Party Manifesto?” (Shillong Times, Nov 7, 2022). That proper care of children ensures the survival and success of the next generation is an axiom of any aspiring society. But children do not have a voice or a vote, and are therefore so heartlessly neglected in election manifestos.

In 2019, the Jharkhand Right to Education Forum (JRTEF) released an 11-point ‘Child Manifesto’ for the state and urged political parties to include these issues in their political manifestos for the Lok Sabha elections. The points were largely based on the fourth Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations for ensuring quality and inclusive education. Apart from education and teacher’s work conditions, the JRTEF also asked for a social audit of all schools and anganwadis in the state.

Apart from education, the manifesto also highlighted troubled children, especially

those victimized by domestic abuse and trafficking. Other recommendations were use of tribal languages in primary education to reduce dropout rates. Congress and BJP representatives attended the event and promised to take up these issues for inclusion in their manifestos. Child-centered budgets have been the norm in California since 2019 with the goal of reducing child poverty. UNICEF has pleaded for increased allocations for children in the national budget of Bangladesh, citing the need for devices for poor and rural children to participate in online or television classes.

Save the Children recommends several initiatives to be included in political manifestos. These include commitment to reducing dropouts, better support for girls’ education, and access to healthcare, especially vaccinations and nutrition. Other recommendations are for protection of children in conflict and crises, and for care of the environment that is so crucial for children’s future quality of life.

It is admirable that a few voluntary organizations in Meghalaya such as Reach Shillong Ministries, Bosco Integrated Development Society, and SPARK have devoted efforts to out-

Traditional Politics by Consensus vs Party Politics by Majority

By Toki Blah

The preamble of our Constitution declares “WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION – that resulted in a Parliamentary Democracy. Political commentators who make observations on the issue and the subject of democracy, often quote the remarks attributed to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose who was credited to have stated that “Those who want to know about democracy should come to the Khasi Hills”. This statement, if ever it was made, was supposedly made prior to Indian Independence. Now 75 years down the line, does this still hold true today? Would people still be impressed by the manner by which we Khasis practice democracy in 2022? Or to be more precise, what were the aspects, facets or features of Khasi Democracy that created such an impression in Netaji’s mind to make him burst forth with such exuberant praise on these noble democratic practices he witnessed in these Hills? Do they still exist in a Meghalaya that today acts within the framework of the Indian Constitution? I have often asked myself this question, because some of the vital Constitutional aspects mentioned in the preamble have a distinct resemblance to the value systems that guided governance in ancient Khasi democracy. Thus I would like to share my thoughts with others of my tribesmen, who perhaps like me in this 2022th year of our Lord, stand confused, bewildered and utterly perplexed by the deterioration of governance we see going on around us.

Most confounding however, especially on the eve of State Assembly elections, is to see and hear champions of political parties, especially those so-called regional parties, that proudly claim that they have been practicing democratic governance for the last 50 years! Question is - have they really? If yes, then from which fount of wisdom? From the Constitution? From our own neglected indigenous value systems? Or from a made-up chameleon version that changes colour with the demands of their own dubious indiscretions?

The Khasi democracy that Bose talked about was most probably about how Khasi Dorbars conduct and carry out their duties with equivalent responsibility. One of the most cherished stories about this type of publicly accountable democratic demeanor has time and again been narrated on how the Dorbar of Hima Nongkhlaw under its

leader, U Tirot Sing Syiem, deliberated and debated for days, the proposal of the East India Company for right of passage through the Hima. Today an Assembly session lasting more than a week to discuss a dozen or more bills and Acts to benefit the entire people of Meghalaya is considered too long! The following are extracts from Dr. Hamlet Bareh’s book on the Khasi Dorbars based on the observations of a certain Mr. A. White who had accompanied Capt David Scott to the above deliberations. White then observes “I was struck with astonishment at the order and decorum which characterised this debate. No shouts of exultation, or indecent attempts to put down the orator of the opposite party; on the contrary, every speaker was fairly heard”. To quote this report further White proceeds to say that “I have often witnessed the debates in St. Stephen’s Chapel, but those of the Cossy Parliament appeared to me to be conducted with more dignity of manner”. He concluded with “The Dorbar was conducted with a degree of independence, coolness and propriety which could not have been under similar circumstances by the inhabitants of the most

“One of the most cherished stories about this type of publicly accountable democratic demeanor has time and again been narrated on how the Dorbar of Hima Nongkhlaw under its leader, U Tirot Sing Syiem, deliberated and debated for days, the proposal of the East India Company for right of passage through the Hima.”

civilised countries.”

To me this could only have been possible because of the ancient Khasis’ firm tenet on the concepts of liberty of thought and free expression of belief irrespective of social status. It is based on the principle of, “ban rai da ka nia, ka jutang” (the belief that only arguments can lead to logical conclusions on which the truth can be established) and by the social value system of “ban pdiang ia kaba bha, ban bret ia kaba sniew” (to accept therefore what is good and to reject what is wrong). Within a system based on such canons of self governance the magnificence of Khasi democracy of those times will not be hard to imagine. The question I have today for my fellow Khasis – “Is this system of democracy still practiced in our Dorbars? Is the voice of every member heard; patiently listened to and logic and reason applied to all Dorbar decisions? Or

have we been swayed, bought over and converted by an alien belief that justice lies on the basis of a majority vote? More damaging is - have we allowed mob rule and the value of money to influence our recognition of the truth? Search your conscience my friends. The answer is already there!

The flummoxed reader is by this time perfectly entitled to ask “So how in heaven’s name did the ancient Khasi Dorbars in the exercise of their style of democracy ever reach decisions of equitable judgment in case of disputes between two equally afflicted parties but both incapable of producing conclusive evidence?” To search and reach the truth and to be able to come to a logical reasoning was the driving force in ancient Dorbar deliberations. Today “prior informed consent” is a recent motto especially employed on issues of governance imposed by a Government or authority on minority indigenous societies. Dorbars never attempt to impose decisions in such cases. The assistance or help of an independent unbiased witness to a dispute was therefore usually resorted to in such cases with the “Prior informed consent” of the

parties involved. Such a witness was called a Saiphla and based on his/her statement or evidence a decision was reached; judgment passed and cheerfully accepted by all parties concerned.

In view of the above obsession of our ancient Dorbars for fair play, impartiality and logic, one would not be far off the mark to conclude that justice was the pivot on which the Dorbar worked and functioned. Seen against this background one of the most prominent of Khasi value systems and principles “Ban Kamai ia ka Hok” would therefore point more to a Khasi’s search for Justice (Ban kamai ia ka hok - to strive for Justice, socially, individually for himself or collectively for his kur.) Here the word “hok” signifies justice more than honesty, contrary to popular belief that it is a call to collect brownie points of self-righteousness for oneself. It is my personal

belief that self righteousness is an ego factor we aped from the West. The ancient Khasis were too practical and down to earth to be bothered with such castles-in-the-air nonsense.

In conclusion I would like to clarify that this writeup is no attempt to portray the Khasi as a perfect homo sapien. Far from it. The Khasis, both ancient and modern are as honest and as deceitful; as brave and as cowardly; as decent and as licentious as the next man. Left to themselves they loved their small yet brutal petty wars and internal skirmishes. We are no different from other humans and today to speak of Khasi unity is another ‘pie in the sky dream. Here we are not discussing the Khasi as an individual per se but his practice of democracy which is based on truth; grounded on justice and decided by consensus rather than on the Western model of majority rule, which is similar to the rule of the jungle – where might is right; where the voice of the many, even if wrong and erroneous, overrule the voice of the weak, however truthful and justified that might be.

This essay is more on how we as Khasis have allowed party-based politics to override our better sense of fairness and tolerance and this is nowhere more explicit than in our interpretation of the meaning of fraternity or spirit of brotherhood among all mankind. It simply took 6 years after statehood for cosmopolitan Shillong and Meghalaya to lose its caliber of secular fraternity and turn into a state that conspired to rule through ethnic divide and hate. Accept this truth for its an ongoing political process. Today once again voices are raised for a separate Khasi as well as a separate Garo state. How long will it then take for the demand for a separate Jaintia state to emerge? Uncomfortable, troublesome questions but problems of our own making. Problems caused by idiots and morons with a vision for a 5 year Assembly seat rather than a vision or policy of how and where they want to take Meghalaya in the next 50 years.

So unless we rediscover the bonding and uniting factors of our ancestors, those universal value systems that for centuries guided their systems of governance and as long as we keep on encouraging cheap, populist and divisive tactics of party-based politics, I can safely predict that 70 or let’s give it a generous 100 years hence there will be no Khasi or Achik tribes as we know them today. This generation in its selfishness would have ensured their extinction.

unimaginable five years ago. While we speak of school buses I often wonder if the State Government has ever thought of arranging buses for its own staff. If I am not mistaken this was done during the Covid pandemic. This may ease the traffic congestion to some extent while it may make it easier for visitors, especially from afar who wish to visit the Secretariats and the Directorates for their respective work, to get a parking space in front of or near these buildings, which is near impossible under the current situation.

Yours etc.,
K L Tariang
Shillong 3

How do we address un-employment?

Editor,
The recent incident that involved a rally against the rise of unemployment should set alarm bells ringing in the ears of wannabe politicians for 2023. Why I say this is because very few understand the magnitude of the problem and the rest have no inkling as to what solutions they will bring forth to address this in their respective constituencies. The core fac-

tor here goes back to the lack of a proper road map as to how employment is linked to our education sector. Graduates of various shades will pass every year but many become unemployable because they will not possess a single work experience. This work experience should actually start for undergraduates or senior higher secondary level by institutions tying up with corporates, government agencies and non-governmental organizations working in various sectors. The other factor is the flawed state investment policy that seems to cater to only major industries whose owners have no interest at all in uplifting the state or to encourage entrepreneurs who can serve as original equipment manufacturer in short OEMs and small vendors. There are a host of issues if we are to deliberate further on the subject of unemployment. How every political party plans to address this burning issue will be seen in the coming months.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Via email

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India must not copy the China model

By Jagdish Rattanani

Horrific stories are emerging from the factories complex in Zhengzhou in central China owned and operated by Foxconn, which is the world’s largest assembler of Apple iPhones and is now in the midst of a new Covid outbreak. Several news reports, including from leading global media houses and from papers in Taiwan, the headquarters of Foxconn, have given accounts of workers fleeing the assembly plants. Strict restrictions and quarantines have been set up, but workers have complained of limited food supplies for those kept in isolation and poor medical attention.

For the 200,000 workers who live here in crowded rooms inside the complex of factories where they work, this has brought new hardships in a company that has already been called out for its harsh, even exploitative, work culture. Now, fleeing workers are being lured but have largely ignored new bonus offers for those who agree to continue to work and help meet the demand for the iPhone 14 as the holiday season nears.

One video said to be shot at the factory speaks of a “desperate cry” as all workers put in isolation in one specific room have reportedly died. Foxconn said there are no deaths at the facility. A Reuters report from Taipei last month-end said the Zhengzhou plant “has been rocked by discontent over stringent measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, with several workers fleeing the site over the weekend.” One worker quoted by the Financial Times, UK, reported “total disaster in the dormitories”.

The stories emerging from the Foxconn facilities are significant for India as it is here that Foxconn and some others are coming to build new facilities as part of an incentive-laden drive by the government to boost manufacturing under the banner of “Atmanirbhar Bharat”, with various production-linked schemes for electronics manufacturing.

A Vedanta-Foxconn joint venture, with 60% equity by Vedanta and 40% by Foxconn, will “set up a semiconductor fab unit, a display fab unit, and a semiconductor assembling and testing unit” in Ahmedabad. Vedanta has said the project envisages a total investment of Rs 1,54,000 crore, and will provide employment to around one lakh people. The venture has not committed but noted that it would “look at setting up a semiconductor manufacturing plant in the next two years”.

It is true that India needs to act fast to invest and open up job opportunities for the youth, and the BJP is desperate to meet criticism that its policies have not helped generate employment. Big investments and hopes of a large number of jobs at one go may help deflect this criticism at a crucial time as elections near. But it also opens questions on whether the Chinese way of mega factories filled with low-end, low-paying jobs should be the chosen route for India at this time. A lot of the work at the factories is about assembly, sometimes as low-tech as fitting a screw on an iPhone speaker as one undercover grad student who took up work here reported in one investigation, or trimming edges after the Apple logos are cut from aluminium covers. Further, the Chinese system is noted for its poor record of protecting worker rights, unions are as good as non-existent and local authorities are

known to stretch to accommodate business demands in a bid to attract more investments. This is what makes China a particularly attractive destination for low end manufacturing jobs. The country has a huge army of job seekers, which inevitably has meant low wages, weak protection for workers and a culture under which the worker almost needs to be and is willing to be captured for the duration of the work to deliver to the maximum. This is why workers must necessarily stay in the accommodation provided, six to eight to a room, with limited toilets and a general standard of living that has driven many to commit suicide.

This is a model of employment generation that India must carefully study and debate before plunging headlong into incentives for large companies and business alliances. The models being encouraged and supported will likely bring in an entirely alien system and method of work in a nation that is noted for a huge contribution to the economy from small and medium enterprises. It is true that SMEs are not always the best of employers or quality producers but the distributed model of growth stands in contrast to growth driven by big industries, super-sized factories and a top-down approach that is tantalising in its promise of delivering quick jobs but has often delivered longer term misery. A similar Foxconn venture in Wisconsin touted by then US President Trump as “the eighth wonder of the world” has failed to take off. A Milwaukee government report on Foxconn’s record of worker safety is damning.

In this context, some of the criticism by the former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan on the incentives for big industry are very relevant. Rajan has correctly noted that there hasn’t been a real analysis of the PLI (Production-linked incentives) schemes that the government has been pushing on the understanding that this is a route to create jobs. Yet, “manufacturing” of the kind that China has gone for has not made that country a world class innovator but marked it out for its limited low-cost production. The bulk of the profits are taken away by the chip designers and the brands they create while the low-end part of the value chain is left with China. Manufacturing costs in China, too, are rising now and it would be an unfortunate turn for India to become that hub which is a lower-end version of China.

A study on the iPhone 7 (factory-cost estimate of \$237.45 in 2016) noted that “all that’s earned in China is about \$8.46, or 3.6% of the total,” including a battery supplied locally and labour. The study, by Prof. J Dedrick of Syracuse University and two others, noted: “The other \$228.99 goes elsewhere. The U.S. and Japan each take a roughly \$68 cut, Taiwan gets about \$48, and a little under \$17 goes to South Korea. And we estimate that about \$283 of gross profit from the retail price - about \$649 for a 32GB model when the phone debuted - goes straight to Apple’s coffers.”

In short, said the study, “China gets a lot of (low-paid) jobs, while the profits flow to other countries.” This may not be a place India might like to end up in manufacturing. (The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

"Always desire to learn something useful."

— Sophocles

The Shillong Times

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Quota and the poor

THE ten per cent reservations for economically weaker sections (EWS) in admissions to educational institutions and government jobs, introduced by the Modi government through the 103rd amendment to the Constitution in 2019, has been upheld by the Supreme Court through a split verdict. Curiously, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) himself and another judge differed from the majority view of three judges out of the five in the pack. The eminent view therein was that reservation on economic ground does not violate the essential feature or basic structure of the Constitution. But, the two dissenting judges took the stand that the amendment struck at the very root of the equality code integral to the Constitutional principles.

Reservations have helped the disadvantaged communities over the past three quarters of a century after Independence. Without this provision, the most-backward segments like the Dalits and Tribals, in particular, would not have gained entry into the portals of power or other government or semi-government institutions or public sector undertakings (PSUs). They are still only nominally represented. Merit is not a considered and nepotism is high. The main problem is the attitude of those who run government – both the political establishment and the bureaucracy. They flout rules and fill the ranks with their favourites. Not so the private sector, to an extent, because companies will collapse if merit is given the go-by. PSUs fail because of weak leadership and loot. There too, open recruitments have become rare. Many appointments are done by selections based on favouritism and political affiliations. In the government sector, the judiciary itself does not have a transparent selection pattern. The attempt by Manmohan Singh to reform the judiciary was scuttled at the top level. Some wings of the establishment continue to be exclusive preserves of certain communities that had established their grip over the system since Independence.

A quota for the poor, per se, is appreciable alongside reservations on community basis. However, the issues do not end there. After 75 years of Independence, every community has its share of the educated unemployed as also youth segments aspiring for higher education. But, very little representation is given even to the meritorious among them, including to Muslims, because the system is under the evil grip of vested interests. The backward communities are currently in the works to form an alliance at all-India level to seek Representation to all segments of the population and not simply Reservations. Both merit and the concept of justice to all must prevail in a modern society. For this, good leadership for the nation is a prerequisite.

Should We Submit to the Era of the Joker-Politician?

By Gertrude Lamare

Looking at the frequency with which the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Prestone Tynsong, casts distasteful and offensive remarks in public, are we, as citizens of Meghalaya, running the risk of growing numb to buffoonery among politicians? Have we reached a stage where we are simply accepting careless talk from our representatives as essential ingredients of political drama? Is politics now mere entertainment and no longer about a dignified participation in democratic governance?

Ever since he took over as Deputy CM in March 2018, Mr. Prestone Tynsong has been relentlessly and unremorsefully spewing nonsensical and hurtful statements with no evident consequences. He has never personally apologised and his party, the NPP, has always given him free pass for such bad behaviour. The latest deplorable comment from the Deputy CM was uttered in Mawkynew where he claimed that his party will generously supply lipstick and powder to the people of the constituency. Without spending too much time examining what Mr. Prestone Tynsong could have meant by this, I would just like to point out two things. One, that the Deputy CM is unsurprisingly out of touch with the lives of people in Mawkynew, and that he tries to cover up his lack of understanding by deploying embarrassingly poor comedy. Two, like most bad comedians, he uses humour tinged with sexism in order to gain mileage. The Honourable gentleman's reference to lipstick and powder makes absolutely no sense in this context. However, it is meant to trigger laughter, and is nonetheless an exploitation of an age-old patriarchal argument where women's use of make-up is worthy of sneers, insults, condemnation and criticisms.

Mawkynew was not the first place which was gifted with Mr. Prestone Tynsong's make-up statements. In July 2022, the Honourable gentleman made a reference to "lipstick and powder" in a speech he made in Nongmali (a locality under the North Shillong constituency) while campaigning for Mr. Ransom Sutnga, the NPP candi-

date who himself is freshly emerging from a series of backlash following the spectacular failure of a number of projects under his watch as PWD (Buildings) Executive Engineer. Mr. Tynsong said that instead of choosing "duplicate" candidates who use "lipstick and powder" to attract voters in the hope that they go to heaven, the people of Nongmali should vote for the trustworthy Mr. Sutnga, who we the public know very well to have an unmatched public service record. Here, the Deputy CM is obviously aiming cheap jibes at candidates from rival parties. However, he is simultaneously drawing a connection between inauthenticity and the appli-

standing of or sympathy for the complexity and precariousness of woman's reproductive health. In fact, he uses this traumatic and heart-breaking experience among women as a catalyst for easy laughs. Perhaps I should remind Mr. Tynsong that until recently, Meghalaya had held one of the highest Maternal Mortality Rates (MMR) and Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) in the country.

As pointed out earlier, whether Mr. Prestone Tynsong's jokes qualify as good comedy is debatable; but it appears that it is his entire projected persona that attracts comedic mimicry. There are multiple YouTube videos documenting the 'funny'

"The latest deplorable comment from the Deputy CM was uttered in Mawkynew where he claimed that his party will generously supply lipstick and powder to the people of the constituency."

cation of lipstick and powder, implying that people who do use such cosmetic products are "duplicate" fakes, who are unreliable and manipulative. Since female persons are the majority of make-up users in the Meghalaya context, is the Honourable gentleman insinuating these things about women in the state or is the mention of powder actually an unconscious reference to the powdered dust of the collapsed Assembly dome that his Honourable NPP candidate was supervising?

The other remark that has angered many is the Deputy CM's disgraceful misuse of the word "miscarriage" in his speech at Shella in May this year. Mr. Tynsong said that the NPP candidate from the constituency, Mrs. Grace M Kharhuri, had nine months until the 2023 legislative assembly elections, and that it is an important period that needed careful treading so as to avoid a miscarriage. Apart from the fact that this is the most terrible of analogies to be shared on a public platform, the statement reveals that the Honourable Deputy CM does not have any under-

person that he is, and some would agree that he has been the most "memed" politician in the state in recent years. Social media, including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, have plenty of material featuring him, including videos of the prolific impressionist from Jowai, Wanchwami Kharsahnoh, who does an excellent Prestone Tynsong. Another crucial component of our Deputy CM's act is his use of self-deprecating humour, especially when he plays upon his baldness. "I feel like my hair will grow back when I saw how bad the road is," the Honourable gentleman said in March 2021 in Sohra. The phenomenon of appearance and disappearance of hair is a metaphor for a variety of things in his book – bad roads, political victory, personal pride, and the like.

Some would argue that that his self-parody is a redeeming factor; by turning his humour on himself, he appears vulnerable and becomes identifiable to the people. Ladies and gentlemen, humour is good, it warms things up, even politics; but sadly, the

bad and bizarre jokes of the Deputy CM are not humbling gestures at all. Amidst the noise, it is important to recognise that the joker image associated with Mr. Prestone Tynsong is not accidental but a very cultivated one. He has learned to make jokes and humour intrinsic elements of his political articulations, and through them, draw attention from the Press or the public to himself. His jocular persona is a strategic ploy to evade scrutiny by shipping any disagreeable or problematic statement he utters to the realm of "just jokes." Let me remind you of the time when he laughingly admitted that politicians (like himself) fool voters every five years and that equally, voters fall for the lies of politicians every five years. This was September 2022 in Mawlai. Such a statement confirms that the Honourable gentleman is not only hiding in plain sight but is wearing his insincerity on his sleeves, whilst looking down on the electorate, the very people who get him to the grand position that he holds.

We in Meghalaya love to laugh, and humour is a significant part of our culture. However, we need to ask ourselves, what is to become to the well-being of our state when the politician is now the joker? In many traditions across the world, the joker is a subversive character who pokes fun and critiques figures of authority. He often provides "the checks and balances" that are needed in a political system through humour. In Meghalaya though, we currently have one of the most powerful men in the state playing the role of the joker, expelling any morsel of subversion from it, and in fact, using it to consolidate his hold on the people. Humour is becoming our Deputy CM's powerful weapon of distraction which aims to draw our attention to Mr. Prestone, the comedian and away from Mr. Prestone, the politician. Should we, as citizens, continue to sit back and laugh along or do we urgently need to demand more from our representatives – more dignity, wisdom, responsibility and accountability? The time is ripe, friends, we deserve better and our future is too precious to gamble with cheap comedy.

NEC: Glorious 50 Years of Existence and its Amrit Kaal

By Dipankar Borah

"If the western region of the country can develop, if other regions of the country can develop, I see no reason why the North East region of the country cannot develop. I am also convinced that India can move forward if all the regions develop including the North East region. The North East region is also very important to us for strategic reasons. And it is my conviction that we have to bring this region at par with the other developed regions of the country."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi while addressing the 65th Plenary Council Meeting, May 2016

Seeing the immense possibilities, cultural strengths and natural resources of the region Prime Minister, Narendra Modi termed the eight States of the region as 'Ashita Lakshmi.' This is an aspiration for the states to grow at a faster pace.

The role of NEC is changing over the decades from Advisory body to Nodal Agency to Regional Planning body etc. But, the primary goal remains the same - to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development of the region so that all the States of Northeast may enjoy growth parity with the rest of the country by focusing on connectivity, capacity building, resource and skill based industry, trade and tourism, harnessing cultural strengths and creativity with massive investments. To understand the role of NEC at present and for future development, we must know the history of NEC and its great achievements over the past decades in the Northeastern region.

History at a Glance

North Eastern Council (NEC) was established by an Act of the Parliament in 1971 (Act no. 84 of 1971) and its formal inauguration on 7th November, 1972 at Shillong, Meghalaya by the then Prime Minister (late) Mrs Indira Gandhi, marked the beginning of a new chapter of concerted and planned endeavor on the part of the North Eastern region consisting of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The national leaders in their wisdom, decided to reorganize the North Eastern region, and to constitute a regional body styled as North Eastern Council, to look after the common economic interests of the different States of the region. The constitution of the North Eastern Council in 1972, may therefore be described as one of the most significant events in the direction of planned and co-ordinated development of the north eastern region as a whole.

North Eastern Council (Amendment) Act, 2002 (68 of 2002) came into force with effect from 26th June, 2003 and the main features of the Act are:

- i) Sikkim included in NEC
- ii) President of India to nominate Chairman
- iii) Three additional members are to be nominated by the President of India
- iv) NEC to function as the Regional Planning Body for NER instead of Regional Advisory Body.

The first Chairman of NEC was B.K. Nehru and the first Secretary of NEC was D.K. Bhattacharjee. The first Plenary Meeting of NEC was held on the day of inauguration itself and the second plenary session was held on 22nd July, 1973.

Development across North Eastern region

Since its inception, the council has made significant contributions to the cause of the socio-economic development of the North Eastern region in its capacity as an Advisory body and later as a Planning body. The NEC has always worked in close coordination with the State Governments and other implementing agencies for the success of development efforts undertaken by it. The NEC has worked towards the goal of development not only through State Government and NGOs but also through various Central Government organizations (like the BRO etc.) and its own associate organizations (like the RIPAN, the RIMS, LGBRIMH, NEPA, NEEPCO, NESAC, NERAMAC, the IFAD, NERCMS and other projects) that cater to the needs of the NER as a whole. Till now, with the funding of NEC more than 11500 kms of Roads have been constructed and supported in the installation of more than 694 MW of power generating capacity and also constructed 2540 kms of

transmission and distribution lines. NEC has also taken up the improvement of infrastructure of 5 major airports in the region – Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Imphal and Umroi, Meghalaya in collaboration with the Airport Authority of India. The council has also undertaken and completed Eleven Interstate Bus Terminus (ISBT) projects and Four Inter-State Truck Terminus (ISTT) projects across different States to ease out interstate movement of people.

Over the past five decades, NEC has been instrumental in setting in motion a new economic endeavor aimed at removing the basic handicaps that stood in the way of normal development and ushering in an era of new hope in this part of the country with full of great potentialities. Some of the landmark achievements and developments of NEC across the region during these years listed below:

- 1) Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal, Manipur, 1972
- 2) Dr B Borooah Cancer Institute (BCCI), Guwahati, Assam, 1974
- 3) North Eastern Electrical Power Corporation (NEEPCO), Shillong, Meghalaya, 1976
- 4) Regional College of Nursing, Guwahati, Assam, 1977
- 5) North Eastern Handicraft and Handlooms Development Corporation (NEH-HDC), Guwahati, Assam, 1977
- 6) North Eastern Police Academy (NEPA), Shillong, Meghalaya, 1978
- 7) Regional Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences & Technology (RIPSAT), Agartala, Tripura, 1979
- 8) North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC), Guwahati, Assam, 1982
- 9) Regional Dental College, Guwahati, Assam, 1982
- 10) North Eastern Regional Institute of Science & Technology (NERIST), Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, 1984
- 11) Koliabhomora Bridge, the second bridge over river Brahmaputra connecting Tezpur and Nagaon, 1987
- 12) North Eastern Regional Institute of Water and Land Management (NERIWALM), Tezpur, Assam, 1989
- 13) Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH), Tezpur, Assam, 1999
- 14) North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC), Umiam, Meghalaya, 2000
- 15) Cane and Bamboo Technology Centre (CBTC) currently known as North Eastern Cane and Bamboo Development Council (NECBDC), Bynihat, Meghalaya, 2004
- 16) North Eastern Tourism Development Council (NETDC), Shillong, Meghalaya, 2016
- 17) Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Policy Research and Analysis, IIM Shillong, Meghalaya, 2016
- 18) Girl's Hostel for NER Students, Bangalore University, Bangalore, 2019 and the list goes on.

Much has been done; much more needs to be done

In 2016, during the 65th NEC Plenary Session held at Shillong, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi expressed the views regarding northeastern region of India and termed it as 'Ashita Lakshmi' and suggested to focus more on the development of the region. The role of NEC in this regard is very significant and can be a unique mechanism in the development of this part of the country. In regard to that recently, Prime Minister Modi also announced a special development scheme named PM-devINE (Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East) to accelerate the pace of development in the region.

As Vice-Chairman of NEC and Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) Shri G. Kishan Reddy has said in the 70th Plenary meeting held at Assam Administrative Staff College, Guwahati – this is the Amrit Kaal of North Eastern Region to grow at par with other parts of the country or even exceed that, but the tasks which still lie ahead continue to be difficult and challenging. Despite all the progress that has been made over the last 50 years, the North Eastern region of India still needs to do more considering it has enormous potential. A lot has been done but a lot more has to be done.

(The writer is Librarian, North Eastern Council)

Letters to the Editor

Whither employment generation

Editor,

The Times of India, supplement TIMES BUSINESS dated Nov 2, headlines, "Tata group to add up to 45,000 workers at iPhone parts plant" in Hosur Tamil Nadu, that too mostly women. In Meghalaya no such facility has come up. Forget the 45,000 workers, even a unit that can employ 1000 workers is yet to come up. Why, despite having an educated populace and there being no taboo on women or men working, as is prevalent in many parts of our country is such employment not easy to come by in this State? The answers are many, but no one wants to listen or implement the right policies or to create the environment for industries or tourism projects to come to the State.

Meghalaya has a reputation for being prone to frequent violent agitations, on any and all issues without rhyme or reason. While the agitations are aimed at making the ruling dispensation listen, they invariably end up targeting the non-tribals and the next day such news grabs the headlines.

The Single-Window system for industries is in itself a road-block as 20% of the project cost is demanded to even register the unit, before they have even invested to set-up the industry, forget about generating an income. This also is not an end but the beginning of other extortions by NGOs and other line departments.

No large scale tourism

units read resorts can be set-up owing to Land Transfer regulations. Each of these resorts can generate direct employment to 500 persons, and all associated economic benefits to the State in form of GST and Income Tax, and to the people by way of indirect employment. At least 5 such units can come-up if this bottle neck is removed.

Any government project looking for implementing partners are given to underserving promoters in exchange for considerations to politicians. They include the medical college, hydro electric unites, hotels, industries etc., most of which do not come up, or take abnormal time-lines to complete, that too on crutches provided by the Government to save their reputation. Cases in point are the Mawmluh Cherra Cement privatisation to a trader, the Crowborough hotel going to a COAL-MINER; then to a Guwahati party who was given an UN-SECURED LOAN of Rs. 45 Crores by MIDC. Then we have the Marriott Hotel Project again originally allotted to a business firm who never paid a rupee of the lease rental, but secured huge loans from banks, on the basis of the signed lease and escaping with the booty, leaving behind a half-constructed project, which the banks sold to another party for peanuts, and then the State Government gives them more concessions by dislodging the Landlord read Shillong Municipal Board.

The questions and answers are many, and known to everyone, but nobody wants a solution. Each person wants to bake their own cake by machinations and

faulty policies.

Yours etc.,
R N Paul
Via email

On traffic bottlenecks

Editor,

I am really happy to read the article by Manas Chaudhuri on the Traffic Congestion in Shillong and he has very consciously mentioned about the callous attitude of politicians and other several stakeholders. Right from the time we attained statehood this problem has gone good to bad, from bad to worse and now the present scenario is from worse to worst. The opposition parties who raise this problem and blame the ruling Government don't do much when they are in the ruling dispensation. In fact they shy away from addressing the problem which they had clamoured against on the floor of the assembly. It was a noteworthy step taken up by the Rotary Club of Shillong to organise the first of its kind symposium on the issue. I vividly recall that the said symposium was held at All Saints Cathedral Auditorium and attended by not only the State Police but also the Air Force, Armed Forces, BSF, Assam Rifles who were represented by either their Heads or a representative. A number of recommendations were made with one voice but as mentioned by Mr Chaudhuri these recommendations have gathered dust in the Secretariat and buried under heaps of files and nothing came from those recommendations.

After that every now and then seminars and symposia

are held where similar suggestions or recommendations have been made but since they don't please the stakeholders, they become a stumbling block for in the implementation of the recommendations.

It is just a hope against hopes that something drastic is done as presently we do not see light at the end of the tunnel. The neighbouring state of Assam on the contrary has the political will to do something to manage the contentious traffic snarls and citizens wholeheartedly support the Government. One can see the pace of development in Guwahati which is an eye opener. In Meghalaya the Government prefers to shut its eyes bent and allow things to carry on as they did 20 or 25 years ago.

We hope that the next Government we elect does not follow the paths of the previous Govt but takes bold and effective measures to solve this cancerous problem which at present seems to have no treatment.

Let us hope that one day the ray of hope will rise from the horizon with arrows of lights pointed towards the future.

Yours etc.,
S L Singhamia
Via email

Of persistent water woes in Shillong South constituency

Editor,

Apropos of the article, "Shillong's traffic blues: Citizens need to push politics for remedy" by Ma-

nas Chaudhuri (ST, Nov 5, 2022) and the response letter, "Traffic pandemonium in Shillong" by KL Tariang (ST, Nov 8, 2022), I have decided to cast my vote in the next assembly election due early 2023 in the state, consciously, on the basis of two major issues that are afflicting the citizens of Shillong and the electorates of 19 – South Shillong Constituency. First and most importantly the issue of water scarcity – which has never been resolved, (much like the issue of traffic mess in the town's roads), in areas like Harisabha, Howell Road, Sylhet Para, ABP Road and more which the incumbent legislator, Sanbor Shullai, knows really well. Second is certainly the issue of traffic scenario in the streets of the town, which successive state governments have only neglected instead of addressing them.

So, Bah Shullai, if you want my vote then address the water scarcity issue in the above-mentioned areas along with the intractable Shillong traffic problem.

Yours etc.
BC Paul
Shillong – 4

Education in Meghalaya: National security dilemma?

Editor

Apropos of the news report "Education in Meghalaya: The seven parts of incredulity", has exposed the Achilles Heel of this depart-

ment. Part two of the analysis sheds light on the types of schools, ghost teachers which would make a better sequel for a movie along the likes of Ghost Rider and how education will be a pipe dream if the malaise is not rooted out.

An astounding reality comes from the fact that politicians have overshadowed the education sector with the strong support of the bureaucracy. We are truly living in a 'Deep State'. The Home Minister, who also handles an important portfolio as education, is busy playing Russian roulette. The police department is already bogged down with corruption and the deadwood is drifting from the policing method using conventional tactics of the twentieth century.

Certainly education is riding through the morass coupled with the increased demand and supply of drugs, cyber bullying, the unemployed venting their anger in the streets. Leadership can be achieved only if the ones talented and who put in the hard work are recognised. Only then will the state reap benefits. Jocko Willink, co-author of the book "Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win" said, "The leader is truly and ultimately responsible for everything."

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gatphoh,
Via email

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MDA Govt's love affair with consultants

A former MLA from Garo Hills has written to Prime Minister Modi to initiate a probe into the Tura beautification project where a flower pot is valued at Rs 7,500 and each electric post at Rs one lakh. While there is little money for the most urgent public concerns such as road connectivity, healthcare, education, drinking water etc., that the State should spend Rs 12.45 crore for beautifying one district headquarter is needless extravagance. What's worse is that the project proposal is prepared by a firm from outside the state – the sine qua non for every single project in Meghalaya today. This speaks a lot about how the MDA Government views its own citizens. This Government does not see any merit in its internal demography and does not consider this critical internal human resource eligible to prepare a beautification project when Meghalaya has some of the best architects and landscape planners that are as good as the best in the country. This is what is creating the cycle of unemployment. The best brains within the state are willfully ignored and a string of consultants now inhabit every space in the government ecosystem. They are driving governance without an iota of experience about the ground realities obtaining in the State.

It would be educative to know whose idea it is to employ consultants by the scores, all of whom are paid huge amounts especially when such consultants carry a foreign brand name. The MDA government is on a spending spree and these days everything is strategically timed for the 2023 elections. Never in the past has the bureaucracy been given such a free hand with the purse strings of the state. This is a cause of grave concern and something that the people of Meghalaya should be concerned about.

The Meghalaya Basin Development Agency (MBDA) was conceptualized to empower farmers and wean them from dependence solely on Government schemes. The MBDA was supposed to allow farmers to think for themselves and become knowledge partners with the Government. Now the MBDA has become a not-for-profit organization – Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA) whose aim is to breed the dependency syndrome among farmers by giving them a Rs 5000 one-time dole. What are farmers supposed to do with that money? What will they invest in? What farmers need is a long term strategy that looks at processing and marketing what farmers produce. In fact, some senior officers have told farmers that if they cannot market they should not produce. This is the height of cruelty. It is the Government that should be creating the means for value addition and marketing. That problem should not be thrown at the producers. But this is the reality of Meghalaya today. The people's representatives are curiously silent on these issues!

Letters to the Editor

Education needs urgent attention!

Editor,
These past few days, the topic of education in the state has been trending as serials on consecutive days of cover stories in the papers. It is trending in the political scenario too, with the leader of the opposition speaking out against the state of the education sector, under the present regime. It seems likely that this topic won't go away any time soon, and is expected to get louder with elections just around the corner. Yes, the state of education is appalling in the state; and 'The Shillong Times' has shed light on some of the problems through the past couple of articles, and many more in the past. The government too seems to dodge every problem on the matter, without any clear direction forward. We can dig deeper and deeper, and we will find more and more problems in the 'system',

but when will this 'examination' end? The failure in the sector is very clear from the countless reports and studies. The numbers do not lie, the story will repeat itself the next year, and the next; this continues to be the case. It is time for the ruling government to acknowledge that they haven't done enough! It is a failure if the teachers are forced to the streets for their rights, instead of dedicating their time to educating our young ones. It is a failure if the teachers still have to wait up to 6 months to receive their due stipends. It is a failure if our children have to study in classrooms without a roof. It is a failure if months and years are required to 'examine' these problems, without any positive steps forward. The government and concerned departments may find a way to justify and explain their way out of these claims, but how does a teacher with a family, explain to his/her children that they can't celebrate Diwali, Pujya, or Christmas, because they haven't been paid for the last five months.

And yes, there may be a few teachers who aren't performing according to the ethics required of one, but there is a bad bunch in every sector. There is no need to distract the masses by highlighting that this is the sole problem, when the 'system' is at fault. When will this habit of blaming everything on the past regime end? Isn't it time to take responsibility for ourselves? And yes, we do not expect a change overnight, but also not a process at a snail's pace, where the stakeholders suffer in silence and isolation. Lastly, it was mentioned in one of the articles recently, on how many categories of teachers the state has. If we are indeed looking for parity and quality education, why is there so much disparity in compensation within these various categories? Is it simply due to a lack of funds, or does this help the authority to divide and rule this great problem for them? Jokes aside, it would be more significant if all of these categories of teachers would remain undivided,

at least ideologically, and work together towards the greater good of education in the state.

Yours etc.,
Andy D,
Via email

A distracted public and warped minds

Editor,
As a reader of your daily newspaper, I always go to the Letters to the Editor in the editorial page and find them informative and I also get a handle on the pulse of the people. What I noticed is that barring one letter by Salil Gewali on the corruption in the police department where the officer concerned is now under judicial custody, there is not a single citizen who wants to weigh in on this issue and to give their views. It just goes to show that we the people of Meghalaya are inured to corruption. We have taken it for granted that politicians in the government

will be corrupt and there is nothing we can do about it so let's suffer in silence. This is pathetic to say the least. Most of the tribal people in this state (and I am one of them) prefer to let the pressure groups take up all issues while they watch from a safe distance. When the procession or rally becomes violent people begin to take to social media to give their wise comments; some in abusive language. Yes, before I forget - we have now also taken the use of foul expletives as part of our vocabulary. Ka jaitbnyiew tip briew tip Blei (a people that knows man and knows God – meaning a God-fearing and people-respecting populace) is merely an empty slogan that is now history. Our young ones are learning that its OK to use swear words. And why not when they see these comments after every news item on YouTube channels. The owners of these news channels don't disable the comments section because the more views and likes they get the better their revenue.

This has become a vicious

cycle and it has turned this once genteel society into a hate-mongering one. Yet the hate is reserved for the 'outsider'. There are social media posts I have come across that even extol the virtues of the cop who was recently arrested for corruption because he is a para Khasi. Is this the level to which we have sunk that we even communalise crime? Frankly I see little hope that anything will change for a society that is incapable of standing up for what is right and calling a spade and spade. A crime is a crime no matter who commits it. If a society is willing to belittle the crime of a person just because he belongs to a particular ethnic group then our sense of justice is deeply warped. When will we see the light?

Yours etc.,
Orion Lyngdoh Tron,
Via email

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Unemployment as a Political Weapon

By H. Srikanth

regions like the northeast, which do not have many industries, the problem of educated unemployment is bound to increase. Factors like population growth, immigration, underdevelopment, dwindling industrial and government jobs, growing corruption, rapidly increasing privatization of land and other common resources, etc., are bound to worsen the employment situation in the region. It is the responsibility of the governments to identify the sectors where there is scope for increasing the job opportunities and provide necessary infrastructure and training to enable the youth gain sustainable livelihood. The government apathy or failure to address the problem of unemployment is likely to compel the people hit the streets in the years to come.

Here it is necessary to realize that unemployment problem has also been a political weapon for different

ployment of the youth in Telangana. In northeastern states, all problems are attributed to illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. But from the experience around the world and within India, it is evident that attacks on other communities only increase social tensions and don't benefit any communities in the long run. Unemployment is not a problem that gets resolved with political measures like the formation of new states, introduction of the Sixth Schedule, or imposing restrictions on the movement of the citizens. Such prescriptions at times create more problems than what they seek to resolve.

In 1970s Late Jayaprakash Narayan organized and mobilized the youth on the issue of unemployment, price rise and corruption in public life. The Nav Nirman Andolan led by JP attracted many youth leaders who subsequently became important political leaders in

national economy, one is not sure whether political leaders like Rahul Gandhi are able to make any difference.

Unlike the welfare economists who seek to find solution for unemployment problem within the capitalist framework, the socialists and communists hold the view that unemployment problem is integral to the very nature of the capitalist economic system, and that there cannot be a solution to the problems of poverty, unemployment, and price rise, as long as class divisions and class exploitation exist. As the surplus value created by workers is expropriated by the capitalists, the purchasing power of the masses will remain limited. Hence in capitalist system there will always be a gap between production and consumption. This gap leads to overproduction and leads to recession and unemployment problem. There is no way that capitalism can resolve the problem. The capitalists in fact use the unemployed workers to reduce the labor costs and increase the profits. Penetration of market economy even in the peripheral areas has led to the emergence of classes even in tribal societies, creating unemployment problem. After the Russian Revolution, the communists have demonstrated the possibility of putting an end to the unemployment problem by initiating structural changes. However, the mistakes that the communist leaders have committed led to the restoration of capitalism in the erstwhile socialist countries. The socialist Russia that encouraged the people to have children to fill the growing need for labor force has now been reeling under the problems of poverty, unemployment and war.

To sum up, unemployment is not a problem that can be addressed by a mere change of governments. It cannot be resolved through protectionism or ethnic pogroms. Unemployment is a structural problem that can be addressed only by bringing radical changes in economic policies that the countries have been following. Every political party / organization that seeks political power uses unemployment as a weapon to win over the people. Their intentions may be genuine. But in the absence of a clear understanding of local, national and international factors that aggravate the problem, it will not be possible to resolve the unemployment problem. The people should be educated enough to distinguish between the quacks and the doctors, and seek remedy for their problems only from those who understand the nature of the disease and have the solution to address the problem. Let us not allow the unemployment problem to become a stepping stone for greedy politicians to make their political career at our cost.

Seeding a spicy future!

By K N Kumar

525 years ago, on July 8, 1497 BCE, four tiny ships set sail southward from the port of Lisbon, Portugal, commissioned to find a sea route to India. The Europeans wanted to outwit the Arabians who by then had a vice-like grip over the global spices sourced from India. Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese captain of the ship 'Sao Gabriel', landed nearly ten months later at Calicut (Kerala), on May 20, 1948 after travelling as many as 38,623 km. The French, the Dutch, and of course, the inexorable British followed the tracks of Vasco da Gama and began a systematic looting of a rich but naive country whose share in the global GDP at that time was about 27%. That it came down to 2% by 1947 when the greedy white colonizers left the country is of course, a different subject. Our distinction as the land of spices eventually proved to be our nemesis because it had led not just to the slavery of our countrymen for at least 400 years, but also to a permanent loss of our culture and pride. Anglophiles may squirm, but even the word 'loot' had never existed in the English language till the Britishers came to India. 'Loot' was a Hindustani word till the British appropriated it. How ironically appropriate!

One way to forget a painful past is to focus on future. The spices that led to our fall can also be the reason for our rise. First the broad picture. Currently Indian spice exports are about \$3 billion per year. (About Rs. 25000 crore). The Spices Board has now set an ambitious 5-billion-dollar spice export target, to be achieved by 2025 and a \$10-billion-dollar target by 2030. With a production of just about 75,000 M.T./year, (all spices put together) Meghalaya is still an itty-bitsy player (just 2% of the national production of spices) but we can play a very big role in making our country achieve this target if we start focusing on seed spices. The purpose of this article is to let the readers know the potential for producing, processing, and exporting spices especially the seed spices and to encourage our farmers to step into this remunerative world of spices.

Meghalaya is designed by nature to be a spice country. Current initiatives of the Department of Agriculture are limited only to Ginger, Turmeric and Black Pepper, though there are about 109 spices grown in different parts of the world in climatic conditions similar to ours. India grows more than 60 spices and no other country has as much diversity as us in the production of spices. My proposition is that the state can most certainly emerge as a leading spice exporting state if the department of agriculture starts making agro-climatic zone-specific investments to promote certain identified spices. And the time to understand their market and commercialize the potential appears to be now.

To begin with, the state has five agro-climatic zones and each of these zones supports a different set of spices. The tropical and sub-tropical spices like Ginger, Turmeric, Black Pepper, Cinnamon, Galangal and small cardamom require high to moderate temperatures and grow abundantly in places with high humidity. Fennel, Coriander, Fenugreek, and Garlic can also be taken up on a large scale in Meghalaya in the sub-tropical terrains during winter. Garo hills districts fit the bill here. Low temperatures during winter and high temperatures during summer characterize the sub-tropical climate and eight of our eleven districts fall in this category. The temperate climate of the eastern districts of the state also is suitable for certain spices like Schizandra, pepper, saffron, celery, black caraway seed, asafoetida, chillies, garlic, fenugreek, coriander and cockscomb – some of which are not being commercially cultivated as of now.

Since the state has already

commenced its investments in Turmeric (through Lakadong Mission in 2018) and Ginger (through a Ginger Mission in 2022) both of which have global demand, the focus has to now shift to other spices. Black Pepper, Long Pepper and Schizandra Pepper (Jaiur) have major export markets that can be worked on. While the agronomic practices relating to Black Pepper are well known to farmers, the other two i.e., Long Pepper and Schizandra Pepper are relatively unexplored. While Long Pepper (commonly known as Pippali, a medicinal spice) does well in the border areas of the state, Schizandra Pepper (Jaiur) is endemic to some areas of Khasi & Jaintia Hills as well as higher altitudes of Garo Hills. To catalyse their cultivation, the Farmers' Commission began an initiative to expand the area under Long Pepper in Pynursla block. We hope to expand the Long Pepper area to 100 acres in the next two or three years.

Truth be told, these are still baby steps and the real story is yet to begin specially relating to the seed spices. The agriculture department has never considered the Seed spices as important crops for our state. Let us attempt to understand them more closely. Seed spices are basically aromatic herbs that are used as flavouring and seasoning agents, generally consumed in smaller quantities. About 20 kinds of seed spices are grown in India, the most important among them being: (1) Coriander (Dhania) (2) Fenugreek (Methi) (3) Fennel (Saunf) and (4) Cumin (Jeera). All these are known for centuries in traditional societies as effective therapeutic additives to their cuisine. Coriander, Fenugreek and Fennel grow very well in our state except that our farmers have never grown them for seed. I do not know if Cumin can be tried out during winter (from October onwards) in the slightly warmer regions of the state, say Ri Bhoi district and Garo Hills. It should be experimented. Since most seed spices are high-value and low-volume crops, adapting them to our requirements may call for some research by institutions like the ICAR NEH station.

There are other minor seed spices which grow well in our conditions viz., (1) Dill (2) Celery (3) Ajowan (4) Anise. Celery grows very well in the Khasi & Jaintia Hills but again as in the case of Coriander, the farmers grow Celery as a salad leaf while its seed has a good market and is known to be very effective in controlling gout. Traditionally seed spices are cultivated in the arid and semi-arid regions of the country. Together the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat and parts of Madhya Pradesh are called the 'seed spice bowl' contributing more than 80% of the country's annual production.

Seed spices are low-volume crops with extraordinary export market and an ever-increasing global demand, so we will need to consider cultivating them very seriously in our state. Seed spices have great use in the healthcare industry because they produce phytochemicals that have historically been used in pharmaceuticals, fragrances, wine industry and some of them are proven to be effective in impacting the gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, reproductive and nervous systems through their metabolic actions. It is now scientifically validated that ginger, cumin oil, coriander, and curcumin possess anti-inflammatory and immunomodulatory properties. One recent study even established a connection between the consumption of spices and the ability to recover from Covid-19. With so many advantages, maybe the time has come to let the seed spices sprout?

(The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission)

"Future shock is the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time."

— Alvin Toffler

The Shillong Times

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Notes ban and after

THE controversial demonetization step resorted to by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016 is widely viewed as a misstep while the government is either mum on this or occasionally defending the decision by citing its "positive effects." The principal aim of the demonetization was to check the sway of black money and stop the flow of counterfeit currency mainly from Pakistan that had the potential to destabilize the national economy. At that time, the government claimed that it managed to get much of the hoarded unaccounted cash into the bank vaults as accounted money. A major push by the government was also to reduce cash transactions and encourage people to adopt the digital mode, the aim being to thwart the flow of counterfeit currency.

Six years after the stunning step announced dramatically at night by the Prime Minister, cash in public hands is at an all-time high of Rs 30.88 lakh crore as per latest data released by the RBI. This was 72 per cent higher than the cash circulation in end-2016. Some 76 per cent of the public still prefer cash transactions for their daily requirements; a 44 per cent rise in this old mode of transactions since 2016 as a nationwide survey showed. This was mostly evident in the real estate sector, which is where the play of money is always at the maximum. Fake notes of the Rs 2000 denomination increased by 55 per cent this fiscal against its number the previous year. In other words, the very purpose of demonetization stand defeated.

On the positive side, an RBI official says demonetization has helped in a rise in tax collections and that demonetization had short-term costs but long-term benefits. Fact is hoarding of currency was made easy – a reverse effect – due to introduction of the Rs 2000 notes post demonetization. The highest till then was Rs 1000. The sudden shortage of currency in bank chests due to scrapping of high-denomination notes was caused by a lack of preparedness on the part of the government to keep ready new sets of notes. Hence, the panic response and release of the Rs 2000 notes. Even then, the economy took a huge hit in the absence of sufficient currency stocks in banks; and long queues were also the result. The scenario was further complicated by the difference in the sizes of the new notes, which ATMs could not dispense with. However, bygones are bygones. It is incumbent on the government to pursue its original goals with more seriousness. For one, the digital payment system must be encouraged through special efforts.

Right to protest versus the rule of law in Meghalaya

By Patricia Mukhim

In a democratic country the right to protest is fundamental do as to ensure that those elected to govern (not rule) the country don't turn arbitrary, self-serving and corrupt and that governance is not derailed. In India the right to protest is derived from Article 19 (1)(a) of the Constitution which grants to citizens the right to freedom of expression. The right to protest so as to publicly challenge and/or persuade the government to respond to certain demands stems directly from a democratic interpretation of various provisions of Article 19. Just as press freedom is not explicitly mentioned in Article 19(1) (a) so too the right to

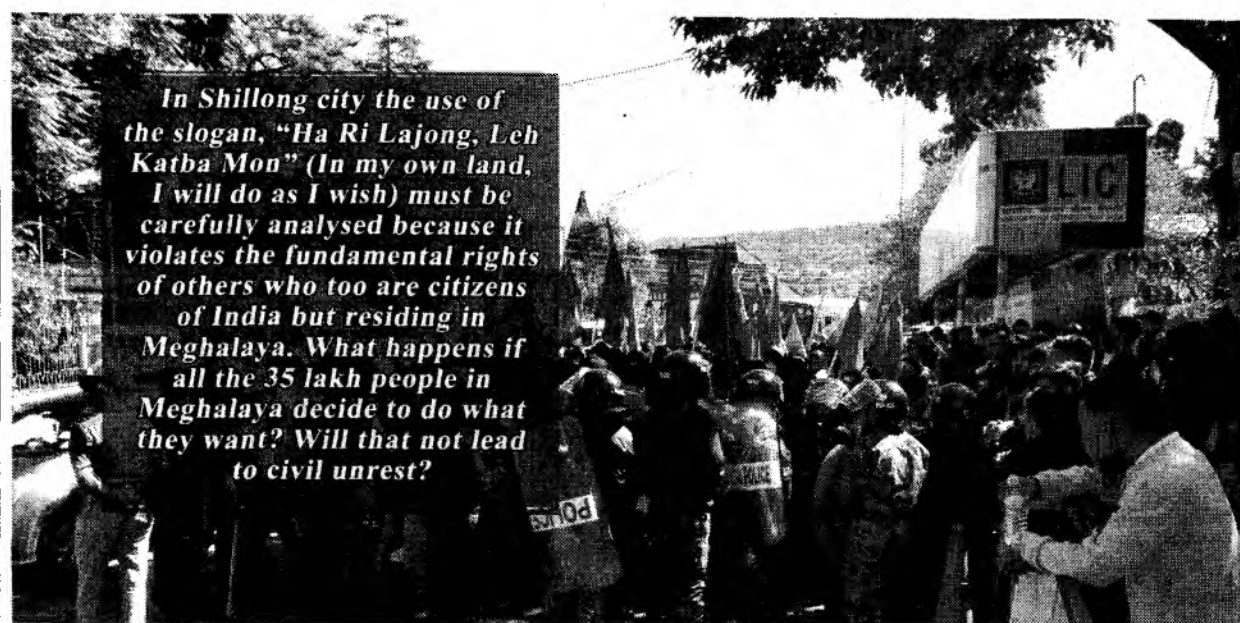
the slogan, "Ha Ri Lajong, Leh Katba Mon" (In my own land, I will do as I wish) must be carefully analysed because it violates the fundamental rights of others who too are citizens of India but residing in Meghalaya. What happens if all the 35 lakh people in Meghalaya decide to do what they want? Will that not lead to civil unrest? Hence the slogan is provocative and a challenge to the very idea of public order as it gives the slogan shouting group a sense of impunity that they can do anything; violate every rule and also encourage others to do the same without fear of being arrested.

off peacefully. If the district administration has invoked Section 144 is there any penalty for violating that law? If not, then why are others who break different sections of the law punished? Is that not using different yardsticks for different categories of people? The HYC has leaders who are well-versed with the law since at least two of them are practising lawyers. How come they congregated on November 10 on the issue of scholarship for students by violating Section 144?

As far as the police are concerned, they need to get complaints from the district administration before dis-

of society a handle to wreak violence at the drop of a hat. And guess who the victims are? As always, the non-tribals residents who are too petrified to even file an FIR. Such intimidatory tactics have gone on for too long and there has to be an end to targeted violence.

Interestingly, the pressure groups that create public disorder have just a few clichéd but populist demands without offering solutions as to how to resolve the issues they wish to be addressed. The latest statistics by the think tank Observer Research Foundation is damning evidence that Meghalaya is unable to meet the nutritional needs



protest. It flows from the freedom to publicly express one's opinion on the activities of the Government.

Protests are usually by a group that believe in similar ideologies. These groups enjoy the right to form associations under Article 19 (1) (b) of the Constitution (Right to Freedom of Association). Groups that form such associations feel they need to challenge government activities collectively. These are by their very nature political organisations. Article 19(1) (c) of the Constitution grants to citizens the Right to Freedom of Assembly. Hence curtailing such assembly of persons who wish to question and object to government actions through demonstrations, agitations and public assemblies as well as to form long-term protest movements as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution is arbitrary. But there is a rider here. The right is to "peacefully" gather and demonstrate against the State's actions or inaction. The protests are in the interests of democracy and the objective is to address flaws in governance. As in the right to freedom of expression there are reasonable restrictions on the right to protest. A group's right to protest cannot infringe on other citizens right to freedom of movement, trade and commerce and the right to safety and security. Above all the right of a group to protest does not give them the right to violate public order by words or action.

In Shillong city the use of

In Shillong we have enough instances to show that each time there is a rally, the processionists have scant respect for public property. Hence all shops along the areas through which they pass have to down their shutters. A shop owner in Police Bazar said "one stone thrown at our shop window can cost us a lot both in terms of repairing costs and mental trauma." Has this been considered by those in charge of maintaining public peace and order in Shillong City? The buck stops at the door of the DC and SP of the District. On November 1, when section 144 was already in force a group decided they were going to violate that order on the plea that they have the constitutional right to assemble and protest. This was repeated on November 10.

As far as permission for holding public and rallies is concerned the Deputy Commissioner can deny that permission on the grounds that he/she apprehends violation of public order. The DC however has to have proof that protestors will inspire unlawful or disorderly activities and that such conduct is likely to occur. All those who have been district administrators know for a fact that each time a pressure group decides to take out a rally, some people invariably get beaten up without any provocation. There is vandalism leading to shops having to shut down because no one wants a confrontation. The question here is whether there has been any example of a rally that passed

persing the crowd that violated Section 144. Since there were no complaints there was little they could do but to stand guard lest someone decides to break the peace. The point that merits discussion is whether it is correct for the district administration to issue an administrative diktat that it cannot uphold. What does this say about the rule of law in Meghalaya? True the HYC rally was peaceful yet the organisation was able to prove to the world that it could violate the law with impunity!

From now on until the elections in February 2023, there will be several groups that will have their list of demands. Some that are politically aligned, albeit surreptitiously, will try to create a law and order situation if only to paint the MDA government in a corner. While there is no denying that this Government deserves the severest of criticism for many of its acts of omission in terms of delivering governance to the last mile and commission in the number of scams that have unfolded, there are other ways of holding it to account than by predictable public protests which create a fear psychosis in the city. This is the only sore point about public protests in Shillong. They tend to turn violent and deflect from the real purpose. On October 28, after the FKJGP protest rally against unemployment ended, the rallyists on their way back assaulted the innocent in places like Laban. It just gave the unruly elements

of its most vulnerable section – the children. 50% of children are stunted due to severe malnourishment. One reason for this is poverty and as a paediatrician had stated it is the result of the mother's own health status. With 56% of women aged 19-45 years suffering from anemia how can they give birth to healthy children? These are critical issues for our society but is anyone going to raise the banner of protest for such issues? Will anyone question the poor healthcare facilities? No, these are issues that are forgotten even during elections. It's the same old ILP bandwagon which now seems to have been subsumed under the unemployment problem.

The Government needs to create a think tank using local resources (no more consultants please) to go into these tenacious issues that have remained unresolved for a long time. We therefore wish to question as to what has happened to the Meghalaya Economic Development Council? Is it still alive or dead and buried? If alive, who is heading it and what are the outcomes of this Council? Also, Meghalaya might be the only state with an Employment Generation Council. For the longest time it used to be headed by the former Mawlai MLA SD Khongwir. How has this Council helped the state to strategize on creating employment outside the government sector? Why are the pressure groups not raising these pertinent issues? Any answers?

Climate crisis accentuating faster globally

Poor and underprivileged are bearing the main brunt

By Krishna Jha

Three coal mining workers died on September 18, 2022, due to suspected inhalation of poisonous gas while working in a rat hole coal mining at Tikok Malu hills in Ledo area under Margherita sub-division of Tinsukia district. Saidul Islam, Hussain Ali and Asmat Ali, all under thirty, died since it was suspected that there were no preventive steps taken against the deadly impact of environmental hazards, and here it was the poisonous gas emitting in the mine. According to reports in the national dailies, illegal mining is continuing under the knowledge of district authorities, but they are compelled to keep quiet because of the involvement of several ruling party leaders.

It is a common phenomenon. The hapless workers, in search of employment which has become a rare commodity, accept the mining jobs in these rat holes that have turned into death traps in the absence of inadequate security measures. Apart from gas, there are accidental deaths too as the mines are left without any measures of renovation. Human lives are considered cheaper than the coal they bring from the mines. The accident is not without context, though media is not allowed to cover them.

First time it was in Jogipora, 900 km from the recent spot. This rat hole is not the

reserve forests spread out to Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Sibsagar districts. The scientists have also realised that there is a steep rise in zoonotic diseases directly linked with biodiversity and forest destruction. Zoonoses have opened the gates for Bird Flu, Ebola, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Nipah Virus, Zika Virus and finally Corona Virus.

It will not be surprising that the tsunami of all these deadly ailments are found to have the only source, and that is human interference. During Pandemic, Union ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) planned out industrial and infrastructural projects detrimental to environment security. In fact a new set of rules have been introduced, which is draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2020, and would replace EIA Notification of 2006 with, and that would be totally contrary to principles of environmental protection. The approval granted by NBWL proves violation of forest conservation Act, 1080.

North Eastern Coalfields is subsidiary of Coal India Limited which was granted a 30 year mining lease of this region in 1973. Since then North Eastern Coalfields have continued mining in the area. The lease expired long back in 2003, but it has



only one, there are at least one thousand such mines in this district alone. The voices against the hazards are not allowed to be raised. Rat hole mining is not the only threat to life, whether it is the human life, wild life or the green life of nature itself. But in each of these cases, the responsibility falls on the greed to exploit the nature. Dehing Patkai Park is spread out in an area of 89.44 km of rainforest, declared a wild life sanctuary, on June 13, 2004.

On December 13, 2020, state government of Assam declared it a national park. On June 9, 2021 Forest Department of Assam officially notified it as a national park. The national park is spread over the largest stretch of lowland rainforests in India. Despite its mesmerising natural beauty, the National Board for Wild Life has accepted a proposal recommending the usage of 98.59 hectares of land belonging to the Dehing-Patkai Wild life reserve, for extraction of coal by Coal India Ltd. Dehing is a river flowing through the forest while Patkai is a mountain, and no one is sure what future has in store for them.

The NBWL discussed Saleki also, a proposed reserve forest land, for a coal mining project by North Eastern Coal Field. Saleki is a part of Dehing-Patkai Elephant Reserve forest, covering 111.19 square km of rain forest and several

continued mining illegally. Dehing-Patkai wild life area and its elephant reserve are in the same danger that our miners face in the rat hole mining in Dibrugarh. These are all the tips of an iceberg. The reality is even more grim and worrisome.

Climate change report has pointed out that India is one of the 197 countries that had made a promise of not letting the Green House effect to cross 1.5 C by 2030. The Climate Action Tracker, an independent analysis that tracks government climate action classifies India's action as "highly insufficient". It also says India's continued support to the coal industry undermines a green recovery. The UN Climate Change report says the world is failing to act with urgency to curb greenhouse gas emissions despite the planet witnessing climate-enhanced heatwaves, storms and floods after just 1.2°C of warming.

Even if the countries meet their pledges, we are on track for around 2.5°C of warming, which will be disastrous. The findings are based on an analysis of the latest Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), or country-specific action plans to cut emissions and adapt to climate impacts. The report adds that emissions compared to 2010 levels need to fall 45 per cent by 2030 to meet the Paris deal's goal! In fact, earth itself is rejecting the life that it once celebrated. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

NE Olympics: PR stunt of CM Conrad Sangma

Editor,

It is utterly appalling to see the pictures of Chief Minister Conrad Sangma with different attire in almost every poster of the 2nd edition of North-East Olympics on display throughout the city from Barik point to NEHU. Even the Sports Minister Banteidor Lyngdoh appears in very few of them. Is it more of a PR stunt than anything else? Just two questions-who sponsored these banners/posters with the CM's photo everywhere or was lakhs of rupees spent from the State Treasury which is unable to pay even the salaries of teachers and health workers in time. The

second question is - why not the names and posters of our past or present sports personalities from within the State instead of the CM or Minister? It only reflects our apathy towards our sportsmen and women by the ruling class which does not miss any opportunity for a PR stunt. No wonder, we fared so badly in the recently concluded National Games. Apparently, our politicians have forgotten that fans are drawn to these games and sports because of good and genuine players and athletes and not politicians.

Yours etc.
Prof. Lakshon Kma
Lawsohtun

Hearsay is not an opinion

Editor,
Through your esteemed

daily I would like to express my sincere appreciation to your column and your editorial page in particular. I have been an avid reader of your daily paper and in fact my day wouldn't start without a glance at your paper. Each and every day is spent devouring the paper from the headlines, the editorial, the op-ed, entertainment, sports etc. I never miss reading the editorial column, letters to the editor and in particular the articles contributed by columnists, intellectuals, bureaucrats, teachers and people from all sections of the society.

The flavour of a good editorial is a class in itself as it expresses an opinion and moulds the opinion of the readers. It critically analyses and presents a refreshing perspective on an issue. An editorial is not only a literary

piece but also expresses a firm and balanced opinion. I am writing this with reference to Albert Thynniang's column under the caption "Should not the slogan 'In our own land we do as we wish' be banned?" in which he rightly condemns the protest and rally of the FKJGP on October 28 and the vandalism and hooliganism that followed thereof.

Let us not scrutinize this further. Instead, as responsible citizens we should offer constructive opinions to the youth by suggesting and putting forward other avenues for jobs. What is shocking to me and many other like-minded people is how a person like Albert Thynniang, a reputed journalist, stoop so low as to make false and baseless allegations that for MPSC posts candidates have to pay 40-50 lakhs and 10-15

lakhs for lower posts! Does he have solid evidence for this or is he just a part of the riff-raff who just mouths out unsolicited opinion? Or is it just a resemblance of slanderous talk of the hoi polloi? As an intellectual, he should be counselling these youths regarding jobs in other aspects instead of relying on government jobs. I would suggest that he also tries to offer constructive advice on how and what kind of work they can do rather than fill up their tender minds with filth and callous talk and a negative approach towards life. If, at all, he wants to preach about fearing God, let him do so from a pulpit and not vociferously through a print media. Why doesn't he try writing more about politics, environmental problems, social and economic aspects in the country as well as in

the world and enlighten the youth more about what is happening in other parts of the country and the world and broaden their minds?

I would suggest that he does some research work and find out how the recruitment process is carried out in the Public Service Commission in the Centre and in all the states as well and encourage these young boys and girls to venture out into other fields and make a living out of their own efforts.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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"Illusion is needed to disguise the emptiness within."

— Arthur Erickson

The Shillong Times

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Between the official & the political
THE race for 2023 has well and truly begun. While the Modi Government at the Centre has been cogitating on the freebie culture adopted by political parties to win elections in poll-bound states, in Meghalaya the freebies come in various shades such as the creation of Sub-divisional headquarters even while some areas of Meghalaya such as Sohra are demanding for a full-fledged district. There are very few to question on whether the newly created districts have the wherewithal to function. Only a visit to these new districts such as South West Khasi Hills and the newly created Eastern West Khasi Hills reveal the lack of basic infrastructure. The Government does not appear to have a pragmatic plan or priorities to develop the districts created.

Any development requires a socio-economic roadmap and identification of resources required and where those resources will come from. Truth be told, in Meghalaya the only reason why new districts are created is to also generate employment in the government sector. But no one questions where the financial resources are going to come from when the state has zero revenue generation barring the GST reimbursements by the Centre. The creation of new districts therefore is a road to perdition. One look at the poor development indices of the state; its nutritional status, the state of its educational institutions and its poor connectivity even today suggests that the bulk of resources are going into payment of salaries with very little left for human development, leave alone infrastructure development.

There is much talk of institutional delivery to reduce maternal deaths and early childhood and infant mortality through newly created facilities where pregnant women and their families can stay closer to health centres until the delivery period is over and the mother is ready to return home. It is to be seen how such facilities are functioning. In Meghalaya it is easy to start something and create a buzz through media attention. The problem is of sustaining such infrastructure away from the prying eyes of the media in distant districts such as South West Khasi Hills or South Garo Hills which still labour from very bad or non-existent roads. Meghalaya has been flagging its ability to provide water through the Jal Jeevan Mission, meant essentially for the rural folks but in the heart of the city there are several areas that are afflicted from the deprivation of this vital life sustaining element. Wherever there is water, the quality is highly suspect. Apart from other forms of pollution, the iron content is much higher than is fit for human consumption. These are serious issues that need addressing but the attention of the MDA Government now is on jamborees and distributing freebies to distract the voters from real issues plaguing the state.

Climate Emergency: Aren't we playing with Danger??

By Dr. Arvind Kumar

"Experts on disaster management suggest the adoption of integrated watershed management by advocating coordinated development planning at a watershed scale with collective endeavours by local administrations and other stakeholders. They also emphasize control through strict implementation of land-use regulations over illegal human encroachment on river corridors along with basing rock and sand mining policies on sound scientific analysis."

Increasingly, we are seeing that countries are being hit with one disaster after another, such as drought followed by fires followed by floods. The compounding effect of these disasters is taking a heavy toll on environment and socioeconomic factors. Immediate impacts of floods include property damage, destruction of crops and livestock, clean up costs and emergency response. The reality is that this is the world we live in with 1.1 degrees C of warming. These records temperatures, record floods are not anomalous, they are the beginning of new norms, and the new records will continue to be exceeded, year after year. In Southeast Asia we have witnessed extreme floods in Pakistan and also in Bangladesh and in India especially in cities of Bangalore, Chennai and in states of Assam and Meghalaya.

Closer home visitation of floods is a perennial annual phenomenon in Northeast India causing huge loss of human lives and animal stock, crops, infrastructure, and livelihoods. The unique topographical and geographical location of the Northeast region of India along with its hydro-meteorological situation has proved instrumental in making this region one of the highest rainfall zones globally having an annual rainfall of 2000 mm. Endowed with a thick network of drainage channels and as many as 7 river basins, this region is blessed with abundant water resources, which have not been adequately tapped or utilized or conserved, and the resultant impacts are discernible in the form of frequent visitation of floods and other water-related hazards from time to time.

Climate scientists have been predicting for so many years that greenhouse gases contributing to global warming render the atmosphere become hotter, and the hot air holds more water vapours, so when it rains, it rains harder thereby causing floods and other water-related hazards. Climate scientists argue that a lot of rainfall within a short span of time and the inability of the already saturated ground to soak the rainwater renders the water to be pooled on the surface where topography pushes the water downhill thereby

culminating in a flash flood and that can be extremely dangerous.

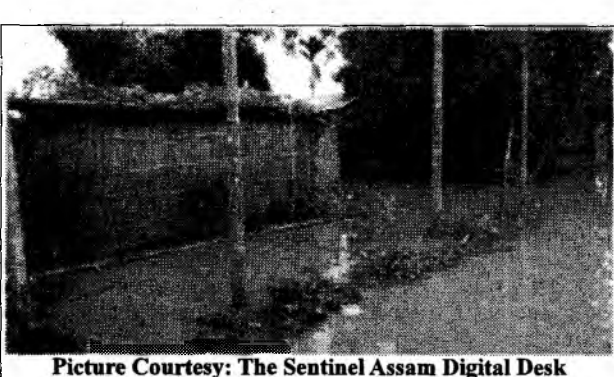
Economic Fallout of Floods

According to broad estimates, floods and other water-related hazards like storms and hurricanes could cause \$ 5.6 trillion in losses to the global economy by 2050. Heavy rains during 2022 have reportedly spurred floods that inundated cities in China, South Korea, Pakistan, India, and many other countries causing irreparable loss of human lives and property. Water-related hazards are costing immense economic losses in developing countries. According to the Emergency Events Database maintained by the Brussels-based Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, extreme weather events like droughts, storms, and floods led to global losses of more than \$ 224 billion in 2021.

In view of the projections by various reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), about climate change fueling more intense rainfall, flooding and drought in ensuing decades, the economic costs are set to soar.

According to Don Holland, a Canadian water mar-

ket expert, water – when there is too much or too little – can be the most destructive force. According to broad estimates about losses countries could incur in terms of immediate costs as well as to the overall economy on account of water-related hazards, the losses for the US could total \$ 3.7 trillion by 2050 and China could face cumulative losses to the tune of \$ 1.1 trillion by the mid-century. The sectors to be adversely impacted by floods and storms, inter alia, include infrastructure and inventory, agriculture, retail, banking and energy.



Picture Courtesy: The Sentinel Assam Digital Desk

Visitation of floods along with droughts is a recurring annual phenomenon in India, and these floods not only come early but they stay longer as well. And most often these floods are not proportionate to the rainfall. The data available with the DTE-CSE Data Centre of the Central Water Commission (CWC) show that from

1952 to 2018, there has not been a single year when a flood did not affect the country with considerable losses to lives and property. It further reveals that during this period, 109,412 people lost their lives, over 258 million hectares of crops were damaged and 81,187,187 houses were razed, and the cumulative economic losses amounted to ₹ 4.69 trillion.

According to media reports, India suffered a loss of ₹ 95,736 crore in the 2018 floods, which was 2.6 times more than the financial loss due to floods in 2017. Assam is said to be the most vulnerable state in the Northeast in particular and India in general which is susceptible to the vagaries of climate change, especially flooding. In 2022, Assam faced the worst kind of flood in its history with at least 90 percent of the state's districts flooded and more than 50,000 people being housed in relief camps. According to media reports, about 40 percent of the state is impacted every year in three-four waves of the deluge. According to Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimates, floods constitute the most devastating among climate-related disasters in India and account for more

on hydro-meteorological observations along with making available remote-sensing technologies. There is a need for prioritizing the enhancement of the capacities of local governments and other stakeholders.

Nevertheless, ADB experts on disaster management suggest the adoption of integrated watershed management by advocating coordinated development planning at a watershed scale with collective endeavours by local administrations and other stakeholders. They also emphasize control through strict implementation of land-use regulations over illegal human encroachment on river corridors along with basing rock and sand mining policies on sound scientific analysis. These experts call for the essentiality of nature-based solutions which comprise reforestation, wetland restoration, and land-use regulation that may be helpful in intercepting rainfall delay, rainfall-runoff, and minimising soil erosion, and thus flood severity.

These experts also call for according priority to the installation of sediment barriers, inserting boulders, enhancement of riverbanks, riverbed protections and other such related measures to "train" the river to find its equilibrium and not change its course, and these measures can be helpful in reducing flood management investment in downstream areas with large infrastructure like flood dikes. There is also a need for exploring the links between extreme weather events and climate anomalies to improve long-term flood forecasting and early warning at the level of each state of the Northeast.

Way Forward
The Northeast region is a very significant biodiversity hotspot which calls for prioritizing disaster risk reduction strategies that are backed by scientific and technological support systems to protect the region from the lethal permanent damage from water-related hazards and disasters due to illegal construction, unregulated mining and structural problems which are also responsible for aggravating the situation. Undoubtedly, under the given capabilities, disasters cannot be stopped from taking place; nonetheless, equipping stakeholders with sufficient knowledge and technology to envisage disaster preparedness, loss of lives and property can be saved. With abundant natural resources, mesmerising landscapes and rich socio-cultural heritage along with its increasing geopolitical and geo-economic significance in India's Act East Policy, the Northeast region requires robust disaster management strategies.

UPPL and new political frontiers in Bodoland

By Pramod Boro

The formation of the United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL) as a political party to realize the goals and aspirations of the people of Bodoland occurred during a crucial period in the region's socio-political history. The BTC Accord of 2003, which granted Bodoland autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, elevated the Bodo people's hopes for a socio-economic change that would bring normalcy, communal unity, and all-around growth. Nonetheless, just a few years later, between 2008 and 2010, the region suffered violence, deaths, and instability resulting in a massive loss to the sociocultural fabric of Bodoland.

The lawlessness and chaos left the people feeling unsafe, casting doubts on the assumption that the Constitution of India and the laws of the land were sufficient to safeguard each and every citizen. The period was marked by a developing gun culture aggravated by the political leadership and bureaucracy's blatant disregard for the sensibilities of the people. The ruling regime under the Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF) reneged on promises of development and community ambitions, with development becoming a mere buzzword. The BPF leadership's authoritarianism resulted in the estrangement of the populace from all aspects of governance. This led to a decade and a half of misgovernance and rampant corruption, which demoralised the democratic spirit of the people and disrupted the peaceful coexistence among the many communities, resulting in a period of severe communal conflict. The protracted period of was fuelled by a section of the intelligentsia with vested interests attempting to draw a fictitious Lakshman Rekha between the Bodos and Non-Bodos.

In this difficult and complicated scenario, it became necessary to delve deeply into the sensitivities of the people. The situation demanded a forthright diagnosis and equally courageous remedial political action. In 2015, the new political party UPPL was founded by merging the BPPF and UPDF into a single entity, with the goal of uniting all sections of Bodo society around a liberal set of ideals.

Inevitably, the formation of a new Regional Party is accompanied by many obstacles. At a time when the then BTC Government's monopolistic tendencies threatened to stifle the essence of Bodo nationalism, the voice of the people demanded an immediate response. Thus, the UPPL began its journey in 2015 as the vehicle for this collective voice to highlight the grave and pressing challenges of the Bodo community, including socioeconomic advancement, governance, and preservation of traditions and culture, among others. The Party's founders were ably supported by a diverse cross-section of individuals and organisations that enabled the creation of UPPL which pushed for a conflict-free and peaceful Bodoland.

On the agenda were the reunification of Bodoland's communities, linguistic groupings, broken psyches, and hearts: UPPL began uniting all segments of society with mutual love and respect, advancing reconciliation among the diverse tribes. Also, while reassessing development strategies and evaluating development indices.

After assuming charge of BTC in December 2020, the UPPL-led alliance with the BJP and GSP began addressing development with a detailed assessment of the previous regime's seven-year-long development

programs, schemes, and expenditures. Within a month, our government issued a White Paper that portrayed an unsettling scenario. We inherited liabilities of Rs. 2,900 crores, with major key infrastructure projects unfinished, the condition of educational institutions at its worst, and the Secretariat malfunctioning with numerous irregularities, among other problems. Governance was disconnected from the reality on the ground, as evidenced by enormous gaps and the lack of relevant development data in any Department.

Nonetheless, we accepted this load and initiated a systematic overhaul of the entire system. During our first and a half years in power, we were able to establish a framework for holistic development in BTR, with the motto "A Safe, Smart, and Green Bodoland" – connecting our Governance with the National Developmental Process and Agenda.

Three and a half million Bodoland residents are a top priority for the government led by the UPPL, which has recognised the most pressing needs of the region and how to heal the decades-long wounds and suffering of the people. We are transitioning from a Zero Work Culture to a Work Culture, as well as from Zero Policy to Policy Making, as part of an effective Governance framework.

Our agenda is to achieve Peaceful Coexistence, mutual care, education, health care, sustainable livelihoods, effective Governance, and the timely execution of the BTR Accord 2020. The secondary objective is to close the gap in all development sectors in order to bring BTC districts up to par with their developed counterparts in the state and the nation. Industrialization and job creation for both skilled and unskilled populations are also a priority. We are improving the livelihoods and social security apparatus to address many concerns, such as reversing the negative effects of protracted conflict and incorporating programmes on psychological healing and well-being into the curriculum. Together with UNDP, we have compiled a BTR Vision 2030 Report defining the organization's short, medium, and long-term development objectives by mapping them to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

Peace and Stability are gradually leading to the success of many of our government's initiatives, as evidenced by the massive participation and success of programmes such as the ISPL Football League 2022, Kokrajhar Literary Festival, Mission Mode Programmes, and numerous aspirational programmes such as the BTR Super 50 for Civil Services and IIT/IIM Entrances, etc. The School Adoption Programme is a unique initiative designed to encourage individuals from diverse backgrounds to adopt schools in the Region. We have formalised collaborations with national and international organisations such as UNICEF, UNDP, NECTAR, and others, in order to enhance and establish a Participative Framework for Governance and Development. My objective is not to limit UPPL to merely winning and losing elections but to pursue a constructive social revolution that would allow the people of BTR to live in peace, safety, and prosperity in the future. On the seventh anniversary of UPPL's founding, we resolve to work with sincerity, purpose, direction, and commitment in the days ahead.

(The author is the President of UPPL and the Chief Executive Member of Bodoland Territorial Council)

Letters to the Editor

Indians: Worst losers in the world

Editor,

Why are we Indians so ungrateful and unforgiving when it comes to our cricket?

Our politicians keep making promises every 5 years without any accountability and keep getting elected for one term after another. Some keep 'serving' the people with one leg in their coffins. Then there are film stars who keep receiving love and support despite perpetual failures because of that one brilliant performance they gave a zillion years ago. That's fine, and I'm not even asking for such a Mother Teresa level of generosity for our cricketers, but how about basic courtesy?

There is no denying the fact that it was one of the most embarrassing bowling and fielding performances that one can remember in recent times by a very talented Indian team at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Thursday (which is expected to do wonders every single time it steps on to the field). It is perhaps not just the defeat but the manner of it that has really hurt the sentiments of Indian fans, and I completely understand that (having had a miserable day myself). However, what I can't understand is the amount of hate

that I can see brewing for some of the players all over social media.

Suddenly, they are too old to play the format, too rich (due to IPL) to try hard, too selfish playing for individual records, too timid to perform under pressure, too arrogant to select the right players and what not? Some people even went on to the extent of hinting that the match might have been thrown away on purpose. Ridiculous! Yes, just like we sing praises for our heroes when they make us proud, we have every right to criticise them when they under-perform. However, analysing what went wrong and what could have been done is one thing and launching such blatant personal attacks on our players who have given us so much joy in the past and literally bled for us on the field is disgusting. It is so ungrateful. So unfair.

It's so easy to make judgments on hindsight. Weren't we backing the same players to go all the way when the squad was announced a couple of months ago? Barring one or two minor disagreements, nobody seemed to have much trouble with the personnel picked to do the job. Now, all of a sudden, every single thing concerning the overall process is being put to the sword by the People's High Court of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and others.

Lately, there's been a tendency to put the blame on the IPL for losses and young players are accused of not working hard enough after having made good money early in their careers due to the IPL. Have we forgotten the two back-to-back Test series wins in Australian soil in the last 4 years? Which team in the history of the sport has done that ever? We did it with half our players injured for more than half of the series in 2021 with more or less the same team that we are screaming at today.

The one player my heart goes out to is India's vice-captain KL Rahul who is bearing the brunt of the wrath at the moment. I can see people calling him 'fraud' because he apparently doesn't perform in 'big matches'. So what exactly is a big match? Is every match you play for your country against any opposition not big? Was India's first match of the campaign against Pakistan not big? Were the matches that followed not big? Would any team qualify for the knockouts if they didn't win the league stage matches?

The GOD of cricket - Sachin Tendulkar scored 4 and 18 in the two 'biggest' matches of his career. If we go by the logic of KL Rahul haters, Sachin Tendulkar will have to be considered a failure despite his 100 100s isn't it?

All said, we are horrible

losers. Period. Simply awful. The way we are reacting to the defeat is more embarrassing than the defeat itself. There are times we dominate and there will be times we get dominated. If anything, we should be glad the former happens much more frequently than the latter. The opposition doesn't turn up for a semi-final of a world championship so that Indian cricket fans can have their prize and we have to understand that. England played brilliant cricket and made us look like school boys on the field. Why can't this also be an acceptable possibility sometimes?

New Zealand lost to Pakistan in the other semi-final in a similar manner. Do we see so much hate for their national players in their country? Let us learn some grace from them.

Yours etc.,
Fahd Alam Hazarika
Guwahati

Editorial oversight?

Editor,
I am dismayed that The Shillong Times has published an anonymous letter titled, "Hearsay is not an opinion" (Shillong Times, Nov 11, 2022) that carries slanderous statements against Albert Thyrniang. This is a miscarriage of proper editorial practice. How can an unnamed person be permitted

to vilify a respectable author in the pages of a reputed newspaper?

If the letter writer had properly read Albert Thyrniang's article, "Should not the slogan 'In our own land we do as we wish' be banned?", published in The Shillong Times on Nov 2, 2022, he would have observed that the author of the article had used journalistically correct words and phrases. He referred to complaints and allegations in the public domain and made by others. Albert Thyrniang has not crossed any journalistic boundary. And surely a well-established newspaper knows how to protect itself and its authors from accusations of defamation.

The writer of the letter has used objectionable terms against Albert Thyrniang such as "riff-raff". He also makes unwarranted suggestions to him about what to do, what to preach and what to write. How is that the business of the anonymous writer? And he makes these pious and pompous statements while protectively hidden in anonymity. This is a letter of cowardice. The newspaper has made a mistake. How can an unidentified person be allowed to make slanderous statements in print? Albert Thyrniang never made a personal attack or accusation against any individual, and yet personal attacks on him are permitted

by the newspaper.

Perhaps this was an editorial oversight. That's the best benefit of the doubt that I can think of.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor,
Via email

Editor replies: This newspaper believes that every person has the right to his/her views. Some are timid about revealing their names because of a backlash. Albert Thyrniang can have his say in these very columns. In fact, the letters to the editor column is a Town Hall where all kinds of points and counter-points are allowed and are meant to trigger debates in a society that is otherwise silent on critical issues. When Albert Thyrniang says that job seekers have to pay a few lakh of rupees to the MPSC, in order to get a job, those that have not paid any money but got in through merit might be offended by the generalization. The editor himself has allowed scathing comments against her own articles. That, I believe is being fair. Anyone who shares an opinion is also open to criticism.

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

Is Twitter's 'blue tick' a status symbol or ID badge?

What will happen if anyone can buy Twitter's 'blue tick'?

Following Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter on October 27, the world's richest man proposed a range of controversial changes to the platform. With mounting evidence that he is making it up as he goes along, these proposals are tweeted out in a stream-of-consciousness manner from Musk's Twitter account.

Primarily to raise revenue, one of the ideas was to charge US\$8 a month to obtain a verified status – that is, the coveted blue tick badge next to the account handle.

Within the space of a few days, the paid verification change has already been rolled out in several countries, including Australia, under the Twitter Blue subscription service.

More than just verification

According to Twitter, the blue tick lets people know an account of interest is authentic. Currently, there are seven categories of "public interest accounts", such as government office accounts, news organisations and journalists, and influencers.

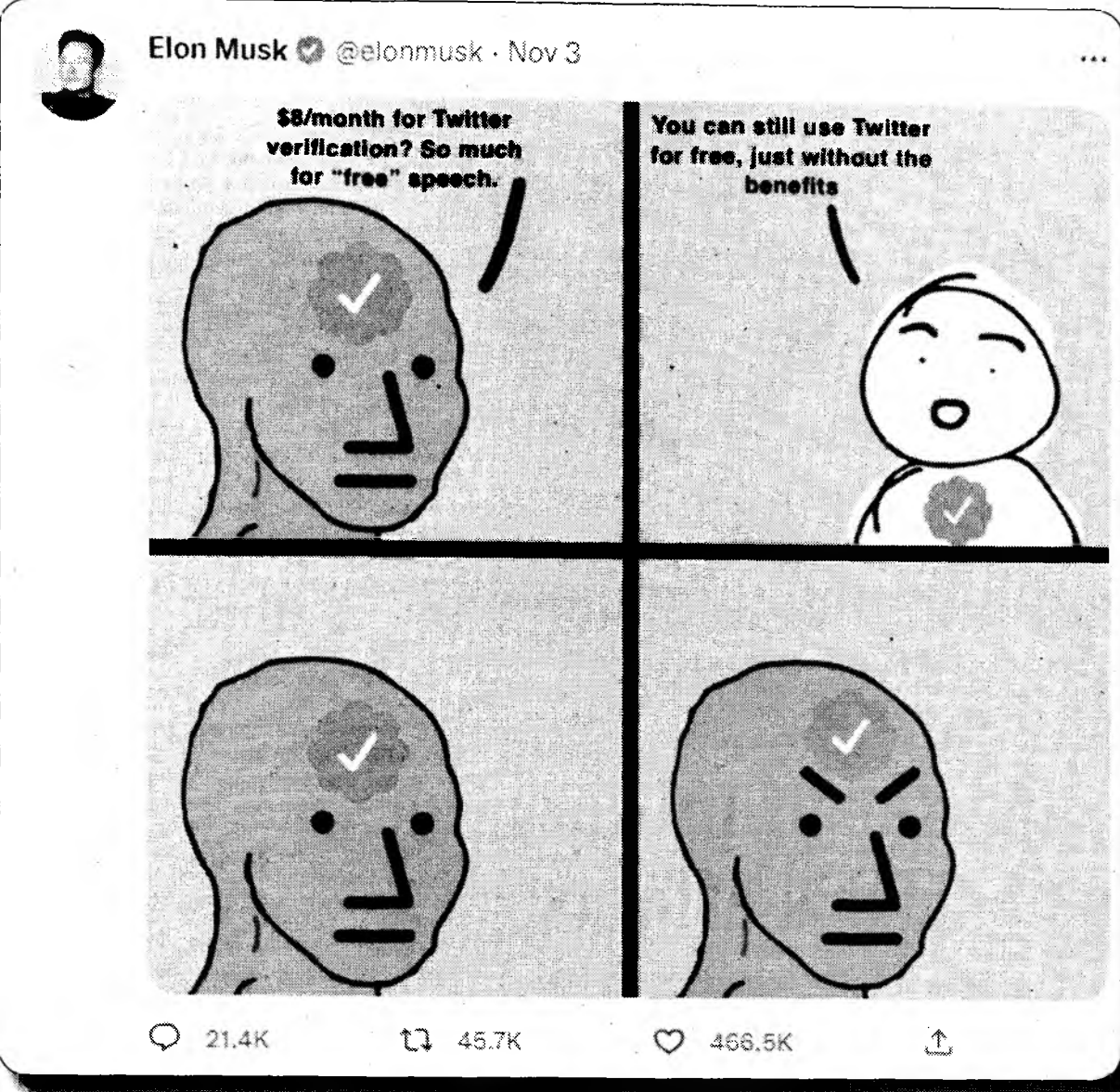
Yet this seemingly innocuous little blue icon is far from a simple verification tool in Twitter's fight against impersonation and fraud.

In the public view, a verified status signifies social importance. It is a coveted status symbol to which users aspire, in large part because Twitter's approval process has made it difficult to obtain.

That's partly because the blue tick has a controversial history. After receiving widespread condemnation for verifying white supremacists in 2017, Twitter halted its verification process for more than three years.

There's a fundamental mismatch between what Twitter wants the blue tick to mean versus how the public perceives it, something the Twitter Safety team itself acknowledged in 2017.

But they didn't resolve it. When



Twitter resumed verifying accounts systematically in 2021, it wasn't long until the process began to fail again, with blue ticks being handed out to bots and fake accounts.

Moreover, the public is still confused about what the blue tick signifies, and views it as a status symbol.

Lords and peasants

Musk's stream-of-consciousness policy proposals may reflect his own preference for interacting with verified accounts.

Despite his repeated claims of "power-to-the people" and breaking the "lords and peasants" system

of verified versus non-verified accounts, a data analysis of 1,493 of Musk's tweets during 2022, shows that more than half (57%) of his interactions were with verified accounts.

Evidently, having a verified status makes one worthy of his attention. Thus, Musk himself arguably views the blue tick as a status symbol, like everyone else (except Twitter).

However, Musk's US\$8 blue tick proposal is not only misguided but, ironically, likely to produce even more inauthenticity and harm on the platform.

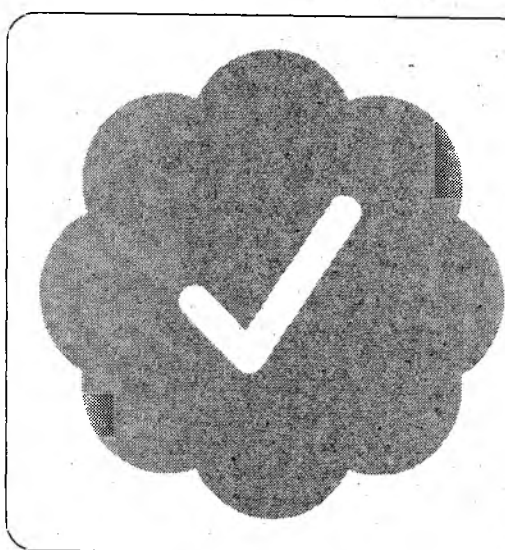
A fatal flaw stems from the fact that "payment verification" is not,

in fact, verification.

Fact from fraud

Although Twitter's verification system is by no means perfect and is far from transparent, it did at least aspire to the kinds of verification practices journalists and researchers use to distinguish fact from fiction, and authenticity from fraud. It takes time and effort. You can't just buy it.

Despite its flaws, the verification process largely succeeded in rooting out a sizable chunk of illegitimate activity on the platform, and highlighted notable accounts in the public interest. In contrast, Musk's



payment verification only verifies that a person has US\$8.

Payment verification can't guarantee the system won't be exploited for social harm. For example, we already saw that conspiracy theory influencers such as "QAnon John" are at risk of becoming legitimised through the purchase of a blue tick.

Opening the floodgates for bots. The problem is even worse at larger scales. It is hard enough to detect and prevent bot and troll networks from poisoning the information landscape with disinformation and spam.

Now, for the low cost of US\$800, foreign adversaries can launch a network of 100 verified bot accounts. The more you can pay, the more legitimacy you can purchase in the public sphere.

To make matters worse, Musk publicly stated that verified accounts who pay US\$8 will be granted more visibility on the platform, while non-verified accounts will be suppressed algorithmically.

He believes this will solve hate speech and fake accounts by prioritising verified accounts in search, replies and mentions. If anything, it will have the opposite effect: those with enough money will dominate the public sphere. Think Russian bots and cryptocurrency spammers.

Consider also that the ability to participate anonymously on social media has many positive advan-

tages, including safety for marginalised and at-risk groups.

Giving users tools to manage their public and personal spheres is crucial to self-identity and online culture. Punishing people who want to remain anonymous on Twitter is not the answer.

Worse yet, connecting social media profiles to payment verification could cause real harm if a person's account is compromised and the attacker learns their identity through their payment records.

A cascade of consequences

Musk's ideas are already causing a cascading series of unintended consequences on the platform. Accounts with blue ticks began changing their profile handle to "Elon Musk" and profile picture to parody him. In response, Musk tweeted a new policy proposal that Twitter handles engaging in impersonation would be suspended unless they specify being a "parody".

Users will not even receive a warning, as comedian Kathy Griffin and her 2 million followers discovered when her account was suspended for parodying Musk.

Musk's vision for user verification does not square up with that of Twitter or the internet research community.

While the existing system is flawed, at least it was systematic, somewhat transparent, and with the trappings of accountability. It was also revisable in the face of public criticism.

On the other hand, Musk's policy approach is tyrannical and opaque. Having abolished the board of directors, the "Chief Twit" has all the power and almost no accountability.

We are left with a harrowing vision of a fragile and flawed online public square: in a world where everyone is verified, no one is verified. (The Conversation)

The 100th anniversary of Marcel Proust's death gives us an opportunity to remember his masterwork, *In Search of Lost Time*, a sort of French-style *Divine Comedy* first released in 1913. Much like the way Dante's 13th-century work forms a neat summary of Medieval wisdom, *In Search of Lost Time* attempts to cover every facet of human knowledge acquired at the dawn of the 20th century.

It discusses aesthetics with archetypal artists (through characters such as Vinteuil, the composer; Elstir, the painter; and Bergotte, the writer), addresses medicine by touching on Freudian psychology, and broaches the art of battle, right at the cusp of World War I. Proust refers liberally to contemporary technological developments, including the telephone, which enables him to communicate with the ghost of his beloved grandmother, the train that leaves the Saint-Lazare station, and the wondrous airplane that appears to him as a god would to an Ancient Greek. He is familiar with the theory of evolution, stating "Selection" ... seemed to me as incompatible ... as it would be if preceded by the adjective 'Natural'.

Ultimately, Proust runs through the many decisive scientific breakthroughs of his time. The early 20th century witnessed two revolutions in physics that shattered our established worldview: relativity, which disputed the absolute nature of time, and quantum mechanics, whose indeterminacy challenged reality itself.

Here are some of the passages where Proust refers to momentous advances in his work.

Humble beginnings in school day memories

In *Purgatory*, Canto 15, Dante alludes to the first law of optics, which theorises light reflection and will be formalised by Descartes in the 17th century. Proust invokes the second law, which concerns refraction, in a tender description of his relationship with his grandmother:

"[My] thoughts were continued in her without having to undergo any deflection, since they passed from my mind into hers without change of atmosphere or of personality."

He also recalls other lessons from high school: "[To] a physicist the space occupied by the tiniest ball of pith is explained by the harmony of action, the conflict or equilibrium, of laws of attraction or repulsion which govern far greater worlds."

These passages brim with the charm of bygone schooldays, when Proust would have carried out experiments such as electrifying an ebonite rod with a cat's pelt. Any physicist would easily spot the Doppler effect in this sentence:

"There was also a new whistle ... that was itself exactly like the scream of a tramway, and, as it was not carried out of earshot by its own velocity, one thought of a single car, not endowed with motion, or broken down, immobilised, screaming at short intervals like a dying animal."

"It encountered in her the electric shock of a contrary will which violently repulsed it; I could see the sparks flash from her eyes."

However, this last statement would have been disputed by Charles-Augustin Coulomb, whose law

When Marcel Proust talks physics

states that unlike charges attract while like charges repel each other!

Proust's X-ray vision

Coming into more modern physics, Proust writes on several instances about ultraviolet and infrared rays. He also mentions X-rays, which were discovered in 1895 by Wilhelm Röntgen. To quote his character, Françoise:

"Madame knows everything; Madame is worse than the X-rays."

In the book, this phrase is uttered at a time in the writer's early youth, even though Proust was actually 24 when Röntgen made his discovery. It might therefore be suggested that the servant character of Françoise had some sort of prophetic gift. Later in the book, he returns to this physical phenomenon:

"[This] strange print which seems to us to have so little resemblance to ourselves bears sometimes the same stamp of truth, scarcely flattering, indeed, but profound and useful, as a photograph taken by X-rays."

Proust even appears to claim to have a see-through vision of reality:

"It was all very well for me to go out to dinner. I did not see the guests because when I thought I was observing them I was radiographing them."

He does not shy away, either, from the subject of radioactivity. Thought to have therapeutic properties, radioactive anti-ageing creams were popularly purchased at the time. In this regard, Proust ventures a bold metaphor when marvelling at the longevity of his character, Madame Swann, who represents:

"a more miraculous challenge to the laws of chronology than the conservation of radium to those of nature."

Madame Curie's prized radium is an unstable element that decays over a period of 1,600 years. A long time, indeed, but other elements last even longer, given that stable isotopes have an infinite lifespan.

Proust on time

Naturally, time plays a fundamental role in Proust's seminal work. The concept is present in both the opening line of the book ("For a long time I used to go to bed early") and the closing one ("... in Time").

Proust's era saw a total overhaul in our perception of time. Of course, today, we still do not know what time really is any better than Saint Augustine, who once said:

"What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what

it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know."

However, Einstein's relativity posits a type of time that is no longer absolute and eternal, but varies according to the framework of representation, that is to say, depending on the measurement. Proust demonstrates an intuition similar to that of the eminent physicist in his description of the church in Combray:

"[All] these things made [it] ... a building which occupied, so to speak, four dimensions of space – the name of the fourth being Time."

This reference to a four-dimensional space clearly echoes the concept of relativity. But was Proust familiar with Einstein's theory? When asked this question years later, he explained himself in a letter:

"Although it has indeed been written to me that I derive from him, or he from me, I do not understand a single word of his theories, not knowing algebra. And I doubt for my part that he has read my novels. It seems we have analogous ways of deforming Time."

A quantum view of reality

Less apparent in the text are Proust's dabbings in quantum mechanics. The then-nascent theory based on quanta – primary corpuscles of energy – was first proposed by Max Planck in 1900.

While attempting to comfort his sick grandmother, the narrator nods to this new idea in physics:

"[According] to the latest scientific discoveries, the materialist position appeared to be crumbling."

Which discoveries does he have in mind here? We can only assume that he is speaking of quantum mechanics. Proust's contemporary, Paul Valéry, also born in 1871, appears to evoke this same scientific theory. In *Reflections on the World Today* (1929), he writes:

"[The light] is compromised ... in the suit brought by discontinuity against continuity, probability against images ... hidden reality against the mind that would track it down and, in a word, by the unintelligible against the intelligible."

Quantum mechanics clashed with the way we traditionally viewed the world. Classical physics is deterministic; we can use it to predict how things will happen. We can understand reality "for what it is". However, with an electron, all we can do is calculate the probability of it making a given journey. In this way, determinism becomes collective, as we are aware of the distribution of a group of electrons but do not know

where any particular one of them will end up. Quantum theory, which governs these behaviours, is a branch of physics that sometimes appears counterintuitive.

It relies on two seemingly contradictory postulates:

- The Schrödinger equation, which regards evolution, is deterministic in nature. It is a dynamic law governing forces other than gravity, much like a more precise version of Newton's law of universal gravitation.
- However, quantum theory also includes the principle of "collapse," which applies at the moment of measurement and chooses the result from among an infinite set of possibilities.

Proust flirts with this quantum paradox, writing: "She acquired an almost beggarly air from having (in place of the ten, the score that I recalled in turn without being able to fix any in my memory) but a single nose, rounder than I had thought, which made her appear rather a fool and had in any case lost the faculty of multiplying itself ... Fallen into the inertia of reality, I sought to rebound."

He contrasts the multiple image that he keeps of this young dairymaid character with the sole reality that he offers himself, such that his vision "collapses" in the real world.

While quantum mechanics reveals a probabilistic material reality, Proust believes in the spiritual reality of human beings, musing that "other people exist for us only to the extent of the idea that we retain of them" and "the evidence of the senses is also an operation of the mind in which conviction creates the evidence."

Quantum reality is dependent on the measurement made by the observer, similar to how any observation engenders a subjective mental translation: "[Reality] has no existence for us, so long as it has not been created anew by our mind."

In *Search of Lost Time* is a magnificent compendium, laden with humour, emotion, poetry and philosophy. As Proust peppers his writing with the ingredients of real life, the laws of physics nestled into his run-on sentences are more than merely decorative. He filters the world through an Impressionist vision of reality, not unlike the teachings of quantum mechanics.

Although many experts have regarded Proust as the greatest French writer of the 20th century, he was awarded no Nobel Prize, his ashes are not enshrined in the Panthéon, and no waxwork of him haunts the Musée Grévin. But he was ahead of his time, taking comfort in such macabre matters:

"[There] is no reason inherent in the conditions of life on this earth that can make us consider ourselves obliged to do good ... nor make the talented artist consider himself obliged to begin over again a score of times a piece of work the admiration aroused by which will matter little to his body devoured by worms ... All these obligations which have not their sanction in our present life seem to belong to a different world ... So that the idea that Bergotte was not wholly and permanently dead is by no means improbable."

And so, too, did Proust enter this ideal realm that he had once wished for his fictional writer. (The Conversation)

By Vikas Datta

Camus: A philosopher for our perplexing, 'absurd' times

We live in strange times – technology has brought the world as close as it can get, physically and virtually. At the same time, the concept of globalisation is getting discredited and replaced by a rather hyper variant of nationalism – which even seeks to own and fence off universal human endeavours such as art and science behind borders, force a trade-off between prosperity and liberty, and foist a sense of conformity.

And when we have almost all that we may want (cool technological devices, fast vehicles and creature comforts beyond the imagination of our ancestors, to say the least), but are still not content, what can be done?

One recourse for the latter would be to turn inward to religion or philosophy – but all of the first and a lot of the second are based on some variety of divine design and control over humans, maybe for their benefit – “the universe conspiring to help you attain something you want,” as Paulo Coelho says in *The Alchemist*. But, we may also find that the universe could be hostile, or worse, absolutely indifferent.

At such a time, it may be useful to retrace the thought of a charismatic French philosopher with movie star looks (he bore an uncanny resemblance to Hollywood star Humphrey Bogart) – the man who identified the “absurd” existence we find ourselves in, or rather, told us clearly that our life is a meaningless struggle and what we can do about it.

Albert Camus, who was born on this day in 1907, is usually considered an existentialist or a nihilist – but rejected both labels, to instead fashion ‘Absurdism’, not in its literal meaning of being illogical, but to stress the futility of man’s inclination to seek meaning in life given his incapability to find any.

Hence the “absurd”, denoting the quest for an impossibility – not logical, but arising from the limitations of human ability – and not caused by either the universe or human thought, but from their simultaneous, contradictory presence.

Camus was not the progenitor of Absurdism, which can be traced



to the writings of the 19th-century Danish theologian, author, social critic and “first existentialist” philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55). He can be credited, though, with making it a distinctive system of thought, separate from both existentialism and nihilism, and suggesting the more credible way to face up to it – at variance with his Danish predecessor.

Considered to be one of the brightest sparks in the City of Lights (though not born in the city or in even France) as post-war Paris entered its last glorious spell as a cultural hub before being overtaken by London and New York in the 1960s, Camus did all this by a particular French expedient – the medium of fiction rather than a theoretical presentation.

Setting out his philosophical outlook better are his novels – *L'Étranger* (The Outsider rather than the literal *The Stranger*, 1942) about the murderous but strangely

indifferent Mersault; *La Peste*, 1947 (*The Plague*), on pestilence sweeping an Algerian town and the responses of the residents; the posthumously published incomplete fictionalised autobiography *Le Premier Homme* (The First Man), 1995 – and plays such as *Caligula*, about the homicidal and insane Roman emperor and his peculiar logic (1938; first performed 1945).

Camus did also write non-fiction as a vehicle, though these were long (even book-length) essays, than any structured accounts, and notebooks containing his thoughts.

His early thought appeared in his essay collections *L'Envers et l'endroit* (Betwixt and Between), 1937, and *Noces* (Nuptials), 1938. It would fructify, however, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where he uses the example of the Greek mythological character condemned to roll uphill a heavy stone, which slipped back as soon he reached the top, to depict human existence.

and pressure – a discourse that may strike a chord among Indians.

Speaking at Sweden’s ancient and prestigious Uppsala University in December 1957, a few days after he became the second youngest recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Camus, noting that writers attract criticism whether they speak or not, stressed that they cannot – and should not – remain aloof, due to the purpose of art, the artist’s freedom and, especially, despite the attitude of the state.

Little wonder then, his Nobel citation noted that he was being honoured “for his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times.”

In an address, famous as *Défense of Intelligence*, delivered in March 1945 at a meeting of a group seeking accord and amity in a just-liberated France – even as the Second World War still raged, Camus made an eloquent plea against violence and hatred and the divisiveness they engendered.

Mincing no words at the barbarity they had just endured – which he noted had also left its mark on the victims, some of whom retaliated in kind at the first chance – he advocated curing “poisoned hearts” by “saving one’s intelligence”. And intelligence here is a sense of reason, discernment and objectivity, not mere mental capability.

And then, in an address delivered at a labour exchange in May 1953 (later published as *Bread and Freedom*), Camus, who was a leftist but never condoned Stalinist excesses, made a blazing attack on totalitarianism and majoritarianism.

Saying that if some trends continued, one could foresee “a Europe of concentration camps”, where “the only people at liberty will be prison guards who will then have to lock up one another”, he sought to dismiss the disingenuous stand that if citizens have their basic economic needs met, they do not require political liberty.

Given the absurdity all around in our personal and public lives, Camus is a thinker who definitely needs to a re-read – more than six decades after his untimely death.

Dance stories for children

Jaya Mehta’s *Nritya Katha - Indian Dance stories for children*, published by The National Book Trust of India consists of nine stories about nine different Indian dance forms. In each story, a child discovers a beautiful Indian classical dance form.

This unique book of dance stories and its exquisite illustrations take us through the world of children today on a roller-coaster of holidays, shifting homes, watching performances, learning new art forms, and finding out how technology meets culture. It is an exploration of India through her incredible dance forms, seen through the eyes of a child.

The book was launched at The Gandhi Centre, in The Hague, Netherlands by Reenat Sandhu, the Indian Ambassador to the Netherlands. It was received with great applause by the Dutch and Surinamese community, and a Dutch publisher already seeks its dutch translation rights.

The book also illustrates India, its traditions, culture, art, diversity, and well-being, which are embedded in Indian art forms. Uniquely situated between the visual, literary, and performing arts, they are visually exquisite books. A lot of parents and grandparents would love to buy this book. (*LANSlife*)



Jaya Mehta

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, NOVEMBER 13, 2022

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Saturn on your solar return chart. You will get success in your efforts. Your name and fame will rise. You will be blessed with good health. Your peers and bosses will support you fully. You will be given additional responsibility in your job. Those who were thinking about changing their jobs can do so now. You will look after your business properly and even will plan a major expansion. Nothing stops you from getting success in life. Your family will also give you full support. Auspicious function will keep taking place. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. Your romantic life is going to be wonderful. You will also plan to get married. Business/work related trips will keep you busy and will prove beneficial. You will also plan to get married this year.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



Taurus: (April 21- May 21)



Gemini: (May 22- June 21)



Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



Leo: (July 23- August 23)



Virgo: (August 24- September 22)



Libra: (September 23- October 23)



Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



Sagittarius: (November 23- December 23)



Capricorn: (December 22- January 20)



Aquarius: (January 21- February 18)



Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



may blossom into a matrimonial alliance. You will get encouraging results in your business. Even your performance in your job will be exceptional. Your bosses will be satisfied with your performance. Those who plan to go abroad can do so now.

You will receive some money that was struck somewhere. You will work with lot of sincerity. Your efforts will get noticed. Your bosses will encourage you a lot. You will make a list of pending works and finish off each work according to priority. You will develop your personality. Financial situation will remain stable. You will not let anything divert from your objective. You will share perfect understanding with your mate. You will be under the glare of publicity. You will wield considerable influence at your workplace and business. You will hold discussions with your bosses. A conclusion will be arrived at and it will make you more confident and assertive.

You will excel in your job/business. Your progress too will be good. You will take guidance from a senior colleague of yours. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. You could also be promoted in your job. There will be an increase of material possessions, happiness and amenities. You will also feel lonely at times. You may visit a religious place for mental peace and may also perform some noble deeds. You will be busy in public welfare and social works. You will also experience changes in your office and home. You will establish contact with influential persons in your profession. You will open the doors of progress for yourself as a result.

Peace and harmony will prevail at your home. Your loved ones will give you love, affection and lot of respect. There will be bonding in family life. A meeting with influential person will open the doors of success for you. At work, you will make plans and work accordingly. Success will be definitely yours. Your business too will flourish. You will get over from all problems with your intelligence and discretion. Your respect and prestige will increase. Success in the financial sphere is awaiting you. You will get a new and big order. There will be serious work on expansion of your business. You will enter into a partnership or association. Your investments too will bring you lot of dividends.

You will take an important decision with regard to your career/business. Financial condition is looking good and there is nothing much to worry about. You will get benefits as a result of some advice or help given by a senior person. You will resolve your property disputes with your siblings. Love affairs will be successful. You will plan to get married. You will plan for expanding your business. Be aware of your enemies and foes. You will obtain everything through your hard work. Some guests may arrive at home and you will welcome them. Your elders will bless you. Your property related matters will get resolved. You will feel a lot more positive about lot of things going to take place in the coming days.

The road leading to success is not easy. You will be made to work hard. But you will not run away from duties. You will face the challenges and will complete your work with sincerity. Your work will keep you so busy that you will not get time even for yourself. People will acknowledge your intelligence. You could get promoted too. Those who are jealous of your progress will be unable to harm your interests. Husband and wife will have good relations. You will also plan to go out with your family. Your family will be proud of your deeds. Peace and happiness and joy will fill in your life. It will make you feel secure and content. You will be satisfied in general.

You will be rewarded for your efforts. In the disputes between brothers, common sense will prevail. You will resolve the matter amicably without involvement of third person. You will be busy in daily activities. Pending works will soon be completed. There will be pressure on you to complete your works. You will meet an influential person, but you will take your time to express your view point and understand this person better. You will also give time to your family. Your time will be spent on entertainment. You need to control your expenses. Victory is indicated in some competition. You will inspire people around you. You will be a role model to follow.

Maradona's 'Hand of God': Why is it priceless and unforgettable?

American football has “The Catch,” baseball has “The Shot Heard ‘Round the World,” and basketball has “The Block.”

For association football, it is Diego Maradona’s “Hand of God” – a sporting moment captured in time, the mere mention of which can conjure up strong emotions among supporters.

Such is its legacy, that some 36 years after bouncing into the back of the net, the football involved is set to be sold at auction on November 16, 2022, at an expected price of up to US\$3.3 million.

So why does this goal, which should not even have been a goal, carry so much significance?

It's about the controversy

The goal in question was scored by Argentinian great Maradona against England in the quarterfinals of the 1986 World Cup. It was the second half, no goals had been scored, and Argentina’s team was passing the ball around the edge of the England penalty box.

England midfielder Steve Hodge tried to clear the ball but only succeeded in kicking high above the goalkeeper. Normally one would expect the goalkeeper to catch it, especially against the 5-foot-5-inch Maradona. But somehow the ball ended up in the back of the net.

At first, it seemed that Maradona had headed the ball, but replays clearly showed him steering the ball with his clenched fist. This was three decades before the use of video assistant referee, or VAR. There was no way to review. The referee’s vision was blocked, and he looked to the linesman for guidance – but the linesman saw nothing wrong, and the goal was allowed to stand.

Speaking after the game, Maradona told reporters that the goal was scored “*un poco con la cabeza de Maradona y otro poco con la mano de Dios*,” or in the English translation, “a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God.” The phrase stuck, and with

it the legend of the goal.

It's really about that second goal

The Argentina team of 1986 was not a great team. Rather, it was an average team combined with the greatest player in the world at the time, and many would say the most talented footballer ever to grace a pitch.

England were probably a better team if you took Maradona out of the game. So that is what England’s defenders tried to do: shut him out by fair means or foul. England’s plan was to make it the responsibility of almost every player on the field to track him and try to stop him from advancing. They tried, but it was impossible.

Four minutes after the first goal, Maradona took the ball and at lightning pace skipped past three defenders and the England goalkeeper to score again. The goal was voted “the goal of the [20th] century” in a 2002 FIFA poll. Argentina would go on to win the final in what is still known as “Maradona’s World Cup.”

Argentina's revenge

There was no escaping the political context of the game – or the goal. In 1982, Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, or Las Malvinas – the name you use determines your allegiance – a British overseas territory some 300 miles off the Argentinian coast.

The islands had been occupied by the British since 1833, and former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher cemented her image as “The Iron Lady” by sending a military task force 8,000 miles across the Atlantic to recapture the islands. The UK claimed its primary motivation was respecting the self-determination of the islanders, but valuable fishing rights and a seat at the table in the administration of the Antarctic were also at stake. Among the neutrals, there was considerable sympathy for the Argentine cause in what seemed like an anachronistic act of colonial imperialism by the British.

The humiliation for Argentinian

generals likely hastened the end of the military dictatorship and the restoration of democracy in Argentina. But it bred resentment against the English – Argentinians believe in their heart that Las Malvinas belong to them, not to Britain – and that coloured the build-up to the 1986 game, as Maradona later recalled in his memoir *Yo Soy El Diego*, or *I Am The Diego*:

“Somehow we blamed the English players for everything that had happened, for everything that the Argentinian people had suffered ... we were defending our flag, the dead kids, the survivors.”

Maradona really is the GOAT

Few players have stamped their presence on a World Cup quite like Maradona. His performance in the England game stands as a memorial to his greatness, and the phrase “Hand of God” neatly puts his name in the same sentence as divinity. It wasn’t a one-off – the entire tournament became a showground for his outrageous skill – and he fittingly raised the trophy at the end.

But Maradona – who died in 2020 at age 60 – was also a troubled genius. A child of the slums of Buenos Aires, he never lost the anxiety that he would not receive his due. He became addicted to drugs – potentially as a result of all the painkillers he needed to keep playing in an era in which defenders were prone to bone-crunching tackles – and struggled with cocaine. He was frequently abusive toward the media, was accused of assaulting one girlfriend, and he was alleged to have close connections to the mafia.

But for most football enthusiasts, none of this really detracts from his greatness as a player.

There are simply some players – a very small number indeed – whose story transcends right and wrong and whose acts are forever remembered like the heroes of ancient Greek epics. Maradona is one such player. Like Achilles or Odysseus, his name will live on, remembered in the “Hand of God” goal. (*The Conversation*)

"Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory."

—George S. Patton

The Shillong Times

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State of the left

CURIOSLY, a "praise" for CPI-M general secretary Sitaram Yechury, that he's a "two-in-one" general secretary of both the CPI-M and the Congress Party, has come from senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh. He's not wide off the mark. Yechury has often presented himself as the mouthpiece for the Congress as equally as he presented his own party's arguments. This was so in his public pronouncements as well as in his parliamentary engagements in the Rajya Sabha. He had no luck to be an elected member of the people in Parliament, meaning a presence in the Lok Sabha. A Telugu, his field of political activity all along was Delhi. The party could never establish itself as a force in the national capital also as its leaders' obsessions had always been to be part of the Delhi elite rather than going down to the grassroots. Arvind Kejriwal, raising the voice of the poor, smiled his way to be the chief minister of Delhi state right under the nose of the Communist leaders. For the likes of Yechury, the Congress suited them best because it was ideologically impossible for the Left to ally with the BJP. The Congress is neither left nor right, but both.

It must be noted that the Communists had a love-hate relationship with the Congress. In 1959, the first elected government of EMS Namboodiripad in Kerala was overthrown by the Nehru government at the Centre at the behest of then Congress president Indira Gandhi. Namboodiripad and the CPIM nursed a grudge against the Congress all through his life till the 1990s. At the same time, the CPI of SA Dange had sided with the Congress and shared power in Kerala for a few terms there and the two cooperated in Parliament for several years. In recent decades, the CPI and the CPIM are together under the Left banner, as they realized they could not make any mark at the national level by standing apart. Yet, they were not willing to re-unite into one Communist party. The Left fought the Congress in West Bengal and Kerala almost always and in a recent election the two joined hands to tackle the TMC in West Bengal. All through the terms of Sitaram Yechury as general secretary of the CPIM, he made it a point to adopt the Congress Party ideology as his own party's. Many suspected that he was the informal adviser to Sonia Gandhi in taking decisions for the Congress. The result is the CPI-M has lost its identity except in Kerala, thanks mainly to Yechury.

The Chief Minister hardly has time to breathe these days. He is on an inauguration spree. The press is full of news of the chief minister and the ministers laying the foundation stone of roads, school buildings, PHCs, CHCs, Sports events, and what have you. Conrad and his cabinet colleagues like procrastinating students have whiled away their time throughout the year and realised when it is almost too late that the examination is coming in a few months. They now are racing against time to try to complete the syllabus, but the result is already obvious, even if the MDA government manages to pass in the third division, the state and its people had lost five precious years.

Basin Development

When the Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Promotion program was launched, this column was the first to criticize the plan, questioning the idea of developing basins, when almost all the rivers in Jaintia hills are dead. Meghalaya Basin Development Agency which promoted IBDLP was a brainchild of the MUA government under the leadership of Mukul Sangma. I had said this before and will reiterate that the Basin agency is a very innovative idea. The innovation is that the agency was created in such a way that it becomes a platform that the government can use to attract funds from international funding agencies and non-government agencies. Since then the Basin agency has had to implement development programs sponsored by international funding agencies and even funds that come from industries under Corporate Social Responsibility.

Doing away with freebies and grant culture

The main objective of IBDLP conceived by the Meghalaya Basin Agency was to do away with the "grant culture" that was prevalent in the state then. In an effort to help enhance the income of the farmers and improve the economy of the state, the MUA and the government before it initiated projects and schemes which involve the distribution of grants and freebies to citizens and farmers in particular. It was found that these grants and schemes do not have the impact that

When FOCUS went out of focus

By H.H. Mohrmen

was expected and the people of the state continued to be poor. Community and rural development experts agreed that giving grants and providing freebies to help the poor and the needy section of the society in the state, even with good intentions does not normally bear fruit. The approach did not give the expected outcomes because; receivers consider grants provided by the government as something free and therefore not valuable. Because it was free there is also no ownership of the scheme by the individual or the community. IBDLP was introduced to do away with the grant culture and to change the mindset of the people.

Partners not Beneficiaries

The IBDLP approach not only tries to do away with the grant culture, but it even forbade its staff from using the term 'beneficiaries' when referring to the target groups they provide service to. The Basin agency came up with the concept of looking at the target groups as 'partners' which also gives the farmers or the group for which the project is intended, the respect that they deserve. This simple change in terminology we use while referring to our target groups is a radical mindset change for both the farmers and the staff who implement the projects. Using the term partner instead of beneficiary implies that the government is showing them respect and not treating them as somebody who only waits for largesse from the government. It also shows that the government treats its poor and needy as equal stakeholders in the development of the state.

FOCUS is a good project but wrongly implemented

Meghalaya Basin Management Agency and the MDA government under the leadership of Conrad K. Sangma, initially launched PRIME Rural program which was later renamed Farmers' Collectivization for Upscaling of Production and Market Systems (FOCUS). The main objective is to encourage bottom-up collectivization to enable the farmer to obtain maximum value for their produce. It is seen as a multi-pronged approach to help farmers in rural areas

and at the same time to tackle the unemployment problem amongst the youths of the state.

It is a known fact that the major problem the farmers in the state face is not being able to get a good price for their produce. They are being exploited by the middlemen in the market. One of the major thrust areas of the FOCUS project is to address this common issue the farmers encounter by encouraging them to form Producer Groups (PG). Promoting PGs is a good idea because it replaces Farmers' Producers Organisation (FPO) promoted by MRD through NABARD which is a big farmers' collective with a membership of not less than fifty farmers. Besides FPO is also expected to be registered under the company's Act, which is a little over-ambitious for the farmers of our state. PG is however a small version of the FPO with a membership of not less than ten and not more than twenty members which are also conducive for the hill areas and the kind of farmers that we have in the state.

The other objective of the FOCUS was also to identify local Nano enterprises and service providers (SP) in the area. Nano enterprises are entrepreneurs who engage more than two employees in their production unit and service providers are trained para vets or barefoot veterinary assistants who will provide services in the area they live.

PG grouping according to major produce in the block

When the project was introduced in the state, the major products in the respective blocks were identified and blocks were asked to come up with a list of three major products from the area. The farmers were encouraged to form a producers' group according to the major crops they produce or the livelihood activities they are engaged in. The goal is to empower them and more importantly to give them bargaining power when they collectively sell their products in the market. The government on its part provides them a support fund of rupees fifty thousand per PG or five

thousand per member. The members were also initially informed that the support fund is like a revolving fund that will cater to the needs of the members of the PG.

Reintroducing grant and freebies culture in the state

FOCUS is a good project or at least the intention was good, but everything has gone topsy-turvy when Conrad started using it as election propaganda. Since the beginning of this year, the government organized mega events to distribute dummy-cheques to the PGs in the different blocks of the state. There is nothing wrong with distributing cheques to deserving farmers but the question is how the cheque is distributed. Every government function is now a freebies distribution event, and from PGs to SHGs they all are waiting for the government's generosity. The government purposely projected the distribution event to look like it is distributing doles to the farmers, even when the groups are not fully trained to utilize the funds. It looks like Christmas has arrived much too early for the farmers in Meghalaya and Conrad an early Santa Claus at the party.

Conrad Sangma apart from rechristening Meghalaya Basin Development Agency to Meghalaya Basin Management Agency has only managed to turn the main objective of the Basin agency upside down.

Freebies not only kill the piglets but the spirit too

It is no surprise that the piglets the government bought from outside the state and distributed to the farmers died. This is bound to happen. Any expert will tell you that the mortality rate in such cases will be high. The freebies and grant culture have not only killed the entrepreneurial spirit amongst the farmer but it has made them lethargic and lackluster and not want to work hard because the government will always come to their rescue. It also does not provide room for innovation and people expect that the government will always come up with schemes and grants to help them. Conrad has succeeded in making Meghalaya a freebie state and one wonders if the Government's plan is to make people continually dependent on the government's largesse.

Gujarat poll spend

To shoot up, satta bonanza

By Shivaji Sarkar

The ensuing Gujarat Assembly elections may cost at least Rs 1000 crore to the nation in direct expenses both by the Election Commission and political parties. The expenses would be about 250 percent more than in 2017, following Nirvachan Sadan's decision to allow candidates to spend more as poll expenses to match inflationary costs.

The election expenses help boost the local economy, those who sell various kinds of bunting, flags, other gifts to voters, photographs of leaders and provide a number of services ranging from vehicles, audio systems and other facilities for holding small and big meetings. Tea vendors and food caterers too earn quite a bit and in addition local artists are given roles to entertain the audience.

In a way, these expenses give support to a large section of small-time operators. But the larger share nowadays are pocketed by event managing units for providing election package services. Bigger expenditure goes into telephone and internet connections and transportation of leaders and workers. Besides, sponsored and not sponsored poll surveys also entail a significant expenditure.

Another interesting aspect is the betting at the satta bazar, or the betting on candidates' fate, which involves thousands of crores of investment. Though it has now become a national phenomenon, in Gujarat the elections evoke special interest. The Phalodi-based satta bazar takes keen interest in the fate, of each of the candidates. It is said that the candidates themselves sometimes create the satta phenomenon to boost their popular esteem to enhance chances of winning. Presently, the satta is throwing its phalanx with BJP. The bookies have become active and are expecting a turnover of Rs 40,000 to 50,000 crore.

On the official front, both the State government and the Election Commission dole out contracts to service providers. The entire election process doesn't necessarily end up as a political drama but involves a large section of the society, which benefits and in Gujarat, every bit is presented as a sophisticated event!

The actual expenses would be known only after the polls, but it's certain that the EC would spend Rs 450-odd crore in conducting the two-phase elections. The State's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) determines the final expenditure under the EC, with the figure usually exceeding the provisional allotment.

In the annual budget for 2022-23 for elections, the State government allocated Rs 387 crore expenses based on costs estimated by the CEO for the 2022 Assembly elections. Assembly elections 2017 were supposed to cost Rs 250 crore, but the actual expenses turned out to be Rs 326 crore. Similarly, in 2012, Rs 175 crore were estimated, but the amount exceeded.

The expenses would go up due to factors including increase in the cost of remuneration to election staff, increased logistics and vehicle costs, increased number of booths and polling stations. Importantly, a candidate in 2012 could spend only Rs 16 lakh, which has now been raised to Rs 40 lakh. Say, on an average if there are three candidates from three major parties BJP, Congress and AAP, the candidate expenses would accrue to Rs 218.4 crore for 182 seats. However, in many constituencies, there will be other smaller regional and state parties that would be contesting, thus perhaps

taking the total expenses to Rs 400 crore plus.

Importantly, political parties are taking extra care of training each of their new candidates on how to manage election expense accounts so that queries from EC are avoided. The poll commission has a large paraphernalia with squads, surveillance, income tax department, state police and state excise department for keeping tab on the minutest of expenses, even cost of garlands and bouquets.

The State Excise Department normally tends to keep tabs of liquor sales at each outlet making it tough for parties and candidates to entertain with booze. Often such entertainments are manoeuvred and sometimes funded by individuals and friends, so that officials shouldn't get a scent of it.

Political parties get funds from electoral bonds and donations. In 2017, the central BJP collected Rs 160.7 crore and its Gujarat unit Rs 88.5 crore. The expenses shown to EC were Rs 115.02 crore by the central party and the State party spent Rs 15.84 crore. There were expenses of Rs 76.24 lakh on top leaders, including three visits of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and another Rs 35.64 lakh for other leaders.

The central Congress party collected Rs 49.1 crore in 2017 and the State unit Rs 20.1 crore. The spending figures were Rs 12.4 crore by the central party and Rs 7.6 crore by the State unit.

BJP Vice President Gordhan Zadaphiahas demanded that the expenses to be incurred on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's poll rallies in Gujarat be added to the party's expenditure, while Congress sought more transparency in the election process during their meetings with Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar during his visit to the State. In many cases, these are added to the expenses of the candidates.

Congress central headquarters spent Rs 6.05 crore on travel expenses of star campaigners and visits of senior leaders such as Rahul Gandhi, Manmohan Singh, Ashok Gehlot and others. The BJP spent 2.5 times of its immediate rival. A major expense was on publicity. Overall, the BJP spent Rs 45.6 crore on media and advertisements, while the Congress spent Rs 8.68 crore. The BJP spent Rs 13.01 crore on procuring publicity materials such as hoardings, flags, arches, banners, stickers and so on compared to Congress' Rs 1.30 crore.

The BJP also spent more -- Rs 6.77 crore -- on public meetings, rallies and processions, compared to Congress' Rs 1.70 crore. The BJP campaign was launched with a sea plane ride by Modi at Sabarmati river. All these expenses were for the 45-day period or less during the elections. Actual campaigning in various modes begins much earlier. For the ruling party, the State government expenses are not reflected.

Apart from official expenses there would be about a moderate portion that would possibly not be in white. But that is how elections are fought. Finally, the expenses may go beyond the normal assessments, which too are likely to go up. Getting the maths right, may turn out tricky. ---INFA
(The writer is former senior editor, The Financial Express and Professor, Indian Institute of Mass Communication.)

Letters to the Editor

What ails NEIGRIHMS

Editor,
NEIGRIHMS has been set up as a super specialty institute of excellence, and true to that name, it has been a boon to the people of North East India, especially the poor and less privileged sections of society, who cannot afford to go for treatment outside the region. Moreover, even patients from outside the North East come to NEIGRIHMS for treatment. Under the present Director, it seems NEIGRIHMS is again moving in a dynamic and positive direction.

But, the progress of NEIGRIHMS has always been hampered by slow pace of recruitments in various departments. Case in point, the various posts such as Nursing Officer, Technical Assistant (Forensic Medicine), Technical Assistants, Pharmacist, Dark Room Assistant, Junior Engineer, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Storekeeper, Junior Perfusionists, Lower Division Clerk, Laundry Mechanic, Deputy Medical Superintendent, Junior Medical Officer, Dental Officer, Medical Physicist, which have been advertised before February 2022 and/or eligibility lists have been published, but no examinations have been conducted for the posts till date, even when DoPT has given specific instructions as per letter F.No.0020 Misc-14017

/15/2015-Estt. (RR) dated 11.01.2016 regarding time limit for completion of the recruitment process which is mentioned to be within six months from the date of advertisement. Such slow pace of recruitment process affects both the Institute's development and the youth who are eligible to apply for the various posts. This delay may deny the opportunity to fresh candidates who become eligible during that period, while creating an atmosphere of uncertainty for candidates who have applied.

To add to that, there are also various posts that are available on direct recruitment such as 1 (one) post of AAO (Assistant Accounts Officer) and 2 (Two) posts of JAO (Junior Accounts Officer) which have been notified in the Gazette of India, as published in Institute's website but have not been advertised by the Institute till date. This delay does not only affect the eligible youth but also limits manpower availability urgently required to cater to the needs of the people and the administration.

NEIGRIHMS should not stoop to the level of the work culture of various state departments where the recruitment process takes more than a year to complete even after the advertisement of posts.

The present administration should take urgent steps to expedite the recruitment process, to complete all recruitment for the advertised

posts within the timeline issued by DoPT, and also, to open up the recruitment process in respect of various sanctioned/available posts, which will only further strengthen the Institute in meeting the needs of the public and so that the eligible youth can apply for the various posts, failing which, it may hamper the prestige of the Institute as it will reflect poorly on the Administration and also lead to stagnation of the Institute's development, relative to other Institutes of excellence in the country.

Yours etc.,
Batkumar Jitem,
Via email

Demonetisation and its impact

Editor,
Apropos of the editorial "Notes ban and after" The Shillong Times 11th November 2022 was interesting reading. Those who defend demonetization say there is growth in the digital economy, tax revenues including GST, less cash transactions, etc. There is no doubt that the digital economy grew. But so did cash transactions which are today higher than during pre-demonetization. What is worrying is the surge of counterfeit currency -- a key objective of demonetization was to stamp out fake currency. The government trumpets the surge in GST but a soaring Goods and Services Tax does not point to

a vibrant economy, because the money has not been used for creation of assets but for doles and freebies. The celebration of the 6th Anniversary of demonetization is misplaced because it was introduced to invoke awe and fear. The Government of India has to be mindful of not collecting more money from the people till they have been able to earn more. Hence the editor rightly stated that "the very purpose of demonetization stands defeated." The adverse impact of demonetization persists. The whole exercise of demonetization ended up like a farce. Anything done at midnight is the work of Rawan. Arun Kumar Professor, Institute of Social Science very rationally put it "Demonetization adversely impacted those who have nothing to do with black income generation, while those generating black incomes benefited. Similarly, while the black economy weakens democracy, the current selective campaign against incomes of the opposition leaders is weakening it far more. These are the unintended consequences of our fight against the 'Black Economy', and must be avoided."

Yours etc.
Gordon Wahlang,
Via email

Down with the VIP culture

Editor,
We have all seen some

strange vehicles coming out of nowhere, blowing their sirens and passing through the middle of a congested road amidst heavy traffic jams across the city. As a student who walks to school daily and a joyful pedestrian, I am curious about the loud siren. I thought it could be an ambulance in a rush or any emergency vehicles but no, it is a pilot gypsy with armed personnel in it with their red flags waving out of the window's car, followed by luxurious vehicles bought from OUR money!

The common man also has an equal right to use the road. Who has given certain categories of people the title VIPs which makes them demi-gods? We all know the condition of roads in Shillong city and the eternal congestion. People are rushing to their workplaces and students to schools/colleges. We are all busy people. Those VIPs are not the only busy people! Get that right! If VIPs need to reach a certain place on time they should leave their homes early like everyone else.

Surprisingly, even some vehicles without pilots or a convoy following them also use the siren merely because they are officials of 'Govt of Meghalaya.' The traffic police who have been trained to prostrate before these VIPs blow hard on their whistles signalling to us civilians to make way for these "public servants." And this when the vehicles are packed with

family members of VIPs. I don't think the concerned officers or VIPs are taking their families to their workplaces. This is extremely disgusting to say the least and it angers us the members of the public no end.

Walking in those packed footpaths and seeing these VIPs rushing through so easily right through the middle of the road, I wondered what would happen if we as students too would have the licence to blow our own sirens and make our way through a traffic jam. I wish that the next Government in 2023 abolishes this VIP culture. This must be an election agenda. VIPs must go through the same pain as other citizens because the "servants of the people" cannot be above the people. To be honest, we citizens are very frustrated and angry. We also find it hard to understand why the VIPs are always in a rush. I ask the Government to make public as to who are the people in the state who are considered as VIPs and how many of them are there. Do we really need these VIPs? What have they done for the people who they are supposed to serve?

Yours etc.,
Aiban B Nongrum,
Via email

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

"Perfection is impossible; just strive to do your best."

— Angela Watson

The Shillong Times

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State of Meghalaya's roads

THE North East Olympics games are one and some game venues are located in Mawlai Mawroh where a road that was started at least three years ago remains incomplete in many parts leading to dust rising and polluting the games venue located just by the side of the road. The police stationed there are covered in a cloud of dust each time a car passes by. This is inhuman to say the least. Road construction in Meghalaya and in the city of Shillong in particular seems to take a longer than necessary gestation period. This is all due to lack of monitoring and the lack of respect and adherence to a timeline. The central government that funds the projects does not really care about setting up timelines within which a particular road project is to be completed and of monitoring the quality of the roads. The Shillong to Dawki project is now kept on suspended animation and no one is really sure how many more years this will take. The problem is the long-suffering citizens of Meghalaya who continue to remain silent despite suffering the consequences of traveling on bad roads.

During his recent visit to Assam and other North Eastern states, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari at several public meetings announced new projects amounting to Rs 1.6 lakh crores of which Meghalaya will be receiving about Rs 5000 crores. At the 2nd Convocation of the Royal Global University, Guwahati, Gadkari said money is never a problem. The problem is delay in decision making. Gadkari could have added delay in project completion. The Union Minister skipped Meghalaya during his visit else he could have been taken to some of the places with the worst road conditions within Shillong city. States like Tripura and Assam being BJP-ruled of course receive maximum attention but to the credit of Assam work on several road projects have been progressing at an appreciable pace. An example is the 6-lane road to the airport. Gadkari of course also stated that the land acquisition process of all development work has to be expedited. In this aspect Meghalaya is a slow coach because land acquisition also means different agents and middle men making money from land owners especially villagers.

The road to Jowai begins to deteriorate after Mawryngkneng and gets worse closer to Umulung. With trucks carrying more than the permitted capacity being allowed to pass by without any checks and balances the quality of roads are bound to deteriorate. Recently the bridge at Dwar Ksuid started giving way. Is the MDA Government really serious about road communication and above all the quality of the roads being constructed. A better question should be – Are the people of Meghalaya happy with their roads?

The Unemployment conundrum

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

we think of developing some part of Meghalaya into a services/manufacturing hub to lure business in? Is the political leadership thinking on this line? As of today in north-east India, only Assam comes close to attracting some corporate investment.

In most cases, the thought process is that employment is created by the government. There is a tendency that it is the job of the government to provide employment. In truth, this is a fallacy as any government can provide only limited direct employment opportunities. We must realise that a government is in itself a 'public sector

organisation'. The people in it (including legislators) are in truth only employees with the goal of working for the masses. According to rough estimates, the employment capacity of the government of Meghalaya

and develop. Many of such youth are from the villages and motivated to come up in life. They do carpentry, cane work, handicrafts, artisan work, bee-keeping, pisciculture, etc. What they do is heart-warming and inspiring.



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"The unemployment rally has become a futile exercise. Many writers have written on the violent assaults, hate, loss of image, etc. Here, we will try to explore some of the inconsistencies in Meghalaya which define the 'unemployment conundrum' and the possible ways out."

is around 70,000 only. So, what really is the job of the government? Its job is to provide a nurturing environment for jobs to be created through the market forces (demand and supply). Provide an environment which is peaceful and investment friendly. Offer schemes and hand-holding to the youth for enterprise creation. Identify areas which are cash cows i.e. sectors with the potential to give maximum returns and build on them. Agriculture and food processing is a cash cow. But, creating such an environment it is a two-way traffic. It needs the coopera-

They deserve a lot of help and hand-holding. Second, those who possess appropriate knowledge/skills and are trying to find employment or do something on their own. Many of such youth are disillusioned today and complain of hitting a glass ceiling due to the lack of opportunities in Shillong and other towns of Meghalaya. This is where the need for a nurturing environment continuously arises. Third, the ones with/without knowledge/skill and have given up already. This is not because they are lethargic; rather, they have given up on the system. They see no op-

portunity and no hope. These need help on a personal and professional level through counselling. Now, just look at the conundrum. On October 28 there were violent assaults. On October 29 there was a huge traffic jam near St. Anthony's college as hundreds of students came out after giving their MPSC LDA examination. The point here is that it would be wrong to paint everyone with the same brush.

In a recent national seminar conducted by Meghalaya College Teachers' Association (MCTA) at Union Christian College, one discussion lamented on how Meghalaya missed the technical education opportunity in the 1980s and 1990s. The premise is that we are facing unemployment today because importance was not given to setting up of technical institutes like medical and engineering colleges. The outcome of this is that in addition to a shortage of local workforce for technical lines, till today our students have to move outside the state in huge numbers for technical studies. To be blunt, this was a blunder by the education policy makers of the past. But, there is still time to learn from it. Apparently, Meghalaya has not.

We are in the third decade of the new millennium and yet there is still no sign of a medical and engineering college. Now, there is also a need for a state university. This way our students will continue to suffer. Policy mistakes/inaction like these provides a space for the pressure groups to agitate and complain that all the jobs are being gobbled up by outsiders. The pressure groups too need to be more realistic. On one hand there is a protest to railways and on the other there is demand for employment. It is a conundrum as railways will create more jobs simply on account of transfer of goods.

In the end, it is observed that some are defending the violent assaults as a necessary evil. In social media, the defence is for all to see. But then, that is the nature of social media. It makes us narcissist-aggressors towards anything that touches our sensibilities like the feeling of community/religion/caste/tribe. Well, enough of this. What goes around comes a round!

(The writer teaches at NEHU; Email - benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in)

Man a savage animal

By Barnes Mawrie

Perhaps it's time to change the saying, "wild as an animal" into "wild as a human." How unjustly we blame the poor animals as "wild and ferocious" while in fact, human beings are more cruel even towards their own species. Human beings may claim that they are civilized and developed but in reality their behaviour has not improved; it has only worsened. Who can deny the fact that among all creatures, human beings are the most cruel and revengeful. There is more human blood shed on the Earth's surface than all animal blood put together.

Since the beginning of human civilization, violence has been the characteristic of humans. Centuries have been marked by thousands of wars fought for reasons of greed, pride and ambition. Man is definitely a "self-destructive being." This is even seen in the violent sports that we have invented from the gladiators of the Roman

nature. Today this saying is being proven true for the fact that militarily weaker countries become easy targets of powerful countries.

In the era of colonialism, the powerful European nations invaded weaker countries in the far continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In the 20th Century, the powerful Nazi army invaded Poland, Czechoslovakia, France and other countries because these countries were weak and ill prepared for war. Today we see mighty Russia invading a small and weak country Ukraine and causing untold suffering and destruction to that poor nation. Had it not been for the military support of NATO, Ukraine would have been swallowed up by Russia in a matter of weeks. The Russian aggression has alarmed many peaceful nations in Europe, thus even Germany has been forced to revamp its defense policy and it is reinforcing its military



era to the WWE Championship of modern times. But what demonstrate more the violent nature of man are the wars that are being fought even to this day. The human carnage that is going on in Ukraine where innocent people are being sacrificed at the altar of one man's greed and ambition, is the most recent example of this. War crimes are being committed in Ukraine and elsewhere which prove that we humans are prone to violence. The horrific events of recent decades like the Cambodian genocide between 1975 and 1979 claimed about 3 million people, the Rwanda genocide in 1994 where 800,000 people lost their lives, the Bosnian genocide between 1992 and 1995 which claimed about 39,000 lives, the Rohingya genocide in 2017 where 43,000 innocent people were killed and the present Ukraine war which has claimed more than 14,000 lives already. If a list of human carnages which have taken place in history is enumerated here, it would run into many pages.

War is an invention of human civilization and with time its lethality has improved by leaps and bounds. From using crude weapons like swords, spears and arrows, we have come to the age of cruise missiles, kamikaze drones, chemical weapons and even nuclear bombs. Thus from a casualty of hundreds, modern wars are capable of wiping out a population of millions. It looks like our civilization will be terminated by wars. People thought that with the end of World War II and its horrific consequences, humanity had learnt a hard lesson and that the world would choose a path of peace. But far from it, human beings are violent by nature and we seem to prefer war to peace. Long ago the great Roman general, Julius Caesar has rightly said "si vis pacem para bellum" (if you desire peace prepare for war). Caesar seemed to have had an insight into human psychology and he seemed to have understood human

power. As a matter of fact China may be tempted to invade Taiwan knowing that it is far superior in military might.

Undoubtedly, if India were to be militarily weak, China would have captured much of our territory by now. The threat from North Korea has alarmed its neighbouring countries like Japan, South Korea and Philippines. Today we see a demilitarized nation like Japan hurrying up to reinforce its military arsenal in order to meet any threat of war from its hostile neighbour. The reason that many countries are going nuclear, is because that seems to be the final act of defense against any inimical aggression. But seeing the violent nature of man, nuclear weapons in more countries could prove to be a doomsday for human civilization itself. Thus finally it is evident that human beings are belligerent by nature and we can never live in peace and harmony. The messianic day foretold by Prophet Isaiah when peace and harmony would reign in our land seems almost impossible. As long we play by the rules of hatred and vengeance there will no end to wars and conflicts. The only solution lies in the adherence to the golden rule of Christ, "love your neighbour as yourself." If we humans learn to love one another like brothers and sisters, then only will we be able to live in peace and harmony. When will that day come when Indians and Pakistanis would cease their enmity and embrace each other like brothers and sisters? (It is good to remember that before the partition we were but one country and one nation). When will that day come when every country would give up the arms race, stop manufacturing weapons and invest more on education, health care and poverty alleviation?

For this to take place, humanity needs to look beyond race, ethnicity, religion and culture.

Letters to the Editor

Duplicity of public representatives

Editor,
I wish to bring to highlight the duplicity of our elected representatives and their behaviour and conduct towards the people of our state as the term of the Meghalaya legislative assembly comes to an end. It is ironic to watch the dual roles played by our public representatives when they frequently declare themselves as "saviours" of the system when the time arrives for them to go back to the people to submit their report cards of their 5-year performance. Of course it has never happened that an elected MLA is accountable to the people nor that the people rate their representative's performances based on the actual work on the ground.

Recently the East Shillong MLA who is also the chairperson of the assembly committee on women's empowerment has been making statements on atrocities against women. In matrimonial Meghalaya women are supposed to be treated better than elsewhere but it is not so. This can be corroborated from the news item, "Assembly committee concerned over rising crime against women in the state" (Oct 3, 2022) where she commented as a member of the Committee with regards to the gruesome murder of a 19 year old girl, allegedly by

her husband that took place at Iewmawlong in Ri-bhoi district. She states, "Something is not going right and I think after elections I would like to see communities and societies around us contributing to the safety of women." She also, "stressed on the need to have an action plan and make it operational at the earliest." The question is why has she to wait until after the election to act on a matter as heinous as this? And what has she been doing as a three-term MLA?

The lady MLA also raised her concern on the murder of two infants in Nongrah and showed keen interest in the case. Why? Perhaps it's because her sister is supposedly contesting the 21 Nongthymmai seat from the NPP. Strangely the same representative is silent when contractual teachers were fired with tear gas by the police in the recently concluded agitation in which mostly women and children were affected.

Another instance of duplicity can be seen from the write ups that appeared in this newspaper on the problems faced by the constituents of East Shillong. Water scarcity has been the number one issue for the people of Laitumkhrah and adjoining areas for the last several years. The incumbent MLA had also held the portfolio of Urban Affairs and the Shillong Municipality was under her command but the water issue was never addressed. Surprisingly she seems to be raising this concern only

now when elections are just round the corner.

A citizen had also flagged in these columns on the manner in which pipes are laid via drains and when the pipes leak the contaminated drain water enters the pipes that takes water to people's home. The representative was also seen carrying a bottle of turbid water in the autumn session of the Assembly last year just to placate the electorate that she is taking up the issue. Another issue that is bewildering for the constituents of East Shillong and Malki in particular is the water scarcity. From time immemorial Malki is blessed with its own source of fresh and clean drinking water from the catchment areas of Ing Um from the source of Wah Risa constructed during the British Raj. This reservoir supplied water to the entire Shillong town in the past. Sadly the constituents of Malki are now facing water shortage on a daily basis, and the fresh and clean water they once enjoyed has now been diverted to God knows where. Now the people of Malki consume water supplied by the GSWSS from Mawphlang which is turbid and oily.

As a representative the lady is also amongst the least performing. Every now and again she only raises concerns but has never come forward to address those issues as a public representative. If an MLA only raises concerns then who will actually

address and resolve those issues?

In the first half of 2021, when commercial vehicles were off the road to strike on fuel price hike, the same representative was spotted walking from home towards the old Assembly building to attend the business advisory committee meeting as a mark of solidarity with the agitating cabbies. But she never took up the cause of the failed STPS buses that are now dumped as junk in various parts of the city. It was because of poor management during her tenure as the Urban Affairs Minister that the SPTS venture failed miserably and now people are deprived of affordable means of transport due to lack of efficient public transportation system. If the MLA/Minister had been effective such failures could have been avoided.

Another failure on her part is to address the ongoing chaotic traffic congestion in her constituency which is an educational hub. The traffic jam also affects the livelihood of cabbies where instead of getting ten trips a day they would have to settle for five. Where is the outcry? Where is the action plan for this issue? And lastly, lets remind ourselves of the infamous education scam that she remains charge-sheeted for by the CBI court that has ruined the careers of many aspiring teachers and loss of jobs to those who were termed as tainted. We barely hear her raising concerns

on the rise of unemployed youths in the state; the lack of job creation by the state even as a minister in the previous Congress-led Government or now as a suspended legislator of the grand old party.

Lastly, coming back to the Congress Party it is amusing to see this suspended member's latest criticism on the recently held Congress Presidential election. What interest does she have on the internal affairs of a Party she had back-stabbed purely for political gains? Her audacity to bite the hand that fed her reveals her ruthless and self-centred nature but what can we expect from a representative who takes cheap shots for mere publicity stunts? It will be worth watching her next move in jumping ship to seek greener pastures for herself while the constituency as a whole will be left in the doldrums as usual.

It is therefore up to the wisdom of the voters to keep a watch on such duplicitous elected public representatives as they do not do what they speak and speak what they do not intend to do.

Your's etc.,
Nikkita Savian,
Via email

Flouting of rules by two wheeler riders

Editor,
What is the purpose of education? Is it just for

brandishing degrees and certificates? On the recent opening ceremony of the North East Olympics, it was bizarre for visitors to witness people riding two wheelers without adhering to the laid down rules in the campus of North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. One police official posted there to ensure smooth movement of traffic for the event said, "I am shocked to find these university students driving two-wheelers without wearing helmets. We feel disrespected when we witness such acts from educated people." Sadly, this practice of not wearing helmets while driving two-wheelers in the university campus has been going on for a long time and is unchecked by the competent authorities. To make matters worse, sometimes more than two persons are seen riding on a two-wheeler causing danger to themselves and other pedestrians inside the campus. I appeal to the concerned authorities to clamp down on such flouting of traffic rules before any mishaps occur.

Yours etc.,
Earningstone R Sangma,
Garos Union Sec School
Compound,
Shillong-1.

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*"In the practice of tolerance,
one's enemy is the best teacher."*

— Dalai Lama

The Shillong Times

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Democracy and China

DEMOCRACY is generally cited as the best form of governance. Curiously, China's president Xi Jinping in his meeting with US president Joe Biden at the G20 Summit in Bali swore by democracy, explaining that the democracy the US practised was different from the 'democracy' that China practised. Democracy means 'rule of the people by the people and for the people' as America's 16th President Abraham Lincoln had put it. The concept evolved from Greece and the term is a mix of 'demos' meaning people and 'kratos' power.

Xi's stress was that freedom, democracy and human rights are humanity's common pursuits and the Chinese Communist Party's constant pursuit. "The US has American-style democracy while China has Chinese-style democracy." A closer look at China would reveal that the Communist Party that runs the government selects or elects the head of state. The party leadership itself emerges from selections at the grassroots level. This is different from dictatorships in the Islamic nations in the Middle East or Africa — two geographical regions where dictators rule the roost. The Gulf states flushed with oil income are run in an orderly manner while there is no individual freedom. So is Singapore, the progressive island nation, where democracy is practised in a limited form. These are where governments take care of their people. As such, a lack of individual freedom is not emerging as a serious issue. This is unlike India, where elected governments can change every five years; meaning a short-term responsibility for those who govern the nation. New governments with new priorities come and overturn the initiatives of the past. Growth suffers. This does not happen in Singapore, China or the Gulf States, or even in dictatorships as in Africa or West Asia. In several democracies, loot by the leaders and the bureaucracy is massive. This is only one of democracy's many problems.

In India, democracy has been in a state of slow evolution since 1947 after the end of the British Rule and rule by princely states. The large mass of the electorate votes by instinct and not by exercise of their brain power. People famously "voted with their feet" and re-elected governments or leaders who deceptively spoke up for the poor and at the same time looted the exchequer. Yet, when corruption was perceived to be high, we the people voted out the UPA-II. With television sets up at most homes, the level of awareness of the people is growing — a good sign for democracy. China grew by leaps and bounds by adopting a different type of governance system. It has its merits too. Freedom in itself means very little.

The 'hearsay' letter on November 11 deserves a rejoinder, not because it is anonymous and slanderous in nature but parts of its content need expansion. First things first, whether a newspaper worth its salt should publish unnamed letters, is for the editor to decide. The letters to the editor column is very popular because they are brief and readers love to read them. It should be a Town Hall where all kinds of points and counter-points are put forward, but whether incognito speakers are permitted in such a platform is debatable.

A clarification is necessary here. If readers get the impression that my statement in the article, which the letter writer has problems with, is a generalisation, I correct myself unconditionally. It was not my intention to make a sweeping statement that all those who get into government jobs do so via bribes. Surely there are many who succeed purely on merit. Full credit to them! Whether the nameless author is one of them is anybody's guess. If so, he or she should say so openly by revealing his or her identity. In a seminar a speaker boldly proclaimed, "I got this job without paying any bribe." Well said but there was a lot of giggling in the room. Why the giggling? No comments. It is open to interpretation. If there are individuals who manage to secure their jobs through the fair way there are also many more who use unfair means including paying handsome amounts. To allege that government job seekers shell out a few lakhs is not based on hearsay. It is not the statement of a 'riff-raff' or of disreputable people or 'slanderous talk of the hoi polloi' as the writer assesses. It is a widespread public perception. People talk openly that in order to get government jobs you have to pay bribes. There are general allegations of this sort in the public domain. Leaders of pressure groups make these allegations in their public speeches. Activists often complain about it. Is there smoke without fire? But to provide proof is difficult. It will be foolish to expect bribers and bribe beneficiaries to acknowledge the malpractice. It could be too much to have a Rudolf Elmer in the state. We may never have a whistle-blower among us.

A person, even after many years, often laments, "I should have been an MCS officer. I failed in the personal interview because I was asked to pay Rs 10 lakhs." Privately he also names officers of his batch who got through on merit, or by bribing their way through

Public perception is not hearsay

By Albert Thyrniang

or other considerations. We know you can't name anyone here. We have certainly heard of recruits who borrow money from friends to secure a government job. There are cases where the family raise the funds demanded so that their son or daughter gets the job. You may demand for proof but if there is no proof should we just remain silent? Is there anyone who can categorically say that the government job 'market' is totally clean? Is there absolutely nothing amiss? Should not this critical issue be discussed and debated, albeit in general terms? It is this perceived corruption that is causing frustration to the youths who feel they deserve to be government employees but are deprived of a job because they just don't have the purchasing power.

The editor of this paper in her program "Upfront"

youngsters are forced to use money. The honest might not get into that system. Interestingly the survey says college students who cheated on a simple task were more likely to want government jobs. In April, the infamous Sindhu diary where a senior clerk at the Mananthavady sub-inspector RT office in Kalpetta revealed that those who are not ready to comply with corruption should not apply for government jobs. Kalpetta is a major town and municipality in Wayanad district, in 'God's own country', Kerala.

As recently as September last year the Local Circles and Transparency International India listed the most corrupt departments in India. Surprisingly the Judiciary leads the way. The rest are in this order, IAS lobby, ED, CBI & IB, Defence Forces, Department of Land

"The editor of this paper in her program 'Upfront' often asks her guests, mainly politicians, including MLAs, on unemployment and its causes. In the show with Mayralborn Syiem, the Nongpoh legislator clearly agrees that many deserving candidates don't get government jobs because of nepotism, favouritism and corruption. We know which categories of people are involved in nepotism, favouritism and corruption."

often asks her guests, mainly politicians, including MLAs, on unemployment and its causes. In the show with Mayralborn Syiem, the Nongpoh legislator clearly agrees that many deserving candidates don't get government jobs because of nepotism, favouritism and corruption. We know which categories of people are involved in nepotism, favouritism and corruption.

Corruption in government jobs in India is a reality. In mid-May this year the shady police recruitments in Karnataka revealed that 'Government recruitments are consumed by corruption'. Left in disgrace is the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC). Aspirants allegedly sold land and valuables to pay fat bribes for police jobs. In November 2013 Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania found most youngsters in India joining the government sector by paying bribes. Since most officials in government jobs are corrupt,

Resources & Rural Development, Municipal Council & Police Department, Tax department, Jail & Prison, Health Department and Education Department. The study exposes that more than half of Indians pay bribes to state and local officials because, "it was the only way to get work done." It is only common sense to infer that corruption extends also to the recruitment process. Do the 'state and local officials' exclude Meghalaya? Is Meghalaya a saint in its dealings? Then why the delay in the Meghalaya Public Service Commission and the District Selection Committee results? Why do we need agitations to speed up the process? Why all the illegality and scams here?

The author could be a mentor. He has a series of advice. A couple of points are sufficient to consider here. One strong recommendation is that if I preach about fearing God, I should do so only from a pulpit and not in the print media. This is precisely

what is happening in the state. Religion is divorced from life. Religion does not extend outside the church. The biblical, religious, moral and ethical lessons preached end up within the church. Values learned in the church do not carry on into places of work. Doing right is only in the church. Doing wrong things outside the church is alright. What is preached in the pulpit on Sundays should not impact life during the rest of the week. What else to say if one is advised to exhort to fear God only in the church! It is strange that if one is told to fear God outside the church one should be resentful. Never mind the illegality in coal mining and transportation! There is no need to talk about the corruption along the highways. A lecture is unwelcome on the rice scam, the smart meter scam, the vehicle scam and others.

Going by the above analogy the collapse of the dome of the new Assembly building, the leakage of the brand new ISBT at Mawiong need not be questioned. No one should raise an alarm on the purchase of votes doing elections. These are not wrong because they don't take place in the church? This is what the writer of the letter essentially asserts. There are a growing number of pastors, priests and preachers who use YouTube and other social media platforms. A few are there in the print media as well because the message should not remain within the four walls of the church. Perhaps the writer is ignorant of this trend.

Another unsolicited counsel is that this writer should write more 'about politics, environmental problems, social and economic aspects'. Well, these subjects are not assigned to me alone. This is neither my sole privilege nor duty. It is not only my responsibility to opine on these topics. Every citizen in a democracy should voice their concerns. The writer of the letter is also eligible to write on the above issues.

The letter writer finds faults that my article did not contain any positive suggestions. Probably a careful reading was not done. Two suggestions were offered: one, to have all interviews in camera with visual and audio facilities. This will minimise if not eliminate corruption, nepotism and favouritism. Secondly, to ban or end the use of the slogan "Ha ri lajong katba mon." My suggestion has found some resonance. North Shillong MLA, Adelbert Nongrum has also appealed to pressure groups to restrain from using the slogan because it can mislead young minds.

Here I end my case.

the morning and afternoon every day. As a parent I feel that it is stressful for the children because they will hardly have time to study. Initially they were given a routine with one subject a day, but the school Principal has changed the routine for reasons best known to her. During the meeting with parents she was preaching about how to raise children; how to nurture them etc., but can she please at least set an example from her end and understand that children also are having a tough time during exams. Not every child is a genius hence they need some time to prepare. Even the Board exams provide some gap between each subject so that the students can prepare properly and do their best. So can the Principal please give a day's gap or at least one subject a day so that the students will not be stressed.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Shillong-2

MPPS examination schedule

Editor,
I am writing this letter to express my opinion on the final routine examination of MPPS (Meghalaya Police Public School) Golf Links Shillong. The exams will begin on November 16 and will be held both in

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Implications of the verdict on the EWS amendment

By Ajit Ranade

Nearly four years ago, in January 2019 the Parliament passed the 103rd constitutional amendment carving out a new category of reserved quota for government jobs and for admission to educational institutions. This was a new 10 percent quota for those persons from the economically weaker section (EWS). Upon its passage, there were a slew of petitions challenging the constitutionality of this amendment. The fact is that this rather momentous amendment was passed in Parliament without much debate because the BJP which is the ruling party has an absolute majority in the lower house, Lok Sabha. One of the few objections against the amendment was made in a spirited speech by Ms Kanimozhi, MP from Tamil Nadu. But largely the amendment passed without much discussion. The Supreme Court this past week in its verdict upheld the constitutionality of the EWS quota and all petitions challenging it were dismissed. The Verdict of the five-member bench was unanimous in affirming that the economic criteria can be used as a basis for reservation (something that the petitioners had challenged). The bench was also unanimous in its implied conclusion that because of this new category, now the aggregate total share of constitutionally mandated reservation (scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, and now EWS) would exceed 50 percent, and this was not per se against the constitution. This too had been one of the contentions of the petitioners. The only issue on which the bench was split 3:2 was whether the SC, ST and OBC groups could be excluded from the newly created category of EWS. The majority view is that their exclusion was ok.

This amendment and the stamp of validity on it provided by the highest court in the country has many consequences, some of which will be discussed below. Has the judgement dealt a blow to the doctrine of protecting the basic structure of the constitution (something that followed from the landmark 1973 case in the Supreme Court)? This famous judgement did not define explicitly what is meant by the basic structure. It also did not prohibit the power of the Parliament to pass amendments to the constitution. But it did say, that you cannot pass amendments of such extreme nature, that they distort the very basic principles of our constitution. Parliament is supreme, but the spirit of the constitution is more supreme. By creating a new category based on economic criteria, to whom special treatment will be accorded (reservation), have we violated the right to equality (article 14)? Or by excluding SC, ST and OBC groups from this new category, have we breached the principle of non-discrimination (article 14 and 15)? These are questions for scholars of jurisprudence to explore. Much has already been written and more will follow. One rather penetrating analysis is by Ayan Gupta which can be read at the blog indconlawphil.wordpress.com. So, it is quite possible that in the days to come a review of the decision of the apex court may be undertaken by a larger bench.

But for now, let us examine other aspects of the amendment and the judgement. Firstly, it is clear that the amendment itself was politically motivated. The word "quotas" has radioactive resonance in the Indian polity, and there is an im-

pression that the amendment was passed to benefit a vote bank of upper-caste voters. But now even Muslims and Christians have also become eligible for the EWS quota. Secondly, the quotas in our constitution were meant to correct longstanding and historical injustice based on caste. They are meant to help those who have suffered from social backwardness for generations.

How can economic backwardness be put in the same category as social backwardness stemming from historical injustice and social backwardness? A person's economic status is fluid, and can change with effort or luck or both. Even a person's religion can be a matter of choice. But caste is an unchangeable marker from birth. So, overcoming caste-based discrimination is not in the same league as economic deprivation. Thirdly, the cutoff decided for eligibility for the EWS quota is an annual income of 8 lakhs, which seems like a very generous threshold. It is far above the poverty line. By one estimate, more than 95 percent of the households in India will fall under this limit. So, is it a remedy to give quota-based opportunities to the poor, or is it meant for everybody? Fourthly, if indeed the EWS quota is meant to help those from poor households, then let us look at the profile of those below the poverty line. As per government's Sinho Commission, nearly 82 percent of the people below the poverty line comprised of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. Poverty and social backwardness have a high correlation. But those very categories have been denied opportunities in the EWS quota. It is on this point that there was dissent by two of the judges as a matter of constitutional principle.

But even from a pragmatic view about poverty, does this not seem questionable as a policy designed to help the poor? It is like saying that we will launch an anti-poverty program, but those people from rural areas, and from agriculture will be excluded since they are covered by other subsidies. Fifth, the status of economic backwardness is fluid. It should be addressed by affirmative action and not quotas. For instance, providing education loans to students from poor households is better than a quota system for the poor. Sixth, one implication is the scramble for income certificates that this EWS policy will unleash. In an economy where 92 percent people work either in the unorganised, unregistered or informal sector, getting authentic income data is notoriously difficult. Only about five percent of the population pays income tax. So where can we get authentic income data, based on which this EWS policy is going to be implemented? Are we opening the gates for more corruption, rent seeking or fake certificates, and more litigation?

Lastly it is clear, that the EWS reservation has great political resonance because of the scarcity of well paying, stable and high-quality jobs. Most of the jobs are going to be created in the private sector anyway, wherein these quotas don't apply. Hence the surest way ahead to correct for social or economic injustice is high, sustained, inclusive growth of the economy, jobs and livelihoods. That as always is the real core agenda.

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

Letters to the Editor

A grave injustice

Editor,
I would like to refer to a news item "State job policy must: Pressure groups" (ST November 14, 2022) which reported about the demands of the KSU, HYC and FKJGP for job reservations in the private sector as is being done by Karnataka, Haryana, etc. Apart from this demand, I would like to request these pressure groups to also focus their attention on a very common trend of recruitment of staff on contractual basis and paying them slave wages by various government departments even for posts that need not be contractual in nature. For example, the PHE department recently advertised for the posts of Water Analysts for a remuneration of Rs. 15000 only per month and Laboratory Multi-Tasking Assistants for a remuneration of Rs.12000 only. The above posts should not be contractual in nature because the services of the appointees would ALWAYS be required to check on the water quality. Besides, aren't the remunerations of Rs.15000

and Rs.12000 for technical personnel equivalent to slave wages? (Regular posts of this category are equivalent to the posts of UDA and LDA respectively. It is learnt that LDAs working in heads of departments, Government of Meghalaya draw a starting basic pay of Rs.26,500 and their total emoluments come to around Rs. 40,000). This being the state of affairs in various other departments, one is forced to conclude that this Government is out to exploit desperate young unemployed people who for the lack of opportunities are forced to work for a pittance.

Yours etc.,
Samuel Swett,
Shillong - 2

NPP-led MDA Govt on freebie distribution spree

Editor,
During last four months or so I have noticed over publicity in the media about Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, how he has been moving in lightning

speed in the state to either inaugurate some projects or in distributing livestock and cheques to Self Help Groups, Producers Groups and Village Organisations established by the Community and Rural Development Blocks or by some outreach NGOs under the so-called PRIME programme, FOCUS Programme, Community Investment Fund, YESS Meghalaya, IVCS programme or Rural Backyard Piggery Scheme PROGRESS or under some fancy Mission to some specially selected beneficiary groups selected by potential NPP candidates or by his political cronies.

All these exercises are nothing short of populist propaganda which were done with a clear-cut view of furthering the chances of the ruling NPP in winning the ensuing elections which is barely three months away. He and his deputies carried out these exercises with lightning speed to ensure that all these so-called sops or freebies are completed just before announcement of the General Elections in the state by the Election Commission of India this coming December-January. These freebies' distribution spree

are nothing short of political baits and fraught with dangers because they are given from the public exchequer meant for specially designed central schemes and from loans borrowed from FIs which the government has to repay with interests. The results are damning indeed for the state which is already overburdened by huge loans yet this NPP led government uses the public funds for open populist propaganda.

Yes, the ruling NPP finds funds for freebies' distribution but has no funds to pay salaries of teachers and various other committed liabilities. These irresponsible steps taken by the Chief Minister, who also holds the finance portfolio, is dangerous for the state and will further push the state into bankruptcy just to win the ensuing elections. We cannot comprehend how the other coalition partners in the MDA have allowed this blatant arbitrary misuse of public money by the leading ruling party? From where will the expenses for these huge political baits be redeemed with costs if not from the people of the state including the beneficiaries of the so called fancy programmes/

“The aim of argument, or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress.”

— Joseph Joubert

The Shillong Times

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NEOG: Proof that Meghalaya can do it

THE grand finale of the 2nd North East Olympics Games was successfully completed without any glitches. Aspirations will always be there that Meghalaya should have state of the art sporting facilities and this should be a priority since the youth of the state have shown immense potential in different sporting categories. Many have observed that Meghalaya is not far behind when it comes to winning medals in different fields at national and international sporting events. If adequate attention and investment was paid to sports from the time the state was born perhaps some of the youth might have even qualified for the Olympics. Matsiewdor War presently in the civil services participated in archery at the Asian Games at Seoul in 1986. At the time India had only about 150 archers. Today there are about 20,000 and counting. Matsiewdor War succeeded not because of state sponsorship but because her father was a proponent of the sport and gave her the required training. This is true of many sportspersons in Meghalaya even today. They make it to international events mainly due to family support and the sponsorship of sports lovers and empathisers. The state has not really invested in sportspersons to the level that other states have done. Nor has the sports infrastructure been up to the desired standards.

It is now time for the State of Meghalaya to focus on a few sporting events that the youth excel in and provide the coaching needed for them to scale new heights. So far parents have been reluctant to allow their children to devote their time and energy to sports on the plea that it would disrupt their studies. But when they see their children performing well and being absorbed by sporting bodies or other institutions on account of their excellent performance, parents will have a change of heart.

As some sportspersons have stated, the games venues and stadia should not be used for non-sporting activities. They are sacrosanct spaces and must be respected so that the athletes too feel they deserve respect. Meanwhile the State has to allocate resources for different districts too and not concentrate on Shillong alone. A serious talent search should begin with the idea of catching them young. Such talent should be diligently nurtured. The problem is with those talented but poor youth. Even if they are given a stipend for a proper diet that amount would not suffice for the entire family. Hence, the state needs to create sports academies where talented athletes can be trained and learn to compete with others and are also nurtured with strict discipline. The MOA and all involved in the NEOG -2022 deserve accolades.

Letters to the Editor

Clarification from William Carey University

Editor,
Apropos of the news item "Meghalaya link in fake degree, certificate racket" (ST November 13, 2022), the William Carey University, Meghalaya wishes to draw the attention of all concerned that the University since long has been fighting tooth and nail to protect the brand value and goodwill of the William Carey University community against such vicious attacks made by unknown unscrupulous persons with criminal bent of mind. Through the columns of your esteemed daily, the University makes it very clear that no employee of the University is involved in any such despicable practices that not only jeopardizes the future of students and scholars but also puts in line the prestige and hard-earned goodwill of the University. After the publication of the said news item, the University, upon being called by the Meghalaya Private Universities Regulatory Board, has explained with clarity the various actions taken to maintain transparency and

our unyielding approach in such matters. Regardless of the fact that the University website since long has listed the names of all genuine students, deceitful people are indulging in forgery and malpractices in the name of the University and there continues a selective witch hunt. Therefore, proper investigations shall bring the matter to its logical conclusions as such raids are being made by law enforcement agencies of various states at various locations in the country now to bust these heinous rackets carried out by devious individuals in the name of various Universities.

Despite our best of our efforts to hold forth, to keep such undesirable, unscrupulous, people with criminal intent of mind at bay, such news items, choice of words, pending investigations is damning Making wild allegations and false claims and spinning baseless stories without being held accountable comes easy to the dodgy and unprincipled; these are dishonest and crooked persons out to make a quick buck at the cost of educational institutions. Lists of genuine students of the University have long been uploaded in the University website for the members of the public to check and verify. Despite that, unscrupulous and

dangerous elements of the society act in such a futile manner. These are conspiracies hatched with malicious and mischievous intent and proper and thorough investigations are the urgent need of the hour. These despicable incidents temporarily affect the morale of our employees, students and scholars who are the stakeholders of this prestigious university. However with resilience we stand together with our head held high without any remorse as we continue with our duties honestly at the University which is a part of our life and soul as William Carey University is committed to a transparent education system,

Yours etc,
Dr. PGJ Richard
Registrar
William Carey University
Meghalaya

The enigma called India

Editor,
A few days ago Mr S Jaishanker, the External Affairs Minister of India was in Moscow confabulating with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavarov. Ostensibly the talks were on economic and political issues but not strangely enough it centered more on the supply of and

purchase by India of Russian crude oil, at ridiculously low prices, curiously at a time when severe Western sanctions were being imposed on Russia and purchase of Russian oil being one of the foremost items in the above sanction list. Countries who dare to defy are sternly glared at by NATO and it is nothing rare for such countries to have their knuckles rapped by an irate US. Yet here we have a I-don't-have-a-care-in-the-world-India, merrily cocking a snook at the World's super power. Of course it's a different matter as to how India intends to transport the purchased crude; if it has the tankers; if other nations are willing to lease us theirs or if the rest of the World see it as a rotten deal. This is a glitch that needs to be looked at closely.

Then again there is another US sanctioned country that India is friendly with and that is Iran. The US would love to see all countries keep their distance from Iran but here again India is openly defying the US. To many, keeping in mind the might of the US; its ability to help India in case of problems with China: its support for India's entry as a permanent member of the Security Council, it would seem that annoying the US

might be a foreign policy blunder but lets not forget that a country's policy, foreign or domestic, is usually run by its national interest. Here too the national interest of India dictates that it must have a route (overland, by air or by sea) to Afghanistan for more diplomatic, economic and cultural relations with that country purely for its own security reasons. The US understands this and it has its own security problems in search of a neutral country that can counter Pakistan and Chinese influence in that landlocked yet strategic country. It is something of overriding importance for US security itself. The national security concerns of the two countries merge. Hence we see the positive way India is involved in the development of Chabahar port to enable it a route to Afghanistan and the Nelson's eye with which the US is watching such developments.

It is however in the Indo-Pacific theatre that the most bewildering foreign policy tactics practiced by India is most apparent. With the threat of a hostile China looming largely on our land border in the North and an aggressive Chinese naval patrolling in our own backyard, the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal, India at first

tried its best to get as many neighbouring nations as possible to befriend it. Thus we had the QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) followed closely by high level and highly publicised naval exercises with countries like the US, Japan, France etc. Then suddenly these defense posturing by India in the Indo Pacific slackened off. Today there is scarcely a leaf blowing in this direction except for other defense pacts like the AUKUS and Japan-Australia but without India. So what's going on in the Indo Pacific and in the Indian Ocean? India it seems has been blowing hot and cold in the region. Things have suddenly become cold down there or is it the Andamans and their proximity to the Malacca Straits that makes India believe it has an edge over China in that respect? Anyway the Enigma called India is making those with an interest in the region quite busy watching things develop.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

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

Sustainable development goals(SDG) and North East India

By Bhagirathi Panda

of individual states, Assam (the largest economy in the region) ranks lower than the country in 13 of the 15 SDG dimensions. This is a serious concern for the region. Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur, and Nagaland rank lower than the country in 10, 9, 9, 8 and 8 SDG dimensions respectively. This clearly shows that the NER is a comparative laggard when it comes to realisation of sustainable development.

Individual SDG Dimensions and the NER

The SDG report of NITI Aayog also provides index score for the country as a whole and various states and UTs on 17 individual SDG dimensions. Two of the SDG dimensions i.e. Life Below Water (goal No 14) and Partnerships to Achieve the Goal(Goal No 17) have not been considered for the NER. Hence, the scores for the NER are provided for 15 SDG dimensions. These 15 goals are: Goal 1: No Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger, Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 5: Gender Equality, Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, Goal 8:

ing wealth and employment in the region. Next to it, are the SDG dimensions of Good Health and Well-being(Goal No 3) and Sustainable Cities and Communities(Goal No 11). Here 7 of the states rank lower than the country's average. In the dimension of Decent Work and Economic Development (Goal No 8), 6 of the states lag behind the nation. With respect to the SDG dimensions of Quality Education (Goal No 4) and Peace and Justice, Strong Institutions (Goal No 16), 5 of the states are below the country. Similarly, in SDG Dimensions of Gender Equality (Goal No 5), Clean Water and Sanitation(Goal no 6), Affordable and Clean Energy(Goal No 7), Reduced Inequality(Goal No 10) and Life on land(Goal No 15), 50% of the states in the region rank lower than the nation's average.

Some other Relevant Key Indicators of Development

Indicators like percentage share of surfaced road to total road length, infant mortality rate(IMR), percentage of institutional delivery and gross enrolment ratio(GER) in higher education are related to sustainable development. The percentage share of

This write-up is essentially a situational analysis of the North Eastern Region (NER) of India vis-à-vis the country with regard to the SDG index and its different dimensions based on the report of NITI Aayog's SDG India Index & Dashboard 2020-21.

Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Goal 10: Reduced Inequality, Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, Goal 13: Climate Action, Goal 15: Life on Land and Goal 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions. When we position the individual states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland, they rank lower than the country in 13, 10, 9, 9, 8 and 8 numbers of these SDG dimensions respectively. It means out of 8 states in NER, 6 are worse compared to the country in majority of the SDG dimensions. In one of the most important dimensions of SDG i.e. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal No 9), all the 8 North-eastern states rank lower than the country. This dimension score is the most important one when it comes to creat-

surfaced road to total road length for the country as a whole is 72 (Basic Road Statistics, Government of India, 2021). In the NER, the share of surfaced road to total road length in all the states except Sikkim is lower than the country(Assam 23.1, Meghalaya 45, Nagaland 49.1, Manipur 56.3, Tripura 61.2, Arunachal 63.3, Mizoram 66.9 and Sikkim 76.5). The region has done reasonably well in IMR. Except, two states i.e. Assam and Meghalaya, the other six states are having better IMR than the country(Economic Survey, GOI, 2021-22). However, in another important indicator of health i.e., institutional delivery, the region does poorly. Six of its states i.e., Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh are having institutional delivery statistics which are worse than the country's average of 79. With respect to GER in higher education, 5 of the

Garoland Statehood demand re-emerges

By P Niroop

It is ironic that the demand for a separate Garoland State, should arise on the occasion of the dawn of its 50th Anniversary, of the Meghalaya State Formation (1972), or is it cropping, only on the eve of the Assembly Hustings due in early 2024? Or are there really existing faultlines in the very organisation of the internal boundaries of India, especially the North-East that gives rise to these intermittent demands for statehood, even where internal mechanisms, in the form Autonomous District Council (ADC)'s exist, to act as 'institutions of local governance' to address regional aspirations and their respective developmental needs, under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India? More so in the case Meghalaya, which is almost completely, with the exception of Shillong Municipality, covered by the said 6th Schedule of the Constitution.

Even, if it is being raked up as an election issue, what is wrong in that, as long as it points to serious anomalies, which the nation-state did not address squarely, at the time of independence from the British Rule in 1947, or at the time of re-organisation of the North-East States in 1972?

The last time the Indian Parliament addressed this issue was in 2014, when the territories of the State of the Telugu speaking Andhra Pradesh, were re-organised into a separate Telangana and the residual State of Andhra Pradesh. Even before that, the Union Government has handled the border issues arising out of the earlier linguistic reorganisation of States in 1956, between Andhra - Karnataka, Andhra - Orissa, and now it is saddled with fresh border issues between Andhra and the Telangana regions.

All this only points out to the dire need for a 'permanent States Re-organisation Commission' to have a re-look at the internal boundaries of India, based on specific criteria, like that of the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) led by Justice Fazal Ali 1955. At a time when the Union Government is contemplating having a Permanent Water Tribunal, in place of River or Basin related water Tribunals, it could even think of a Permanent SRC, to deal with the making or re-making of its flexible internal boundaries, leaving out the external boundaries, out of its scope of work, as they are inflexible. This step would go a long way in consolidating the integration of Indian States, so assiduously forged together by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel ably assisted by V.P.Menon after Indian Independence.

The demand for separate states across the country, be they, the larger statehood demands of Bundelkhand, Vidarbha in Central India, or the smaller ones like Gorkhaland, Bodoland, Garoland, Tipraland, Karbi Anglong - Dimas etc. in the North-Eastern part of India, have to be tested on the anvil of relevant criteria, which has to be fixed by Union Government after taking Parliament into confidence upon the recommendations or the proposed Permanent SRC. In the absence of a set-criteria or a federal index for adjusting the internal boundaries the states autonomy movements fall under three categories of (i) regional aspirations, (ii) assertions & (iii) adjustments.

Unfortunately, when the Telugu speaking States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh were being created in 2014, it was not based on any criteria and even earlier on when the States of Uttarakhnad, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand were created in the year 2000, they were not based on any set-criteria, but were formed only to meet the political exigencies of the moment. Whereas the linguistic organisation in 1956, based on the SRC Report and earlier on, even in British India, States-reorganisation in 1935, 1930 or 1919 was done based on set criteria. Hence if the Union Home Ministry chooses to deal with this issue, it has to not only put in place a Permanent SRC, but set the criteria for making or re-

making of internal boundaries. As such there is need for a 'Federal Index', for such an exercise to be undertaken. To the earlier criteria of 1955, for Re-organisation of States, based essentially on the linguistic criteria, as set out in para 93 of the SRC Report 1955, other relevant criteria such as regional cultural identities, shared-history and self-rule, may have to be added, to make it more comprehensive, and cure the existing fault lines in the organisation of it's internal boundaries.

"para 93- the principles that emerge may be enumerated as follows:

- (i) preservation and strengthening of the unity and security of India;
- (ii) linguistic and cultural homogeneity;
- (iii) financial, economic and administrative consideration; and
- (iv) successful working of the national plan".

But what is the need for such an exercise of re-arrangement of internal boundaries against the larger canvas of globalization? It is precisely against this backdrop that re-organisation becomes imperative, so as to derive maximum leverage, for India to emerge as a superpower, as against the other Asian giant, China. Without going into the initiatives of India's powerful neighbour, to consolidate its regional boundaries, such as Belt and Road initiative, their dominant presence in the South China Sea, apart from being active on the Indo-China border in Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh & Doklam (Bhutan border), internal changes might be disruptive. Ever since the launch of the Look East Policy of 1991 by India and re-christening of the same, as 'Act East' in 2014, not much has happened in the region for India to emerge stronger. It is necessary to look at the North-East in the context of the Himalayan as well as South-East Asian Geopolitics.

The author of this article is only pressing for the need for a Permanent SRC, to look into the issue, as against the broader philosophy of small states making for efficiency, well captured in the classic statement of E.F.Schumacher "small is beautiful - a study of economics as if people mattered".

Another pragmatic initiative which has drawn the attention of the world is the formation of Forum for Small States (FOSS) by the Singapore Government, after the process of liberalization, was set in motion in 1991. This initiative which was taken informally, at the UN had just 13 Members to begin with, drawing mainly from the Scandinavian Countries, whose population is small, when compared to the larger states. In the recently concluded UN General Assembly, the Member-States of this Forum, increased to 136 countries, across the world. What is more interesting to note is that 36 of these countries have excelled in certain areas and have gone far beyond the rest of the world. To cite a couple of examples: Bhutan has excelled in formulating Gross Domestic Happiness (GPH) in measurable terms, while Norway has excelled in topping the 'zero tolerance to corruption' list.

As against the antiquity of the idea of India in geographical terms and also the mass of historical material available, the permanent States Re-organisation, Commission, if constituted, would have to formulate a federal index, which could then be applied to any exercise of re-organisation of India's internal boundaries. Since, Sovereignty under the Indian Constitution rests on two pillars equally that, is the Union and the States, one only hopes to see India emerge stronger as a real Union of States, as envisaged in the national parchment, not just a conglomeration of territories. It is only New States with strong federal linkages that can make for a New India.

(The writer is Senior Advocate Supreme Court of India & Former Adl. Advocate-General, State of Meghalaya (2016-2018)) Email: pnirup@yahoo.co.in

"Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving."

— Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

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Crisis in IT sector

THE global Information Technology sector is in for some churning with major implications for India, which demonstrated its might, earned huge income via software exports and drew in lakhs of youths into its fold in the past three decades. Reports about layoff or job losses are streaming in. This also means a steady depression in the high-flying sector in the post-Covid period – this, after this sector managed to ably beat the Covid phase with an abrupt switch-over to the Work from Home (WfH) mode.

While WfH is continuing majorly with several IT firms, companies like Infosys have stopped the practice, calling back the staff to their offices. In recent years, the IT sector growth was pushed also by the linking of mobile phones to a whole set of IT services. This caused a boom in hyper-activity in the software sector. Cities like Bengaluru benefited hugely from this, though most IT offices in the southern city remained closed for the 2019-21 term. Impacted by global recessionary trends, the fall in the IT market is resulting in job losses of the order of over 2.2 lakh in the post-Covid phase. Over 50 lakh educated techies are employed in the Indian IT sector, while large numbers of Indian youths, male and female, are manning IT offices across the world, principally in the US.

Exports from the Indian IT sector was expected to touch \$350 billion in the next five years, with the lead being maintained by the states of Karnataka, followed by Maharashtra and Telangana. As per last year's figures, Karnataka's software exports were of \$58 billion or Rs 2 lakh crore, while that of Maharashtra Rs 1 lakh crore and of Telangana (Hyderabad) Rs 70,000 crore. Note the fact that Telangana state's annual budget now is just three times this figure – its IT sector growth having started from zero in 1995. The gain for India from the IT sector, which started building its might from small beginnings in the mid-1980s, is also that it changed the profile of India in the comity of nations of it being a tech-giant, in the Information Technology sector. It is not just that a large workforce from India pushed the global IT sector growth but also that Indians started occupying lead positions in US-based software companies. The latest news is of Facebook's parent company Meta appointing an Indian woman techie as its new India head. Salaries for top IT techies are unimaginable and comparable with the best in the management fields. Fact also is that a large number of techies in lower levels are exploited with low salaries, in India as well as in the US through contract employment.

Election 2023: Tell us your future plans; don't harp on the past

By Patricia Mukhim

Roads in a wretched condition

Chief Minister Conrad Sangma is a man in a hurry. Naturally he has to use the chopper to reach from one inaugural programme to the next. In the bargain he misses out on the big picture – the most horrendous condition of our roads including those close to and within the State Capital. The other day the CM made a surprise landing at Union Christian College and from there had to be picked up by his entourage. Alas those riding on SUVs do not really see the miserable road condition that daily commuters on those roads have to suffer. They include farmers from beyond Mawlyndep; teachers of UCC who have to commute daily on that most bumpy and dusty road and other ordinary mortals. Tourists that wish to visit some of the swanky resorts in the area around the Umiam Lake question why the resort owners don't make common cause on the disgraceful state of the roads. Last heard was that the tendering process for this road that cuts through to Eastern West Khasi Hills was completed a long time ago but the construction work is not in sight. Let's face some facts. Roads have never been as decrepit as they are under the MDA regime. These days no one wants to visit Shnongpdeng or Dawki or even Sohra unless they are hardcore off-road vehicle drivers. For the uninitiated an off-road trip is an adventure ride on a vehicle meant to be driven off the paved or gravel surface over huge craters and for the driver to still enjoy the ride. For ordinary commuters these journeys are back-breaking. Think of pregnant women being compelled to ride on such roads! Yet we all watch in utter helplessness as if it's our destiny to ride on these bad roads fifty years after Meghalaya was created. A silent public deserves these roads, I guess!

Agriculture, Horticulture and Veterinary:

In the last six months we have seen too many programmes that are aimed at simply doling out cash in the name of supporting farmers. What we are not told is (a) what are the farmers going to spend the one time payment of Rs 5000 on? (b) How did the Government/Agriculture Department work out that Rs 5000 is enough for farmers to upscale their production? Has any farmer spoken publicly as to how he/she is going to use the money? We have seen several piglets that have been distributed but have died. Some of these piglets were thrown away in the forests on the way to NEIGRIHMS. Only after the Shnong was

informed did they take action and bury those piglets. It's fine to distribute piglets and chicken but what are the survival rates? Does anyone ever do a follow up in Meghalaya? The mortality rate of piglets brought in from outside the state is very high. The Veterinary Department does not have the facilities to acclimatize the piglets before distributing them to farmers. Yet public money has been invested in these piglets. Who is keeping track of the

melting youth energy (c) Is Meghalaya a transit state for drugs or a consumer state? (d) Are there enough recreation centres for the youth of the State? These questions are critical to developing a more pragmatic youth policy, rather than a policy that is theoretical in nature.

This writer has spoken to several young people and tried to understand their anxieties. A common complaint is the absence of good swimming pools that are

"The other day the CM made a surprise landing at Union Christian College and from there had to be picked up by his entourage. Alas those riding on SUVs do not really see the miserable road condition that daily commuters on those roads have to suffer. They include farmers from beyond Mawlyndep; teachers of UCC who have to commute daily on that most bumpy and dusty road and other ordinary mortals. Tourists that wish to visit some of the swanky resorts in the area around the Umiam Lake question why the resort owners don't make common cause on the disgraceful state of the roads."

dead piglets across the state and how much money has gone down the drain? And no, asking these pertinent questions is not politicizing the issue.

Sports in Meghalaya:

Let's now come to Sports in Meghalaya. The successful completion of the 2nd North East Olympic Games and naturally CM Conrad Sangma was seen posing with the athletes with a wide grin on his face. Sports officials, the Meghalaya Olympics Association and various other verticals in the Sports Department and also the DC's office worked relentlessly to ensure that the games passed off well. However, Meghalaya cannot rest on its laurels as far as Sports is concerned. The State needs better infrastructure that is equal to or better than that of Manipur. The young have been sufficiently enthused to take up various games and they have excelled in quite a few and this without much coaching but through sheer grit and determination. The question that needs to be out to those that wish to contest the 2023 elections are (a) How much do they care about sports as an activity that will make the young expend their energy positively? (b) The State should conduct research on why the youth take to drugs instead of blowing their trumpet each time there is a drugs haul. This answer is critical to chan-

accessible to any young person with an interest in the game. Other than the Crinoline Swimming Pool, which other public swimming pool is there in the entire state of Meghalaya? Now that rivers have become shallow drains, swimming in such rivers is no longer tenable. There are those who wish to play badminton but find no 'venue' now after the NSCA stadium is being razed to the ground to accommodate some government infrastructure. The correct thing to do would have been to first construct a state-of-the-art indoor stadium before demolishing the old one. Consider Table Tennis for instance. Where can those interested in the game play? Only elite spaces like clubs and hotels have these facilities. How can an ordinary youth with a love of the game play it? Only a few schools and colleges have a football ground or a basketball court. They don't invest in other sporting infrastructure. We hardly hear of schools and colleges trying to expand the breadth of sporting activities other than the predictable ones.

And now as we head for the elections we would also like to ask the Government where it will stock the EVMs and where the counting of votes will be held in Shillong and other district headquarters. The last thing we want to hear is that the JN Stadium will be

used for election purposes. This should not be allowed at any cost because it would reduce a sporting arena to a free for all government infrastructure. A stadium is for sports activities and not for accommodating every programme that is unrelated to sports. Please spare all the sporting arenas from use during elections as this sends out a very distressing signal for sports enthusiasts who need to practice daily and cannot have a break whenever the Government decides to arbitrarily turn a stadium into a vote-counting arena. Voting is not a sport and the sooner the Meghalaya Government realizes this the better.

Those holding office in different sporting associations must put pressure on the Government not to misuse sporting venues and stadia for anything else other than sports. For this to happen these associations need to maintain their autonomy and speak up on behalf of the voiceless sports persons instead of seeing themselves as part of the Government.

Meghalaya has to sow the seeds of sporting ambition in the youth and provide them that much-needed coaching. Above all, Meghalaya must seek central assistance to beef up its sports infrastructure. Officers of the Sports Department say that the scheme 'Khelo India' has helped to take the message of sports as an integral part of education to every corner of Meghalaya. This is encouraging provided it is implemented in letter and spirit.

For too long sports has been a neglected issue in Meghalaya. This time it has to feature in the election manifesto of all political parties. Any political party that does not give due importance to sports does not deserve the votes of the youth population.

Conclusion:

Finally, what Meghalaya urgently needs before the 2023 elections is a Town Hall type of discussion where ministers will be asked to interact with and answer questions from the public. That's how we can judge their performance in the last five years. Next we can call the political parties and their candidates and ask them what they have to say about Sports, Agriculture and Veterinary, Roads and other means of communication, Health and Nutrition and Education. We need to hear what vision the candidates have for the people of Meghalaya for the next 20 years.

For this to happen media houses should come together and organize these Town Hall (public platform) meetings. This would be an important public service.

Making Shillong City more livable

By Rudi Warjri

Sometime ago I had written about the need for the Shillong Governing Authority. My suggestion was a result of the symposia held at IIM Shillong on "Improving Mobility in Shillong City," with the subject of traffic jams as the main issue. Last week the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) launched the Citizen Perception Survey (CPS) 2022. CPS is a part of the Ease of Living Index 2022 that aims to capture the opinion of citizens about the quality of life in their city; economic ability and sustainability. <https://eol2022.org/citizenfeedback>

A Workbook - Making a City Smart - Learnings from Smart Cities Mission, was also released. https://smartnet.niua.org/sites/default/files/resources/making_a_city_smart_mar2021.pdf. Prescribed mainly for decision makers, urban planners, policy makers and practitioners the above would also be useful for academic institutions, students and general awareness of the populace in general.

CPS contains the following questionnaires!

Q1. How do you commute in your city? Motorised Personal vehicle (Car, Bike, Scooter); Non-motorised Personal vehicle (Cycle, push scooters); Public transport; **Q2.** Do you rent a house or own a house? **Q3.** How often do you face power outage in your house? (1 being rarely and 5 being frequently); **Q4.** How satisfied are you with the availability of water supply in your house? (1 being dissatisfied and 5 being satisfied); **Q5.** Rate the quality of water supply in your house (1 being the dirtiest and 5 being the cleanest); **Q6.** How affordable are health-care services in your city? (1 being not affordable and 5 being affordable); **Q6A.** How accessible are health-care services in your city? (1 being not accessible and 5 being accessible); **Q7.** How do you rate the quality of education facilities in your city? (1 being not affordable and 5 being affordable); **Q7A.** How accessible are education facilities in your city? (1 being not accessible and 5 being accessible); **Q7B.** How do you rate the quality of education facilities in your city? (1 being lowest and 5 being highest); **Q8.** How easy is it to find employment opportunities in your city? (1 being the hardest and 5 being the easiest); **Q9.** How do you rate the level of air pollution in your city? (1 being lowest and 5 being highest); **Q10.** How do you rate cleanliness in your city? (1 being dirty and 5 being clean); **Q11.** Are there adequate recreational facilities (Parks, sports complex, theatre/cinema halls, etc.) in your city? (1 being inadequate and 5 being adequate); **Q12.** How easy is it to travel in your city? (1 being the hardest and 5 being the easiest); **Q13.** How safe do you feel in your city? (1 being very unsafe and 5 being very safe); **Q14.** How would you rate the cost of living in your city? (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest); **Q15.** How easy is it to walk in your city? (1 being the hardest and 5 being the easiest); **Q16.** How would you rate your interaction with your municipality? (1 being bad and 5 being good); **Q17.** How likely would you recommend the city to a friend or a relative looking for a place to live? (1 being very unlikely and 5 being most likely);

Citizens of Shillong city are requested to visit url <https://eol2022.org/citizen-feedback> and please answer the questionnaires.

Smart Cities Mission Vision :

The purpose of the Smart Cities Mission is to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local area development and harnessing technology, especially technology that leads to Smart.

What is a Smart City? City that works for migrant workers and their families; City that leverages its local

strength and retains young talent (Agnes Nongrum a student of National Institute of Technology, Shillong - co founded a food start up that procures organic jack fruit and sells it across India via e-commerce; City that promotes a green and healthy future

Why a Smart City? Inclusion; Engagement; Resilience; Adaptability; Healthy Urban Environment; Resource Conservation and Regeneration; Connectivity; Safety and Security; Responsible Technology; More from Less;

How to determine what's a Smart City? Build a Small Crack team; Sense the city through research and data; Identify your Stake holders; Sense the city by engaging with stakeholder groups and communities; Innovate; Do things differently; A business as usual attitude won't make your city smart; Put together a draft Smart City; Plan using an ORK + A Framework; Ensure that the Smart City Plan projects are bankable; Determine in the Smart city plan how your city is contributing towards the country's international commitments; deploy technology effectively; write the smart city plan but remember to keep the plan flexible and iterative;

The Smart Cities Mission is guided by the following core principles:

1. Citizens at the core: Citizens are involved in every stage of Smart City development. 2. More from less: Smart Cities strive to generate more impact and outcomes from use of less resources- energy, finance and others. 3. cooperative and competitive federalism: cooperative collaboration and healthy competition between States and cities. 4. Convergence: Smart Cities are focused on creation of integrated infrastructure and services, promotion of circular economy and sustainable habitats through convergence of financial resources and programs. 5. Technology as a means, and not the goal: Technology enables and provides speed and scale but is not the end result of smart city development. 6. Inclusiveness: Cities are for all people irrespective of age, gender, background and ability and hence they have to be inclusive to be smart.

As of 2018 there are over 4, 300 statutory towns and cities in India with 40 crore inhabitants. This is expected to double by 2050. So far in the 100 cities in India, work has been completed in 4436 projects amounting to Rs 75,827 cr out of a sanctioned 2,05,018 cr.

Considering the humongous number of towns and cities in India the CPS is largely indicative and not exhaustive. What is lacking in the CPS is however covered extensively in the Workbook. The Workbook provides the format, methods, techniques and tools that would enable each city in India to address its particular needs. It serves as a convenient guide to address the exceptional needs of growing city like Greater Shillong where three fourths of the area comes under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution and outside the jurisdiction of the Municipality.

The website of the MoHUA also contains information with regards to city awareness programme such as billboards and hoardings; campaigns; print media; innovative initiatives; wall graffiti; referral survey promotion; digital media with a scoring chart on each of them.

The Meghalaya Government portal only mentions the Office of the Shillong Smart City Ltd. There is no other information except for some tenders relating to multi-level parking at Motphran. Inter alia it is opportune to immediately involve civil societies already active in waste management, cleaning of rivers, environmental groups etc like Operation Clean Up, Green Tech Meghalaya, Team Jiva, Project Clean Surrounding and many others.

(The writer is a former diplomat)

Letters to the Editor

Idle chatter feeds busy rumours

Editor,

In response to Albert Thymiang's rejoinder on the 'hearsay' letter, I, once again vehemently stress on the point that false accusations and allegations against any person or body of persons and especially any generalizations made in particular are erroneous. The accusations should be more specific and supported by proof or evidence. With reference to job recruitments in the MPSC, I would like to state that the present recruitment is based purely on how much the candidates have scored in the Written Examination since 87.5% is taken from the written examination and only 12.5% is taken from the personal interview. So if candidates have performed well in the written examination then they will easily sail through.

The marks secured by candidates in the written examination are kept strictly confidential and there is no chance of manipulation at any stage. Everything is

based purely on merit as recruitment of suitable persons is of utmost importance. If a candidate is certain that he has scored well in the written examination but has not got the job then he can file a representation under the Right to Information Act.

It is so easy to say that he has failed in the personal interview because he was asked to pay a certain amount but he couldn't afford it. He's just an immature self-absorbed person who is trying to blame the system without having put his best foot forward. If there are recruits who claim that they have borrowed money to secure a government job, then they should be called cowards for not coming out in the open to name those they have paid bribes to. I feel that they are equally guilty for not doing so. What about those youths who have succeeded purely on merit? Shouldn't they be applauded for having faith in the system and putting all their hard work and efforts into clearing the written examination? What I am trying to emphasise is that insensitive generalizations are uncalled for and reflect on the character of the person making the unfounded

accusations.

The main reason why I retained my anonymity was to present a general unbiased opinion but since it seems to have created an uproar, I would like to state that I am currently a member of the MPSC and have been here for over four years and we have been trying very hard to cleanse the system and to redeem its tarnished image. I also proudly declare that I come from a family where moral values have been deeply ingrained in us by our parents to develop our character to be persons of integrity. My husband, who is at present a member of the Rajya Sabha, and I try equally hard to make sure that our children and grandchildren are embedded with these beliefs and ideals. Whatever my children have successfully achieved in their life and careers have been purely on merit and by God's grace and not because of having any political affiliations.

Honesty, truth and decency all link together and with these values we can improve our families, communities and our society. Integrity is the seed for achievement. It is the principle that never

fails. Never judge someone's character based on the words of another. Instead, study the motives behind the words of the person making unfounded allegations. Making accusations and condemning someone without actually knowing all the facts is a tactic of abuse used as a 'guilt trip.' Therefore, it would be wise to say that, in future, pointing fingers at any one or at any group of persons is unacceptable.

The only solution in such circumstances would be to file a defamation suit against such persons but that would be the last option out of respect for your position as a columnist with a religious background.

Yours etc.,
Corina Lyngdoh,
Shillong-3

Pathetic road condition

Editor,

Through your esteemed newspaper I would like to highlight the plight of the road a few metres away from Dobasipara Petrol Station leading to Tura-Dalu national highway-51. This short stretch has remained

incomplete for the last 3 years and has been left in the same pathetic condition with no signs of completion in the coming days. The said stretch has become a nightmare with all the bumpy tracks and unevenness. Add to that the dust that spirals out from all the vehicles plying daily on this road. The condition of the same road during rainy seasons is even worse to maneuver for 2-wheeler drivers due to heavy trucks and dumpers plying daily making it slippery and dangerous. I request the concerned Department and the Union Transport Ministry to kindly speed up the process of levelling and black topping the stretch as it has already been three years with no sign of work taking place. The people from this area feel neglected due to the prolonged delay in completion of the roads.

Yours etc.,
Jordan Ch. Marak,
Via email

Well done Meghalaya!

Editor,

The just concluded North East Olympic Games

(NEOG) has brought glory to the state. The different venues and the infrastructure were of national standard. Through the NEOG our sportspersons have come to know where they stand. Besides, all the top people in sports administration were here from all the states of North East India and the rest of the country too as officials and coaches. They were also keen on bringing more national events to Meghalaya. The State Government and Meghalaya Olympic Association should cash in on this feel-good factor and push their agenda forward.

There were small hiccups here and there but the end result was excellent!

I congratulate the State Government and the Meghalaya Olympic Association for bringing the NEOG to Shillong and organizing it in such a professional manner.

Yours etc.,
Ajay Gupta,
Via email

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"Art is the path to being spiritual."

— Piet Mondrian

The Shillong Times

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Toothless Meghalaya Lokayukta

THE Meghalaya Lokayukta Act 2014 came about after a protracted struggle by civil society activists, mainly the Thma U Rangli U Juki (TUR) which had engaged extensively with the government to constitute this anti-corruption forum. According to the Act the Lokayukta should comprise of a Chairperson and a maximum of four other members of whom 50% percent will be judicial members. In Meghalaya this clause was ignored. Justice Mushahary functioned as a one-man army. The Lokayukta as an institution is only as strong as the citizens allow it to be. If people do not make complaints the Lokayukta would have little work since it cannot take up any case suo-moto. During the tenure of Justice Mushahary several cases were taken up pertaining to illegal coal mining and transportation. The Lokayukta then had become a thorn in the flesh of the MDA government.

The 2014 Act clearly states that the Chairperson of the Lokayukta should be a retired Chief Justice or Judge of a High Court or an eminent person with 25 years of experience in matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management. The members of the Lokayukta too are expected to either be from the judiciary or persons of eminence as required for the appointment of a Lokayukta. The amended Act of June 2021 however, confers discretion on the government to constitute a single or multi-member Lokayukta keeping in mind the size of the state, number of cases and financial implications in maintaining a multi-member Lokayukta. This amendment too came only after the Meghalaya High Court asked the State Government to file an affidavit as to when it would constitute a fully functional Lokayukta. The 2021 amendment to the Meghalaya Lokayukta Act waters down the very purpose of this institution. By appointing a one-man Lokayukta who is a non-judicial person and adding words like 'person of eminence' to define a retired bureaucrat which inter-alia is a subjective term the Government has all but defeated the purpose of the Lokayukta.

The MDA Government appointed the Lokayukta only after the Supreme Court directed the State to complete the process of constituting this body at the earliest. Only then did the selection committee comprising the Chief Minister, Speaker of the Assembly, Leader of Opposition, Chief Justice of the Meghalaya High Court, eminent person nominated by the Governor do their job. The selection committee then nominated a 5-member search committee which zeroed in on the name of Mushahary who retired in May 2021. Following the amended Act the need for a person with judicial background to head the Lokayukta was also done away with. The Lokayukta today is a toothless body that is there only to fulfil mandate set by the supreme court. No government would want a strong Lokayukta. Hence this institution is as good as not being there.

In the G-20 Summit at Bali, India will be handed over the presidency of the most powerful economic group and will host the 18th summit next year. As is his wont, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will add an Indian flavour to the summit. He did say so while taking off to Bali to participate in the summit, "India's G-20 presidency will be grounded in the theme, 'vasudheva kutumbakam' (world is family), or One earth, One family, One future". This underlines the message of equitable growth and shared future for all. It is, indeed, a powerful line of emotive thinking.

India may transmit such a message to the world body, as Swami Vivekananda did in his iconic speech on 11 September 1893, to "world's parliament of religions", at Chicago. His address to Americans as sisters and brothers shook as well as touched their hearts. However, the moot point is how much India benefits economically from Modi's leadership of G-20 for a year?

G-20 consists of strong economies of the world, represents 85 per cent of the global GDP, 75 per cent of the global trade and 66 per cent of the world population. It began as G-7 in 1970s in response to the spikes in prevailing food and fuel prices. It came to be known as G-8 when Russia joined it in 1996. However, in the late 1990s, the financial crises affected a number of emerging economies in Latin America and Asia, threatening to spill over G-8 countries. That is when the G-8 countries began to expand to include other countries. After some experimentation, a solid grouping of 20 countries, G-20 was created in 1999 that included countries from global South to make it more inclusive and egalitarian. This group was a great improvement on elitist G-8, and different from the unwieldy 38-member OECD --- Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development.

Now, the G-20 comprises Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the UK, the US and the European Union. Spain is a permanent invitee. In addition, the special invitees are called in its summit.

This year, the invitees include Cambodia, Fiji, Netherlands, Rwanda, Senegal, Singapore, Suriname and the UAE. Also heads of several international agencies and regional bodies attend the summits. In Bali, those attending are UN, IMF, ASEAN and the African Union. The Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) has also invited the Ukrainian President Zelenskyy to address the summit virtually.



There is a troika of leadership consisting of the past president of G-20, the current and the future. For now, the troika is made by Italy, Indonesia and India. The next one will consist of Indonesia, India and Brazil, marking the transition of leadership from North to the South. Note that the summit is a combination of several ministerial meetings and working groups that have been at work for the past one year in the key priority areas, in the run-up to the summit.

The slogan of the Bali summit was 'recover together and recover stronger'. It comprised three sessions: food and energy security, health partnerships for global infrastructure, and investment and digital transformation. Besides these working sessions, the G-20 leaders discussed key issues of global economy, environment, climate change and agriculture. To highlight the concerns about the climate change, President Jokowi invited and escorted his guests to the Indonesian mangroves and planted mangroves at the Ngruh Rai forest park; mangroves act as bio-shields against extreme climate change.

The summit took place against a backdrop which

was neither desirable nor conducive to world peace, progress and security. The challenges in the environment, especially that of climate change, lack of progress in the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and the perilous impact of Covid pandemic, the struggle for economic recovery, debt vulnerabilities, and to top it all, the ongoing war in Ukraine and its tragic consequences on food and energy security

and inflation etc. The joint declaration issued after the summit which is based on consensus, covered a wide range of issues and concerns encapsulated in 52 points in 17 pages.

All eyes were on the war on Ukraine, which loomed large on the summit. The declaration said, "Most members strongly condemned the war in Ukraine and stress it is causing, immense human suffering and exacerbating existing fragilities in the global economy --- constraining growth, increasing inflation, disrupting supply chains, heightening energy and food insecurity, and elevating financial stability risks. There were other views and different assessments of the situation and sanctions. Recognising that the G20 is not the forum to resolve security issues, we acknowledge that security issues can have significant consequences for the global economy". From the statement, it's clear that not all member states condemned Russian action against Ukraine.

The second assertion made in para 4 of the declaration is, "It is essential to uphold international law and the multilateral system that safeguards peace and stability... The use or threat of nuclear weapons is inad-

missible. The peaceful resolution of conflicts, efforts to address crisis, as well as diplomacy and dialogue, are vital. Today's era must not be of war". The last sentence echoes and reiterates verbatim the argument made by Modi to Russian President Vladimir Putin at Samarkand in Uzbekistan. He had said, "I know that today's era is not an era of war, and I spoken to you on phone about this." Subsequently, this was endorsed by French President Emmanuel Macron and by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during his tour of India.

Now, on India taking over the presidency, what should we expect as New Delhi's contribution to G-20 and benefits it will accrue for the country. On his departure to Bali, Modi had suggested that India's presidency will focus on green development, Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), digital transformation, inclusive and resilient growth, women-led development, a greater voice of developing countries in the global south in the economic world order and the need to reform the 21st century world institutions.

Admittedly, India begins the presidency of the most advanced economies from 1 December at a time of economic hardships and political polarisation in the world. A positive signal that came from Bali is that a joint declaration could be produced despite differences and division on the war in Ukraine. India had obviously a hand in drafting this declaration and its leadership has played a balancing and reconciling role in many such summits. Hopefully it will maintain that pragmatic role while hosting the G-20 and SCO in 2023 as their president. Moreover, New Delhi needs to ensure full participation of the countries in both these groupings, including China and Pakistan. New Delhi is planning to host about 200 meetings in the run up to the summit in September 2023.

Unarguably, the important strategic point to bear in mind is to prepare for and count the benefits resulting out of these meetings for India, which means the immediate restructuring of the Indian political and economic environment, to adapt to and receive international investment and cooperation. ---INFA (The writer is Prof. International Relations, JIMMC)

In India, caste matters

By Martin Macwan

The successful agitation of Gujarat, the 'Patidar Andolan', demanding reservation brought us to the 103rd amendment to the Constitution of India, granting 10 per cent reservation on the basis of economic criteria. It is claimed that this reservation for economically weaker sections (EWS) is not based on caste. But taking into consideration that in India there is no class without caste, this reservation is without doubt based on caste and specifically for the so-called "forward" castes.

First, this EWS which is reservation for the poor amongst the forward castes alone, who have always benefited from their caste identity, has directly challenged the acclaimed Gujarat model of development. The move spells out clearly that the Gujarat model has not brought development even for the forward castes. Second, if there is development in Gujarat, it is not for the poor. Third, the so-called development model has only increased the gap between the rich and the poor. Fourth, for the poor in India, irrespective of their caste status, the surest way to development is only through reservation.

For the first time, the reservation policy has expanded the scope of reservation wherein the reservation for EWS also covers private educational institutions, irrespective of whether they are funded by the State or not. The UPA-I government had publicly stated its commitment to expand caste-based reservations to the private sector, but that has become history --- and is rarely mentioned now in public discourse.

The EWS reservation also covers recruitment in the public sector. Strangely, the eligibility criteria fixed is Rs. 8 lakh income (and not the wealth). As compared to this, the eligibility of SC and ST members for many welfare schemes is fixed at Rs. 2.5 lakh. The only exception to the latter is the Rs. 6 lakh income criteria for SC girl students and no income limit for ST girl students. The 103rd constitutional amendment has brought about a new category of Indian citizens, the "backward forward castes (Pachhat savarn)". For OBCs, the eligibility for reservations combines economic, social and educational backwardness whereas the EWS has considered only the sole criteria of income eligibility.

The majority judgement of the Supreme Court has brought to the fore an uneasy reality that there can be two sets of "conscience" among the apex court judges, both contradictory to one another, even on critical issues such as what actions might be "unconstitutional" or "against the basic structure" of the constitution. Two of the three judges of the majority view have been the judges of the Gujarat High Court before their elevation to the apex court. The representation of SC, ST or OBC on the concerned constitutional bench has been absent. The institution of caste-based reservations in India has had a long history which produced scientific and rational data to prove beyond doubt that such reservation was a necessity to ensure the basic tenet of the constitution so that in a true sense, all citizens can be "equal".

The social disability arising out of the caste system in general and the practices of untouchability in particular, brought about not only the structured under-representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the consequent inequality but also validated grounds for such inequality to perpetuate. The same applies to the OBC reservations where their eligibility has been rigorously decided based on a long list of criteria.

Has there been the same level of rigour and scientific data to validate EWS reservation for the general castes? What have been the compelling realities to legitimise the EWS reservations for the Supreme Court to set

aside the 50% ceiling it had set for the total reservations in India? There have been a number of State proposals for enhanced quotas that have been turned down by the Supreme Court only on the ground that the 50% ceiling cannot be breached.

Whereas the Supreme Court nod to extension of only EWS reservation to the private sector and the relaxation of the 50% ceiling has been a curious case. The Supreme Court did not ever care to suggest a system to ensure that the representation of unreserved class-caste did not exceed 50%, as was done in pre-independent India by the progressive King Sahoo Maharaj of Kolhapur. One wonders why the position of the Supreme Court has not been so liberal in the case of reservations for Christians and Muslims converted from the caste considered untouchable. One has heard little about the views of the Supreme Court on the unsuccessful attempts to secure equitable representation of women in the State Assemblies and Parliament.

The Indian Parliament has witnessed little debate about the non-implementation of the reservation policy in various States for SC and ST groups, especially in the public sector recruitment. It has also seen little debate on the non-implementation of revolutionary post-independence land reform legislations in favour of SC and STs (in the former State of Saurashtra, the implementation of land reforms in favour of the Patidar community was complete). This was considered a very important step aiming at the redistribution of means of production and thus the reduction of structural economic inequality. It has also seen little debate on the forgotten plan of UPA-I to extend caste-based reservations to the private sector. There is virtually no debate in the Parliament before extending at the end of every 10-year period the caste-based reservations in the political sphere --- the only sphere where the constituent assembly had suggested a 10-year limit to debate and assess the impact and outcome of caste-based political reservations on effective representation of the SC and ST communities in the politics of the nation.

To me it appears a natural consequence of the 103rd amendment that it will create vigorous arguments for dismantling of the caste-based reservation system, and/or it will inch closer to a system of 100% reservation in India based on the caste census to ensure universal representation proportional to the population. In either case it amounts to the same thing --- dismantling the caste-based reservation system and negating its purpose.

In the case of caste-based reservations, the objective of the constitution framers was to eliminate the structural exclusion and discrimination based on caste and to ensure their effective representation. In the case of EWS quota, the logic is to reassert the supremacy of the caste over the class, without saying so.

Gujarat had witnessed a series of bloody anti-reservation riots in 1981, 1985 and in 1989 as had happened in other parts of the country too. Both, the caste-based reservations and the introduction of the Prevention of SC and ST Atrocities ACT, have been most fiercely debated issues in almost all seminars. However, there is complete silence on the question of the EWS quota.

In the end, the question is: Will India ever rise to be a nation free of caste and untouchability? The dream of Dr. Ambedkar of caste annihilation has now ceased to be even a slogan.

(The writer is the founder of Navsarjan, a grassroots Dalit organisation fighting for human rights and has also served as a convener of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Eastern wisdom and Western intellectuals

Editor,
Soon after the recent release of the German edition of my research-based book 'Great Minds on India,' by Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma I was able to have conversations with many curious people. I just told them that I'm just one of the learners so far as the vastness of ancient wisdom is concerned. Some even persistently asked me to write on the Sanskrit language and how it bowed over the top European scholars. I really felt that I should take it head-on. Of course, the light of knowledge should not at all be the cause of fear!

It is because of the incredible richness of the Sanskrit language that a renowned linguist, Sir William Jones, who came to India as a judge, first translated Kalidasa's Shakuntala from the original Sanskrit into English in 1789. There is a fascinating story concerning how this English scholarly gentleman learnt Sanskrit, which I will keep for a later date. This translation of Shakuntala by Sir Jones immediately stirred the minds and hearts of top European intellectuals that included Johann Goethe, Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Schiller, August Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt etc. Deeply impressed by the language and its philosophi-

cal framework, the father of German literature - J. Goethe, was also inspired to learn Sanskrit. Later he was immersed in this ancient play Shakuntala for about thirty years. This is a fact he disclosed to many of his friends. He even wrote a poem praising this play. Again, another German scholar George Forster translated Kalidasa's work into German in 1791. Within a few decades, "forty-six" translations were brought out in fourteen European languages. Just imagine how the Oriental became the subject of fascination for European geniuses.

Later the translation of the Bhagavad Gita by Charles Wilkin in 1784 and Upanishads by a French researcher Anquetil Duperron in 1801 again opened up "unprecedented vistas" for the philosophical regeneration hitherto "unknown" in European literature. The most celebrated German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer proclaimed, "Upanishads are the solace of my life and they will be the solace of my death. They are the product of the highest wisdom". The universal wisdom of Vedanta, such as the 'Oneness of the universe', interdependence and interconnection of all entities and all particles, seemed very convincing to all those knowledge seekers from the West.

Again, one of the fathers of modern linguistics, Franz Bopp and a great philosopher Friedrich Schlegel, both from Germany, laid the "revolutionary foundation" of comparative linguistics by liberally borrowing from Panini's Ashtadhyayi which was later further developed by the language geniuses like Ferdinand de Saussure, Leonard Bloomfield and Noam Chomsky. Panini's work consists of about 3959 sutras that can handle the nuances and intricacies of any language in the universe.

Being astonished by the depth of the Sanskrit language, a renowned American linguist, Leonard Bloomfield, exclaims, "It was in India, however, that there arose a body of knowledge which was destined to revolutionize European ideas about language. Panini's Grammar taught Europeans to analyze speech forms; when one compared the constituent parts, the resemblances, which hitherto had been vaguely recognized, could be set forth with certainty and precision." Yes, here at home, we prefer to call Sanskrit a dead language but are quick to embrace German, Spanish and French when choosing to learn languages.

There are countless western scholars and scientists who have overwhelmingly acknowledged the exceptional richness of the Sanskrit language, wherein they saw an "immense scope" in the development of any area of study. Voltaire, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Emerson, Henry Thoreau, William Blake, Leo Tolstoy, TS Eliot, Niels Bohr, Schrödinger, Heisenberg, Oppenheimer, Mark Twain, Carl Jung, J. D. Salinger, and others either learned Sanskrit or

studied Sanskrit literature to strengthen their intellectual prowess. Frankly speaking, those people's thoughts and opinions also became a source of inspiration to this writer as well.

One of the most outstanding modern scientists, Niels Bohr, once confided, "I go into the Upanishads to ask questions". Bohr made unparalleled contributions to the studies of atomic structure and quantum theory, for which he received the Nobel Prize in 1922. TS Eliot never fell behind in praising the Sanskrit language. In one of his works, he burst in appreciation of the ancient texts: "Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year in the mazes of Patanjali's metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, left me in a state of enlightened mystification". Patanjali's Yoga sutra is a highway that takes you to the door of enlightenment. It says by practising yoga "alone," one can feel that God and a human being is "not-different".

Here are a few questions I wish to raise. Had all these acclaimed western writers and thinkers gone out of their minds to heap praises on Sanskrit and its literary treasure troves? I strongly believe that we need to sit and introspect. The light of knowledge should not be eclipsed by a load of prejudice. One feels that the dawn of a new day should inspire us to feel and appreciate the "sunshine" that helps nourish our minds and hearts.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gawali,
Shillong

Distressing Children's Day memories

Editor,
Abolitionist leader and author Frederick Douglass in 1855, in a dialogue with white-slave owners about the immortality of slavery, wrote, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." The goal is to equip and empower our young people while they're young so that when they become adults they're in a better emotional, mental, spiritual, financial, and/or physical position than we are in today.

Every year, Children's Day is celebrated across India on November 14. Jawaharlal Nehru was a great advocate for children's rights and for an all-inclusive education system.

Children's Day is a greatly anticipated day, as students look forward to seeing their teachers put up performances in schools for their entertainment. This is also the day when children are showered with a lot of love, gifts and pampering. Children's Day this year, however, was observed slightly differently in Loreto Convent Shillong. We the parents were greeted in the morning by an SMS from the Principal of the School stating that Children's Day was a

celebration of childhood, innocence and happiness. But when our daughters returned from school at noon after the celebrations they were distraught and afraid. We were told that their phones were confiscated, bags were checked in their absence and what should have been a joyful day turned to something that would scar their minds forever.

Adolescent children are at a vulnerable and emotional age and such incidents can scar them for life. In 2011 a class 9 girl from the same school had lost her precious life when she jumped from the school building after the school authorities had confiscated her phone. We, the parents, have no objection to the school checking and disallowing phones during school days. However, during Children's Day celebrations or any school event the children are eager to carry phones to school to record memories of the celebrations.

The school is maintaining a stoic silence and has not informed the parents about the incident. I request the school to kindly treat the children in a more humane manner.

Yours etc.,
An affected parent
(Name withheld on request)
Via email

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The Foundational Leader

Contemporary Indian history is incomplete without the mention of Jawaharlal Nehru. The impact of various decisions that he made as Independent India's first Prime Minister has been long-lasting.

Nehru was born on November 14, 1889 to a wealthy Kashmiri Brahmin family settled in Allahabad. His father, Motilal Nehru, had a flourishing law practice at the Allahabad High Court. Although always surrounded by people at home, Nehru's childhood was 'sheltered and uneventful'.

His private tutor, Ferdinand T. Brooks, helped him develop an aptitude for reading and initiated him into the world of science: "We rigged up a little laboratory and there I used to spend long and interesting hours working [on] our experiments in elementary physics and chemistry."

In his teens, Nehru was impressed by Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. He thought of India's freedom and "Asiatic freedom from the thralldom of Europe", and nationalist ideas filled his mind.

In May 1905, he set sail for England for further studies. After two years at Harrow, Nehru joined Trinity College, Cambridge. It was there that he read Meredith Townsend's 'Asia and Europe', which influenced his political thoughts.

Meanwhile, back home, Nehru's father had got active in politics. Though he was happy with the development, Nehru did not "agree with his politics", possibly because his father was too much of a moderate. He completed his higher education from the University of Cambridge in 1910, studied law, was called to the Bar, and finally returned to India after a seven-year stay in England to begin a law practice.

STEPPING INTO POLITICS

Nehru's first political foray was a speech at a public meeting, sometime in 1915, to protest against an anti-free press law.

"As soon as the meeting was over, Dr Tej Bahadur Sapru, to my great embarrassment, embraced and kissed me in public. This was not because of what I had said or how I had said it. His effusive joy was caused by the mere fact that I had spoken in public on the dais."

Nehru's political career took off when he began to participate in the mass movements initiated by Mahatma Gandhi.

Over the years, Nehru emerged as the foremost leader of the Congress party and the global voice and face of the country's freedom struggle. He was "wholly absorbed and wrapt" in Gandhi's non-violent forms of protes-



tations. He was first arrested towards the end of 1921, after mass protests had broken out in the wake of the Prince of Wales' visit to India.

He was incarcerated on several occasions in the years that followed; he was jailed for almost three years for his participation in the Quit India Movement. During this time, Nehru wrote two of his most popular books -- 'The Discovery of India' and 'Glimpses of World History'.

As the country arrived on the cusp of Independence, Nehru was positioned by Gandhi as free India's first PM. On August 15, 1947, close to midnight, he delivered the famous speech, 'Tryst with Destiny'.

MOULDING THE NEW NATION

As a PM, Nehru adopted a liberal and democratic approach towards his ministerial colleagues. Five of the 14 ministers in his first Cabinet were non-Congressmen. And while disagreements broke out between him and some of his Cabinet colleagues, Nehru refrained from sacking the dissenting members. Ministers, like Syama Prasad Mookerjee and B.R. Ambedkar, who felt strongly, left of their own will.

He was instrumental in overseeing the creation of various centres of excellence. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) was established in Delhi -- its foundation stone was laid in 1952. The Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) came up during his tenure. The first Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) was set up in 1951 in Kharagpur. The IITs and IIMs are today globally recognised for their excellence and have grown in number.

The Atomic Energy Commission of India was also established

in August 1948, with a view to harness atomic energy for the nation's need to maintain peace.

Nehru was particularly influenced by the Communist experiment in Russia and believed in the virtues of economic development within a socialistic framework. Senior Congress leader C. Rajagopalachari parted ways with Nehru in 1957 over the PM's economic prescription for the country.

Rajaji opposed government control over the private sector. Non-partisan commentators, too, were critical.

"To a foreign observer valuing both men, and loving India, much of what Rajagopalachari was saying was more than telling. It was the truth."

The Five-Year Plans executed by the Planning Commission were part of the Socialist agenda. The Nehruvian economic model proved to be a failure, as the country's development started stagnating. Yet, subsequent regimes continued with it, until the reforms of 1991 came along and dismantled the old system for good.

TOUCHSTONE OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Nehru's inclination towards the policy of 'non-alignment' in dealing with the global community was evident back in January 1947, when he wrote that New Delhi must be friendly to both the US and the Soviets, but join neither camp.

As PM and External Affairs Minister, he stuck to this formula, which became the touchstone of the country's foreign policy. Governments since then have, in spirit, treaded this path. It was at Nehru's initiation, along with that of Josip Broz Tito and Gamal Abdel Nasser, that the Non-Aligned

Movement (NAM) was established in Belgrade in 1961.

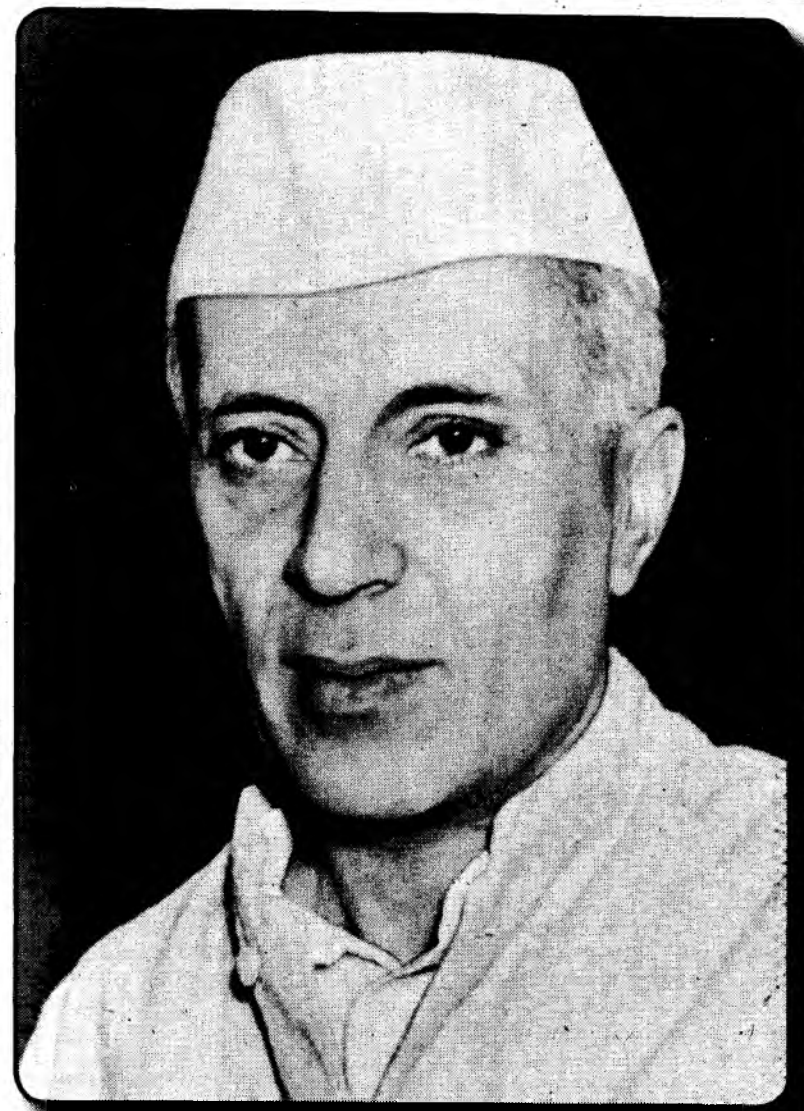
In 1961, Nehru added another feather to his cap -- the liberation of Goa and Daman and Diu from Portuguese rule and their integration into the Union of India. Initially, however, the PM had been reluctant to order military action to liberate the said territories. The idea had been discussed back in 1950 and Patel had observed that "it was two hours' work". Nehru resisted, and the matter rested there.

In 1961, his government decided to act after it failed in its diplomatic efforts to persuade Portugal to give up the occupied territories. The 17th Infantry Division, the 50th Parachute Brigade, the 1st Battalion of the Maratha Light Infantry and the 5th Battalion of the Madras Regiment were pressed into action. The Indian Navy also joined the effort, code-named as Operation Vijay. It deployed two warships off the coast of Goa.

Nehru faced some challenges on the foreign policy front, which have had a lasting impact on the nation. This was partly because his outlook was based on idealism and not ground realities. He sought the United Nations' intervention following the infiltration and mayhem caused by armed Pakistani tribesmen, who entered Kashmir with the Pakistani state's support in 1947.

Indian troops moved in and repulsed the offensive, pushing back the attackers. Just when the Pakistanis were on the run, Nehru approached the United Nations, which imposed a ceasefire. The part of Kashmir that was under Pakistan's hold has since remained with it.

"This (going to the UN) was done on the advice of the governor general, Lord Mountbatten."



The manner in which the matter played out, thereafter, shocked Nehru: "By now, Nehru bitterly regretted going to the United Nations."

THE CHINA DILEMMA

He faced another challenge in terms of foreign policy when China attacked India in 1962. Nehru had been forewarned of Chinese designs as far back as 1950 by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who wrote to Nehru that India should strengthen its position in Tibet and Sikkim to counter the "growing Communist menace in China".

And months before his death, Patel again wrote to the PM: "The Chinese Government has tried to delude us by professions of peaceful intentions."

But Nehru apparently did not take the cautions seriously, holding to the 'Hindi-Chini bhai bhai' (Indians and Chinese are brothers) slogan in letter and spirit.

Two years before the war, in 1960, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai had visited India and discussed border issues with Nehru, but the talks had led to nowhere. There was also a lingering bitterness on the Chinese side over the Nehru government's decision to give asylum to the Dalai Lama, who had fled Tibet in 1959.

According to US-China scholar John Garver, at a meeting in 1959, Chairman Mao Zedong said that India had to be "dealt with", as it was "doing bad things" in Tibet. Notwithstanding Patel's cau-

tion and Zedong's remark, only a few people in the Indian establishment believed that China would actually launch a full-scale war. And when it did, India was caught unprepared. The Chinese completely dominated the western sector of the theatre of war, with their intelligence network having fed them accurate details of Indian positions and placements.

To make matters worse, there was demoralisation in the Indian military ranks as a result of the then Defence Minister V.K. Krishna Menon playing favourites with key officials of the Indian Army. Indian positions were overrun and the fear that China would take over Assam was real. Nehru's remark that his heart went out to the people of Assam was seen by many as surrender. But then, the Chinese unilaterally declared a ceasefire and withdrew.

Nehru died on May 27, 1964 in the aftermath of the 1962 debacle of the Sino-Indian War, following a brief illness.

About his legacy, he had said: "If any people choose to think of me, then I would like them to say: 'This was the man who, with all his mind and heart, loved India and the Indian people. And they, in turn, were indulgent to him and gave their love most abundantly and extravagantly.'" (IANS)

(Excerpted from "Iconic Indians - 75 Extraordinary Individuals Who Inspired The Country" with the permission of the publisher, Rupa)

The Philosophy of Philosophy

Musings on World Philosophy Day from Ratan Bhattacharjee

In his 'Twilight of the Idols', Friedrich Nietzsche said: "Without music, life would be a mistake." Without philosophy, life would be impossible too.

Plato banished poets from his Republic which he imagined would be ruled well by the philosophers but the universe -- during his time and later -- is full of stupid people who lack philosophical thoughts. As Albert Einstein said, "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the universe."

But the philosophers fight among themselves so much that it seems easier to live without taking recourse to philosophy. Probably that is why the world still has poets even after the banishment of the poets from Plato's world of philosophy.

The world is divided into the Oriental and the diametrically opposite Occidental philosophy. Eastern philosophy is largely spiritual in nature while western philosophy is quite practical. Within the subject of philosophy, analytical thinking is used to investigate existential problems. While western philosophy uses logic and reasoning to address these problems, eastern philosophy is more subject to interpretation.

Although both schools of thought are concerned about virtues, there are some differences between the two. Western philosophy is dominant in the western world, primarily in Europe while eastern philosophy is predominant in Asian nations such as China, India, and Japan.

In a larger sense, western culture tries to discover and verify the truth through the use of accurate facts from logical sources. Eastern civilisations, on the other hand, accept facts as presented and are more concerned with maintaining the equilibrium than with the sources. Eastern philosophy encompasses metaphysics, epistemology, and religion despite the lack of a clear demarcation among the multiple categories.

Western philosophy is the viewpoint that origi-

nates from the Greek philosophy that impacted the majority of western civilisation. This philosophy attempts to uncover and demonstrate the truth via the use of logical and rational data. When it comes to eastern versus western philosophy, western philosophers place a higher value on individual values than eastern philosophers, who are more concerned with societal duty. Western philosophy is split into five groups: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics, and aesthetics.

Eastern philosophy is a varied collection of perspectives on existence and introspection with a focus on comprehending the never-ending cycle of the universe. In essence, it lacks the strict intellectual conventions prevalent in western thought. While eastern philosophy takes a more communal approach to seeking a purpose in life, western philosophy takes a more individualistic one. Eastern philosophers are just looking for solutions to the meaning of life and existence. Western philosophers, on the other hand, seek information that is logical and rational.

Exactly when Socrates began thinking deeply about life and morality is unknown. Accounts and dialogues from his students mostly transport us to a time when Socrates was a relatively old man. His thoughts were usually geared towards the pursuit of ethics and value-laden life. He searched for a set of universal truths that would help Athenian society live a morally upright life. According to him, the physical world we live in is just a mirror image of things that are false. The real truth, to him, is found in justice and good. He said material things like wealth, financial gains and power have not and cannot give us true happiness.

Socrates believed that a society that ignores the quest for philosophical constructs and ideas is doomed to be sad and miserable. The pre-Socratic philosophers had a different approach that desisted from using mythological analysis of the environment. Examples of such schools were the Milesians, Xenophanes,

Pythagoreans, Eleatics, Heraclitus, and Sophists. The focus of the study was mainly on cosmology, mathematics, and ontology. In Sophism, for example, philosophers believed that there are relative ways of explaining the constants in the environment.

Socratic philosophy sharply differs from its predecessors because it searches for universal truth. Unlike the Sophists, Socrates believed that the law (nomos) never changes. The ideals (forms) of justice, beauty, bravery, and honesty remain unchanged. Hence, those truths should be the pursuit of every one of us in order to lead a moral life. The sensible world, according to Plato is the world of contingent, contrary to the intelligible world, which contains essences or ideas, intelligible forms, and models of all things, saving the phenomena and giving them meaning.

Building on the demonstration by Socrates that those regarded as experts in ethical matters did not have the understanding necessary for a good human life, Plato envisioned a systematic, rational treatment of the forms and their interrelations, starting with the most fundamental among them (the good or the One); in ethics and moral psychology, he developed the view that the good life requires not just a certain kind of knowledge (as Socrates had suggested) but also habituation to healthy emotional responses and therefore harmony between the three parts of the soul (according to Plato -- reason, spirit and appetite).

Aristotle was the first philosopher to seriously advance a theory of virtue ethics, which remains one of the three major schools of ethical thought taken most seriously by contemporary philosophers. With all these contributions, he may have been the single most important philosopher in history until at least the late 18th century. St. Thomas Aquinas synthesised Aristotle's views with his own Catholic theology, re-introducing Aristotelian philosophy to the world and establishing the foundation for the scientific advances of the enlightenment.

Indian philosophies share many concepts such as dharma, karma, samsara, reincarnation, dukkha, renunciation, and meditation with almost all of them focussing on the ultimate goal of liberation of the individual from dukkha and samsara through a diverse range of spiritual practices (moksha, nirvana). One of India's greatest philosophers, Adi Shankara, has said it. Really, India is a great land where many profound thinkers and philosophers took birth. They are behind some of the deep ideas that still mesmerise people all over the world. Here's a list of a few famous philosophers from India. These philosophers have shaped many of the beliefs and ideologies that people today live on. The main aim of these philosophers was to bring global peace, humanity, and equity in turbulent times. These thinkers are key figures in introducing the Indian philosophy of Yoga, Vedanta, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, and Self-Knowledge to the western world. And through their works, the world is still learning Indian philosophical views on the nature of the world (cosmology), logic, the nature of reality (metaphysics), ethics, the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and theology.

There are six primary schools of Vedic philosophy -- Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta, and five major heterodox (sramanic) schools -- Jain, Buddhist, Ajivika, Ajñana, and Charvaka. However, there are other methods of classification. Vidyaranya for instance identifies 16 schools of Indian philosophy by including those that belong to the Saiva and Rasesvara traditions. The main schools of Indian philosophy were formalised and recognised chiefly between 500 BCE and the late centuries of the common era competition and integration between the various schools was intense, despite later claims of Hindu unity.

Some schools like Jainism, Buddhism, Yoga, Saiva and Vedanta survived, but others like Ajñana, Charvaka and Ajivika did not. Finally, it should be realised that life is above all philosophical formalities. Whatever fight is there among the philosophers, life goes on in its own way. The positive motivation of the philosophers is most needed for advancement. Thomas Hardy, in spite of his prolific writings, did not get the Nobel Prize for his pessimistic philosophy. On the other hand, Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gitanjali' bagged it by inspiring the world with a positive philosophy of light and hope.

(The author is a senior academician, trilingual poet & story writer and a contributor at The Shillong Times)

Twitter under Musk: 'Demise' of the blue bird

What do a cybersecurity researcher building a system to generate alerts for detecting security threats and vulnerabilities, a wildfire watcher who tracks the spread of forest fires, and public health professionals trying to predict enrollment in health insurance exchanges have in common?

They all rely on analyzing data from Twitter.

Twitter is a microblogging service, meaning it's designed for sharing posts of short segments of text and embedded audio and video clips. The ease with which people can share information among millions of others worldwide on Twitter has made it very popular for real-time conversations. Whether it is people tweeting about their favorite sports teams, or organizations and public figures using Twitter to reach a mass audience, Twitter has been part of the collective record for over a decade.

The Twitter archives allow for instant and complete access to every public tweet, which has positioned Twitter both as a archive of collective human behavior and as a credentialing and fact-checking service on a global scale. As a researcher who studies social media, I believe that these functions are very valuable for academics, policymakers and anyone using aggregate data to obtain insights into human behavior.

The proliferation of scams and brand impersonators, the hemorrhaging of advertisers, and disarray within the company call the future of the platform into question. If Twitter were to go under, the loss would reverberate around the world.

ANALYZING HUMAN BEHAVIOR

With its massive trove of tweets, Twitter has provided new ways to quantify public discourse and new tools to map aggregate perceptions, and offers a window into large-scale human behavior. Such digital traces or records of human activity allow researchers

What the world would lose with the demise of Twitter: Valuable eyewitness accounts and raw data on human behaviour, as well as a habitat for trolls

in fields ranging from social sciences to healthcare to analyze a variety of phenomena.

From open source intelligence to citizen science, Twitter has not only been a digital public square, but has also allowed researchers to infer attitudes that are difficult to detect through methods from traditional field research. For example, people's willingness to pay for policies and services that address climate change has traditionally been measured through surveys of subjective well-being. Twitter sentiment data gives researchers and policymakers another tool for assessing these attitudes in order to take more meaningful action on climate change.

Researchers in public health have found an association between tweeting about HIV and incidence of HIV, and have been able to measure sentiment at the neighborhood level to assess the overall health of the people in those neighborhoods.

PLACE AND TIME

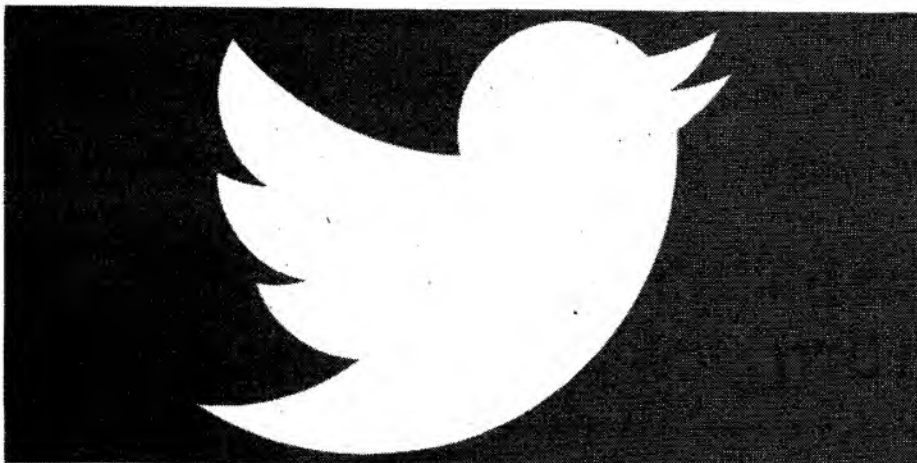
Geotagged data from Twitter helps in a variety of fields such as urban land use and disaster resilience. Being able to identify the locations for a set of tweets allows researchers to correlate information in the tweets with times and places – for example, correlating tweets and ZIP codes to identify hot spots of vaccine hesitancy.

Twitter has been invaluable in the field of open source intelligence (OSINT), particularly for tracking down war crimes. OSINT uses crowdsourcing to

identify the locations of photos and videos. In Ukraine, human rights investigators have focused on using Twitter and TikTok to search for evidence of abuses.

Open source intelligence has also been helpful for cutting through the fog of war. For example, OSINT analysts were quick to provide evidence that the missile

reducing some of the uncertainty people face in searching for new information. The platforms perform a credentialing role that some scholars refer to as "public relevance algorithms," in that they have replaced dedicated business or technical expertise in identifying what people need to know.



that exploded in Przewodow, Poland near the Ukrainian border on Nov. 15, 2022 was likely an S-300 antiaircraft missile and unlikely a ballistic or cruise missile fired by Russia.

CREDENTIALING AND VERIFICATION

Although misinformation has been disseminated far and wide on Twitter, the platform also serves a role as a global verification mechanism. First, vast numbers of people use Twitter and other social media platforms. With crowdsourcing writ large, social media assumes the role of an authoritative information provider,

SQUARE

Twitter's dual role in fostering real-time communication and acting as an arbitrator of authoritative information is of crucial interest to academics, journalists and government agencies. During the pandemic, for example, many public health agencies turned to Twitter to promote behavior that mitigates the risk of infection.

During disasters and emergencies, Twitter has been a great venue for crowdsourced eyewitness data. During Hurricane Harvey, for example, researchers found that that users responded and interacted the most with tweets from verified Twitter accounts, and especially from government organizations. Official Twitter accounts helped in the rapid dissemination of information during a water contamination crisis in West Virginia. Twitter data has also helped in hurricane evacuations.

Twitter has also been an important way for people with disabilities to participate in public discourse.

Twitter's real value has been in enabling people to connect with each other in real time and as an archive of collective behavior. Recognizing this, international organizations, government agencies and local governments have invested significant resources in using Twitter and have come to rely on the platform. Sen. Edward Markey has described Twitter as "essential" to American society. If Twitter were to collapse, there's no clear replacement in sight. (*The Conversation*)

#RIPTwitter trends

The hashtag "RIPTwitter" is trending and lots of the site's users are scrambling to download their data.

They're also sharing alternative places to find them (consumer champion Martin Lewis, who has two million Twitter followers, has set himself up on Mastodon, although he admits he doesn't know how to use it yet).

The hashtag #RIPTwitter, #GoodbyeTwitter, #Twitter-Down trended as worried social media users posted about the platform's fate as the company faces extreme turbulence. Following this, Musk responded with a meme featuring a tombstone with Twitter's bird logo morphed on it.

"I'm not pressing the (yes) button. My watch ends with Twitter 1.0. I do not wish to be part of Twitter 2.0," a user posted.

Twitter's new boss Elon Musk, never one to ignore a trend, tweeted a meme of a gravestone with the Twitter logo on it.

Staff have been leaving in their droves - half the workforce was laid off by Mr Musk one week after he completed his purchase of the platform, and many more are choosing to leave since he sent an email demanding "hardcore" working conditions and long hours from his remaining employees.

Quite a few of those departing, according to their Twitter bios, are engineers, developers and coders - the people who work on the guts of what makes Twitter function.

Twitter had around 3,000 employees left after the massive layoffs when Musk sacked about half of its workforce after taking over the company.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Aja Bhambi

Sunday, NOVEMBER 20, 2022

Moon is eclipsed on your solar return chart and it will give amazing results. Your efforts will bring in lots of money. You will make progress in your job/business. You will receive love from family members. Husband/wife will share wonderful bonding. New business orders will be profitable. You will make changes according to the needs of the time. Jupiter will bring lot of benefits and gains for you. Your boss will be happy with your performance and you could get promoted too. You will get lot of praise and acclaim too. You need to read all legal documents carefully before signing them. Your opponents will get defeated and will be unable to harm you. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your spouse/partner. You will also participate in family functions. Someone close will help you a lot and provide timely support. You will make failures as your strength.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It will turn out to be a great week for you. You will get wonderful results. Despite hardships and stiff competition, you will be victorious over all the tensions and troubles you face. You will have monetary gains. You will do well in your business/profession. You will also be in the mood to enjoy and relax yourselves. You will spend lot of time with your family and friends. You will also remain popular among your neighbors. You will remain committed to your partner and share wonderful bonding with him/her. You will have to decide about your children's future. Your struck work related to pension will now get resolved. You will solve property related disputes. You will earn lot of money. You will get the rewards of hard work done by you.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You will be in high spirits and raring to go. You will meet lot of new people and also able to get your work done with ease. You will be meeting lot of prominent people. You will finish all your urgent work first on top priority basis. You will inherit some property in legacy. You will also host someone at your place. You will come close to your loved ones. You will buy new property. There will be discussions about weddings, auspicious matters etc. There will be happiness in the family. You will also get new job/business offers. You will get the credit for the works done by you. You will do every work with full dedication. Your bosses will praise you.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

The time is good for professional and business persons. In the workplace, there will be compatibility between officers. You will take decisions with consensus. Your experience will come handy in these matters. You will also meet some old friends in an unexpected manner. Old memories will get revived as a result. Your luck will favor you. You will be impressed with someone. You will have monetary gains. You will be given some additional responsibilities in your job. Your boss trust you and have lot of faith in your abilities. You need to take full advantage of it. Financially you will be stronger. Doors will be opening one by one for moving ahead and progressing further in life.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

It will be a normal week. Life will run smoothly and on its own course. Luck will start favoring you. You will have continuous inflow of money. You will get remarkable success in your work. Your daily routine will be good. There will be time of full self-confidence. This self confidence will take you far ahead in life. The people who want to make new investments will get great returns. You will spend your time happily with your friends and family members. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. You will understand life's each aspect very well. You will purchase new items for your households needs. You will welcome guests at your home.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

It will be a money gaining week. You will get new achievements. You will make progress in your job/business. This time of your is very rewarding. You will have unforgettable moments with your money. You will make best use of this favorable time and make your life happy. You will experience positive changes in your lifestyle and work. You will make new investments. Your knowledge will grow. Whatever works you take in your hands will be successful. You will be turning towards family, friends and colleagues for support. Those in politics, media and social service will do very well. Your business will run well. Your name and fame will also rise.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Some pressing matters will keep you engaged. You will remain a lot more busy. No need to panic and give up. Success is just round the corner. Rivals will be unable to harm you, but remain careful in financial matters. You will have a great time with your

family members. You will be full of energy, enthusiasm and desire. This is the time for party and celebration. You will be full of creativity. You will interact with people nicely. You will also participate in meetings and seminars. You will finish the main plans on top priority basis. You will share wonderful bonding with your partner. Your focus will be on finance. You will make good gains.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You will have mental peace. You will remain committed to your partner/spouse. You will feel delighted and blissful in his/her company. You will not shy away from taking new challenges. This is the mark of a great person. If some people criticize you, it will not bother you much. The time will be auspicious. You will expect high standards of performance from your colleagues. They too will not disappoint you. You will be honest in your dealings with people and will be disciplined in approach. You will look forward to meet an inspiring and motivating person. You will be a person of high character. Some new person can come in your life and you can fall in love. There will be a mentally good time. You will like to go on a top with your family.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It will be a well spent week. Your time will be good. You will get fabulous returns in your business. There will be inflow of money. You will share your feelings with others. You will get success in efforts put by you. You will have close relations with family and loved ones. You will be busy with money earning activities. You will be careful in money matters. You will get lot of name and fame. You will have a great time with your family members. The burden of responsibility will be on you, but you will take it as a challenge. And will not let the opportunity go out of your hands. You will also go on a travel with family.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

You will get some special reward or award. Your nature will be praised all over. You will be satisfied with your children's work. You will take steps with caution in your business dealings. Money matters will catch your attention. You will have profitable days. You will get good news from everywhere. You will do work with good thinking and will get the results accordingly. The persons associated with media, politics and sports will get good name and fame. You can be busy in purchase of property or selling related activities. You will adopt new methods in your business. You will live in the present but will also plan for future. You will shine in your work.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will get fabulous results. Your struck works will get completed. Your experiences will be very fruitful. You will be inclined towards artistic things. Your finished works will get completed. You will focus on your office and home. You will get full credit of your labor. You could be promoted also. You will be full of enthusiasm and self confidence. You will also take responsibility for the new work. You will solve other people's problems with an open mind. You will look to start a new business/work. You will have a pleasant time. You will be more and more popular. You will have blessings of your elders. Students will get admission in courses of choice.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will complete your work with lot of interest. Your focus will be on your work. You will earn lot of name and fame for yourself. You will be enthusiastic and full of ideas. It will be a very fabulous time. You will feel relieved and enjoy yourself. You will get good offers in your business/profession. You will get offers in your job and would be satisfied with your efforts. You will gain lot of money. You will have good food and will enjoy with your family. Do not lend money to anyone, or your money will not come back. You will meet lot of influential persons. The time will be very important for students. They will concentrate on their studies.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You will get a good news from somewhere. You will progress along with helping others. You will make gains in your business/profession. You will win in official works. You will manage your time well and finish your work well ahead of schedule. You will also have to do a lot of travelling. You will get extra income. You will remain healthy and carefree. The time will be profitable. You will be quite busy. If you want to change your staff or your job then this is the right time to do so. Students will perform well. This is the time to cash in all your hard work. You will have more profits and satisfaction. Your popularity will grow in society and family. Your name and fame will rise.

Bengal Partition literature: More than just a discourse

It's a question that has continued to haunt till today, even after seventy-five years of the Partition. Cyril Radcliff, whose fateful line of demarcation divided the Indian territory into a "Hindu India" and a "Muslim Pakistan", had never before been to India, nor had he the necessary skills for drawing a decisive border. But it was he who emerged as the destiny in the history of Partition that involved gruesome sectarian violence, persecution of minorities and wide-scale migration whose legacies (unfortunately) are visible even to this day.

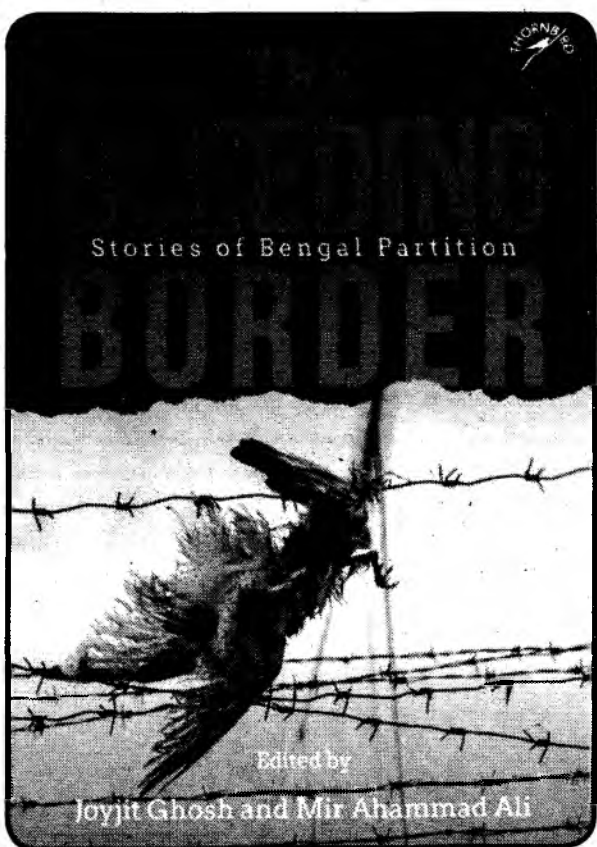
The Bleeding Border - Stories of Bengal Partition (Niyogi Books) is an anthology of twenty-four partition stories written by both prominent and lesser-known authors from West Bengal and Bangladesh. The poignant descriptions of various forms of violence, tension and anxiety at the porous border of two countries make these stories disturbing reading. They delineate the ghastly communal riots at various places and the trauma and disruptions of memory caused by them, the exodus of the "refugees" from the then East Pakistan and their fierce struggle for survival in newly mushrooming colonies at unknown terrains, and above all, the nostalgia for an imaginary 'desh' (motherland) that defies cartographic barriers.

It is often said that the Bengal Partition in comparison with that on the western border of India has not received much literary attention. Some even go to the extent of saying that celebrated Bengali writers, more or less, remained 'silent' regarding this cataclysmic issue. Thus, 'Partition Literature' has become almost synonymous with the writings of Saadat Manto, Bhisham Sahni, Intizar Hussain, Joginder Paul and others, and we often tend to ignore the contribution of the authors from the eastern and Northeastern parts of the country and Bangladesh.

This obviously speaks of a politics in the formation of canon particularly when it is evident that Bengal Partition fiction is no less powerful and appealing than its western counterpart. One may think of short stories and novels by the authors like Jyotirmoyee Devi, Pratibha Basu, Manik Bandyopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Prafulla Roy among many, from the side of Bengal, and Syed Waliullah, Hasan Azizul Huq, Rizia Rahman and others from the Bangladesh side. The list of authors of Bengal Partition literature is not only huge in its corpus but immediately relevant in the socio-political context of the present day.

The stories of this present anthology include some of the most striking and dominant themes of the Bengal Partition and its aftermath. One major theme is obviously the ceaseless movement of rootless masses in search of safe shelter in an ambience of generalised violence.

Bengal Partition literature offers more than a stereotypical discourse. It has a tremendous sense



of contemporaneity and it addresses various issues with which the readers of the present day may immediately identify. "The stories are representative of Bengal partition fiction in their poignant depictions of various forms of violence, agony and anxiety at the 'border' which is porous and bleeds still," co-editor of the book Joyjit Ghosh said.

"Most of the stories included in the volume have been translated into English for the first time. They are largely concerned with 'the human dimension of Partition' and delineate the discontents and trauma of countless 'refugees' when the Partition of the country was thrust upon them overnight. But they are nostalgic narratives as well, as they voice a craving for a 'desh' that knows no margins or barriers," co-editor Mir Ahammad Ali said.

On publishing the book, Trisha De Niyogi, Director and COO, Niyogi Books, said: "Sometimes all it takes to revisit your history is just relocate yourself in a timeframe long left with the narratives unheard, hushed down, or perhaps ignored. The Bleeding Border: Stories of Bengal Partition is a collection of Partition stories of those kinds on the eastern frontier--a rare assemblage. As a publisher, it is somehow our responsibility as well to unearth those unheard narratives and re-assess history as it is." (*IANS*)

*"Time is the father of truth,
its mother is our mind."*

—Giordano Bruno

The Shillong Times

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Live-in and societies

MARRIAGES, as the adage goes, are made in heaven. Inherent in this is an acknowledgement of the sanctity that the institution of marriage holds. But times are changing. Not just Western societies but those in Asia too are now increasingly seeing the spectacle of live-in relationships. This is legally accepted by courts in India through a series of judgments since 2006. Yet, fact is that live-in relations are not wide-spread. The positive side of this is its care-free nature. For, pregnancy and parenting are optional or rare among them. They live in their todays. Such relationships accord the freedom to both man and woman to separate and go their ways generally without legal hassles. The negative sides are there too. The brutal murder of Shraddha Walkar in Mehrauli, Delhi, is a case in point. The murder of the 28-year-old woman and the chopping of her body into 35 pieces allegedly by live-in partner Aftab Poonawalla, was among the worst horror-stories of our times. It would, however, be naïve to expect that the youth would "see reason" and avoid live-in relationships. Rather, the trend is steadily rising.

Societies evolve. What does not change or remains stagnant has a tendency to rot. A new society frames its mind by virtue of the influences from its surroundings; while the surroundings and situations keep changing. Courts are mindful of this, a reason why they refused to stand in the way of live-in-relationships even granted that this is neither advisable nor healthy from the traditional or religious points of view. The wealthy societies in the West had evolved faster than those in Asia or Africa. The institution of marriage was not strong in African countries. In nations like Botswana, live-in relationships are the norm. Marriage is abhorred. The Islamic world zealously follows the institution of marriage; and in a different manner too, depending on individual preferences. Polygamy is widely practised in Islam and there also exists Triple Talaq or similar systems of abrupt divorce at the sweet will of the male partner.

What must be admitted is that the brutal murder of the young woman in Mehrauli is an aberration; just as a similar murder of Nirbhaya by blood-chilling gang-rape. Horrendous, though, such acts keep happening despite the best alerts and laws. Animal instincts are not alien to humans. India is a nation of 1.40 billion. Let us admit the fact that Indian society is less brutal compared to, say, societies in Afghanistan, Iraq or some African countries. Even some of the societies in South East Asia are known for their brutality. But these horror stories are slowly catching up in India too.

Letters to the Editor

Idle chatter feeds busy rumours! Says who?

Editor,
In response to Corina Lyngdoh's letter, "Idle Chatter feeds busy rumours" (ST Nov 18, 2022), and Albert Thyrniang's rejoinder on the hearsay I wish to state that I am neither alleging nor assuming anything on the transparency model in which the MPSC exams are conducted. Thank you for enlightening us on the pattern that MPSC follows which is based on 87.5% written and 12.5% marks for personal interview (at least I got to know this now). Though not an expert on the subject, the pattern adopted by our State Competitive Exams like MPSC, DSC, and Departmental exams etc., also adopt the same format. The letter writer states that, "the marks secured by the candidates in the written examination are kept strictly confidential and there is no chance of manipulation at any stage." Is that really so?

I appreciate the efforts made by the MPSC team to cleanse the system and redeem the tarnished image of the Commission. Congratulations on this and good for us! Further to what's stated in the letter I would like to illustrate the procedures followed by many Competitive Exams institutions such as SSC, UPSC, JEE, NEET, GATE, NIELIT(NIC), ICAR, and other State Commission Exams which are absolutely transparent and without ambiguity. Hence examinees are satisfied with their marks. Many feel that

there should be a two-way communication system in the conduct of examinations. For the information of readers I will describe some of the procedures adopted by these agencies which I (as a candidate) feel satisfied about the entire recruitment process.

It goes as follows: a) Declaring answer keys in the public domain Having answer keys would really help us know the strength and weaknesses of the subject and, in fact, we can evaluate our own performances. b) A platform that allows the candidate to file a representation with regards to the wrongly printed erroneous questions/answers in the question paper. I feel this is a must as it will help in the marking system. How can you be sure that the question paper is 100% accurate? What if there is a printing mistake in the question or the answers? Who do we communicate this to? c) Details of the cut off for the next round of interview. d) Details of marks obtained.

If the above measures are adopted, then nobody can question the transparency in the MPSC's examination framework. And what is so confidential about our marks? Are our marks something related to Space DATA or ISRO DATA that the MPSC needs to hide them? I am not here to debate or to allege lack of transparency or corruption in the MPSC but if you really feel that it is so transparent then please illustrate that transparency to the candidates in any form.

To conclude I would say that, having those measures in the public domain would

Come election and reporters from outside the state with eyes as sharp as that of the eagle will delve into the electoral reportage role not for analyzing the information and data but for reasons other than that. Every election that we have had in the past would have journalists asking me for an interview or would receive questions over the phone about the peculiar names that people in the state have.

There are indeed people who if given a choice would wish to be born in a different avatar. Given the opportunity, one would wish to be born richer, healthier, or perhaps in a country that is more developed but there are people whose only wish is that they were given a proper name. What's wrong with the name is the common refrain. Few people have to carry a wrong name for no fault of theirs. Embarrassing as it may be for them, they have to live with it. And as if carrying a funny name is not embarrassing enough, then some people dare to ask them questions about their names. Like how did you get such a name and why did your parents give you such a name?

The identity of the individual

In a tribal culture, the person's name and clan name is something that one would have to carry on till the person dies. The person's name and one's clan name is the most important part of a person's identity which distinguishes one from the other as the person is known by his/her name and clan name. The first part of the name gives out the person's unique identity in the community and the latter tells us about which clan the individual belongs to. Unlike in the western culture where people have the tradition of having three names, the first name, the middle, and the last name, the indigenous people of the state only carry two names. The second name tells us about the clan that the individual belongs and the first name gives us the identity of the person. An individual can change his or her first name but one cannot change one's last name. Interestingly enough there is a change in the way people have named their children and this has evolved with time.

Names and Traditions

justify every penny we pay for the exams and we would then begin to trust the so-called system of transparency, no matter how we perform.

Yours etc.,
C L Kynshi,
Via email

No election rallies on working days please!

Editor,
On Friday, November 18, Tura suffered a major traffic disruption due to the AITC rally which brought in thousands of AITC supporters in their vehicles onto the narrow streets of Tura. Political parties do have the right to exercise their democratic rights by conducting rallies and meetings to propagate their ideology, but many are of the view that such political rallies must be held on holidays or Saturdays when most educational institutions and government offices are closed and no inconvenience is caused to anyone. The local District Administration must keep in mind that no difficulties are experienced by the citizens when granting permission to political parties to conduct rallies and meetings.

Tomorrow other political parties will take a leaf from the AITC book and also display their strength too. Such events would put us back in a helpless situation as we faced last Friday. The traffic police in Tura is heavily understaffed and when rallies are allowed to be conducted then the result is a foregone conclusion.

School children had a

The interviews that I give to reporters and writers from outside also compel me to introspect and question myself about the way people decide on the names they give to their babies. Unfortunately, the Hyñew Trép people do not have a readymade list of names for the parents to choose from when they decide to name their son or daughter, and that is also why the names of people evolve with time. Of course like any other tradition, the Hyñew Trép people also have their traditional naming ceremony and in Jahtia hills it is called "sib syiñ/bam syiñ" or "chat lane." In the fifties and the sixties perhaps the popular female names in the area were ka Lasubon, ka Synchar, ka Diang, ka Rimai, ka Imai, ka Rophimai, ka Lakhi and for male u Riata, u Lo, u Manik, u Riang, u Kiang, u Iang, u Mon and others.

There are indeed people who if given a choice would wish to be born in a different avatar. Given the opportunity, one would wish to be born richer, healthier, or perhaps in a country that is more developed but there are people whose only wish is that they were given a proper name. What's wrong with the name is the common refrain.

In the traditional religion, twin babies were given special names. Whenever twin babies are born in a family, the tradition is to name the elder ka Durka and ka Kongka in case of baby girls and u Ram for the elder son and u Lakhon for the younger son. In the War Jahtia area of the Amlarem sub-division, the other unique naming tradition practice in this region is to name kids by their father's clan's name. In the southern slopes of the West Jahtia hills district, the tradition has it that the first child of the family is always named after the surname or the clan's name of the father of the baby. That is the reason you have people with names like, Min because the father is from a Lamin clan, Lah because the father belongs to the Khonglah clan, Chiang because the father belongs to the Myrchiang clan, and Riang because the father is from the Tariang clan and Bui because the father is from the Rymbul clan.

we proceed further let us understand the concept of counting days in a week as per the tradition. According to tradition, a week has eight days in the Khasi Pnar traditional calendar and the name of the day is based on the market day when the market was held in any village. The day when the market is held at Jowai is called ka Musiang and similarly, the market day at Wahiajer is called ka Pynsiñ, and the market day in Nartiang is Mulong, and so on.

The market day in the area is always considered the penultimate day of the week for all the villages in its vicinity. It serves as a pay-day because on a market day people from everywhere and from all walks of life congregate in the market. It is also the day when people do their weekly shopping because in the past markets happened only once a week and that is on the market day. The week starts with Muchai which

one of the costliest world cup soccer championships held so far in terms of the money spent in infrastructure etc which amounted to \$300 billion.

However, in the run up to the kick-off which was held on 20 November 2022 there was a huge protest in Germany under the banner "Boycott Qatar." The protest in a country like Germany which is the global power house of soccer is to be taken serious note of. The protest and the call for "Boycott Qatar" is primarily against the human rights abuses and exploitation of migrant workers who were solely responsible for building the spectacular stadia, majestic hotels and metros etc.

Independent reports had cited that there are about 6500 migrant workers, including those from India and neighbouring Bangladesh and Nepal who have died in the construction industry in Qatar since it was awarded to host the World cup in 2010. The families of those migrant workers are waiting for answers and majority of those who died are the sole bread earners who had gone to Qatar with the hope of improving the living conditions of their families back home. Many had also borrowed money from loan sharks to pay the service agency which facilitated their employment in Qatar. Now their families will have to repay the loans and perpetually live in poverty. Some may perhaps be serving as bonded laborers in the hands of lenders.

As a soccer enthusiast myself I would like to take a political stand and appeal to the International Community,

is the day of rest, followed by Pyngkat, Thymbleñ, Hat, Khyllaw, Pynsiñ, Mulong and Musiang being the last day of the week. Popular names during those days were Siang for a person born on Musiang, Chai because the person was born on Muchai and Kat, Law, Siñ, and Long because the person was born on Pyngkat, Khyllaw, Pynsiñ, and Mulong respectively.

Saints and English Names

The next stage was when Christianity arrived in the region and people started naming their children using saints, apostles, and biblical-related names. This is why people have names like Peter, Mark, Moses, Mary, and what have you. Some people named their kids after Christian saints like Xavier, Anthony, Thomas, Theresa, and others. Kids were also named after a certain event or by the names of important persons in the event. For instance, a boy with the name Maradona would certainly be someone who was born during or after the 1984 World Cup. But the names which will be an opportunity for the journalists from outside the state to have a field day are the peculiar English names people give to their children.

When the election process begins they will first look for odd names from the list of candidates who contest in the elections for their story on peculiar names in the state. Then they will spot names like Hitler, Napoleon, Never Care, Evening and Morningstar, and Midnight. And then they will dive deep into the whole electoral roll and look for more interesting names. The roll will consist of all sorts of names from Helpme, Bless me, and Withme to Toilet or Tilet. Very recently there is an unfortunate incident that turned hilarious just because of the name the alleged criminal had. An alleged hardened criminal along with his partner in crime was brutally murdered, but what made the incident humorous was the name of the main person in the gang who went by the name 'I Love You.' A gruesome crime turned into a humour, social media burst into laughter, and memes were made just because of the name the alleged hardened criminal had.

So much for naming children thoughtlessly!

National Sports bodies and International Organizations to put pressure on the Qatari Authority to be accountable and transparent and to appoint an Independent Commission in this regard. Moreover, those construction companies under whom the migrant workers might have worked must pay appropriate compensation as per international laws and treaties.

Finally, I also appeal to all the players of the competing nations in the Qatar World Cup 2022 that, "in every match you play remember that the turfs on which you will be kicking and running throughout 90 minutes and the stands where thousands of fans will be filled to cheer your skills are being built and crafted by the hands of the labourers who toiled ceaselessly under the scorching Middle Eastern Sun. Those are the hands of labourers like you. Lest we forget in the neo-liberal era you too are labourers under soccer capitalists, but you are better off than those migrant workers in the Qatari Constitution Industry because you are paid the highest amount by the highest bidder in the soccer market."

I stand in solidarity with the migrant workers and appeal that the families of those who died must be informed and compensated.

Yours etc.,
Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh,
Via email

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

Implications of the verdict on EWS amendment

By Ajit Ranade

Nearly four years ago, in January 2019 the Parliament passed the 103 rd constitutional amendment carving out a new category of reserved quota for government jobs and for admission to educational institutions. This was a new 10 percent quota for those persons from economically weaker sections (EWS). Upon its passage, were a slew of petitions challenging the constitutionality of this amendment. The fact is that this rather momentous amendment was passed in Parliament without much debate because the ruling party BJP has an absolute majority in the lower house, Lok Sabha. One of the few objections against the amendment was made in a spirited speech by Ms Kanimozhi, MP from Tamil Nadu. But largely the amendment passed without much discussion.

The Supreme Court this past week in its verdict upheld the constitutionality of EWS quota and all petitions were dismissed. The verdict of the five-member bench was unanimous in affirming that economic criteria can be used as basis for reservation (something that petitioners had challenged). The bench was also unanimous in its implied conclusion that because of this new category, now the aggregate total share of constitutionally mandated reservation (scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, and now EWS) would exceed 50 percent, and this was per-se not against the constitution. This too had been one of the contentions

sion that the amendment was passed to benefit a vote bank of upper-castes voters. But now even Muslims and Christians have also become eligible for the EWS quota. Secondly, the quotas in our constitution were meant to correct longstanding and historical injustice based on caste. They are meant to help those who have suffered from social backwardness for generations. How can economic backwardness be put in the same category? A person's economic status is fluid, can change with effort or luck or both. Even a person's religion can be a matter of choice. But caste is an unchangeable marker from birth. So, overcoming caste-based discrimination is not in same league as economic deprivation. Thirdly the cut-off decided for eligibility for EWS quota is annual income of 8 lakhs, which seems like a very generous threshold. It is far above the poverty line. By one estimate, more than 95 percent of the households in India will fall under this limit. So is it a remedy to give quota based opportunities to the poor, or is it meant for everybody? Fourthly, if indeed the EWS quota is meant to help those from poor households, then let us look at the profile of those below the poverty line.

As per government's Sachin Commission, nearly 82 percent of the people below the poverty line comprised scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. Poverty and social backwardness have a high correlation.

As per government's Sachin Commission, nearly 82 percent of the people below the poverty line comprised scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. Poverty and social backwardness have a high correlation. But those very categories have been denied the opportunity in EWS.

of the petitioners. The only issue on which the bench was split 3:2 was whether SC, ST and OBC could be excluded from the newly created category of EWS. The majority view is that their exclusion was ok.

This amendment and the stamp of validity on it provided by the highest court in the country has many consequences, some of which we will discuss below. Firstly, has the judgement dealt a blow to the doctrine of protecting the basic structure of the constitution (something that followed from the landmark 1973 case in the Supreme Court)? This famous judgement did not define explicitly what is meant by the basic structure. It also did not prohibit the power of the Parliament to pass amendments to the constitution. But it did say that you cannot pass amendments of such extreme nature, that they distort the very basic principles of our constitution. Parliament is supreme, but the spirit of the constitution is more supreme. By creating a new category based on economic criteria, to whom a special treatment will be given (reservation), have we violated the right to equality (article 14)? Or by excluding SC, ST and OBC from this new category, have we breached the principle of non-discrimination (article 14 and 15)? These are questions for scholars of jurisprudence to explore. Much has already been written and more will follow. One rather penetrating analysis is by Ayan Gupta which can be read at the blog indconlawphil.wordpress.com. So it is quite possible that in the days to come a review of the decision of the apex court may be undertaken by a larger bench.

For now, let us examine other aspects of the amendment and the judgment. Firstly, it is clear that the amendment itself was politically motivated. The word "quotas" has radioactive resonance in the Indian polity, and there is an impres-

correlation. But those very categories have been denied the opportunity in EWS. It is on this point that there was a dissent by two of the judges as a matter of constitutional principle. But even from a pragmatic view about poverty, does this not seem questionable as a policy designed to help the poor? It is like saying that we will launch an anti-poverty program, but those people from rural areas, and from agriculture will be excluded since they are covered by other subsidies. Fifth, the status of economic backwardness is fluid. It should be addressed by affirmative action and not quotas. For instance, providing education loans to students from poor households is better than a quota system for the poor. Sixth, one implication is the scramble for income certificates that this EWS policy will unleash. In an economy where 92 percent people work either in the unorganized, unregistered or informal sector, getting authentic income data is notoriously difficult. Only about five percent of the population pays income tax. So where can we get authentic income data, based on which this EWS policy is going to be implemented?

Are we therefore opening the gates for more corruption, rent seeking or fake certificates, and more litigation? Lastly it is clear that EWS has great political resonance because of the scarcity of well paying, stable and high-quality jobs. Most of the jobs are going to be created in the private sector anyway, wherein the quotas don't apply. Hence the surest way ahead to correct social or economic injustice is high, sustained, inclusive growth of economy, jobs and livelihoods. That as always is the real core agenda.

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

"Nothing is impossible to a willing heart."
— John Heywood
The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya BJP playing fast and loose
ELECTIONS to the Meghalaya assembly are due in February 2023. This leaves the political parties with just two months to prepare for what is the biggest statewide extravaganza. Despite all talks of reducing election expenses and the Election Commission ostensibly keeping an eagle's eye on possible violations of its orders, money flows like water and wine. The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) has to all intents and purposes had a smooth ride despite the number of scams in its kitty. Due to lack of public pressure the Government has been able to outwit the people of the State. Enquiries into the scams that were called out by the media were all meant to hoodwink. It is a pity that the legislators too remained content with the shabby enquiry reports. For the purpose of transparency enquiries should be conducted by an independent body. How can a government accused of wrongdoing be allowed to pick and choose people to be part of an enquiry committee? Is this not a hoax played on the people of Meghalaya?

The coalition partners in the MDA include the NPP, UDP, BJP, PDF and NCP. Each of these parties will be fighting each other in the 2023 elections. Having been married for all of five years and been partners in all the scams committed under the aegis of the MDA, the parties are now going to indulge in the biggest blame game. Going by visible trends the UDP and BJP are both going to wash their hands off the scams and blame it all on the NPP, the main coalition partner. It will be interesting to watch these coalition partners launching verbal calisthenics at their former allies. This happens because voters are considered dumb driven cattle who can be easily fooled.

The BJP is now most vehement in its display of animosity towards the NPP. From claiming that it will win a majority in 2023 to launching broadsides at the NPP, the BJP has done it all. But will the Party be able to wash its hands off all the scams so easily? A coalition by definition implies collective responsibility on all actions taken. The BJP is as much responsible for the poor governance that Meghalaya has suffered for the past 4.10 years as the other parties in the MDA Government. No amount of whitewashing by the BJP honchos will clear them of the allegations that they were part of the smart meter scam, the rice scam, the Assembly dome collapse, the vehicle and construction scam in the Police Department amongst others. All the coalition parties are partners in crime. The BJP should stop fooling voters by threatening to divorce the MDA at this juncture. It just does not wash!

Letters to the Editor

Who will reform the MPSC

Editor,
On December 14, 2020, MPSC published an advertisement for 328 posts lying vacant under various State Government Departments. Here, I would like to caution the educated unemployed not to feel elated for it will take an eternity before these posts are filled up. For instance, MPSC conducted written exams on December 10, 2020 for posts advertised way back in April 2016. Further, drawing from past experiences, it will take another eternity before results are declared and interviews conducted. For our MPSC, this is not an aberration but the norm. In contrast, the Staff Selection Commission rarely exceeds one year after publication of advertisement to appoint its staff.

The State Bank of India Recruitment Board and the Institute of Bank Personnel Selection take 5-6 months and 7-8 months respectively to complete the entire process of recruitment. The above three Recruitment Agencies always mentioned the exam calendars and stick to such calendars while our MPSC never mentions any exam calendar in any of its advertisements. It appears that MPSC can afford to abdicate its responsibilities towards the unemployed because there is no demand

for accountability from the unemployed themselves and from society at large. Our elected representatives and various students' unions and youth councils cannot be faulted because they have much more weighty issues to pursue.

When it comes to reforms, MPSC is at best a laggard. In this regard, these columns published my letter on May 25, 2018 under the heading, "When will Meghalaya abolish Interviews" drawing attention to a news report which appeared in The Shillong Times dated May 19, 2018 headlined "Centre slams nine states over slow progress in abolishing job interviews". The report inter alia mentioned that the Centre censured nine states including Meghalaya for not abolishing oral interviews to Group B (non-gazetted) and to all Group C and D posts in line with what the Central Government has done since January 2016 to bring transparency and fair selection as well as provide a level playing field for job aspirants from all sections and backgrounds. The above Shillong Times report also mentioned that this issue was discussed with the Principal Secretaries/Secretaries of General Administration Departments of all states at a meeting held on April 22, 2016 in New Delhi.

It is noted that almost all States and Union Territories have abolished oral interviews for the mentioned categories of posts consequent

to Letter NO> 39020/ 09/ 2015- Esstt (B) dated January 28, 2016 circulated to all States and Union Territories by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. This letter is in the public domain and can be accessed from the said Ministry's website. Significantly, the above letter also refers to correspondence dated 4th September 2015 and 29th September 2015 from the Secretary (personnel) of the mentioned Central Ministry addressed to all Chief Secretaries and from the Minister of State addressed to all Chief Ministers requesting them to ensure that no more oral job interviews should be undertaken for the mentioned categories of posts.

Under the above circumstances, it appears that the more things change elsewhere in India, they remain the same here in the Abode of the Clouds and that We The People cannot do anything about it. Can We?

Yours etc.,
Samuel Swett,
Shillong-2

Dampeners at the Jay Sean's concert
Editor,
I attended the Jay Sean concert last night and certain things happened which certainly dampened my mood and the mood of all those who attended. First and foremost the security check before and after entering the venue is ludicrous to say the least. There were three levels of security check within a 300 meters radius and the worst part is the third tier of security barely 70 feet from the second tier of security but the idiot who frisked me acted as if the two persons who frisked me earlier had not done their job properly. It is as if the organizers of the event have no clue about how security check is done elsewhere. Even in an airport, where security checks are considered sacrosanct post 9/11, there is only one level of security check!

Secondly the public announcement of the arrival of the Chief Minister at the concert is uncalled for. The concert last night was not a cultural event where a choir or a dance troupe was performing. If it was a cultural event then it will be fine to announce the arrival of the Chief Minister; Meghalaya is not North Korea, where the name of the supreme leader has to be announced at every public event. For goodness's sake, last night's concert was a pop concert where an International pop star performed. It is as if the organizers of the event and the Chief Minister himself have no world view.

Thirdly the host of the show had no idea what he was talking about. It painted the organizers and Meghalaya tourism in a bad light. The host introduced Jay Sean as an Indian when actually

he's a British Indian. Indians who are citizens of the USA and England are called Indian Americans and British Indians respectively. He also said that Jay Sean topped the "Billboard charts around the world". The Billboard chart is the music chart in the USA. Topping the billboard chart means a singer has made it considering the cut throat competition that exist in the global music industry.

I would like to end this letter on a positive note. In spite of the shortcomings, I would still give props to the organizers for making the event a grand success. There is always room for improvement and hopefully next time the same organizers host another grand event, such types of shortcomings don't recur.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbanianag,
Via email

Politicians as comedians and charlatans
Editor,
One major observation after reading the newspapers each morning is that the Meghalayan politicians are excellent athletes and comedians too. Athletic in nature as most of them excel in 'Running down each other.' Nothing of substance is ever expressed by them. Comedians, because instead

ate have no right to accuse the voter of incompetence. This is outright political hypocrisy! When wannability through purchase of votes is given preference over the ability to lead and govern; when winning an election is all that matters, why then do all of us react with shock and surprise when governance plunges into depths of ignominy?

So what reason is there to believe that 2023 this time will be anything different? From all indications available, any hope for a change for the better is a vain hope as any change will definitely be a change for the worst. So am I a pessimist? Of course I am! In the 2018-2022 sessions of the Assembly, hardly 8 (only 5%) out of the 60 MLAs ever spoke or took part in debates of the house. A glib-tongued Chief Minister all too often stood up to speak on behalf of Ministers who when they were forced to open their mouths, were more prone to putting their foot in their mouths than anything else. A majority of members preferred to stay mum, silent because they really had nothing to contribute. So in a system that governs by rule of the majority, if the majority of the elected representatives are dumb in articulating their thoughts (that is if they have any) what happens to the state and its people? (Questioning the capability of our elected representatives will hopefully not attract a privilege notice). It has become clearer by the day that power apparently means access to Government funds for the next five years and nothing else. Enough reason to give one the Pre Election shivers!

Fact is everyone is fed up with the manner we go about choosing and electing our political representatives. Irony of ironies is that even those who won through money power are the first, once elections are over, to endorse this public sentiment. It's however meaningless to be sanctimonious and self righteous about it by simply calling upon the poor not to take free money. For the poor, it has nothing to do with morality but everything to do with putting rise on the table. As long as poverty exists, and it seems that this is a deliberate political strategy, money will always be a game changer. Perhaps the best way would be for political parties to openly and officially declare

their opposition to 'money for votes' practice or will this be expecting too much? On record all of them are sincerity itself for such a change but everyone ends up busy in the exercise of the pot calling the kettle black. An insult to the intelligence of the ordinary voter! That's what is so disgusting about our political system.

If our political parties and political managers could come up with self regulatory measures to curb use of money during elections, the people of Meghalaya would have won half the battle against corruption in public life. If the political system could develop the guts and courage to take this simple step, we would start getting real leaders who would not hesitate to lead from the front. I mean if a peon whose job is simply to carry files, is put through a rigorous interview before appointment why should the person who decides and signs on those files that determine the fate of the state, be not pre-grilled for his suitability for the job? Think about it. It would be the first step towards viable reforms in the electoral process. It would rescue Meghalaya politics from the death grip of scoundrels who enter politics to make money rather than to give service. It's the vision of our state and its people! Unfortunately, it's a vision totally at odds with that of our elected leaders. Is this the reason why I have this gut sinking feeling that politicians still consider Good Governance as something the cat brought in? The reason why there is no political leader left who cares for justice? Why does the suspicion linger that candidates for the 2023 elections will continue to see their electorate as purchasable commodities rather than ordinary common citizens whose real need is simply Good Governance! Why do I have this sinking feeling that the next 5 years post 2023 will not be a period of joy but instead most likely be an era full of continued rip-offs, scams and swindling of public money?

I have a vision it will be a government composed by men of straw, for crooks, run by delinquents. For the people there will be nothing but frustration, annoyance and despondency. In conclusion I would be most pleasantly surprised if there should be any politician or political party who will disagree with me on this through a rejoinder.

of addressing the real issues plaguing the citizens for decades, most of them are unconcerned about the misery that more than 50% of Meghalayans find themselves in. The response of politicians is pathetic and a non-serious. One tried to belittle the electorate by talking of 'lipstick and powder' at one of his rallies in Khasi Hills.

For how long are we going to squander our birthright by allowing 'these people' with minimal grey matter and a total lack of conscience to continue to misguide this magnificent state given to us by nature. 2023 is an opportunity for us to identify the wolves in sheep's clothing and disregard these charlatans who have not thought of anyone else but themselves. Meghalaya has wasted itself for decades with the mal-governance and there is not much light at the end of the tunnel. The only saving grace now is that the State now has the Meghalaya High Court. No one is able to throw sand in the eyes of the venerable judges else we the people are condemned to put up with political shenanigans.

Yours etc.,
Tyron D'Brass
Tura

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India's uncontrolled black economy is choking real economy

Government is grand on promises, poor in performance

By Nantoo Banerjee

The government may disagree, India's economic performance in the last eight years has proved to be rather lacklustre. It has been facing a real challenge from the ever expanding black economy, substantially eating up the revenue income of both the national and state governments. Unaccounted money with the rich is hurting the government and the common man. It is a major contributor to the price inflation. The government's demonetisation and digitisation measures have had little impact on the dark economy's growth. The failure to contain the black economy is hurting the entire society. The government appears to be clueless about the size of the black economy in the absence of a reliable assessment of the situation. However, the rectification of the system may prove to be an uphill task as it will call for policing on politicians in power, the police and government officials who are behind the black economy's prosperity.

Black money is surging. So are illegal mining, smuggling and asset building and transfer. The latest CBI and ED raids in certain non-BJP governed states — though termed political by the opposition — show the massive growth of black money transactions, Benami asset transfers, real estate transactions, smuggling and illegal mining. India's GDP in the last eight years averaged a growth of around five percent. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stormed India's political stage with a thumping mandate in 2014 and 2019 promising more jobs, prosperity, less red tape, black money control and big bang reform. They have remained mostly on paper. In fact, the country's parallel black economy may have done much better in recent years. The government's avowed GDP target - a \$5 trillion economy by 2025, or roughly \$3 trillion after adjusting for inflation - would appear to be a pipe dream now. Eight years ago, when BJP came to power it also promised to recover black money from safe havens abroad and ensure a deposit of Rs15 lakh in every Indian's bank account.

In the government's own admission, the demonetisation of Rs 500 and Rs1,000 currency notes in November, 2016, followed by a massive push for digitisation, had little impact on cash money circulation. Cash continues to remain the king. Black money is expanding. The Narendra Modi government had expected demonetisation to extinguish at least Rs 3-4 lakh crore of black money. However, RBI data showed that 99 percent of the money that was invalidated by demonetisation returned into the banking system. Of the invalidated notes worth Rs.15.41 lakh crore, notes worth Rs.15.31 lakh crore returned. Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan had stated that he never supported the idea of a note ban and felt that the short-term impact of the exercise could outweigh the long-term gains. The RBI data suggests that demonetisation was a failure in unearthing black money in the system. In November 2016, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the demonetisation of high currency notes, he said he had taken the step primarily to fight black money.

The government also failed to contain the growth of fake money circulation in the market. The growing presence of counterfeit bank notes continues to be a cause of worry. The RBI detected a 101.93 percent rise in fake notes of Rs.500 denomination, while fake notes of Rs.2,000 increased more than 54 percent during 2021-22. The RBI annual report showed that there was an increase of 16.45 and 16.48

percent in counterfeit notes of Rs 10 and Rs 20, respectively, in FY22. Fake Rs.200 notes rose 11.7 percent. Counterfeit notes detected in denominations of Rs.50 and Rs.100 declined 28.65 and 16.71 percent respectively, the report showed. Of those, 6.9 percent were detected at RBI while the rest 93.1 percent at other banks. Advances in technology may have created some of the most sophisticated, counterfeit-proof currencies in history, but counterfeiters are fast on the trail of the latest wave of security improvements and attempts to keep the counterfeiters at bay. Fake Indian Rupee notes are said to be printed mostly in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Illegal mining and quarrying continue to be a major contributor to the growth of India's black economy. A Union Environment Ministry report listed 4,16,000 incidents of illegal mining between 2013 and 2017. There are at least one lakh incidents of illegal mining in the country every year. "Every month, there were 8,833 cases of illegal mining, every day 294 and every hour 12 incidents". Some of the country's rivers and hills are dug illegally. India's mineral wealth is openly looted. The cases of illegal mining rarely reach the police or the court. For instance, 1,07,609 cases of illegal mining were reported in 2016. Of them, the FIRs with the police were registered only in 6,033 cases. The mining mafia is too strong to be fixed. The offenders manage to escape easily using such commonly practiced tools as bribery, hooliganism and collusion with ruling political party satraps, police and government officials. There is little public discussion or debate on the issue.

Unofficial reports suggest that hawala gangs mint more profit than what is gained through gold smuggling. Their business is to channel the hawala money from Saudi Arabia to different parts of the world. The business continues to grow helping illegal money transfers among cash-rich people. Hawala activities are also commonly used for money laundering, terrorist financing, and drug trafficking. The Hawala transfer system is fast, efficient, and anonymous. Across the world, the hawala system has come under scrutiny in recent years as it is frequently used to finance terrorist activities.

Even the United Nations has enacted regulations to try to control the hawala system and prevent it from being used to finance terrorism. The system has long been popular in India for money laundering, terror funding and fund transfer between people living in the country and their contacts abroad. A traditional money transfer system, hawala is popular in West Asia, North Africa and South Asian countries, including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The system is based on trust and personal relationships between hawala brokers and hawaladars. India's record in controlling hawala transactions has been very poor. Little is reported on the growing hawala racket. India's white economy is inextricably linked with its black economy. It was well explained by economist Arun Kumar in his book, The Black Economy in India, published in 2017. Where in 1991, the black economy constituted about 35 percent of the national economy, it had reportedly increased to 62 percent by 2013. The pernicious effects of black income or illegal asset creation and transfers on the macroeconomy and the resultant inefficiency in society are known. Only a strong political will can control the system. Unfortunately, this seems to be totally missing in the country. (IPA Service)

"All things truly wicked start from innocence."

— Ernest Hemingway

The Shillong Times

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Assam-Meghalaya border combats

THE police firing on five alleged timber smugglers belonging to Meghalaya, at Mukroh, West Jaintia Hills in the wee hours of November 22 has brought parts of the state to a standstill. All ongoing festivals on which a considerable amount of public money has been invested have been called off. Above all, the internet has been short-circuited and therefore all financial transactions such as GPay, UPI etc. have come to a rude halt. It takes one incident to send the entire state into a tizzy. What begs the question is why the Meghalaya border outposts are so poorly guarded, under-staffed and under-armed. Each time there is a border skirmish between Assam and Meghalaya why is the latter at the receiving end? To merely suspend or transfer a police personnel after the grave act of committing daylight murder with not enough evidence to show that the Assam police fired in self-defence, is poor consolation for Meghalaya.

The MDA Government should act in concert and not be coerced into a poorly crafted peace deal. There can be no peace without justice and the bodies of the victims in a pool of blood cries out for justice. Allegations that those shot were timber smugglers will remain allegations until proven beyond reasonable doubt and with credible evidence that they were indeed smugglers. This is the route that the law will take, hopefully. Meanwhile those dead have weeping relatives, parents, widows and orphaned kids they have left behind. A one-time compensation for a death is only a short-term solace.

This is not the first time that Meghalaya's border residents have suffered or been killed by Assam Police. To the onlooker it would appear as Assam and Meghalaya are two separate countries and not states of the same Indian nation. Even interlopers from Bangladesh are not killed in cold blood. Clearly the Assam Police have been given strict orders to deal sternly with violations at the border. The problem is that the borders are yet to be agreed upon; they are still under contestation. So how did the Assam Police decide that the stolen timber belongs to that state? There's also the case of difference in perception. The indigenous people or tribals are by nature forest dwellers. The modern state with its rules has evicted them from their natural abode. There is a huge clash of civilisation here. Tribals still have faith in the traditional governance system but are at the same time governed by modern jurisprudence and that's where the interface clashes. But who will resolve these dichotomies?

Letters to the Editor

Ignorance of the future

Editor,
Election time is approaching and our politicians are busy buying votes. Our voters tend to forget the hardships we endured because of the so-called politicians' lack of accountability while they are preoccupied with lining their coffers. Our politicians frequently switch parties to deceive voters who support them in hopes of bringing about change, but they forget that they are the same people who, when they held office, did nothing to address the problems. The same politician fails to bring the State university, Inner Line Permit (ILP), Policy for job reservation in the private sector, the inclusion of Khasi language in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, India, employment for the youths, etc which are imperatives.

The government has also failed in its efforts to regulate private universities because the majority of the mushrooming institutions lack the facilities and requirements necessary to qualify as universities.

Our politicians are clueless when it comes to the education sector, so instead of making changes, the government is busy planning festivals that will not improve the educational scenario but instead encourage youth to engage in activities

that will reduce their ability to compete in competitive exams.

The only way to solve all of these issues is for the public to vote responsibly; refuse to be duped by dishonest politicians, and be politically conscious since politics will shape and define our future.

Yours etc.,
Kenneth Nongsiej,
Via email

BJP President's statements absurd

Editor,
Apropos of the news, "CM may contest 2023 elections from South Tura" (ST November 21, 2022) reading between the lines of this news, the statement of Mr Ernest Mawrie, BJP President Meghalaya on November 16, 2022 that "Chief Minister Conrad Sangma is aware of the rising popularity of Bernard Marak and is scared of losing the peoples' mandate in Tura is without substance. Also the statement that people of Tura and the State have already made up their minds to oust the NPP government in the upcoming election" is absurd. I call it absurd because the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance is not that of the NPP alone. The BJP is also

What distinguishes humans from animals is their brain structure. Humans have highly developed brains which are capable of thinking, reasoning and learning. We are endowed with the power to conceptualize and formulate ideas and systems of knowledge.

Every group of people in this world has its own method and approach towards learning. The science of learning as a branch of philosophy is known as epistemology. Epistemology is defined as "the theory of knowledge." It is concerned with the mind's relation to reality. What is it for this relation to be one of knowledge? Do we know things? And if we do, how and when do we know things? Western philosophical schools which have their origin in ancient Greek Philosophy, have a well formulated epistemology. It is characterized by a scientific approach to our understanding of the reality around us.

The Khasi people as a tribal community, do not have a scientifically and philosophically formulated epistemology. However, this does not mean that they do not have their own credible system of knowledge. In fact, in spite of its limitations in comparison to western epistemology, Khasi epistemology has many other aspects which surpass its western counterpart. If epistemology deals with the mind's relation with reality and how this leads to knowledge and understanding of that reality, then we can apply this same principle to the Khasi's perception of reality (visible and invisible, material and spiritual, concrete and abstract).

1) With regard to the relation of the mind with the invisible or spiritual reality, namely, God, spirits, devils, evil forces, ancestors etc, the Khasis perceive these realities from a perspective of otherworldly power that these realities possess. The mind perceives them as ultra-human and supernatural entities who wield tremendous influence on humans and on the universe itself. The ancient Khasis employed their reason to conceive of such realities. Thus they formulated their ideas about God as U Blei and ascribe to him many titles which indicate his nature and power like U Blei u balah baijai (almighty), U Blei nongbuh nongthaw (Creator), U Blei uba pyndap pyndap (sustainer) etc. The Khasis' knowledge about the good nature spirits (ki blei) is derived from their perception of nature as the abode of God himself. Thus

to simplify the idea of the omnipresence of God, they speak of spirits who inhabit their natural environment in the form of Leilum leiwah (spirits of mountains and rivers), Leikhlaw-leibtap (spirits of forests), Leishnong-leikhyrdop (spirits of villages) etc. Simultaneously, the Khasis perceive evil forces as co-existing with good beings. Their idea of evil is expressed by their belief in the existence of khyndaj pateng niamra (nine layers below or hell) where ki suid ki khrei (devils) exist. Similarly, along with the good spirits (Lei) there exist side by side evil spirits (Suid) in our natural environment. While the good spirits bring blessing, the evil spirits cause sicknesses and suffering. Thus they speak of

have already known that, as evident in their folktales. This indicates the power of observation of the Khasis which helped them to identify realities around them even the distant ones.

b) With respect to their knowledge of the natural world, the Khasis have a much deeper and realistic perception of their natural environment. Unlike the western perception of the natural world which is basically peripheral, the Khasis' knowledge of their natural environment is holistic and profound. Their intimate knowledge of Mother Nature springs from their close relationship with her. It is a knowledge that arises from a relationship of intimacy wherein they are able to communicate with her like

"The Khasi people as a tribal community, do not have a scientifically and philosophically formulated epistemology."

Suidlum-suidwah (evil spirits of mountains and forests), suidkhlaw-suidbtap (evil spirits of forests), Suidkrem-suidkroh (evil spirits of caves and crevices) etc.

2) There is a common belief that a weak and unfortunate person can be easily affected by such spirits and they call this "ngat lyngkuh pakuh." For this reason, the Khasis would often appease these evil spirits more than they would do to the good spirits, for fear of being tormented by them.

3) With respect to the relation of the mind with the visible or concrete realities, the Khasis definitely have a deeper understanding of the visible reality around them.

4) even more than the western people do.
a) With regard to the universe around them, namely, the visible heavenly bodies like the Sun, the Moon and the stars, the ancient Khasis perceive these as part and parcel of the human family. It is interesting to note that the Khasis never consider either the Sun or the Moon as gods unlike many other civilizations who tend to deify them. The Khasis have always correctly considered these realities as created beings and personified but not deified them in their myths and legends. Thus the Sun is spoken of as sister and the moon as Brother. It is interesting to note that much before NASA scientists prove the existence of ashly soil on the moon's surface, the ancient Khasis

humans do. If close relationship and intimacy is what leads to a deeper knowledge and understanding, then the Khasis' knowledge of Mother Nature is deep and authentic. The fact that they are able to forecast natural events like storms, rain, good weather, bad weather, or to indicate what season would be best to cut down trees and bamboo, vindicates their scientific acumen and power of observation. Another important proof of their authentic understanding of nature, is their extensive knowledge of medicinal herbs which they very effectively use in treating various diseases and ailments or their knowledge of edible wild plants and fruits.

c) When it comes to their perception of the animal world, the Khasis' knowledge and perception of these, go beyond the normal. The Khasis relate with the animal world just like they do with their fellow humans. They look upon the animals, birds and all living beings as part of the big family and they have the ability to communicate with these. The legend of a common market for humans and animals known as Iewluri-lura and the ancient belief that a common language existed between men and animals, prove the supernatural knowledge and perception of Khasis about the animal world which the western civilization had lost long ago. Many folktales and idioms relating to the animal

world, clearly prove that the Khasis possess a credible knowledge of animal psychology.

d) With respect to knowledge and perception of human beings, the ancient Khasis' understanding of human nature and psyche is clearly seen in their folktales, legends and idioms. However, what is more unique about their perception of human attitudes and behaviour, is closely intertwined with their perception of other living creatures. The Khasis observe human behavioral patterns and are able to categorize them accordingly. Thus we have idioms like "sew bnalad" (street dog) which refers to a particular shameless behaviour of a person. Take another idiom which says "miaw bamkhun" (cat devouring its offspring) which indicates a peculiar behaviour of parents who spoil their own children and ruin their future. Another popular idiom says "dong shimat" (one close-ended tube) signifying a typical behaviour of a person who cannot keep any secret. Yet another idiom says "khun jynreih" (flea child) signifying a perverse behaviour of children who bankrupt their own parents through their lavishness. There are so many such idioms which prove that the Khasis possess the ability to observe and understand different categories of human behaviour. However, what is unique and significant about Khasi behavioral psychology is its relationship to the natural world, thereby proving the interconnectedness of all species on this planet.

Perhaps we can discuss more extensively on Khasi epistemology based on further research and study. Nevertheless my intention here is to draw attention to the richness of our Khasi culture and tradition. I wish that soon we will be able to formulate our own Khasi Philosophy just like Indian Philosophy, Greek Philosophy or Chinese Philosophy etc.

In today's world where people all over the world are seeking to reestablish their connectedness with the natural environment on account of the adverse impact of climate change, Khasi epistemology which is so linked to nature could serve as a model towards a holistic understanding and perception of the realities around us. This perhaps would liberate us from the grip of western epistemology which definitely has revealed many loopholes in it especially with regard to man's relationship with his natural environment.

On Modern "Love" – a Farce!

By Deepa Majumdar

Centuries later posterity will perhaps marvel at our frenetic search for love – a search that is also frantic and futile. Why frantic? Because people today are more lonely than ever before. A desire-laden age, modernity carves individuality – a superficial "I" that culminates in the self! Plotinus (204/5-270 CE), the philosopher of Lycopolis, would have been aghast at the selfie. According to Porphyry, he seemed ashamed of "being in the body." Moreover, he "objected so strongly to sitting to a painter or sculptor" that he said:

Why really, is it not enough to have to carry the image in which nature has encased us, without your requesting me to agree to leave behind me a longer-lasting image of the image, as if it was something genuinely worth looking at?

The sum result of this focus on the "I" is the cell of loneliness modernity traps the individual in. Hardly the abundant and profound solitude of the hermit who focuses on the highest verities, modern man isolates himself in a self-imposed cell of unwholesome seclusion, which is more about property rights than search for the higher self.

Materialism and the capacity to love are mutually exclusive. For the presence of one implies the absence of the other. We turn to material things when the world fails us and we are starved of healthy and wholesome forms of love. Conversely, we lose the ability to love others, when we worship material things and mammon. Needy and isolated, modern man seeks love in

substance to them. Insincere verbiage cannot satiate the thirst for love. Finally, our inordinate descent into the body has proscribed friendship, because lust and love move in opposite directions, defeating each other.

Modern man's search for love is futile because he seeks it in all the wrong places and in the wrong ways – in soulless things, in superficial human characteristics, and in and through the body, which can never be the source of love. Moreover, he projects his desires onto the beloved, thus blinding himself through acute subjectivity that adds to the futility of his search for love. When selfish, love is inevitably blind, blinding, attached – even addictive. But when unselfish, love is detached, mature, and full of a spirit of service that teaches us this truism – to love is to sacrifice.

Love comes at myriad levels – from the highest agape, which manifests itself as compassion, to the lowest level, which is love of evil. Love, therefore, draws its moral quality from that of its object. Romantic love is somewhere in-between. Driven by a thirst for self-knowledge, romantic love is really a form of self-love. We need the other as a mirror for our self-knowledge. But when it sublimates infatuation through unselfishness, even romantic love reaches beyond the self. Now sincere and stable, it becomes capable of fulfilling the fundamental purpose of love, which is to know the other – a knowledge easily thwarted by lust and selfishness. To love, therefore, is to know. A faint mimesis of agape,

"Materialism and the capacity to love are mutually exclusive. For the presence of one implies the absence of the other. We turn to material things when the world fails us and we are starved of healthy and wholesome forms of love."

frantic ways. In love with soulless material things that cannot love him back, he loses his soul by succumbing to the appetites. Materialism, which represents this most unrequited of all loves, exacerbates his need for love as a measure of self-completion and self-knowledge. It adds to his inner emptiness. His need for love, therefore, cannot help but be frantic.

When selfish and deluded, his search for love is also futile. Two people cannot exist in a vacuum. Bereft of community and family, the modern individual turns to the beloved to satisfy all his emotional needs – which is more than what any one person can give another. Sometimes he looks for a therapist in the beloved. But a relationship of therapy is not friendship. If anything, the culture of therapy has led to parasitic relationships, wherein two people drain each other. Sometimes the relationship consists of intellectual discussions about the relationship! An "it" therefore intrudes – not the higher ideal that would bind the two persons into one, as the late Pope John Paul II suggested, but a third entity, or "it" – namely this discussion about the relationship. The couple therefore becomes he-she-and-it. Selfishness makes our search for love futile. A self-centered person does not have the love necessary even for ordinary attachment. With incapacity for attachment masquerading as detachment, couples today tiptoe around each other, ever fearful of break-ups and walkouts. A deathly politeness replaces the banter and easy intimacy of true trust and friendship. Insincerity rules the day because modern hypocrisy is more fantastic than modern technology. Most of our human relationships today are about words rather than deeds. But words can lie. Words can beguile. Without deeds to match them, words are mere husks, with no

this level of love, therefore, promises both self-knowledge and knowledge of the other. Love is the relational knowledge of the other. Yet, because romantic love can be intoxicating in its infatuation – or state of limence – and because falling in love comes laden with hidden motives, romantic love is often deluded, subjective, and narcissistic.

The capacity for higher love comes from unselfishness. To love another, one must first glean love through unselfish, ethical actions towards others outside the couple – then bring "home" this love to offer one's family. Moreover, the monogamous relationship demands great moral discipline. Not long ago, marital love meant self-sacrifice. Couples spent a lifetime serving each other. Mothers and fathers gave their all for the sake of their beloved children. No labor was too much, and no sacrifice too great. In turn, children took care of their parents, prioritizing them above all personal desires and pleasures. Love took the form of a profound and unshakeable sense of duty. Neither institutional, nor contractarian, love was personal – because it was sanctified by duty.

This was the stoic generation I saw – a child-centered generation that did not divulge their problems or shed tears before their children. Rarely, if ever, did they use the word "love." Instead, they read it in each other's eyes and proved it through actions. Perhaps they understood (better than we do) that to give love is far greater than to receive it. But perhaps we understand (better than they did) that it is better to be hurt than to hurt another – a sad truism imposed on us through heart-aches and mistakes. Hopefully, in a few generations, we will return to the child-centered ideals of our forebears, but now improved by greater equality.

rad K Sangma compared to the votes secured by Bernard N Marak is 4.4 times more while the votes he secured is 87.54 times more than the votes secured by Marak. Given these facts and figures, the statement of the BJP President, Meghalaya is indeed bizarre.

Yours etc.
V K Lyngdoh,
Via email

Pathetic condition of roads

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed daily I would like to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to the pathetic condition of the roads in our state. In many localities, such as in Golf Links, Nongmensong, etc the roads are ridden with pot-holes. Vehicles have to halt after some seconds to avoid just with the road so people cannot drive their vehicles smoothly and often this leads to accidents. During the rainy season, this situation just gets worse as people cannot find a safer way to move ahead while driving and their vehicles are stuck in the potholes.

Some roads are so badly damaged that they need to be re-constructed while others need to be repaired immediately. Therefore, as a resident of the above local-

ity, I request the authorities to take immediate action so that people are not inconvenienced and also their vehicles do not get caught in the potholes.

Yours etc.,
Prasenjit Dey,
Via email

A parent's concerns

Editor,
It is the month of November when examinations are scheduled in the KJP Synod Mihngi Higher Secondary School Jowai. As a concerned parent, I would like to bring to light that the Physical Training (PT) classes, which are usually held every Friday of the week, have not been held for a while now according to my child. However, in the time table framed for the final examination of classes VIII and IX, PT exam has been included. The question that arises here is how will teachers be able to assess and allot marks when there were no PT classes for the whole year? Now, apart from the PT exams, the school also has periods allocated for Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) and the teacher assesses such work at the end of the annual exams. Here, students normally display their creativity in turning something useful out of waste materials brought

from home. Such activities are usually done in school under the supervision of a teacher. This year, however, it was announced that the students have to complete their SUPW at home and bring them to school. It is doubtful if students will learn anything this way. Also, it is important to note that this particular class is their only chance to understand the value of working with their two hands.

Lastly, I still have one more child in this school; the others have passed out a while back. So far, there has not been a single parent's meeting called by the school, which in my opinion is rather strange especially in the post-pandemic world. As information spreads rapidly along with rumours in this day and age, it is good for the school authorities to interact with parents to dispel unnecessary rumours about the school. I therefore request the concerned authorities to convene a parents' meeting so that every parent can share their views and be kept abreast of the functioning of the school.

Yours etc.,
A Concerned Parent,
Name withheld on request

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"The truth of the matter is that you always know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it."

—Norman Schwarzkopf

The Shillong Times

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Of internet shutdown

A panicky state, poor on governance and high on rhetoric resorts to internet shutdown at the drop of a hat. Other measures such as stopping Meghalaya bound people at Jorabat when they are tourists that had planned their trips well in advance also reflect poorly on the decision-makers. The decision to stop all celebrations is well taken as the people of Meghalaya are grieving at the loss of five precious lives even while many are fighting for their lives in hospital. But the internet is the lifeline of a modern state. Shutting down the internet implies that the state is unsure about whether it is in a position to maintain law and order. At best this is a hasty decision by the Home Department which has at one stroke sent Meghalaya back to the dark ages. When even vegetable vendors and other small vendors are accepting payment via G-Pay, the internet shut-down is like killing a fly with a sledgehammer since all electronic payments have ceased.

Shutting down the internet is also restricting freedom of speech and expression as people are unable to communicate over WhatsApp or to use other social media platforms. A timid state feels that internet shutdown is the only way to prevent trouble from boiling over. Now suppose some cantankerous groups want to put the government on the mat not just for the Mukroh incident but also for any other issue that has the potential to affect the electoral prospects of the ruling party/parties, will the internet be shut down then too? There are people today that are given medical guidance over WhatsApp. Simply because a few irresponsible people want to capitalise from human misery should the State take the arbitrary decision to shut down the internet? Just think of the inconvenience caused for those wishing to book train or flight tickets online? Or even those who need to remit funds elsewhere via RTGS etc. Internet shutdown is a sign that the Government is insecure and why is that so? Because the Government does not believe that its police machinery can tackle any breakdown of law and order? And why have police arrived at this point? Because they are used by politicians and are at their beck and call instead of securing the lives of citizens.

A report by TOP10VPN says that in 2020, India was on internet shutdown for over 8,900 hours, affecting 10.3 million users and causing \$2.7 billion in economic losses. In a nutshell, an internet shutdown is bad for the users as well as the economy. India is among the top 3 fastest-growing internet markets. Yet it is unfortunate that individual states of India resort to internet shutdown to ease themselves of the responsibility of maintaining the rule of law. Will Meghalaya Government release a finding on how much financial loss the present internet shutdown has caused?

The Mukroh Massacre: Counting the Cost

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

Nong-Jingee 11. Nongkhlieh 12. Nurpoo 13. Nurtheng 14. Oomeo and Panchpoonjee 15. Oomwai 16. Raliang 17. Rambai 18. Sath-Pathar 19. Sath-Poonjee 20. Shang-Poong 21. Shilliang-Muntang 22. Sootoongah and 23. Toomar.

Therefore, the Jowye Sub division of 1869 formed the modern day Jaitia or Pnar region which is now under the Jaitia Hills Autonomous District Council and the two Administrative Units, i.e. West and East Jaitia Hills Districts. Then, history took its own course when in 1950 the Governor of Assam appointed the Commission to examine and report in

of Paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and as described in the schedule of this Notification Dated 13th April 1951, shall be excluded from the said United Khasi and Jaitia Hills District. Thus, the exclusion of villages under Block I and II was notified and there are eight (8) villages under Raliang Dolloiship which are included in Block I, viz. 1. Psiar 2. Salaat 3. Mawlibar 4. Mashbar 5. Mukoilum or Mukolam 6. Lummuji 7. Umkynmi and 8. Mynthing (Reference, Khanasamari-U Khun U Hajar Ka Ri HYNiewtrep by Sumar Sing Sawian).

It was until the creation

ous principles had evolved while determining the boundaries. The ethnic principle was applied for Block I and II in which the tribe-wise comparative population was to determine the boundaries of the Mikir Hills and United Khasi-Jaitia Hills District. That the Census Reports of 1951 and 1961 were to be the basis of comparison among Mikirs and non-Mikirs population and the transfer of Block I and II from the Mikir Hills to Jaitia Hills will be determined by the population figures. However, this principle had never worked as both the States did not concur on the method of collecting and analysing the data. Thus, the matter remained inconclusive ever since.

The rage against the inability and ineptness of the present Government led by the NPP-BJP-UDP and Regional/Independent combined to bring about lasting solution to border imbroglio is going to be harsher in the coming days and it might rear its ugly head in the form of communal violence in volatile areas in Shillong and elsewhere in the State. The Law enforcers and respective District Authorities as well must be on their toes not to let any backlash occur in any part of the city and the State.

In the aftermath of the Mukroh Massacre the State and people stand to lose big time. We are already losing precious lives and livelihoods, as six innocent lives were shot dead. Innocent villagers along the Meghalaya-Assam Border are living in fear and are suspicious of each other. On the day of the Mukroh incident the vegetable and food vendors in the main commercial hubs shut as early as 8 PM due to sharp and sudden drop in footfall. The impact on shops and business establishments is huge and crores of rupees are being lost since the incident and we will be losing more in the coming days till the tension subsides. Public transport remains off the road at sunset and long-distance commuters are the worst hit and they are in grave distress.

The Mukroh Massacre could have been averted had the Assam Police and the Forest officials acted in a mature manner. The Mukroh-like incident must be stopped from occurring in the future by finding tenable and practical solutions to the border problem. A people-based approach must be adopted and both the States must facilitate people to people interface along the borders and allow them to decide what is best for them. Moreover, the rights of indigenous people to have access to forest must be safeguarded at any cost and as per law.

Lastly my thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved families in this darkest hour.

It was until the creation of the United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills District and the subsequent exclusion of villages under Block I and II from the Jowai Sub-Division in 1951 that there began the simmering tensions along the areas bordering the erstwhile United Khasi & Jaitia Hills and the Mikir Hills. The border between Meghalaya and Assam runs into 885 kilometres long and in between there are several geographical locations which are considered as disputed or areas of differences and it is an inherited mess which was created by the British. Mostly the areas of dispute or differences were Inter-District border disputes since the erstwhile Assam Province and Composite State of Assam.

the matter of, (a) exclusion of certain areas from the United Khasi and Jaitia Hills Autonomous District and inclusion of the same in the Autonomous District of Mikir Hills and (b) exclusion of certain areas from the Mikir Hills District. The term of references of the Commission is to- "examine and report the matter of exclusion of two blocks of areas... in the Jowai Sub-Division of the United Khasi-Jaitia Hills District and inclusion of the said areas in the Mikir Hills."

After the consideration of the report of the Commission appointed vide Notification No. TAD/R/31/50 dated the 3rd October 1950, the Governor was pleased to order that the area hitherto comprised within the United Khasi-Jaitia Hills District as defined in sub-paragraph (2)

of the United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills District and the subsequent exclusion of villages under Block I and II from the Jowai Sub-Division in 1951 that there began the simmering tensions along the areas bordering the erstwhile United Khasi & Jaitia Hills and the Mikir Hills. The border between Meghalaya and Assam runs into 885 kilometres long and in between there are several geographical locations which are considered as disputed or areas of differences and it is an inherited mess which was created by the British. Mostly the areas of dispute or differences were Inter-District border disputes since the erstwhile Assam Province and Composite State of Assam. As a matter of fact, the border between Meghalaya and Assam is a jagged line and since the British era vari-

The shocking truth about police encounters

By Jagdish Rattanani

The nation should be shell shocked by the report of an eminent panel set up by the Supreme Court to investigate the death of four accused in the brutal rape and murder case of veterinary doctor (identified only as Ms. Disha) in Hyderabad in 2019. The panel, comprising Justice V S Sirpurkar (retired judge of the Supreme Court), Justice Rekha P Sondur Baldota (former judge of the Bombay High Court) and Dr. D R Kaarthikeyan (former CBI director), begin their recommendations in the case of the "encounter" killings with the following words: "Just as mob lynching is unacceptable, so is any idea of instant justice. At any point of time, rule of law must prevail. Punishment for crime has to be only by the procedure established by law."

Their 387-page report is so thorough, meticulous and in graphic detail that it amounts to a conviction of the police and the State machinery for what clearly and beyond any shadow of doubt was a staged encounter in which four accused, three of them juveniles, were killed. Accused Jollu Shiva, Jollu Naveen and Chintakunta Chennakeshavalu were aged 17, 15 and 15 respectively, their ages conclusively proved as recorded in school registers. The fact that at least two of these three were juveniles was clearly known to the police. The fourth accused killed in the "encounter", Mohammed Arif, was 26.

All the four were from poor families - truck drivers and cleaners who were picked up, it appears, not by police but by the owner of the truck that was seen in video footage as the investigation commenced. The report should also be shocking to all of India because it gives a graphic account of how the police function, almost like rookies who have no clue about anything remotely linked to any formal investigation, let alone investigating a shocking case that led to a nation-wide public outcry.

If 75 years after independence, this is how police operations work in some of the most important cases, then questions need to be asked on the state of the nation itself. Further, the case comes not from what was once the backyards of Bhagalpur but in a thriving State capital that wants to become the technology capital of the nation and attracts investments like Amazon's largest campus anywhere in the world. These modernistic investments and infrastructure sit ill at ease with governance structures that live on from pre-historic times. They mock the State, they bring ridicule to its elaborate and carefully constructed norms of due process, and they lower the standing of a nation that seeks to be a global power. It would therefore be legitimate to ask: has India progressed since independence at all or we slipping and heading toward a governance collapse?

The report should further shock the entire cadre of the Indian Police Service officers, who are considered the top echelons of the police bureaucracy but have rarely if ever spoken about the growing menace of staged encounters, the shoddiness of investigations and the lack of anything remotely professional in the functioning of the Indian police. Each and every IPS officer in the nation would hang his or her head in shame on reading this report.

Now in the dock and almost impossible to escape are the local police and the State machinery that not only allowed and probably sanctioned at the highest

level such a crime but also did not complete a full and proper investigation of a case that had shocked Telangana and the nation. In that sense, the so-called encounter quietened public anger but it did not do justice to anyone, not even the victim, because the case was not investigated fully and the real culprits probably were never at risk of being caught. The encounter that killed four accused also killed all leads; it killed investigation and it murdered the process by which justice is delivered.

The report by the eminent panel records some of the most ludicrous claims put up by the police - that when taken to the spot for recovery of material evidence, the accused threw mud into the eyes of the police escorts, that they snatched a revolver and fired at the police. One para from the long report illustrates the bankruptcy of the official narrative: "On account of the fact that the allegation of throwing of dust and earth is introduced belatedly and considering the improbabilities in the version, it is to be held that this allegation is an embellishment and introduced only to give a plausible explanation that the accused could escape from the custody of such a large contingent of armed police party. When any such mischievous attempt is initiated by one of the accused, the entire police party would get alerted and would thwart all such attempts. Such helplessness could not have been expected even from a layman..."

The report illustrates how State-sanctioned killings and the subsequent coverups are done - at one level ham-handed but also unfettered by any fear of a follow up. The teams put to this task are so brutalised and confident that there will be no accountability that they care not about a cover for their killings. Linked to this of course is the political class - all parties at all levels - that want quick fixes for potential political trouble on law & order issues and to keep the economy ticking. The nexus of the political-business class stands out clearly, standing as a force called progress and prosperity against the weak and the downtrodden who have little hope of justice from such a system. This is an India-wide divide and it makes the nation weaker even though the numbers on the economic dashboard may look stronger.

The Supreme Court of India has done yeoman service by setting up the panel, which has served the nation by its detailed findings. The report should lead to immediate local area arrests of the guilty policemen but it must also trigger a rethink on the problem of police encounters. All political parties must recognise this as a dangerous decline in standards. IPS officers must speak up. We also need new administrative protocols - sending on compulsory leave top officers in the immediate chain, leading to the IPS officer in charge, as the case is investigated by a judicial panel, will end the sorry case of police encounters right away. Until then, silly stories like the accused threw mud in the eyes of the police will continue to throw mud in the eyes of the nation.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at Bhavan's SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

The Mukroh shooting incident

Editor,
We condemn in the strongest possible terms the mindless act of cruelty and barbarism of the Assam Police which killed five villagers of Mukroh in West Jaintia Hills. The flare-up of border disputes between states of North East India has been recurring and if not resolved at the earliest will one day escalate into war.

By the Executive Act of the then Assam Government in 1951 two areas of Block I and II were transferred and mechanically tagged with the non-contiguous and truncated Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills District in spite of the strong opposition of the lone Member of the Legislative Assembly from Jaintia Hills. This was the third partition of Jaintia Hills and till today the sense of irredentism prevails in the

political mind of the Jaintias. Many Jaintias from the areas so forcibly transferred were arrested and taken to Nowgong jail and other jails elsewhere for their peaceful opposition to the high-handedness of the then Assam Government. Two of the arrested, namely, Mr. Trod Thiang and Mr. Pin Thiang Sarian were beaten to death in Nowgong jail while three other persons were missing and their whereabouts are not known even today. Even militant elements have been used occasionally by the Assam Police to intimidate the Jaintias.

Since 1951 and for the last almost 80 years there were a series of peaceful movements and agitations by various NGOs formed by the Jaintias on the question of retransferring of Block I and Block II areas to Jaintia Hills officially known earlier as the Jowai Sub-division, one of the oldest subdivisions of the then composite state of Assam. The Jaintia people

will never accept the government report according to its letter No.POL.78/2010/209 dated Shillong the 8th August 2011 regarding the area to be transferred to Meghalaya in these two Blocks and the separate consideration of the two villages of Khanduli & Psiar which are part and parcel of the two Blocks.

The martyrdom of all those who had sacrificed their lives shall never be reconciled until the restoration of the pre-1951 map of Jaintia Hills is fulfilled by the re-transfer of the detached area of Jaintia Hills; the souls of those who were martyred are still heard crying for the re-transfer of the two areas Block I and II to Jaintia Hills.

We however hope the Meghalaya government would be able to convince Assam to honour this history and to undo its unconstitutional act committed soon after the promulgation of the Indian Constitution, and to agree to the re-transfer. We do accept the five principles as agreed

by Assam and Meghalaya viz. historical facts, geographical continuity, administrative convenience, ethnicity, and people's will, in deciding the boundary issues between the two states.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

Disturbing news from Meghalaya

Editor
The news from Meghalaya and India has been shocking these last few days. First the gruesome murder of Shradha Walker by her boyfriend (after months of domestic violence), then the killing of Meghalaya citizens by Assam police, then the honour killing in Gujarat. It seems unbelievable that Aftab Ameen Poonawalla's parents used to visit the couple! Why did they not intervene? It seems unbelievable as well that Assam police, who are supposed

to defend the defenseless, have killed Meghalaya citizens in cold blood. When will they learn that Meghalayan lives matter? As you state in your editorial (TST, Nov 23, 2022), there is a clash of civilizations here between Meghalaya and Assam. As for the Gujarat honour killing of a sister by her brother, for allegedly having an affair, which century are we living in? How are young men being raised these days? How are police being trained? All this is incredibly sad.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

Most inhuman attitude

Editor,
The recent shooting incident involving once again the Assam police and its administration at Mukroh situated under Laskain Block of West Jaintia Hills district is a stark reminder that a small spark can break the peace. The ada-

mant attitude of the present state government to take head on the state of Assam shows a lack of firmness, lack of political will and hard stances when it comes to asserting one's right. The State police has been shamed on various social media platforms which portrays a sad picture of the police department for not acting immediately but possibly certain political strings were being pulled. We have a Home Minister who belongs to a ruling party with no firmness in his statement while his party colleagues are calling for a stronger stand. How well the present government stays the course will be interesting to watch. However, prayers for the fallen victims and remembrance is what we need to have in such trying times.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Via email

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"I find hope in the darkest of days, and focus in the brightest. I do not judge the universe."

— Dalai Lama

The Shillong Times

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If wishes were horses

THE "lightning speed" with which the central government appointed former IAS officer Arun Goel as a member of the three-man Central Election Commission faced the scrutiny of the Supreme Court. The government took the stand that courts need not sit in judgment over matters under the purview of the executive. The apex court has admitted that it cannot overturn this appointment as the Constitution does not specify any yardstick for appointments to the EC. Yet, the court has sought "files" from the government vis-à-vis the appointment for scrutiny. On the positive side, the court intervention has brought the subject to public focus. Discussions and debates are integral to the success of Democracy. Prima facie, a retired IAS officer has within him the necessary qualifications to act as EC or in future as CEC. A colossus like TN Seshan had proven this. So much so, his word was law. An officer known for his integrity and rough and tough postures, Seshan was the toast of the season when he held the CEC post. By all reckoning, it however is unlikely that the Modi government would be magnanimous enough to allow the re-creation of such a situation.

The Supreme Court's observation that a "short tenure" for CEC would "destroy" the independence of the election commission is well-taken. At the same time, this should be applicable to other institutions as well, including the judiciary itself. The 49th CJI, Justice UU Lalit, retired in a short span of 82 days; and his predecessor exited after 124 days. In the present case, the central government submitted that EC post lasts cumulatively for around five years. The apex court has stated the obvious – that someone in a position should have the time and space to perform and enable him or her to correct the ills in the system, strengthen it and leave it in a better shape. But, the likes of Lalit got no such time. The judiciary is one of the four pillars of a democratic system. The Election Commission is an independent body just as courts are and both these entities should be run by individuals with a high degree of integrity; and so should the executive be. But ideal situations are different from real life. No government with a sense of seriousness would want a parallel authority to sit over its head. Multiple power-centres do no good to a nation; and the scenario in this country is already complex. The central authority that must carry with it a great sense of integrity should also have the courage and freedom to perform. If only wishes were horses....

Letters to the Editor

Why allow protests near Civil Hospital?

Editor,
The location of the statue of U Kiang Nangbah opposite Shillong Civil Hospital has now become the venue for dharnas, sit-in demonstrations, rallies, and hunger strike for groups of people demanding their rights from the government. Inspired by the life, courage, and sacrifice of the great Jaintia patriot, this place is popular for staging agitation programmes by various pressure groups, teacher's organisations, etc. However, I am appalled at seeing the staging of such programmes so near to the Civil Hospital, which is the most sought-after hospital for commoners. These dharnas/agitation programmes last for hours and vehicular movement is restricted or diverted. How do we expect patients to reach the hospital in emergencies? These demonstrations occasionally turn violent, like the one we witnessed on Thursday. They have the potential to disturb the patients and put their lives at stake.

It is understood that staging an agitational programme near the Meghalaya Secretariat cannot be allowed. But what is the justification for allowing these to be held in a location close to a hospital? Are the lives of innocent, poor patients mostly from rural areas less important in any way?

Yours etc.,
Dr Omarlin Kyndiah
via email

Spineless MDA Govt

Editor,
The recent incident in the border village of Mukroh where five Jaintia tribesmen of Meghalaya lost their lives also points out to the state of misery within the political establishments here in Meghalaya. The Government of Assam led by its able and dynamic CM, Himanta Biswa Sarma spared no time in suspending the police and forest officials besides retransferring the SP. The Assam Government has also handed over the matter for judicial and CBI inquiry besides ordering framing of SOPs for the Home and Forest departments. Mind you,

Meghalaya's economic dilemma as a dependent state

By Patricia Mukhim

Tourism is a money spinner if we know how to nurture and sustain it. But there are certain pre-conditions that are non-negotiable. A climate of peace and security is imperative. Tourism is a fragile industry. It takes one incident in a distant village in West Jaintia Hills to shatter the peace in Meghalaya. Sure, we are all outraged by the loss of five innocent lives at Mukroh at the hands of a panicky Assam police contingent that went berserk and started firing to kill, instead of firing to disperse a crowd. Our demand for justice for the family members of the five victims who died a violent death must be ongoing and not an intermittent one. The trouble is that people of Meghalaya have short memories and only rake up issues selectively and generally before the elections. Once elections are over it's back to business as usual.

For nearly two years between 2020-2021 Covid had put paid to the tourism and hospitality business. Quite a few homestay owners could not repay their bank loans and struggled to stay afloat. Tourism had just begun to pick up this year when we now have another bout of insecurity and most tourists cancelling their plans to come to Shillong and also cancelling their hotel/homestay bookings. Think of the loss to those running these facilities! It has been stated times without number that tourism is one important engine for employment generation. Yet those who specialise in creating a law and order situation on the plea of demanding justice for the dead souls don't stop to think of similar other living souls that are dependent on tourism and other ancillaries for their livelihoods. There are taxi owners and drivers; vegetable and meat vendors; restaurateurs, tour guides and tour operators and the list goes on. Will those who deploy their skills to create panic and insecurity compensate for these losses? I guess if they can be arrested then perhaps they can be held accountable. But who will arrest them? The rule of law in Meghalaya has never been at its best except during the short stint when late RG Lyngdoh was Home Minister. He gave the police enough freedom to carry out their tasks and did not reduce them to handmaidens of the Government as they are today and have been in the last four years.

On Thursday afternoon the news spread that the Assam Petroleum Mazdoor Union would not send their members to Meghalaya on account of the fluid situation, vehicles from every nook and corner came out and queued in front of petrol pumps. Every road, lane and bye-lane in the city was jammed with vehicles. It's the first sign of panic. Housewives started panic buying and we know what that means – cost escalation on several pretexts.

What is missing in all of this is the voice of sanity which should come from civil society. In every enlightened society there are peace activists whose voices would prevail and they become bridge builders between agitating groups and the government. Recently the Government called a meeting of the Rangbah Shmang and the all-faith leaders forum to assist in ensuring that things did not spiral out of control after the Mukroh firing incident. So what are these "leaders" doing? Have they

they surmise that cutting the links to social media by banning the internet can save their collective faces. This is such a short-sighted and cheap short-cut to redeeming political ego. The tragedy is that the truths of these moments have no space to be distilled. There is a disconnect between expectations and reality. The youth expect so much but those mandated to govern the State are buffeted by their own proclivities to make hay while the sun shines and keep off the thinking for the next five years and the next....

Just a few days ago the North East Olympics Games (NEOG) had come to a grand climax. Everyone was overjoyed but more so the Chief Minister and the CEO in chief who virtually ran the

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spoken out and called for a better handling of the present situation? Are they able to prevail upon the pressure groups to remain calm and not create more problems for their own people in their quest for revenge on what happened at Mukroh?

In periods of tumult and confusion people tend to lose

NEOG like clockwork. Naturally celebrations were in order and the celebrations were such that they went on to the wee hours even while tired drivers waited outside for their masters to pack up.

"Just a few days ago the North East Olympics Games (NEOG) had come to a grand climax. Everyone was overjoyed but more so the Chief Minister and the CEO in chief who virtually ran the NEOG like clockwork. Naturally celebrations were in order and the celebrations were such that they went on to the wee hours even while tired drivers waited outside for their masters to pack up."

faith in governance systems. They feel it is necessary to take extraordinary action by tearing down systems of power. Such situations leave no space for alternative narratives. Social media has become a drug that gives power to even the most unthinking person. The collapse of decency feeds the attack on democracy and the tenuous threads that hold democracy together suddenly seem to disintegrate. These signs of the loosening of democratic tenets tends to put those at the helm of power in a vulnerable position. From that convoluted position

of events. The poor internet is always the casualty for the Conrad Sangma Government. This Government believes that the best way to fix what is broken is with a sledgehammer.

Meghalaya is a broken state. The poor are increasing phenomenally hence one cringes to see the vulgar display of wealth by those in power and close to those in power. The road (only parts of them being in a driving condition) to Mukroh whether one takes the Nartiang way or the Barato-Phramer-Jowai road are nightmares. From Barato

-Phramer-Jowai the road passes through miles of stone quarries and hundreds of women breaking stones even in the dark. It's a hard life and they have learnt not to complain. They barely survive on the MNRGA wages.

The recent survey released by the Union Ministry Education shows Meghalaya to be the state with the highest number of dropouts at 39.2% till and just after Class 10. The overall figure for India is 16.9%. Just think of the future of these kids and adolescents! Where will they end up? And this is the tragedy of Meghalaya. We are going down on all parameters. And there is no serious thinking as to how to redeem our failing state.

The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo community however has not produced a brave enough politician who will question the privileges enjoyed by the upper middle class. Progressive policies whether on education or land reforms (cadastral survey being one) all run into the wall of upper middle class opposition. The idea is killed stone dead! Today this tribal society is not just fragmented by a clash of ideology but also because of the need to carefully preserve and sustain the strong drive of entitlement coming from the top 20% of rich tribals. For the tribes of Meghalaya to solve the problem of this deepening class division we will have to start by admitting their existence and our own complicity in maintaining them and their lavish lifestyles which come out of the public exchequer. Beneath the veneer of classlessness the Khasi class reproduction machine operates with ruthless efficiency. And this happens across faiths – Christians and the so-called indigenous faith practitioners. Religion does not provide us with the moral rubric we need to measure our humanity with. Just look at the conspicuous consumption in terms of swanky vehicles on the road and the over-the-top weddings even while a huge number of our own people are sinking deeper into poverty. They are just existing, not living! And this while the top 20% of tribal elite go about their wealth accumulation project without so much as a moral disquiet!

Whenever there is a law and order situation those who suffer the most also occupy the last rung of the economic ladder. Pressure groups that create desperate situations should therefore think who they are punishing. They are punishing the poorest in a graver dilemma than they already are in. Pressure groups need to be more responsible and accountable and not kick those who are already hungry in their starved frames.

Jal Jeevan Mission project is incomplete. I request the concerned authorities to take urgent steps to complete the project at the earliest.

Yours etc.,
Mangrak M. Marak
Village: Seelpang Rongara,
South Garo Hills

Two big upsets in 2022 WC

Editor,
The ongoing Football World Cup which is less than 1 week old has so far sprung two big upsets. For a competition that's usually won by global heavyweights, this World Cup is still the place for shocks. Saudi Arabia delivered a sucker punch to Argentina 2-1 and Japan stunned Germany with late strikes. It has really been an unpredictable start to this latest edition of the World Cup.

Yours etc
M. Haque,
Shillong-6

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The Curse of Joblessness

By Joseph M. KharkongorB

"With Meghalaya's unemployment rate at 3.56% last month as compared to 2.28% previous month, there is an overwhelming need to shift youths' efforts from seeking conventional employment to creating marketable opportunities for themselves. However, the lack of employment opportunities is a serious concern all over the country, but the situation in Meghalaya has been considerably one of the worst!"

We're in an economic emergency! This message is a stark one and indeed, with unemployment set to surge, we're yet to see the full extent of impact on the economy. For those of us in the education and skills sector, we know the important role that upskilling and education play in economic recovery. But sadly, we were left underwhelmed. Time and time again the Meghalaya government talks up the need for skills but fails to commit to anything transformative. And this time was no different – demonstrating once more that the government still doesn't have a long-term and sustainable plan for skills to both stem unemployment and fuel economic recovery.

Whilst re-focusing existing funding is sensible right now, Meghalaya Labour Laws and Policies feels outdated and lacks any details about how we're going to support people to retrain and reskill now. It would serve no one, least of all those trying to get back to work, to see a rehash of the unsuccessful planning. We are at a pivotal moment in time and we need to use this as an opportunity to make radical changes to our education and skills system to help Meghalayans get back into meaningful work and ultimately, make strides towards getting our economy back on track. This year we witnessed Meghalayans enter into a "great depression" mode with many losing their jobs and many many more deprived of one. Glimmers of hope are needed to help us tide through this collective despair. As the year draws to a close, here's a look at the unemployment movement that shook the state and beyond.

Teachers should stay in School : The city came to a standstill after hundreds came out to participate in a public rally led by FKJGP as well as other NGOs, including the KSU, the RBYF and the HNYF. Hundreds of youths marched from Motphran to the Fire Brigade Ground as part of the rally raising their banners; their stated gripe being that "no positive steps have been initiated by the government to increase employment for the youths." Loud slogans also echoed the streets of Shillong even as the protest took an unfortunate turn when police vehicles were vandalized and violence ensued amid flaring tensions. The protestors demanded the state government to come up with a policy to safeguard the future of the youths of Meghalaya. The never ending agitation by contractual teachers outside the Meghalaya Secretariat demanding for the restoration of service took an ugly turn after the police lobbed three tear-gas shells at the agitating teachers, including pregnant women, to prevent them from staging protest outside the gate of state secretariat. The Meghalaya police however, had to face severe criticism for lobbing teargas shells and lathi-charged the teachers.

Hacker caught in his own Web : In April, a frustrated unemployed youth angry with the government over the lack of employment opportunities in Meghalaya sent shivers across the Northeastern region of the country for attempting to execute a series of bomb attacks on various educational institutions across the state in retaliation for the rising unemployment in Meghalaya under the name of **Lawei ba Phymai (Bright Future)**. Reliable sources from the police department said that the accused is a hacker and

has been involved in unlawful computer hacking since 2010. They further stated that he has been under the radar of the Crime Investigation Department (CID) since 2016 for various hacking crimes. The accused, currently locked up at the Shillong District Jail, was -- with the assistance from the CID (Cyber Cell, New Delhi) -- finally traced and arrested on April 13th this year by a twenty-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) consisting of highly experienced investigators from the CID and the Crime Branch of Meghalaya. The hacker has now been booked under the stringent UAPA for attempts to unleash terror in Meghalaya, as well as the Information Technology Act, 2000 for hacking into the email accounts of several senior government officials, for spying, stealing confidential documents and sending threat mails directly to the Chief Minister of Meghalaya and other high dignitaries of the state. Unemployment in Meghalaya certainly is a ticking time bomb waiting to explode if effective interventions are not put in place to mitigate the unsavoury impact of high youth unemployment.

Corporations in need of Correction : To join the joyride, this year contractual workers of Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited (MeECL) under the banner of MeECL Progressive Workers' Union (MePWU) took-out several protests against the state government for failure to regularize their services. The employees of the Mawmluh Cherra Cement Limited (MCCL) too under the banner of the MCCL Employees Union (MCCEU) staged a sit-in-protest against the state government's failure to clear their pending salaries. The employees were compelled to come out to the street and protest against the failure of the state government to clear their pending salaries. A spokesperson of the Union said, the government would require Rs. 200 crore for payment of salary and clearing other pending dues to the employees. KHADC EM and Nongshken MDC Grace Mary Kharpuri also extended support to the agitating employees and urged the government to address their grievances at the earliest but till date no such aid has been received.

The list goes on and on... Over the past several years, Meghalaya have witnessed the most severe economic crisis. Poverty issues may not be the major agenda to tackle in Meghalaya however, the unemployment rate among youths in the abode of clouds has been on the rise particularly, in comparison to other regions. Unemployment has been seen to be one of the causes of poverty and that the unemployed should not just rely on the government jobs but instead, they need to think further ahead – they need to venture into the entrepreneurial fields (social entrepreneurship in particular) to gain a sustainable income and thus, help the society to further improve the standard of living of a country.

We need to create an environment where lifelong learning can flourish and be appealing and accessible for all. And to do this, we need an outside-of-the-box solution which is more robust and flexible. Not only should this include increased online opportunities – utilizing existing schemes and employment infrastructure – but also a programme focused on 'taking learning to the people' to give learners the chance to access shorter, sharper courses – and learn in a time and place that suits their own lifestyles. There has never been a more important time for us to focus on reskilling and lifelong learning. Unlike the current 'NPP Quick Fix' solutions in place, we need a plan with longevity to address unemployment, skills shortages and ongoing productivity issues. We need to think differently, and we need to act now!

*"Nothing strengthens authority
so much as silence."*
— Leonardo da Vinci

The Shillong Times

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Social crises and a silent civil society

EACH time there is a law and order fall-out in the city of Shillong this newspaper gets several letters from concerned individuals expressing their views succinctly and with large doses of pragmatism. However, most of these authors do not wish to reveal their names for fear of a backlash. What kind of a society do we live in where free expression is fraught with danger? A democracy thrives because citizens engage in day to day governance, call out wrongdoings and generally give suggestions on what and how governments could improve governance and enforce the rule of law. A society where people feel insecure even to express their views cannot be called a democratic society. Only in autocratic societies and dictatorships are people resigned to the culture of silence despite all the sufferings they endure. When people are asked why they want to maintain anonymity they say that they feel unsafe revealing their identities. What does that speak of the civil society space in Meghalaya? Is there such a space or are people condemned to remain silent despite the violence that regularly visits a section of the society?

Civil society is a diverse group of people coming together for a common cause. This is yet to develop in Meghalaya. Most groups are ethno-centric pressure groups and echo-chambers of each other. Those who speak up at critical times also get marked and targeted. Many feel that an issue that does not affect them is not worth speaking up for. But there is such a thing as humanity that connects individuals in a society and humanity is about being there for each other. People of Meghalaya, especially the educated and informed section should ask themselves if silence is equivalent to approval of all the wrongdoings that are happening in the society around. Refusing to speak against injustice can be translated to accepting the status quo. Silent spectators are also enablers in crime. Keeping silence in the midst of injustice only allows injustice to prevail.

And what if the person who is silent becomes a victim at some point and everyone chooses to remain silent? Not speaking up means allowing others to trample on our human rights. Speaking up is a responsibility, not a choice. It also gives one inner peace. Above all speaking up is an act of humanity. Inequality is a major threat to social and economic rights. Standing in solidarity with those affected by racism and other injustices gives them a sense of hope. This is what fosters human relations and builds a democratic ethos. When one person speaks up others too are encouraged to take a stand for the truth. People don't need to be reminded that there's unity in strength.

Letters to the Editor

Internet ban!

Editor,
The internet has been banned for 3 days since November 22 in Meghalaya. It was done so abruptly that some people are still asking what happened. There is nothing on the news channels that we have been watching and the news from the newspapers are always a day late. This is the age of information technology; we are so used to and dependent on the internet, so much so that we'd rather read e-paper and follow news channels and newspapers on social media than buy one from Kong's shop. Yet, we are still in the dark.

There have been many kids handing out black flags and telling people to shut down offices, but when I saw their faces, it looked like they were having fun. There was no remorse, no sadness, not even sympathy for the people who have died. And the situation has now only gotten worse.

So I have a question; is the internet ban intended to curb 'misuse' of information and prevent 'breakdown of law and order', or has it been done because we are scared of showing our true colours, of the potential of our people to spread hatred and not show any sympathy towards others?

There are always two sides to the story. If there is something good that can come out of something, then there is also a possibility that the worse can come out of it as well. There are people who will use the internet to spread rumours and misinformation, yet there are also others who need the internet

for their studies, for their job, and for correct information. We have lost a lot just from a day of no internet.

There is a need to be connected in these trying times, there is a need for information, and we have seen this since the beginning of the pandemic, it can be done only through the internet, which can bring us closer.

Yours etc.,
Aibanbha Mylliemgap,
Via email

Khasi
Epistemology
and Mythemes

Editor,
I read with interest Barnes Mawrie's article on "Khasi Epistemology" in the Shillong Times, Nov 23, 2022. I commend this newspaper for creating a space for intellectual discussions that have societal value and relevance, and the many authors that contribute to such discourses. Intellectual dialogue leads to the formulation of ideas that create progressive mindsets, value-added policies, and a better society.

To paraphrase Dr Barnes's definition, epistemology is the structured expression of our lived reality (ontology). He takes the view that Khasi and other tribal cultures have a deep relationship with nature and spirits that leads us to an understanding of "ultra-human and supernatural entities". These concepts are embedded in our beliefs, behaviours and social interactions.

He goes on to say that "The Khasi people, as a tribal community, do not

After urging the universities to hold orchestrated debates and discussions on a non-academic propaganda book titled, "Modi@2020", the UGC has issued instructions recently to organize seminars on Constitution Day on the theme, 'India as mother of democracy'. No national leader worth the name had ever made such an absurd claim. Contrarily, recognizing the hierarchical and undemocratic nature of the Indian society, our national leaders worked hard to give a shape to a constitution that defended democratic and secular values, and espoused the liberal ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. Organizing seminars glorifying the kings and the khap panchayats amounts to making a mockery of the Indian Constitution.

November 26, 1949, is an important day in the history of modern India. It was the day when the Constitutional Assembly of India completed the task assigned to it and formally approved the draft of the Constitution of India. Indian Constitution took a concrete shape because of the hard work of 299 members of the Constitutional Assembly who sat for 114 days, spread over nearly three years. Our Constitutional makers took inspiration not only from the ancient republican traditions but also from the modern constitutional experiments in Britain, the USA, France and Ireland. The Indian Constitution with 395 Articles, 8 schedules and 22 parts is the largest written constitution in the world. The successful completion of the task by the Drafting Committee under the effective leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar enabled India to overcome the dominion status and become a modern republic on 26th January 1950.

The history of the Indian Constitution was intimately related to the history of India's freedom struggle from colonial rule. While fighting against the British, our national leaders aspired for a constitution of our own that would set the goals for a sovereign democratic state. Although Indians fought for over a hundred years, independence became possible only after the II World War. After the war, Britain became so weak that it found it difficult to contain the growing discontent and continue the colonial rule in India. Although Winston Churchill

won the war, his party got defeated in the elections. The Labour party government led by Clement Attlee, decided to put an end to the British rule in India and announced its intention to form Constitutional Assembly to decide on the future of the Indian state. To facilitate the political transition, an Interim Government was formed in September 1946 to assist the Imperial government, with Jawaharlal Nehru as Vice President, Sardar Patel as Home Minister and Liaquat Ali Khan of the Muslim League as Finance Minister. Simultaneously, the members of the Constitutional Assembly were also elected indirectly from among the elected members of the provincial assemblies.

When the Cabinet Mission came to India in 1946, Mohammad Ali Jinnah pitched up the demand for separate Pakistan. He declared that the Muslim League representatives would join the Constitutional Assembly only if his demands were conceded. Because of opposition from the Muslim League, the British government was hesitating to convene the meeting of the Constitutional Assembly. It was only after Jawaharlal Nehru threatened a mass resistance, the British government agreed to convene the first meeting of the Constitutional Assembly on December 9, 1946. The first session attended by 211 members elected Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad as Permanent President of the Constitutional Assembly. All representatives from the Muslim League boycotted the session. On December 13, 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru moved the historic 'Objective Resolution'. The discussion on the Resolution was however postponed because of the absence of the Muslim League representatives.

Meanwhile, the communal situation in the country worsened, and different parts of the country witnessed riots. Lord Mountbatten was appointed as the Viceroy in February 1947. The meeting that he convened in Shimla seeking political consensus failed, as Jinnah persisted on the demand for Pakistan. Even Mahatma Gandhi failed to convince Jinnah. To keep the country united, Gandhi proposed Jinnah as

the Prime Minister. But his proposal was not to the liking of Nehru and Patel. Against Gandhi's will, the Congress leaders accepted the proposal for the partition of British India.

Amid the communal riots that followed the Partition decision, the elected members of the Constitutional Assembly, who were from the proposed truncated India met again to resume their work in 1947. The members of the Muslim League from the provinces within India agreed to attend the Constitutional Assembly. The princely states also sent their representatives. On July 22, the Assembly adopted the National Flag. On August 15, 1947, Independence Day, Jawaharlal's famous 'Tryst with Destiny' speech was made on that day from the floor of the Constitution Assembly. The members took the oath at 12 midnight. On the eve of independence, at the advice of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru invited Dr. Ambedkar to serve as Law Minister in his government. Subsequently, Ambedkar became the chairperson of the Drafting Committee of the Constitutional Assembly. Different sub-committees were constituted and their recommendations were compiled and presented for debates. There were threadbare discussions on every Article and clause. All decisions were taken democratically after intense discussions. As the members belonged to different ideologies and represented varied social interests, there were heated debates and differences within the Assembly. But their commitment to India made them work together and arrive at a consensus on various contentious issues. Absence of the communists and RSS members facilitated the birth of a Constitution which was largely liberal democratic in content, but with welfare orientation. It guaranteed liberal rights and gave us a vision of a secular and egalitarian society in the distant future.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was not unaware of the contradictions between the Constitution that promised political equality and the Indian society that remained unequal and hierarchical. Hence, in his last speech in the

heal the wounded hearts of the deceased wives, parents and kids. A fair investigation should be initiated so that exemplary punishment is awarded to those trigger-happy police personnel and others who are responsible. Even the Assam Chief minister has said that certain cops have overstepped their authority.

Nevertheless, at this critical juncture, we need to act with utmost caution and discernment. We should ensure that people from either side of the border are not affected in any manner. Yes, any demonstration of ill-feeling will never augur well for our future and for both sides. Needless to say, most of the people, particularly the weaker sections of people on either side, are entirely and mutually "interdependent". We cannot change our "geography", nor choose our neighbours. We MUST learn to live with them, else we shall never have peace of mind. We need to take this factor with all seriousness. Moreover, if we analyze objectively, the state of Meghalaya has more things to lose than Assam in case of frequent face-offs.

What if a fleet of vehicles carrying essential goods are blocked by the uncontrollable angry mobs at Kanapara? It is heard that certain labour unions working for petroleum transportation in Assam have already raised the safety concerns. Hope such a posture will not be replicated by others too. Let's be practical. With WhatsApp at our disposal, the news that strains the relationship spreads in no time. The roars on social media might directly hit the economy and much more. Look at how

By H. Srikanth

Making a mockery of
the Constitution Day

Round The States

By Insaf

Recent EC Appointment
Centre caught on
wrong foot?

Amid elections to State Assemblies, petitions in the Supreme Court have stirred a hornet's nest with the recent appointment process of former bureaucrat Arun Goel as Election Commissioner coming into question. On Thursday last, a five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice Joseph questioned the "haste" and "tearing hurry" with which the Union government appointed him, observing his file travelled at "lightning speed" within departments in 24 hours! Unheard of indeed. This apart, it questioned how the law minister shortlisted a panel of four names when none would have completed the stipulated 6-year tenure in office. (Goel would be in office for 5 years after CEC Rajiv Kumar demits office in February 2025.) The embarrassment for New Delhi started a day earlier, when the top court observed: "There have been numerous CECs and T N Seshan happens once in a while. We don't want anyone to bulldoze him. Enormous power has been vested on the fragile shoulders of three men. We have to find the best man for the post of CEC. The question is how do we find that best man and how to appoint that best man." It was hearing of a bunch of pleas seeking reform in the system of appointing the ECs and a collegium-like system for their selection.

Much to the chagrin of the government, the court asked for the files on the appointment of Goel. At the outset it clarified it wasn't questioning the merits of the new EC's credentials but the process. The dates raise eyebrows: The matter was heard on November 18; on the same day, the file was moved and the PM recommended Goel's name to the President. The vacancy in NirvachanSadan happened on May 15. The court asked:

hand and "Someone who is so experienced, senior and whom the party has given so much, it's unbecoming to use this language, make such completely false and baseless allegations." The young leader found support from a minister RS Gudha who threw a challenge to Gehlot saying "We will leave our stake for the chief minister-ship if you do not find 80% MLAs with Pilot... No better politician than him." Party headquarters has condemned Gehlot's remark and said the differences should be resolved in a manner that strengthens the Congress. Easier said than done!

Maharashtra
Karnataka Border Row
The BJP has trouble on its hands with Maharashtra and Karnataka with the inter-State border row escalating. The trigger was pressed by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis on Thursday last, when he said "No village in Maharashtra will go to Karnataka! The state government will fight strongly in the Supreme Court to get Marathi speaking villages in Karnataka including Belgaum-Karwar-Nipani!" Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai hit back terming his statement as "provocative" and elaborating "His (Fadnis') dream will never come true. Our government is committed to protecting our state's land, water and borders." Plus raising the demand that "Kannada speaking areas of Maharashtra like Solapur and Akkalkot should join Karnataka." Remember, the dispute goes back to the 60s after reorganisation of States on linguistic lines and the matter is in Supreme Court. Both sides are gearing up their legal battle in the case filed by Maharashtra in 2004, which is to come up soon. Bommai is confident that Mumbai has not succeeded and will not in future either. Politics apart, will there be a resolution? Keeping the iron hot is one

*"Congress should consider embarking
on a 'Party jodo yatra' given the ongoing
political tamasha in Rajasthan. Chief Minister
Ashok Gehlot-Sachin Pilot bickering is getting
uglier, causing a major embarrassment
to the grand old party."*

"Can you show us from the records that from May 15 to November 18 what was done? What prevailed upon the government that the appointment was made so fast in one day? Same day the file was processed, same day clearance, same day application and same day appointment. File has not even travelled for 24 hours. Why was the file cleared with lightning fast speed?" Certainly, the question whether all is "hunky-dory" remains. Importantly, the court flagged Article 324 of the Constitution, on appointment of ECs and said it doesn't provide the procedure for such appointments. Moreover, "the Article had envisaged the enactment of a law by Parliament in this regard, which has not been done in the last 72 years, leading to exploitation by the Centre." More need not be said, but the Union government must clear the air. For lingering doubts about free and fair elections are unhealthy for any democracy.

Rajasthan Cong Tamasha
Congress should consider embarking on a 'Party jodo yatra' given the ongoing political tamasha in Rajasthan. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot-Sachin Pilot bickering is getting uglier, causing a major embarrassment to the grand old party. Gehlot has ruffled feathers when he called Pilot a "gaddar (traitor) who colluded with BJP" and that he can never become the Chief Minister of the state. This on the day Pilot joined the 'Bharat jodo yatra' led by Rahul Gandhi in the State. Pilot has hit back saying it 'wasn't part of his upbringing to use such language' as the CM did. Instead, priority must be to fight unitedly to defeat BJP and strengthen Rahul's

thing, but bickering within the family doesn't bode well for the BJP.

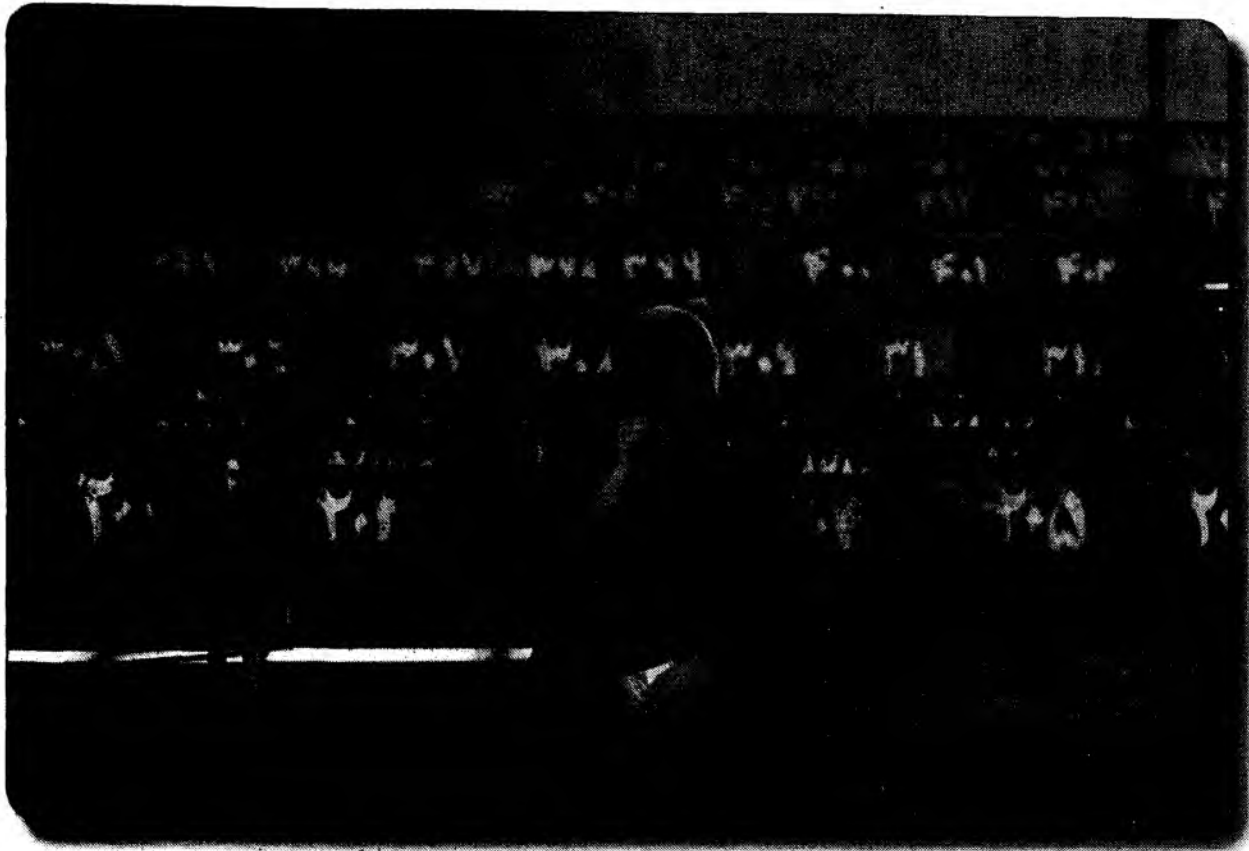
Gujarat Muscle, Money Power
Money and muscle power continue to rule the roost. A profile of candidates in the 1st phase of December Gujarat Assembly polls confirms the trend. Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report on Thursday last stated ruling BJP contesting all 89 seats, has 79 candidates (89%) of its nominees with assets above Rs 1 crore, followed by Congress with 65 candidates (73%) and Aam Aadmi Party with 33 candidates (38%) fighting 88 seats! While average assets per candidate is Rs 2.88 crore, BJP candidate from Rajkot South constituency is the 'richest' with Rs 175 crore. On other side, an independent candidate from Rajkot West seat has 'zero' assets. Party-wise average assets are BJP, Rs 13.40 crore, Congress Rs 8.38 crore and AAP Rs 1.99 crore. Additionally, 167 candidates (21%) of total 788 contesting are 'facing criminal cases' (100 and 12% serious charges like murder or rape) with AAP topping the list, 32 nominees (36%), followed by Congress 31 candidates (35%) and BJP, 14 candidates (16%); the Bhartiya Tribal Party, has 4 such candidates (29%). In comparison to the Assembly election in 2017, percentages on both fronts have increased. The parties obviously have paid no heed to the Supreme Court's direction on selection of candidates (with no criminal background, rather looks like saying a big boo. So much for political parties' pledging a clean and corruption-free government!! ---JNFA

Love thy
neighbors for
peace and
prosperity

Editor,
A blatant display of cruelty against the innocent is no small sin. What happened at Mukroh village in Jaintia Hills on November 22 should be condemned by one and all. Just imagine the pain and anguish of each family member of those six people. No amount of monetary or physical help can

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

Women more oppressed than ever under Taliban rule



The recent announcement that women and girls in Afghanistan have been banned by the Taliban government from visiting parks and gyms – even if accompanied by a male “chaperone” – has understandably been greeted with outrage.

The UN special representative in Afghanistan for women, Alison Davidian, said it was “yet another example of the Taliban’s continued and systematic erasure of women from public life,” adding, “We call on the Taliban to reinstate all rights and freedoms for women and girls.”

In the past 50 years, from the occupation by Soviet troops and US-led international forces, to the takeover by the Taliban in August 2021, women’s rights have been often exploited for political gain packaged as a justification for war. At times things have slightly improved for women, but most of the time their rights have significantly been violated.

Women’s rights were enshrined in the post-invasion constitution

introduced with US backing in 2004. The constitution allocated 25% of parliamentarian and provincial council seats to women, as well as 30% of civil service positions.

The constitution also obliged the Afghan government to respect and implement international conventions on women’s rights. Alongside this, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs was created as the main body responsible for women’s rights and empowerment.

After the Taliban takeover, this progress was quickly overturned. Only a month after coming to power, the Taliban government disbanded the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) and replaced it by what they called a ministry for the “propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice”. Women were completely excluded from working for the Taliban’s interim government, except for those cleaning female bathrooms.

The government told reporters that women should refrain from attending work until “proper systems” were put in place to “ensure their

safety”. Women were barred from their workplaces, sent, or escorted home by and told they would be replaced by their male relatives.

Similarly, women and girls’ access to education was curtailed. Upon taking power, Taliban leaders announced that a “safe learning environment” was required before women and girls could return to education.

In September 2021, the authorities announced that secondary education (above grade 6) would resume for boys, but access for girls was not mentioned. Without access to education, girls are at a higher risk of child marriage and abuse.

In May 2022, the Taliban commanded women to cover their faces in public and instructed them to remain in their homes except in cases of necessity. Women were banned from travelling long distances without a male chaperone.

Shelters supporting women and girls fleeing domestic abuse were closed, and staff were forced to send many survivors back to their “abusers”.

Fariha was nine months pregnant when she told Amnesty International: “Before, there was a shelter ... They said it’s not running now ... There are no options for me now.”

Child and forced marriages, meanwhile, have reportedly increased in the past year, despite the Taliban’s claim to oppose them. Amid all this, an increase of suicides among women has been reported.

Fighting the patriarchy

Yet Afghan women continue to make history with their acts of courage, peacefully protesting against restrictions, while being harassed, threatened, arrested, detained and tortured.

Stripped of their rights, under constant threat of violence, Afghan women and girls are claiming their agency and sharing their stories in news outlets and online.

All this has been happening as many Muslim countries are witnessing a revival of feminism. Young women, in particular, are becoming

increasingly interested in feminist ideas as a way of making sense of their lives.

In the 1980s and 1990s, an Islamic feminism emerged using Islam and its doctrines as the single essential element in women’s lives and identities.

But a new wave of young Afghan women are adopting feminist ideas which do not necessarily operate from a religious standpoint.

But the Taliban are not the only issue for Afghan women. Indeed, feminists in many Muslim countries face a dual problem. There is the patriarchal cultural setup which sees women as subordinate to men.

And then there is the difficulty of fighting for women’s rights in the face of a religious establishment which demonises them for challenging what they see as “fundamental” Islamic teaching.

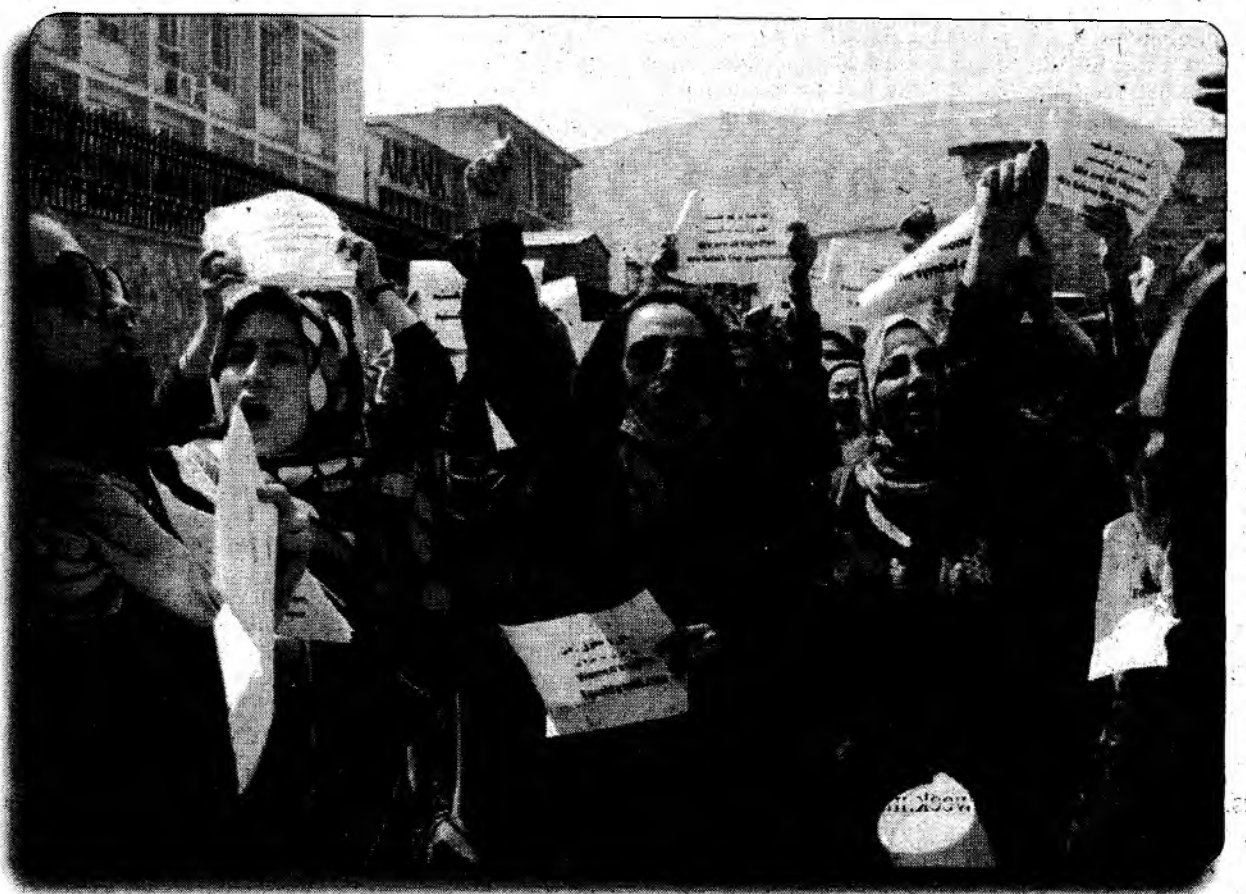
In turn the religious authorities in Afghanistan are accusing these feminists of being westernised, inauthentic and sometimes anti-

nationalist.

Frustratingly, the western world has always found it hard to look past what it sees as Afghan women’s victimhood. This has become the default western attitude towards women in virtually all traditional Islamic societies, because the west remains fixated on the idea that freeing women from oppression is a by-product of defeating fundamentalist Islam – which it sees as indelibly linked with terrorism.

Meanwhile the growing isolation of Afghanistan from the west – and the harsh economic sanctions that are crippling the country financially – makes life all the harder as it is denying young Afghan women any agency they might be able to achieve in a flourishing economy.

This makes it all the more urgent that the world hears, understands and supports voices of Afghan women, rather than imposing a version of western feminism which has already proved unfit in Muslim contexts. (*The Conversation*)



Qatar World Cup beams misogyny around the world

One of the fundamental questions relating to the 2022 World Cup being hosted by Qatar is what message this gives to women and girls around the world. Fifa purports to uphold human rights. Its decision, in 2010, to award the hosting duties for the 2022 tournament to Qatar was not, however, without controversy.

In the 12 years since, these issues have only intensified. The treatment of migrant workers throughout the run-up to the event has garnered continued attention, as has the way LGBTQ+ rights and women’s rights are contravened by local law.

Misogyny, a sexist contempt and hatred of women, aims to keep women in a lower position than men within a patriarchal society. With discrimination against women enshrined in Qatari law – which, among other things does not criminalise domestic violence or sexual assault – misogyny is being beamed through television internationally, via the means of the 2022 men’s football World Cup.

Women in Qatar

Qatari law undergirds a profoundly patriarchal system. Sex outside of marriage is banned and Qatari women can only marry with the permission of a male guardian.

This controversial system of male guardianship also shapes women’s ability to study, drive and travel. Men have the unquestioned right to divorce, yet the grounds on which a woman can apply for divorce is limited. Wives are expected to obey husbands and their priority is seen to be home making.

Women cannot pass nationality on to their children, as men can, nor can they be their children’s primary carer in case of divorce or the death of their husband. Female beneficiaries only get half of any inheritance their brothers receive.

Women are asked to provide proof of marriage to receive sexual health and antenatal care. And they have to abide by a strict dress code.

Crucially, domestic violence and rape is not criminalised. While family law forbids moral or physical assault by husbands against wives, reporting domestic abuse or sexual violence is frowned upon as it is seen to bring shame upon the family.

Both the lack of prosecution for domestic violence and the victim blaming that surrounds sexual assault point towards possible risks for any women attending the World Cup. Research shows that women face a heightened risk of sexual assault at any major sports tournament. It also shows, in the UK, the increase in domestic violence around World Cup matches and other big sporting tournaments.



A woman on the tribune painted her face in memory of Mahsa Amini, a woman who died while in police custody in Iran at the age of 22, prior to the World Cup match between Wales and Iran, in Al Rayyan, Qatar, on Friday. (PTI)

Women at the World Cup

Reports have highlighted that this heightened risk has already resulted in many women not wanting to travel to Qatar for the World Cup. This, in itself, is discriminatory.

Those who do head for Doha are advised to follow a strict dress code. Fifa’s position on this is unclear. It states that people attending matches can wear what they want but also that they must respect local laws. When in public, women in Qatar are expected to cover up. They must forgo tight clothing and not show their cleavage, knees or shoulders, and contravening these rules can result in prison or fines.

Official advice for travellers published by the UK government also covers strict laws against relationships outside of marriage. There are multiple cases of visitors being punished for being seen to be in contravention of these laws. In June 2021, a Mexican world cup official reported that she was sexually assaulted. As a result of this, she was accused of extramarital sex, which is against Qatari laws, rather than being seen as a victim of sexual violence. This saw her threatened with imprisonment and 100 lashes.

And in 2020, 13 Australian women were forcibly removed; at gunpoint, from grounded Qatar Airways planes in Doha. They were then forced to undergo internal examinations, without their consent, as officials sought to find the mother of a newborn baby who had been found in the airport.

This subordination of women is in direct conflict with human rights laws. The United Nations and the European Convention on Human Rights categorically state that any compromise of women’s rights contravenes international human rights laws.

By holding the men’s World Cup in Qatar, and thereby not sanctioning the lack of progress the country has made in terms of women’s rights, the impression given is that these rights are discretionary. Preventing discrimination and violence against women and girls, however, is never optional. This is not a cultural issue. It is a serious breach of human rights. (*The Conversation*)

European film festival goes pan-India

The European Union Film Festival (EUFF) wrapped off its physical edition in New Delhi on November 13 and launched its virtual version from November 15 through December 15, 2022. The Indian audience will have access to 35 films in 25 languages, spanning 6 genres, and they may stream them whenever and wherever they want.

The virtual avatar of the 27th edition of EUFF will bring to the audience a boutique of 30 days of handpicked, high quality cinema that’s curated to delight them.

It brings award-winning movies across three sections: Eurorama: screening latest, award-winning movies from across 27 EU member states; India @ European Film Festivals: curated by Dharamshala International Film Festival it’s a selection of outstanding Indian films that have participated at prestigious European film festivals; and Green Cinema: Addressing Climate Change.

The specially curated “India @ European Film Festival” section celebrates 60 years of diplomatic relationship between the EU and India and puts a spotlight on the works of some of the most watched filmmakers from India such as Rajan Khosla, Shrihari Sathe, Rima Das and Shubhashish Bhutiani.

The Virtual film festival is a great opportunity for all cinema lovers and people who are generally interested in discovering new cultures & stories to get access to films that are not easily available and may not ever have a theatrical release.

The European Union Film Festival is by design the cinema through a completely new lens- the lens of curators who search the world of stories that have the capability to take us by surprise and provide an absolutely new perspective on cinema.

The “free for all” festival organised by the Delegation of the European Union to India, Embassies of EU Member States and regional partners, will feature movies from India and 27 EU member states – Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland,

France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

Highlighting individual stories yet reflecting universal experiences, these films offer a ‘Window to Europe’ and demonstrate the power of cinema to transcend boundaries and create shared experiences.

Commenting on the festival, H.E. Ugo Astuto, Ambassador of the European Union to India said: “It gives me great pleasure to bring the virtual edition of the European Union Film Festival to a larger audience in India. The festival will take audiences on a journey across Europe & India through different genres such as comedy, action, drama and animation. As we mark 60 years of EU-India diplomatic relationship this year, the film festival is a testament to our long-standing cultural ties.

“To celebrate this landmark, the ‘virtual leg of the festival’ will showcase a special section on ‘India @ European Festivals’ featuring the best of Indian cinema. Cinema is a bridge between different cultures; it provides insights into everyday lives, experiences, aspirations beyond geographical boundaries. I invite you on an unparalleled cinematic journey across Europe. Happy viewing!”

Talking about the line up, curators Veronica Flora and Valerio Caruso said: “The line up at the 27th edition of the European Union Film Festival is aimed at creating a dialogue while also taking a viewer on a cathartic journey. The festival offers an exciting mix of genres and styles, from new spectacular frontiers of documentary to the ever more sophisticated and lively field of animation, from the bittersweet laughs of sharp comedy to the emotional touch of moving drama and the power-packed world of action. Our selection underlines the crucial role of intergenerational and intercultural dialogues as a way to banish stereotypes.”

They added: “Europe & India share a long-standing love for stories that has manifested over the years

through mutual inspiration, learning and inter-cultural dialogues. And the European Union Film Festival this year is a celebration of this deep bond and stories that restore the depth of the human experience, beyond limits and borders.”

The films to be screened at the virtual edition of EUFF 2022 are:

European films: Austria/Fox in a Hole; Belgium/Playground; Bulgaria/The Naked Truth About Zhiguli Band (Golata istina za grupa Zhiguli); Croatia/Even Pigs Go to Heaven (Nosila je rubac crleni); Cyprus/Dog; Czech Republic/Even Mice Belong in Heaven (Mysi patri do nebe); Denmark/Riders of Justice; Estonia/Rain; Finland/Force of Habit (En vanefraga); France/Les Parfumes; Germany/Coup; Greece/Tailor I Raftis; Hungary/Wild Roots (Kulon falka); Ireland/Rose Plays Julie; Italy/Easy Living (Easy Living- La Vita Facile); Latvia/The Pit (Bedre); Lithuania/Feature Film About Life; Luxembourg/Lo Sto Bene; Malta/Luzzu; Netherlands/Romy’s; Portugal/My Grandfather’s Demon (Os demonios do meu avo); Romania/The Island; Slovenia/Sanremo; Slovakia/Chlieb Nas Kazdodenny (Liquid Bread); Spain/The Volunteer (La voluntaria); Sweden/Comedy Queen

Ukrainian Film: My Thoughts Are Silent

Climate Change Films: Denmark/Into the Ice; France/The Velvet Queen; India/Jharia; India/The Climate Challenge

Indian Films: Ek Hazarachi Note; Gattu; Mukti Bhawan (Hotel Salvation); Village Rockstars

To watch the films virtually
 □ Login to www.euffindia.com
 □ Click on the film you want to see.
 □ You will be redirected to Festival Scope.
 □ If it is your first visit, you will have to register here. (IANSIfe)

The 8th Edition of India Bike Week

Five different race tracks, Wheelie Training, Biker's Mart (Indoor & Outdoor Expo), Big Trip sessions, Ladakh Tent, the Club Village, Jameson's Howling Dog Bar, and more-this year's India Bike Week 2022, organised by PETRONAS Sprinta, is all set to provide experiences that are out of this world.

The "Ride to IBW" is just the beginning of a daring voyage that begins with a ride to Goa and culminates with a flurry of activities that are not for the timid and entice the free spirit of brave riders.

Races & Rides

IBW 2022 will have five tracks and races for all motorcycle fans; whether you're a Big ADV rider or a Moto Cross aficionado, there is a track for you. The Mud Rush, a wild dash across loose sand with some unexpected twists and turns, and our Hill Climb, where the fastest person up a hill wins the race, are both co-hosted by our tyre partner CEAT. The motorcyclists use their talent at balancing man and machine around an oval dirt track as they ride, slide, and race at the IBW Flat Track. While the Dirt Dash is the location to test one's skill with mud and slush, the Adventure Flow Track is an obstacle course made for ADV bikes.

Trophies, diplomas, cash awards, and interesting automotive accessories will be given to all winners. There are several different track sessions available to join up for those who wish to pick the brains of the true dirt masters. The BAR Academy's Vishakh will lead 1-hour Enduro sessions to help participants master the challenging hill trail. For fans of Moto Cross and dirt, Nelly from ProDirt Adventure, Motofarm, and FMAE Motopark will provide coaching on three more tracks: Adventure Track, Flow Track, and Dirt Dash. These tracks are intended to allow anyone who are interested in dirt biking to discover their own personal and mechanical boundaries. www.indiabikeweek.in



registration for the events.

The ongoing IBW Chai Pakoda Rides presented by PETRONAS Sprinta is a venue for bikers around the nation to ride, interact, and celebrate. It takes place on Sundays in 30 cities throughout India with the goal of connecting like-minded individuals over a quick breakfast ride and, ideally, creating new friendships within the motorcycle fraternity. The RIDE TO IBW support system, developed in conjunction with KoGo, will be live on November 20. The IBW team is hoping that the community will take advantage of it and get on their bikes for the annual Great Migration to Goa. Major motorcycle manufacturers like KTM, BMW Motorrad, Harley-Davidson, and others have also declared their involvement.

Ladakh Tent

The Moto League 2022 are the individuals and organisations responsible for creating the motorcycle subculture over the past 20 years and for maintaining the history of the Indian moto scene. These industry veterans will conduct discussions with adventure bike trip

planners, the founding motorcycling clubs, and biker cafes. The Rodcast Tent, Beer Garden, Jameson Black Barrel Bar, a wine collection, singer-songwriters, and community open mic nights will all be present in the cosy Ladakh Tent.

For the first time, Shirshendu Banerjee (Shandy), host of The Biker Radio Rodcast, India's first internationally recognised podcast on motorcycles, will record live at IBW 2022. At the Rodcast Tent, Shandy will do interviews with legendary riders, travellers, and builders. The motorcycle community will have the chance to watch Shandy in person as he produces his well-known podcasts.

IBW People

The festival is encouraging the locals to get involved and share their own, distinctive stories at IBW. The Motography Show by motorcyclists at Jameson Connect at Howling Dog Bar will be followed by the Mod Bike Show, a venue for showcasing and discussing custom-built vehicles. At several sessions, notable individuals including Murtaza Junaid, Yogi Chabaria, Marco Rosetto, the

founder of Mini GP India, Shardul Sharma, the first Indian to compete in the Red Bull Romaniacs, and others will join together to share their passion for riding and stories.

Potential moto artists can exhibit their work or work with other artists to co-design IBW merchandise. The incredible superbike collection by JS Films will be on display this year, and the Collectors' Corner has organised a Fan Meet for IBW 2022. We will continue to work closely with biker cafes like Throttle Shrottle, Trip Machine, and Super Chai in the IBW 2022.

Music Bonanza

India Bike Week is a celebration of everyone who shares a passion for music, food, travel, and adventure. Music enthusiasts won't be let down by this year's concerts. Lagori and Teri Miko are the headliners, with Easy Wanderlings and DJ Mojo Jo Jo performing on the Main Stage, DJ Unnayaana and Uday Benegal performing in the Ladakh Tent, and DJ Ayesha Pramanik performing in the Jameson Howling Dog Bar. Red Bull's freestyle artists, including rappers, MCs, BMX stunt riders,



and break dancers, will perform at IBW 2022.

Food Festival The Big Forkers Meat Fest by Jameson

Everyone will find something to like at IBW 2022. The Big Forkers Meat Fest, a portion devoted to the art of curing, grilling, smoking, and barbecuing meats in India, is this year's particular attraction because barbecues hold a unique place in the hearts of bikers. The top pit masters in the country, including Chef Aal (Nagaland), Chef Arjun Sikdar (Goa), Chef Geoff (Canada), Chef Oneal (Kochi), and Chef Chris, will be serving everything from entire hog roasts to spitroasts, fire & meat displays, churrascarias, tawa, and tandoor (GOA). Ten additional neighbourhood Goan caterers and food trucks will be present on the Eat Street, and their menus will include standard IBW fare.

IBW Ride-outs:

With its Ride to IBW digital support system, Kayakin' Rides with Sahasea, Secret Trails ride with the Goa Motorcycling Club to explore the hidden treasures

of Goa, and Flavours of Goa ride with Chef Marlon, IBW helps the community. It also hosts brunches and after-parties. Each of these will feature thrilling activities that will immerse participants in the wild experience that IBW is known for while providing an opportunity to rekindle links with the community that has a similar DNA.

Tickets

IBW 2022 is poised to host the greatest yearly gathering of motorcycling fans, regardless of the wheels they ride, as a celebration of motorcycle culture enhanced by the principles of freedom and independence. The cost of a single day's admission to the festival is INR 1,900. Weekend Value Pack tickets, which come with an IBW Festival Kit that includes a festival T-shirt, an IBW Sipper, 2022 edition decals, and 500 KOGO Coins, are available for INR 2,800 only through November 20. Lounge Passes cost INR 5,000 per day. For clubs with more than 25 members, club packages cost INR 2,600 per person.

To register book tickets visit: www.indiabikeweek.in. (IANS/ife)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi Sunday, NOVEMBER 27, 2022

Moon semi square Sun on your solar return chart and it will bring mixed results for you. You will be involved in buying and selling activities. You will look after your family well. You will earn money but expenses will be on a higher side. You will be kept busy in your work. You will also take interest in other things. You will be very enthusiastic. Time will be spent in laughter and joy. You will be excited about a lot of new things. Your love relations will keep you happy. You will welcome guests at home. You will be liberal in your approach. You will work with sincerity. You will get success in your business. You will get a promotion in your job. You will feel more satisfied and give yourself grand results.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You will be getting some great news from somewhere all of a sudden. You will progress in your job. You will also help people a lot. You will think of something big and different in your business. You will make profit. You will be materially prosperous. You will participate in social activities and have peace and satisfaction in your heart. Your friends will support you a lot. You will have money inflow. You will win official works. You will also remain loyal to your partner and will enjoy wonderful bonding. You will give time to your home and office. You will also recover money that was given to someone else. There will be some travels related to business also.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

The time will be profitable. You will be busy in your work. If you want to change your staff or your job, then it is the right time to do so. You will take care of your business and finance. The confusion you were having in your mind will get cleared. Many new ideas will come to your mind. You will work hard and get connected to people. This is the time to cash in all the efforts put by you. You will have lot of profits and satisfaction. Your popularity will also grow in society and family. You will find yourself in the place where you want to see yourself and always dreamed of. You will enjoy life to the hilt. Your desires will get fulfilled.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You will have a good time. There will be positivity in your heart. You will have gains in business. You will get promoted in your job. Your business will run well. You will be dependent on others to get your work done. Not at all a bad idea because we have to put collective efforts to achieve our goals. You will be a lot active and will also boost your energy. You will dominate over others. You will be loyal to others. You will also do your best. The time will be fruitful. You will search for new means to make money. You will exhibit your creative abilities and family members will support you.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

It is time for extra profit and victory. You will have monetary gains. Your life partner will support you. You will also give your best contribution in your job and it will be visible to all. You will have the support of your friends and family members. You will purchase some land or property. Lands and investments will be important for you. All your financial activities will keep you busy. Home, family and domestic responsibilities will keep you busy. Your nature will be gentle and people will also try to take advantage of it. You need to remain alert.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Whatever work you plan will get finished in style. You will have profits and victory in your business/job. Money will never be a big problem. Your partner will also support you a lot. You will give your best contributions in your job and it will show. You will have the support of your friends and well wishers. Drive your vehicle carefully. Students will perform their job well. Married couples will have a loving relationship. You will search for additional sources of income. Lovebirds will have a great time in company of each other. You will concentrate on your business. You will be full of self confidence.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The time will be favorable. There will be new depth in your life. You will fulfill all your domestic responsibilities. The worries regarding health of your partner will prove unfounded. He/she will remain fine and fit. You will take things in your life as a good learning experience. You will be full of positive thinking. You will also go to a tourist place. Your

actions and activities will be watched by the people. But this will put no pressure on you. New energy and determination will boost you to new work. There will be some growth also. Your mood will be good. Your total focus will be on work.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

It will be a rewarding time for you. There will be honesty in your behavior. You will be successful to grow your popularity, image and reputation. Transit of Saturn and Venus will change your fortunes and you will be full of energy. Your prestige will also grow. Your business will also prosper and flourish. Your faith in God will increase. You will progress in your life. Your name and fame will grow. You will have pleasant and peaceful time at home. You will have lot of thinking to do on your part. Auspicious functions will keep taking place. There will be success in official works. You will make situations favorable for yourself. Your intelligence will increase.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It will be an amazing week for you. You will be at your best. You will have financial gains. People will take advice from you and follow your directions. People will also be impressed with your attitude. You will concentrate on new sources of income. There will be situations of some auspicious events. You will attend some function at your relative's place. You can get your good works results in the form of money or awards. You will get success if you are in policies, media or sports. You will get success in love affairs. Your marriage could get fixed. You will buy or sell some property.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It will be a fantastic week for you. Pending works will gather speed. You will get benefits in partnership. You need to back your associates and have confidence and trust in them. You also need to give autonomy and more decision making favoring you. Your sources of income will also increase as you put in more hard work. You will be realistic about your goals and family will provide you full support. You will manage to keep your expenses under check. You will keep things simple and will do every work in balanced manner. You will meet new friends and will be cheerful. You will have the company of an influential person and your self confidence will increase as a result.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will have lot of profit and gains in your business. Your popularity will grow. You will remain in demand at your workplace and in family too. You will be close to your family. You will find yourself at the place you want to be. Things will happen to your liking. You will be able to fulfill your wishes. Business works will speed up. Your bosses will learn a few things about you. They will be surprised to see your skills and efficiency at work. You will continue to do the good work you have been doing. Your life partner will listen to you and will help in every work.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

There will be beneficial situations at work. There will be a new freshness and excitement in relationship with your life partner. You will start a new work in partnership/association. You may have some health issues to face. Take timely treatment. Your officers may rebuke you on some policy decisions. You need to learn from your mistakes and move ahead. You will focus on your work. Along with this you will also take care of your family. You will value family ties and realize its importance. You will have happiness. You will also decide the priorities of life. You will also solve your property matters.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

The time is right. Your important work will get done. The time will be good. You will begin with great enthusiasm. Friends will come with lot of hopes. You will be happy to help them to the best of your abilities. You will move ahead with all the hard work you put. There is a possibility of a better atmosphere for you at your home and office. You will be full of self confidence. You will be ready for any challenges due to your strong power of belief in yourself. There will be new opportunities for earning. You will impress people a lot. You will avoid arguments with neighbors. Some auspicious functions will take place at your home. You will get admission in a prestigious institute.

AstaGuru's first exclusive intl auction

The second half of the nineteenth century was a remarkable period in the history of modern art. Beginning in the 1860s, the western world saw the emergence of several important movements that sought to challenge the hitherto accepted academic realism style of art that was primarily based on mythology and religion.

Marked by non-decipherable figures, abstractionism, and unique application of colour, these movements would continue to evolve and transform into different unique idioms that gave a new voice to modern painting. In its upcoming 'International Iconic' Auction, auction house AstaGuru will showcase a medley of works by revered and iconic global artists. The stunning lineup of the auction scheduled on November 28-29, 2022, represents some of the most important moments in modern art history.

Baigneuse Assise by Pierre Auguste Renoir

Leading the auction line is lot no.8, a beautiful work by French Impressionist master Pierre Auguste-Renoir, who created an extraordinary artistic legacy with his fascinating canvases bearing sublime female nudes. Titled *Baigneuse Assise* or the Seated Bathing, the circa 1915, oil on canvas creation depicts the sitter in profile with a softly defined figure against a warm abstract dominated by a brown and green background that almost blends with the contours of her figure. Her curled hair, pink naked flesh, and the nonchalance of her unassuming posture in this idyllic masterpiece are exemplary of the intimate study of his models undertaken by Renoir. With variations of a rich mould of colours and sporadic thick impasto, the surface of the canvas evokes a dreamlike, almost ethereal harmony. It will be offered with an estimate of Rs 4,34,50,000 - 5,53,00,000.

Dali Tarots

A collection of unique works, lot no. 2,3,4 by Salvador Dali will be showcased in AstaGuru's upcoming international iconic auction. These works belong to a limited series of 78 custom decks of tarot cards

known as Dali's Universal Tarot which the artist started to work on during the early 1970s. First commissioned to him by Hollywood producer Albert Broccoli, the tarot deck was meant to be used as a prop in the James Bond film *Live and Let Die*. However, the deal fell through, supposedly due to Dali's exorbitant monetary demands, the artist remained intrigued with the idea and continued to work on the cards. Each of the cards is estimated to be acquired at Rs 19,75,000 - 27,65,000.

Buste D'homme Et Femme Nus by Picasso

The reinterpretation of the female nude is one of the greatest legacy in the oeuvre of Pablo Picasso. Picasso's groundbreaking works on this subject not only questioned the long-standing conventions, but also introduced a disconcerting new way of looking that rejects the majority of the constraints that had hitherto characterised the feminine body. A work by him, lot.no.5 executed with coloured wax crayon on paper in 1969 is also a part of the auction. It was exhibited at RS Johnson International Gallery in 1971. This work is offered at an estimate of Rs 2,37,00,000 - 3,95,00,000. With 2023 being the year of Picasso's 50th death anniversary, galleries and museums around the world are gearing up to celebrate him. Added to his monumental fame, this has heightened interest in his work.

Beautiful Hours Spin Painting IX by Damien Hirst

Lot no. 14, a work by Damien Hirst titled *Beautiful Hours Spin Painting IX*, was originally unveiled as the cover for the album *See the Light* by British rock band The Hours. The impactful imagery rendered in a psychedelic colour composition with high-gloss paint embodies the central theme of life and death, which has been a preoccupation and inspirational subject for the artist. The elements in the work, such as the skull, and a clock in the eye socket, become a metaphor for the fleetingness of life. This work will be offered with an estimate of

Rs 2,37,00,000 - 3,95,00,000.

Poinsettia by Andy Warhol

Lot no. 33 is a unique work titled *Poinsettia* by iconic artist Andy Warhol and marks a departure from his popular body of work focusing on the culture of consumerism. At the same time, it also gives an insight into his personal side and his approach to aestheticising the surrounding elements and subjects that intrigued him. Bearing *Poinsettia* flowers, often referred to as the unofficial flower of Christmas, this work is an ode to Warhol's endearment to the theme of Christmas. Resembling the Star of Bethlehem, the ubiquitous flower traces its attachment to the Christmas holiday through a 16th-century Mexican fable about a poor girl who decorated the church altar with weeds that miraculously sprouted into flowers. Sharing this festive merriment with a large legion of his friends during the early 1980s, Warhol executed over 20 paintings in different sizes featuring *Poinsettia*. One of these, the presented work, was created in 1983 by Warhol and gifted to his friend Christopher Mako. It will be offered with an estimate of Rs 1,10,60,000 - 1,89,60,000.

Love Sculpture by Robert Indiana

Lot no. 30 is a rendition of famous *Love Sculptures*, by Robert Indiana. First executed as a painting in 1965 and being displayed at a solo exhibition at the Stable Gallery, it became a career-defining piece for the artist. Inspired by his Christian Science church upbringing, Indiana created hard-edged paintings stacking each letter on top of the other in an angular, slightly tilted manner. He went on to use the image for various other mediums including the iconic sculptures and stamps known around the world. The image was also selected to be the Museum of Modern Art's Christmas card. In 1970, he created a 12-foot tall steel sculpture with the same word for the Indianapolis Museum of Art, followed by *Avava* in Jerusalem and *Amor* in Spain. It will be offered with an estimate of Rs 3,16,00,000 - 4,74,00,000. (IANS/ife)

“Nothing is more gratifying to the mind of man than power or dominion.”
—Joseph Addison

The Shillong Times

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Inside Xi's China

THIS could be China's hour of reckoning. The massive protests across major cities against the ongoing lockdown aimed at checking the Covid-Omicron spread would have been dismissed as a natural response, had they been in democracies. But, these protests, the first time under the iron grip of Xi Jinping, make it clear that the people under dictatorships too cannot be taken for granted or stretched beyond a limit. Dictators should be mindful that there's a limit to one's tolerance level. Taking the people for granted could mean courting trouble. Yet, Xi did precisely that.

China is battling with its own baby - Covid19, which erupted as a lethal by-product of the country's footloose industrial hyper-activity without a matching role for the regulatory mechanisms. The genie was out and it was a hard struggle for the world to overcome its hard effects lasting a couple of years. This upset life and hurt economic activities in the harshest manner ever. While the rest of the world managed to extricate themselves out of the grim experience, China despite its hard-edged controls is still battling with the virus - of the order of 40,000 new infections a day. The standard official response was long spells of lockdown; and the people say enough is enough. Shanghai, the main commercial city that had been kept under a lockdown lasting two months is into fresh seizures and more spells of lockdowns, provoking the people. Capital Beijing and several other cities are into similar curbs on public life. This could also signal a fresh round of Covid-related problems for other nations; and India too must keep its alert levels high. These are the negative sides of an interdependent world. What the present protests signify is also that the last word on party-inspired dictatorship in China is not heard yet. For instance, if the 25-million-strong inhabitants of Shanghai erupt into its streets one day, the show's over. Anti-Xi, anti-Communist Party slogans were raised at some of the protests this time; a strange development in the red empire.

The Tiananmen Square student protests with its echo in 400 cities across China was brutally suppressed, thousands killed and many maimed 33 years ago. By now, a new generation has sprung up -- over and above the older lots whose minds remained paralyzed for decades by the state-inflicted brutality. Xi will have to reconcile between the need for his nation's push for growth and the aspirations of the new generation. Shadowboxing by the youth against Xi's policies is already evident on the internet just as Xi won a third consecutive term in power a month ago.

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya at the Crossroads

Editor,
I would like to express my sincere concern about the recent turn of events that had severely affected our day to day activities. Yes, we are deeply saddened by the Mukroh incident. In fact, bloodshed and precious innocent human lives taken away can never be justified. Justice should definitely be meted and the culprit should be severely punished.

However, many untoward incidents are happening in and around the city in the name of Mukroh which are unjustifiable. Burning of police vehicles, assault on non-tribals/police, demand to down shutters, to name a few, creates fear, panic, anxiety and a sense of uneasy calm in the so called 'peaceful State'. Huge traffic jams, long lines of queue in petrol stations and panic buying are the resultant effects on common people who are simply tossed back and forth by the strong force of the wind. Even if one does not agree to the dictates of the powerful, out of fear, it becomes a compulsion.

The protests, rallies and demonstrations are necessary in a democratic country to express one's grievances towards the Government. But when it takes an ugly turn, when the bone of contention is being diverted and violence takes centre stage, the river has to change its course. As an educated and civilized society, effective measures must be put in place, keeping in mind that victory or success cannot be achieved with violence. The wellbeing of the people

should always be a priority, but do they have a say?

This reminds me of what Herbert Spencer, a sociologist said when he compares society to the organs of a human body wherein, all parts are inter-related and inter-dependent. Each part is handicapped without the functioning of the whole. Similarly, in a society, especially today, in a globalised world and technological age, no one can live in isolation. And Emile Durkheim (a well known sociologist) also supported this view when he talks about Division of Labour- though divided in profession but united in serving.

Added to the above, civilisation has now entered the scientific stage where technology plays a vital role. The world is at our fingertips and in a split second, one receives information and it gets circulated at lightning speed. Hence it becomes necessary to be aware of the consequences. In this regard, I would further like to put 2 key points for introspection:

1. Many of our loved ones are outside our state for education (considering the status of education here) job and employment opportunities

2. Health issues (where many who are capable) prefer treatment outside the state

On the other hand, it is at these trying times when Government can prove whether it is capable of handling the present situation in an appropriate manner for the welfare of its people. Otherwise, it is up to the citizens to discern who is to be in power to govern them.

Meghalaya was gradually crawling back to becoming a tourist destination with tourists coming in good num-

Forests, PES and Carbon Credit

By H H Mohrmen

The State of Meghalaya is blessed with a significant forest cover as 17,146 sq km or 76.44 % of its geographical area is under forest cover. This is as per the State of Forest Report, 2017 published by the Forest Survey of India. The survey also stated that the state ranks fourth in terms of forest cover in the entire country. But because of the prevailing land tenure system in the state, only 5.10% of the forest area in the state is under the direct control of the state government. The remaining forest area which is about 71 % of the geographical area of the state belongs to the communities, the clan, and private owners and the Autonomous District Council also owns some forests in their respective jurisdiction.

The community-owned forest is divided into categories like community forest, clan forest, and sacred forests. Sacred groves in Jaintia are called by different names in different places of the two districts of the erstwhile Jaintia Kingdom. In some places, they are called "khloo langdoh," while in other places they are called "khloo blai" or in some cases, people use both *khloo blai* and *khloo langdoh* when referring to the sacred forests in the "elaka." In the War Jaintia area, sacred forests are called *tken*, and they are smaller in size and are kept by the clans. While in the other parts of the Jaintia Hills, there are some sacred forests kept by the community, in most cases the Raji. There are also sacred forests that are under the care and protection of the clans.

In Jowai the two prominent sacred forests are Mooliksoo and *khloo Langdoh*; both these forests are managed and controlled by the Raji Jowai, while Mooliksoo is used for performing the final rites (thang mynso) of those who died an unnatural death, which included u Kiang Nangbah whose final rites were performed here. Khloo Langdoh, like any other sacred forest, is kept because certain rituals and sacrifices, especially those that have a connection with Behdienkhlam, are performed in this forest. The other sacred forest is ka khloo Rampyithai on the banks of the river Myntdu.

The sacred grove in Ialong is also under the care and protection of the Raji Ialong;

it is sacred because sacrifices and rituals to appease a deity like u Ryngkaw u Basa are performed in the forest. The unique aspect of the sacred forest in Ialong is that occasionally a bull was sacrificed inside the forest. It is unique because in almost all Niamtre traditions in the Jaintia Hills, partaking of beef is a taboo; perhaps this could be because of the influence of Hinduism, the religion of the later generations of the Jaintia monarchy, but only Ialong Raji has this special bull sacrifice and at least on this one occasion people can eat beef. Again this has a story of its own which would justify why for once the Ialong were allowed to partake of beef and kill a bull instead of a fowl, a goat, or even a pig. The sacred forest in Ialong also tells a story, or rather the history of the village. The ancestors of the Ialong people, like other ancient settlers, lived close to the river, in this case, the river Myntdu. So in the old Ialong village one had to pass through the forest to enter the village, but because of the frequent outbreaks of a plague which almost swept the village clean, the people decided to move to a higher elevation and the old Ialong and the cremation ground became the sacred forest.

It is the same story as the sacred forest of the Raji Tuber. The sacred forest of Raji Tuber is in the Chohchrieh village and it is also located near the banks of the river Myntdu. Legend has it that earlier the village was situated close to the river, again in this case the river Myntdu, but later on, the village moved to higher grounds and the old village and cremation ground became a sacred forest. In Chohchrieh if one walks down towards the river one would also see a collection of monoliths which are remnants of the old cremation ground. Again this is also a place where we can find a big collection of monoliths. There is a certain part of this forest where one has to walk barefoot and no item made of leather can be taken inside the forest.

Near the Ialong and Tuber sacred forests, there are two more sacred groves, one in Chyrmang and another in Iongnoh village; both these villages are under the Raji

Chyrmang. In Chyrmang village the sacred grove is near the Aitmar or the place where the final part of the Behdienkhlam festival of the Raji Chyrmang is celebrated, but the biggest of all the sacred forests in the Jaintia Hills is 'ka blai Khap-Jaba,' which is situated in Iongnoh village. *Khap-Jaba* is still intact and free from any human interference; very few people visit the place because even the local people are scared of the curse of the deity of the forest. The other special aspect of this forest is also that the river Myntdu passes through the forest so *Khap-Jaba* is a very special sacred forest.

In the *Elaka* Raliang there are four sacred forests; some of these forests are maintained by certain clans while there are forests that are owned and maintained by the *Elaka*. The forests in Raliang are not as big in comparison with the forests in Chohchrieh and Ialong, but the *Daloi* of Raliang informed us that there is another bigger forest in the *elaka* Raliang which is in the village of Khonchong. Part of the famous harvest festival "*Pastieh Kopati*" was also performed in one of the forests nearby known as Khloo Raji. Despite being one of the biggest and the oldest *elakas*, Shangpung has just one sacred forest; this is also a shadow of its previous glory because part of the forest was given to the community to expand the village playground.

There is one sacred forest in Bataw village, and again this forest is unique because it is also part of the sacred lake known as ka Um Hang (which is much bigger than Wards Lake in Shillong). The folk story of Ka Um Hang and ka Hang Polok Suchiang is another tragic tale of a young woman who met with a sad end. The sacred forest is also adjacent to the cremation ground and sacrifices are still performed regularly in the area.

The story of the sacred forest in Sohmynting village needs to be shared because it is distinct from the stories of the other sacred groves. In the sacred forests mentioned earlier, the forests are maintained and protected by people who are followers of Niamtre; some stud-

ies believe that in the areas where locals have converted to another religion, the forests are not properly maintained, or they are encroached upon by neighbours and in some cases even desecrated. But in Sohmynting, although the entire village has converted to different Christian denominations, the forest has been kept intact by the community. The village also has one khloo Langdoh of the Pyrtuh clan and the other conserved forest are khloo Kyndait, khloo Moosyiem and khloo Nangrim.

There are smaller sacred groves in Mukhla and Mihnmyntdu from where the River Myntdu originates. In the War Jaintia area, the tradition of keeping sacred forests is different because the "*tken*" are mostly kept by the clan rather than the community. To name a few there is one *tken* in the center of Padu village and another in the vicinity of the village, one *tken* can be found in Pamchadong village, and two in Kudeng. There is another *tken* in Sohkhla Shnong, another in Nongbareh, and still many in Nongtalang and other places.

The total area of forest under the direct control of the state government which includes reserved forest, protected forest, national parks, wildlife sanctuary, non-forest transferred to the department, parks, and garden is 1145.19 sq km. How are people going to benefit from keeping their forests? The state government has started Paying for Ecological Services (PES) to people to encourage them to conserve forests but we also have a model of a community selling carbon credits.

Mawphlang sacred forest has benefitted from REDD+ project and speaking to A. Parveen Rahman of Mongabay November 30, 2020, Tambor Lyngdoh said that between 2013-2019-20, the community had sold 280,000 tonnes of carbon at the rate of USD 5-9 per ton and they still have 66,000 tonnes of unsold carbon. The public can benefit from carbon credits and because the State still has a large forest cover, it can help the community avail this opportunity. If the government wants to encourage people to conserve forests, it should encourage and support the communities to enter into the carbon credit market like Mawphlang.

No end to racist attacks in Meghalaya

Editor,
The continuing racial attack on innocent people in Shillong is the result of deep abhorrence that exists in the minds of the perpetrators of such crimes. For generations, this philosophy of hate is definitely being preached to the young mind in a section of the society otherwise such happenings could not have continued for decades together. If one studies the past incidents and present events, it is easy to predict that this kind of racial atrocities in Meghalaya would continue in future as well. There is no magic wand that can make life better and liveable for the potential targets of such violence in the immediate or distant future. Any change in Government, reshuffle in the administrative hierarchy or ritualistic condemnation by handful of people in the print and electronic media is definitely not going to change the mindset of the hate-mongers who will remain as an integral part of the society under the new dispensation as well. As such, the obvious potential targets of racial crimes in Meghalaya need to reconcile with the hard unpalatable reality and decide their future with pragmatism as the words 'liberty, equality, fraternity and justice' would remain a mirage to them in the future as is today.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee
Shillong-1

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HM Amit Shah finally admits to BJP role in Gujarat riots in 2002

Disclosure during poll campaign a ploy to consolidate hindu support

By Sushil Kutty

It couldn't have been slip of tongue. Was it a boast, or a dare? Perhaps, a warning, a straightforward reminder, to vote-bank to stay put because if you don't do that communal rioting will follow. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statements spelled out that Gujarat 2002 was the watershed that separated the years of communal rioting from permanent peaceful settlement since then.

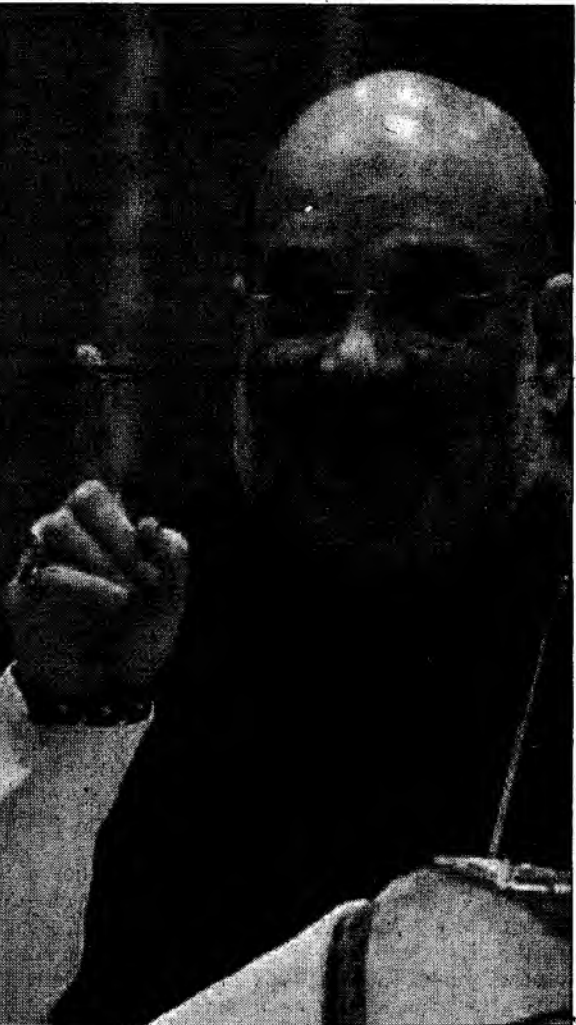
That the reminder came at an election stump rally and that, too, in the run-up to an election being closely fought told its own tale. Will there be a twist at the end of tale? Did the 'Shah of Gujarat' want to caution the electorate of a repeat of Gujarat 2002 if the Congress is returned to power?

Shah concentrated his firepower on the Congress, ignoring the AAP like it never was. Arvind Kejriwal should light a lamp, and pray. Shah not mentioning AAP while holding forth on Congress and rioting was high praise following all the bad press the AAP got after the vulgar display of Satyender Jain's gluttony behind bars.

To such a wide cast of people? To people who had nothing to do with the Gujarat of 2002. All of a sudden, for no ostensible reason, Shah retrieves 'Gujarat 2002' from the dustbin of history, why? It has everything to do with the Gujarat elections 2022? Maybe Gujarat 2002 has acquired election issue status. Maybe, for the first time in 20 years, the BJP is in need of an election issue; one that raises the hackles just thinking of it.

Gujarat 2002 was undoubtedly the scariest issue any political party could pull out of its hat in a 100 years. The bloody pictures are there in the photo archives of veteran news photographers, those who survived time and tide and, most recently, Covid-19. Bilkis Bano and Zakia Jafri would not have forgotten Gujarat 2002.

The Hindutva face of Gujarat 2002, a ferocious looking trident-wielding saffron headband, is now an impoverished cobbler doing his cobbling from an Ahmedabad street. He, too, must not have forgotten Gujarat 2002.



That said, Amit Shah does not miss a chance to remind people of the benignly tough nature of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. And one of the most transformative actions of the BJP had been to put a halt to communal rioting, and restoring "permanent peace" in Modi's and Shah's home-state.

Gujarat 2002 was one of the highlights of Shah's life in public glare. Now we know Shah's favourite pastime is to lose himself in the reverie of Gujarat 2002. A couple of bogeys of the Sabarmati Express were set on fire with the passengers still in them and some people ratcheted it up to communal flare-up, which then became a public-private crackdown on communal rioting.

Amit Shah has now taken the credit, on behalf of the BJP, for "teaching a lesson" to the rioters with 'Gujarat 2002'. This Union Home Minister is the sort who can scare the clock to a stop. What did Shah mean when he said the BJP ended communal rioting in 2002, and "peace" has prevailed since then?

Why does Shah have to remind people of the bad old days? The majority of the 'then' people of Gujarat must have forgotten the dastardly scenes of 2002 and moved on in life? Half must have died in their sleep; others must have been lost to nature.

The majority of the now living were unborn in 2002. Why resurrect Gujarat 2002

Shah has brought back memories--of the macho-masculine give-no-quarters kind and of those which leave people in tears. For Amit Shah, Gujarat 2002 must have been the class to teach a lesson to the rioters, to lakhs others it was rape, rapine, and blood in the streets.

Imagine, killing an infant by swinging her by the feet and banging her head-first on a wall? And 20 years later, the perpetrator gets a remission, and reparation? Amit Shah's "taught a lesson" was not for the 11 gang-rapists of Bilkis Bano.

Elections are supposed to be joyful events, a celebration of democracy played out after regular intervals. Why do politicians have to reduce them to anniversaries of petty albeit bloody conquests? What should people make of "such a lesson was taught in 2002 to those engaging in communal riots" that it led to "akhand shanti" in Gujarat?

Will the historians of the future write about Shah's brag? Are they an indictment of the Gujarat government of 2002? People brag only about well-planned vents, with well-enacted outcomes, those carried out with deliberate intent. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has all but admitted that there was a BJP hand behind 'Gujarat 2002' that brought about 'eternal peace'. (IPA Service)

"Only you can control your future."

— Dr. Seuss

The Shillong Times

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Political capital from human tragedies

THE greatest irony of modern times is that politicians don't spare any pains to capitalize on human tragedies. When politicians across the spectrum visited the families of the bereaved families in Mukroh recently they made sure that the optics were not missed. The focus became the politicians rather than the tragedy. Each political party shamelessly dragged their own camera persons/videographers to record what they had to say and how they said it so as not to miss making a political point. Some promised to fight for justice for the bereaved families knowing fully well that a month from now Mukroh would have been forgotten and some other more politically surcharged issue would occupy their minds. In Khasi society funerals are solemn spaces where people sit quietly and make themselves inconspicuous. Our politicians, however manage to turn even such solemn spaces into a spectacle with the cameras turned on them and those visuals are later translated into news. The Congress is yet to be seen visiting Mukroh though, and nor have the newer parties. In fact these newly launched parties have been silent on the matter.

The first to reach the scene of the tragedy was the TMC; then followed the members of the MDA Government led by the NPP but with the BJP minister conspicuous by his absence. On Sunday it was the BJP's turn to visit Mukroh and the result was the Party's demand that the Home Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui should step down. That was more like the voice of the Opposition. In fact, even the TMC did not demand Rymbui's head. That's called political grandstanding as if the BJP has no part in the mess created by the MDA Government since 2018. Surely an astute electorate should take note of all these shenanigans. But will they? There is today in Meghalaya a huge constituency that are camp followers of respective parties, especially the parties in power. These do not believe in internal criticism of their respective parties but like the proverbial fable of the man who bit his mother's ears for not correcting his faults while there was time, these camp followers also live with self-deception and do not point out their party's shortcomings. Naturally the political parties live in a fake world where they believe they can do no wrong.

Beyond the call for justice for the bereaved families of Mukroh, the Government of Meghalaya including the one that will return in 2023 will have to constitute a committee which will study the border issues in great details and propose solutions that go beyond demarcating boundaries or sharing of enclaves between the two contesting states.

Letters to the Editor

Mukroh reverberates

Editor,
The Mukroh incident which has taken lives has shaken Meghalaya, and the demand for justice grows ever stronger as the days pass by, and rightly so. The sad turn of events in this village is now overshadowed by agitations of the masses against the MDA government. The roles now seem to have changed. Who represents the masses now, the NGOs or the so-called representatives of the people?

From a layman's point of view, the MDA government or governments that have gone by, have not been the voices of the people, though they have done what 'pleases' their voters most, thus playing on the emotions of the people. If the representatives cannot be the voices of the people, then someone has to step in to fill the vacuum.

Having said this, we still need our political representatives for obvious reasons. We need representatives who are able to switch off their 'lal batti' attitude, and acknowledge the fact that they are representatives not demi-gods. At the moment, we can all be sure that every

politician is thinking of the political mileage they can gain from the Mukroh incident, for this will be used in the upcoming election campaigns. But, for once, can these individual political and business agenda be kept aside? It does not matter whether you are in the government or in the opposition, be the voice you have been chosen to be and put your heads together to resolve this, and the many other issues that have gravely affected Meghalaya. You do not have to be at loggerheads at all time.

There are three kinds of personalities in the world, each having a distinct way of looking at the world. Each personality has an underlying motivation which powerfully influences the thought process, emotions and behaviour. One is not greater than the other. Among our representatives, we have all these personalities, and all can share a common platform to resolve issues. As a lay person, I see this but do our representatives see this or will they argue that this is not the political game they play?

Yours etc.,
Fabian W Marbanian,
Via email

This Is Just Not Done

By Oliver Lyngdoh

It's been two years, almost three years give or take since the Covid-19 Pandemic happened. Lives were lost and normalcy was disrupted since people had to stay at home during the months-long lockdown. It's been more than a year since the mayhem and the clashes that arose from the cold-blooded encounter between the special police forces and one surrendered militant in the early hours of a Friday morning which led to the killing of one "Bah Che", now idolised as a martyr, due to the inhumane act of the police akin to cold-blooded murder.

Of course there were 'peaceful' rallies, of course there were protests, of course there were agitations by various agencies and NGOs and student unions against a plethora of issues ranging from teachers' salaries, unemployment, the much debated Inner Line Permit to name a few. And as usual and as is the norm in our state, these "gatherings" would always take a turn for the worse and there would always be some form of backlash by unwanted elements just waiting to disrupt the proceedings that these gatherings were called for.

An unemployment rally that was called for putting the government on notice that the educated youth of the state have had it with its lackadaisical behaviour against their ailments of creating new jobs, of unfairness and inequities turned into a mass procession of a hotpot of anger and unrest leading to unnecessary beatings of civilians and loss of private and public property.

This is Not Done!
Inner Line permit or a version of it has been a debate, a demand and an election agenda/manifesto of almost every student union, political party and NGO and the mass public alike. Some feel the need for it and some do not. But even when a special Assembly Session was called for on December 19, 2019, where in the house unanimously adopted a resolution in favour of implementing ILP in the State, there has been no progress on the same. Of course there is a need to protect the indigent people of the state and the worry and concern for influx is correct, but the matter on how this particular issue has been taken up is a cause for concern.

Because, it felt like it was just rushed in order for the people and the state to be provided with a sense and an urgency that the ones in power are doing something. Of course, our educated unions/agencies/mass collectives/pressure groups saw right through it and are still demanding to this day that something be done about it

On the 50th year of statehood, the government decided to finally hold talks with its neighbour and demarcate the borders of the state - a pending issue which has long been awaited by the people. But as newspaper articles and news articles would let you know, this was not done by due consultation with the people affected and residing in these areas but as we were led to believe (And I can't neither deny or confirm the same, for my sources are the

and not just offer whimsical solutions. "Maybe this is just a ploy or a tactic of this government to further strengthen its own party so that they may gain political mileage in the next election," as stated by the HYC general secretary.

This is Not Done!
One of the selling points of Meghalaya, Shillong is as the Education hub of the North East with a wide array of top-notch missionary run schools and colleges, private schools and colleges, upcoming nationally accredited universities and one ranked central University and the fairly new IIM and NIT.

Our youths are educated and our educational institutions are sought after not only from the students of the Northeast but from all over India. However, our teachers - the backbone of this so-called hub of education are treated poorly and are not given their dues.

Poor government infrastructure and lack of manpower plague the government educational sector. A four part piece in the Shillong Times, a local daily, highlighted just how poorly managed and ill-treated the government schools are - lack of basic amenities, infrastructure and unmotivated individuals appointed as educators only add to the woes of the students who have no other means to go to the aforementioned top-notch private schools.

And to top that, agitation and protests by none other than the teachers, the backbone of the pillars of education because of their mistreatment, their demands of a higher pay and increments, their reinstatement amongst other issues add to the woes of the education sector.

But as previously mentioned, even an agitation by teachers is not spared for earlier in October 2022, our teachers in the course of their rally and sit-ins for their ongoing demands were lathi charged and shot at with teargas. At "TEACHERS" armed with nothing but their educated words and speeches.

This is Not Done!
On the 50th year of statehood, the government decided to finally hold talks with its neighbour and demarcate the borders of the state - a pending issue which has long been awaited by the people. But as newspaper articles and news articles would let you know, this was not done by due consultation with the people affected and residing in these areas but as we were led to believe (And I can't neither deny or confirm the same, for my sources are the

same as yours - media outlets) were done in a hurried manner in order for the issue to be resolved. Of course talks were held, of course people were consulted, we were told but it gives rise to the question on how effectively the same was done as in 50 years we were not able to solve this burning issue but all of a sudden in a matter of months twelve areas were already finalised. Makes one wonder whether kudos is to be shelled out or whether something else is amiss.

This is Not Done!
Which leads us to the ongoing issue that is plaguing our State. The unrest at the border, the shootings and cold-blooded murder of five people and the death of six people as per reports. And as per reports, there are varied versions of what happened but there is no wrong or right here. Death is death and killings are killings no matter who pulled the trigger.

This incident, as always, added fuel to the fire that was already burning in our state. Add to the civil unrest hidden underneath the people fuelled by unemployment, uneasiness about how things are going where the rich get richer whereas the poor get poorer and the medium class struggles to survive - another onslaught of agitations have started. Tyre burnings, pelting of stones, beating of innocent civilians and the latest, attacking a healthcare facility which to this day I myself do not understand why and what the relation or correlation these actions have with the issue at hand.

I fail to understand why we the innocent people have to bear the brunt of the inadequacies of the ones in power.

I fail to understand why we the general public have to move out in fear because of the actions of some miscreants who want to take the law into their own hands.

I fail to understand why at the end of the day it's the ones who have to struggle to survive who are at the receiving end of this nonsense.

This is Not Done!
We are all here to support the cause if the cause has meaning. We will condemn the cold blooded murder of innocent people because as a society, we have been taught to not look the other way. But why do we have to go about this and every other cause like we are animals who are not educated and who do not know how to demarcate right from wrong?

Is it because our teachers are out on the streets demanding for their rights that we do not now know this? Or

is it because we are being fed so many lies on a day to day basis that we are angry and can't even calm ourselves down to be able to see that our actions are impacting a lot of other people who are trying to survive.

Because as Kong Angela mentioned in her post that we are the ones who are losing out, it is high time that we realise that because we really are the ones losing out.

Eggs per piece in a span of four days increasing to INR 10, petrol increasing by 1 Rupee more means all other amenities will increase exponentially. Vegetables, fruits and common produce laid to waste because the market was bleak - said one of the vendors I spoke to when I was buying produce for my home. She almost broke into tears because her whole week has gone to waste and she didn't make enough to make ends meet for the week to come.

Who then will come to her aid?
And who will come to our aid?
No one will.

We are all but dependent on others and we are all just struggling to survive and nobody will come to our aid and hear our cries when the time comes. This is a deeper issue that we need to address by addressing all concerns and by consulting all and everyone involved.

Your wild antics and mayhem will not do anything but will only cause inconvenience to the common man and not to the ones who travel with escorts all around. We all criticise the government for taking an immediate action of blocking cellular internet which has not only hampered small businesses, people who rely on the same for work from home, students preparing for exams and our food deliveries and ride share captains, but we fail to notice that our hooliganism and unprecedented beatings, trashing and acts of violence are also the same - an interim solution to a huge problem where nobody is trying to address the root.

This is Not Done!
A sense of "normal" was just starting to crawl back in our state after years and years of militancy and right now many do not want us to spiral back down to the same path. We need to move towards a brighter and better future but not through violence but via a rational logical path.

Violence begets violence. In the end it's the common man - you and me who will bear the brunt of it all.

Violence is not the answer to Violence.

This is Not Done.

ment apparatus because, in the event of law and order issues in Shillong, the Additional Secretariat would take care of daily needs, thereby safeguarding government revenue. I defend this by pointing out that Ladakh, a modern Union Territory, too has two State Capitals: Leh and Kargil. Jammu & Kashmir also has a Summer Capital (Srinagar) and a Winter Capital (Jammu). The destruction of public property, the breakdown of law and order, and the victimisation of innocent individuals hurts me as a law-abiding citizen. Since the Garo Hills have ended their rebellion and returned to normalcy, the Government should reconsider establishing a second administrative capital. This would be advantageous for both the Government and the public as it would make it easier for the former to carry out its daily operations. It will take time, but I believe it is better to start now than never.

Yours etc.,
S. Momin,
Via email

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Narratives: a distortian view

By Chiranjib Halder

A distortian is defined as a person who distorts, rather than honestly reports, history. The dictionary also terms a person who under the guise of reporting history, engages in a diatribe, debunking or moral defenestration as a distortian. In the recent political furor over Union Minister Karen Rijju's salvo at Jawaharlal Nehru's five follies in Kashmir, a tug of words has broken out between the BJP and Congress. While Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has taken a dig at Karen Rijju's distortian perspective on Kashmir's accession, the latter has asserted that Nehru's quintet of blunders is still being rectified by Prime Minister Modi. The row started with an article by Rijju in which he held Nehru responsible for 'rejecting' Maharaja Hari Singh's accession request in July 1947 and grave mistakes which cost India dear.

Nehru vilified by the current regime is nothing new, umpteen ills befitting the nation have often been indirectly or directly foisted on out first Prime Minister. But eulogising Maharaja

Gwalior, giving an ultimatum to the rulers to either join the Constituent Assembly or to be treated as hostile. He bluntly told Nehru that he 'considered his speech to be both mistimed and unfortunate.' So, why the BJP and Congress are sparing over Nehru and his role in Kashmir? Kiren Rijju lambasts Nehru's blunders and how the present dispensation is still rectifying them. Earlier, Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a rally in Gujarat said, 'Sardar saheb (Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel) persuaded all the princely states to merge with India. But another person handled this one issue of Kashmir', an obvious riposte to Nehru. The Congress has hit back accusing the BJP and its ilk of whitewashing history.

Congress communications in-charge Jairam Ramesh tweeted 'Nehru didn't dictatorially insert Article 370 in Constitution. It was discussed, unlike notebandi. Patel, Ambedkar & Shyama Prasad Mukherjee didn't object. Ayyangar who had worked in J&K drafted it. Nobody resigned over it...'

"Congress communications in-charge Jairam Ramesh tweeted 'Nehru didn't dictatorially insert Article 370 in Constitution. It was discussed, unlike notebandi. Patel, Ambedkar & Shyama Prasad Mukherjee didn't object. Ayyangar who had worked in J&K drafted it. Nobody resigned over it...' The war of words on Kashmir's accession and Nehru's role may be proof that Karen Rijju and the present regime is deliberately recasting the Nehruvian mould which post-independent India has always lauded."

Hari Singh 'takes the cake' and the Congress has cast shenanigans at Minister Karen Rijju for exalting the former Maharaja. The bone of contention between Congress and BJP is Rijju's blatant assertion that 'Seven decades were lost due to these Nehruvian blunders & India paid a heavy price... finally history took a turn in 2019 when India First was the only guiding principle.' He also blamed Nehru for rejecting Hari Singh's accession request and instead pitching for special status. Congress ideologue Jairam Ramesh's jibe has only exposed Rijju's 'distortian' notion.

Sclerotic thinking reflects the mental silos of a few. And when wisdom overrules fiction, the latter gets brushed under the carpet. The quintet of blunders attributed to Nehru may be plain bashing of India's first Prime Minister which suits the ideology of the current dispensation. In his diatribe Union Law Minister Karen Rijju opines '...Seven decades passed since those tumultuous years. India has since paid a heavy price for Nehru putting family, friendship and personal agendas above national interest. The world got a lever to pin India down...' Is that a fair assessment in retrospect or ideological plain speak to disseminate and distort facts, rather keep the chaff and grain instead of separating them?

The sluggest extraordinary on Kashmir and Nehru's role may be ample proof that majoritarian India has been getting enthroned. An ethic unflinching in its determination to impose itself, embody a particular viewpoint and vacate all others. It thus becomes the essential arbiter and convinces us that we have bid sayonara to the original idea of India.

The story on princely states and Kashmir starts on April 19, 1946 when Mountbatten recorded that he was disappointed with Nehru's 'inflammatory speech' at

The war of words on Kashmir's accession and Nehru's role may be proof that Karen Rijju and the present regime is deliberately recasting the Nehruvian mould which post-independent India has always lauded. Some have equated it with the old Goebelian formula of reiterating deceit till it appears as the truth. Or is there more to this slugfest? It is pertinent to revisit the timeline of that tumultuous October, 75 years later. On 24th October, 1947 Mountbatten received a 'desperate appeal' from erstwhile Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh for help. On 25th October, 1947 the Defence Committee chaired by Mountbatten met and asked V.P. Menon, Secretary, States Department to visit Kashmir to assess the situation. The very next day, on 26th October, Menon reported to the Defence Committee. Lord Mountbatten decided that Kashmir's accession was a legal requirement before sending Indian troops to repel the marauding invaders. Till the Kashmir issue was taken to the United Nations on Mountbatten's advice on 1st January, 1948, Menon was Sardar Patel's confidante and comrade-in-arms. No emissary was sent by Maharaja Hari Singh to Nehru in July, 1947 as is being narrated. The moot point to grasp is that V.P. Menon and Sardar Patel were handling Kashmir and not Nehru. Hence the blunder as attributed to Nehru is more of a fallacy.

The political furor over Nehru's role in Kashmir's accession has brought a number of skeletons out of the closet. Highlighting Nehru's quintet of blunders has more to do with the erosion of centrist philosophy. An alternate political narrative is taking centre-stage and an aberrational brand of nationalism which was never the cornerstone of India's psyche seems to have gained traction.

(The writer is a commentator on politics and society.)

Why punish internet users?

Editor,
Here in India, mobile internet suspension has become the easiest tool to maintain law and order by the central and various state governments. This has been widely abused to hide their inefficient administration and adopted as a one solution fits all model. However, this has affected the economic activities carried out by both public as well as private entities in great magnitude and very much in contrast to the policies favouring ease of doing business tag for the country. Presently, the state of Meghalaya is witnessing such events due to over 5 days of continuous internet blockade imposed by the State Government due to fear of breakdown in law and order. Common citizens, petty traders, students, e-commerce, etc are being greatly affected by such arbitrary measures. Surprisingly the Government has turned a blind eye to this monumental loss and is ironically claiming the success of governance in the state in the wake of approaching state legislative elections slated to take place

early next year.
We have witnessed on TV news channels the parading of security forces in the aftermath of a few incidents of arson in Shillong. If these forces were deployed to the disputed border areas by the State Government, then many problems associated with law and order could have been minimised. Sadly, the state police force had to take the blame but actually it is the Government that failed to put its trained manpower to good use. Consequently, the Government resorts to knee-jerk actions by imposing mobile internet shutdown which is in vogue these days as its easier than brainstorming for better solutions to deal with the present unfortunate events unfolding in the State. May their eyes open to such truth for ensuring better days ahead for us citizens.

Yours etc.,
Earningstone R Sangma,
Via email

Establishment of a second State capital
Editor
I wish to draw attention to a few crucial concerns

that the Government needs to take into account. It is evident that Shillong rallies have occasionally descended into violence. Although the NGO leaders have maintained strict instructions for their members, some take unfair advantage of the situation to damage government vehicles, public property, and people who are caught off guard by the sudden developing situation. It is now clear that Shillong's law and order is frequently disturbed by this violence, which also has an impact on the Government machinery. This is the case when Government employees are compelled to skip their regular workday schedules out of fear for their lives. Therefore, the daily operations of the State machinery and administration are disrupted. Even though they had the option of using force, the police have also been largely restrained. There have been reports of police personnel being beaten up and/or receiving petrol bombs (Molotov) thrown at them.

Therefore, I believe it is imperative that another administrative capital, namely the Winter Capital, be established in the Garo Hills. This would not interfere with the operation of the Govern-

"Flowers are the sweetest things God ever made and forgot to put a soul into."

—Henry Ward Beecher

The Shillong Times

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Countdown for results

ASSEMBLY elections in two states – Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh – have raised the curiosity levels to a high across the nation; and understandably so. Ten days hence, the results will be declared together on December 8. The two-phase polling in Gujarat would be held on December 1 and 5 while Himachal's one-day polling was over on November 12. A general understanding is that the BJP will sweep the elections in Gujarat but the scenario remains unpredictable in Himachal Pradesh where the Congress party has put up a good fight. Himachal has a tendency to vote out the party in power. This and the likely play of anti-incumbency sentiments against the five-year-rule of the BJP as was reflected in the large public presence at some of Priyanka Gandhi's rallies give the Congress some amount of confidence this time to upstage its political adversary.

The presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi—BJP's main vote-fetcher across states – in both the states during the campaign-run gave the BJP considerable morale-boost. The deft handling of communal equations among the Hindus in Gujarat with the upper hand accorded to the numerically strong and financially powerful Patel community had boosted the BJP's chances. This apart, the massive industrial progress for Gujarat apparently at the behest of the Prime Minister in the past eight years is well-appreciated. The status of Mumbai as the nation's principal financial centre, for instance, is systematically being robbed by Gujarat through resolute steps as in the setting up of the GIFT City linking the principal urban sprawls of Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad. It is not just that the GIFT City was launched by Modi while as CM, but the central government under Modi midwived the process of Gujarat's economic progress. The rich and the middle class there are enthused no end by the "Modi magic" while the large army of the poor has less reasons to feel comfortable under the BJP rule there. Arvind Kejriwal and the AAP are seeking to win the backing of this segment.

In this polarization, palpably, the Congress that did somewhat well in the last assembly polls in Gujarat took a hard beating. Opinion polls project a scenario of the Congress doing a bit better than the AAP. Whether Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra through Gujarat added to the strengths of the Congress in any manner is worth a watch. Kejriwal's claim that the AAP would wrest power in Gujarat is taken by many observers with a pinch of salt. As of now, a repeat of the Punjab victory for this party in Gujarat is seen as wishful thinking.

On being a Policeman

By R Bamon

Being a Policeman I just wanted to clarify matters about policing. Randomly if you ask any person about what comes to mind when we say "POLICE," most of them will answer that Police are corrupt, keep torturing people, they are living in a world of their own making etc. That is what usually comes to the mind of the general public. Most often we see that media, human rights activists, the Judiciary, the NGOs, politicians and even the general public are all against the police.

Unfortunately, sometimes even our family members and friends are against the police. Being a policeman sometimes, I am confused as to who I am working for. Am I in the wrong profession? Am I not working for humanity? Is there something in us that makes us different from other humans? Let us deep dive into this matter.

Firstly what is the purpose of policing? Do we deserve the blame that comes our way? We policemen are also brought up in the same culture as other humans? Some among us are greedy, and that's the main reason why people hate us. But is there any field in life where there's no greed and corruption? Whether its Medicine, Engineering, the Judiciary or even in the village administrative there is corruption. The entire society is corrupt. The teenager in the villages, declare their age as 18 only so they can get a voter ID. A girl about to deliver at the age of 15 gets a fake medical certificate and a child is born with this lie. This is how we are raised up.

Some have asked me why being a policeman I cannot even afford to have a house of my own. Society teaches us corruption. When I went for the personal interview for the post of constable I was asked, "Will you be corrupt too?" Seems like they are telling me that the system I am about to enter is riddled with corruption, so will I be able to cope in that system?

Nine years ago when I was not in a service, I also thought policing is a dirty job. But 9 years later I realize that the only department I would ever want to work for is the Police Department. Every day a victim comes to us with a complaint that he wants justice. At the same time a person who commits a crime also comes to us. A victim and a culprit both come to us. Now it is up to us to decide who is right and who is wrong? It's really a difficult job.

Now talking about manners. Once a traffic constable was on duty at a NO PARKING Zone with instructions not to allow any vehicles to park at the location where he was on duty. A car parked exactly at that place. The constable came and spoke politely with that person,

and told him it's a No Parking zone. The answer he got was, "Who are you? It's nothing let me park here for a little while, Don't you know who am I?" How should the constable react? He did his duty but after a while a call came and the constable was asked to apologize to the man who violated parking rules because he is the so-called big man.

Very few respect the 'No Entry' board in the middle of the road. The car they drive costs lakhs of rupees but they cannot read the board and they end up quarrelling.

Some blame the police saying that the police security system is getting weaker by the day. The public ask, "What are the police doing? Are they sleeping or what?" Yes, we too sleep; we eat as well because we are BUT human beings. We do feel tired and hungry. Some people make fun of the police by making memes and funny videos of police sleeping. Some blame that police don't arrive on time. Do you know why? Because there is somebody out there who is taking advantage of the police and making false complaints.

I remember once a headman of a village kept complaining about the people of his village. Sometimes he would call us at to the village at midnight. When we reach there we would find it was just a minor incident. The headman's son and his friend got into a drunken brawl. This could have been solved by the village administration. But no, the headman wants to show his power. This is the reason behind police delay in taking any action. In a day hundreds of complaints are received, and sometimes it's hard to decide where to take quick action and where not to.

A research on why police are overweight found that a police on duty eats once in the morning and there's no guarantee when he will get his next meal. So, whenever he gets a chance to eat, he eats to the brim. The untimely eating and over eating habits lead to accumulation of fat in the stomach leading to the pot belly and being overweight. Another is the mentality of the people out here. I remember when there was a football match at Polo ground I was on duty at the entrance. We had to check every person entering the ground. Some muttered, "Are we terrorists that you check us?" I told them, "Sir/Ma'am, let us perform our duty." But they still do not want to get checked.

Sometimes the so-called VIPs want to take their cars right in front of the entrance. When stopped the VIPs agree to get off the vehicle but their wives are adamant. If we are talking about security

then leave us to perform our duties. Don't look at our nameplates, and say, "We will see you."

As far as police manners are concerned if every person says, "I am an advocate; I am the magistrate; I am an NGO member," how can the police do their duties? Coming to the corruption part, are you aware that the police department is one with the least corruption? I know most of you will disagree, but the police department is viewed as the most corrupt because policemen wear uniforms and are dealing directly with the public. Now when a policeman takes Rs 50 from someone, everyone notices him but when a civilian takes lakhs no one takes notice.

When the police demand a fine for an offence committed it is visible to all. Hence the police are accused of demanding money from the public. I am not saying that the police are not corrupt. I know some are extorting from the public and because of this the whole department is blamed. In the last 5 years, the police have been blamed mercilessly. Some say they are not fit to be in the police if they cannot make sacrifices for their motherland. I don't think those who talk of sacrifice would put their own lives on the line.

I too was posted in the border areas, and there were disputes as usual in a place where the Assam government was constructing a bus-shed. The villagers opposed the construction and from there a dispute arose. The villagers informed us about the matter. Immediately our in-charge along with few constables headed to that area. We had no weapons so we carried lathis. When we reached the location we found that from the Assam side the ASP, the Dy SP, the CI was there with around 5 to 6 trucks of forces. What will we do? We had to hide our lathis in embarrassment. After some time, there was a talk between our ADM (who too came with his single gunman) and ADC from the Assam side (who came with two Thars of escort and a truckload of troops). If you have been in the border, you would know. There's a wonderful saying, "elephants in the room and cows in the border."

Now talking about sacrifice. I have heard people blaming the police for not countering the Assam troops. You know the reasons by now. Moreover, holding a gun does not mean that we free to open a fire on any one under any circumstances. Remember in the past year there was firing between the Meghalaya Police and the Assam Police and one senior officer from Meghalaya Police was injured in the incident. Do you know how much the

Government paid him for treatment? Did the media cover the news? No, their mouths are shut and their pens did not drop ink in the paper. Now do you think our jawans will dare to leave a widow and an orphaned child? In the army or any central forces if any of the family members of the soldiers get sick, the medical expenses are borne by the Institution. Do police have such facilities? If a police personnel has serious health problems, he will have to spend his own savings. If he goes for medical reimbursement, by the time he gets the money he will be dead.

If people accuse us of being incapable remember that it is the Meghalaya Police who without the help of the army or para-military forces had wiped off militancy from Garo Hills. It is not that we are incapable; it just that we are used as puppets by our own system. We are humans and we do care for humanity. I remember the day we were sworn into the Police force. Each word is fresh in my mind that we will uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India to the best of our ability, knowledge and judgement and that we will perform our duties well.

While we were in Garo, hills we fought heart and soul against terrorists using our skills and judgement because we are fully aware that they will kill us. Now turning to the border situation some ask why the Meghalaya Police did not counter the fire of the Assam Police. It's because we are using our better judgement to uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India. The Assam Police firing brutally in an inhuman manner are not our enemies. Even in the midst of a crisis we still use our judgment and choose to respond by running than to react by firing.

There is misunderstanding among the public regarding the Police. The reason is that we are just puppets in the hand of the puppeteer. The audience don't see the puppeteer. They will always choose to blame the police – the puppets. The newly emerging YouTube news channels and other social media platforms choose to show only the negative side of the Police in any situation because they are uninformed. The only want 'likes' and 'views' and dehumanize the police.

I ask all who read this article to stop dehumanizing the police. Let's join hands to fight against social evils. We are all of the same stock and the same value systems. Just look at our state Meghalaya that was once known for moral principles. Now we are known for all the wrong things. Let's stop fighting each other and join hands for the betterment of our society. We are helpless; our necks are tied with chains. But if you have some empathy you will understand our predicament.

Shah 2002 reference to Modi 'restoring peace' in Gujarat is ominous

BJP wants to communalise new voters in the state Assembly polls

By Arun Srivastava

With the assembly elections in Gujarat reaching its last leg, the BJP Chanakya Amit Shah took to the trusted lane of communalism, this time with the precise goal to communalise the Gujarati youth. With this mission he even dug up the past and did not hesitate in telling the people that the Narendra Modi government established peace in the state and "taught lesson" to the anti-social elements or rioters in 2002.

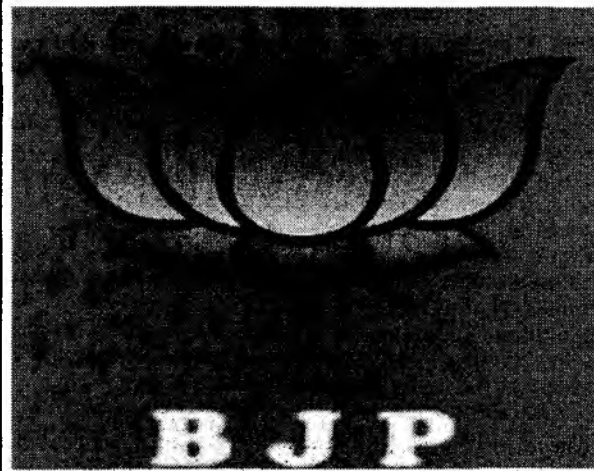
Obviously Shah was pointing to the Gujarat riots in which nearly 2000 Muslims were killed. If what Shah told is to be believed the incidents of riots and violence were common in Gujarat as the Congress party encouraged it but once the BJP government led by Modi came to power peace returned to the state.

Notwithstanding the fact even while deposing before the Supreme Court appointed probe body, Modi had outright denied his involvement in the riot or providing patronage to the marauders. But Shah's observation makes it explicit that Modi had

ability, peace and prosperity for the community. With the traditional voters showing their averseness towards BJP, desperation was growing to get the younger to replace them. This could be achieved by arousing the communal feelings to win over the vast population of the first time voters.

The urgency to reach out to this new electoral force was driven by youngsters' particularly in the urban areas of the four big cities getting enamoured with the election promises and agenda of the AAP. It was their leaning towards the AAP that the entire leadership and workforce of AAP had descended in Gujarat. The BJP during its initial phase of campaigning was emphasising on development and growth. But with youths showing their like for AAP forced the BJP to amend its strategy and take-out the Hindu-Muslim leaf out of its old book.

To win the trust and support of the youngsters it is imperative from BJP arouse their Hindu feelings



played his role of teaching lessons to the civil activists and individuals opposed to Hindutva politics. Shah must be applauded for the confessional narrative.

Yet another reason which has forced Shah to come out with this threat is the fear of opening up several criminal cases that are gathering dust. Already the opposition parties have been demanding the review of several cases that took place coinciding with the Gujarat pogrom. Two recent cases which have shaken the trust of the people in the government as well as judiciary are; one relating to release of convicts who had raped Bilkis Begum and killed her kinds, the second is the refusal to have the killing of the Congress Lok Sabha member reinvestigated by an independent agency. Besides these two there are many other cases.

There is little doubt an opposition party coming to power would order for review of the cases. Sanjiv Bhatt a senior officer in Gujarat Intelligence bureau had said that he attended a meeting at which Modi alleged to have said that the Hindus should be allowed to vent their anger. In a sworn statement to the Supreme Court, he said that his position allowed him to come across large amounts of information and intelligence both before and during the violence, including the actions of senior administrative officials. He had also alleged that, in a meeting in the night before the riots, Modi told officials that the Muslim community needed to be taught a lesson following an attack on a train carrying Hindu pilgrims.

It is not that while making this comment Shah was unaware of the implications of it. But even then he resorted to this tactics. The importance of Gujarat election for Modi could be gauged from the simple fact that Modi has been consistently camping in the state, ever since the elections were announced. He desires to win the Gujarat election at any cost.

With electoral stakes quite high he had no options. At least two compulsions forced him to reveal the fact; and project Modi as the Hindu patriarch who can bring sta-

and emotions. But how far Shah's machination would succeed in achieving the motto is not sure. Experts also feel that just a week ahead of the first round of votes projecting Modi as the Hindu Hridaya Samrat would not serve the interest of the BJP. The youths of the state are quite angry with the Modi government for not doing anything to create employment avenues and opportunities during its 27 years of rule. Some election watchers feel that Shah resorting to this nature of daring inventiveness to induce the first time voters would not work.

Shah is absolutely right, riots used to happen during the days of Congress, but once the BJP came to power not in Delhi but also in other states, the number of riots have declined sharply. An insight into the historical backdrop of riots would make it clear that almost all the riots were engineered by the RSS. Shah's remark is quite loaded; "They tried to create a problem for [Prime Minister] Narendra Bhai [Modi], but he taught them such a lesson that they have not dared to do anything till 2022". Gujarat riots were one of India's worst outbreaks of religious violence.

Shah is quite certain that enumerating the economic achievements or counting the growth projects is not going to ensure the victory. To win it is imperative that communal emotions are aroused. With this the development plank has taken the back-seat. J.P. Nadda, the party's national president, on Saturday promised to launch an "anti-radicalisation cell to identify and eliminate all threats of destabilisation as well as the sleeper cells of radical groups, terrorist organisations and anti-India forces". At a time when "permanent peace" was prevailing in Gujarat as Shah had claimed, it is quite intriguing what made Nadda to set up an anti-radicalisation cell. As if this was not enough Nadda said that "a new law will be brought to help identify those who damage private and public properties. These anti-India forces will be identified and penalised." (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Absence of law and order

Editor,

The season of Cherry Blossoms in Meghalaya started on a jarring note as the news about the loss of lives at Mukroh filtered in. As usual the state capital received a jolt out of the blue from the violent protests. November 24 was marked by violent agitations and many unreported cases of assault. Why are the District Administration and Police so incompetent in dealing with such situations? Surely it is not the first time that such mayhem has erupted in the city. How many more such incidents need to occur before the concerned authorities really give the matter a serious thought?

Although we have accustomed ourselves to all such incidents in the heart of the city, the occurrences of November 24 are frightening to say the least. Why was Civil Hospital stormed? A close friend of mine informed that his uncle was assaulted by masked goons near Laban. A group of hooligans had started to vandalize a few shops near Bishnupur. Also, a high-ranking customs official was assaulted at IGP and is now critical. Will the State Government compensate

the losses or will the victims have to knock the doors at Delhi to get the money? Perhaps the attackers have little brains to think of what would happen if an official from Meghalaya gets the same treatment in another state. A few days later, a petrol bomb was hurled at the house of a non-tribal at Mawbah.

A state should be governed by law and order but it seems that we are at the mercy of a few petrol bomb engineers. The Police Department should know that excuses like "exercising restraint" will not help to hide their incompetence. The Chief Minister of the state must also realize that appealing for peace just through social media posts will bring no change. He must have the courage to take decisive decisions to prevent further deterioration of law and order.

Yours etc.,
P Bhattacharya
Shillong-4

Wanted a dignified protest

Editor,

The macabre incident where five villagers at Mukroh (an area within Meghalaya) were massacred by rogue policemen and forest guards of Assam is a despicable act that deserves the sharpest

condemnation and warrants strongest action against the perpetrators. Our thoughts and prayers are with the grieving families -including that of the forest guard of Assam- and also to those grievously injured in this incident. It is clear to all that this is a criminal act perpetrated by the Assam police and forest personnel- a fact admitted by Mr Himanta Biswas Sarma, the Chief Minister of Assam. Mr Sarma has not made any attempt to camouflage the incident to protect the guilty officials from his State. Rather he has taken immediate action and suspended/transferred the involved officials so that they do not tamper with evidence as well as calling for an independent inquiry. These actions by the Assam government provide an opportunity for a thorough and impartial investigation of the death of all six individuals, leading to identification and punishment of the culprits. This outcome is a top priority for Meghalaya to ensure speedy justice for the affected families and also for Assam to send a loud signal that such misadventure by its officials, which seem to be a common phenomenon in the border areas, would not be tolerated and go unpunished.

Another matter that de-

serves equal attention is the economic security and welfare of the affected families who have not only lost their loved ones but also their adult earning members. In a rural family, the loss of an adult male member could plunge a family into deep distress as he provides both economic and social security. While the monetary compensation announced by the State government will help the affected families in the interim, more needs to be done to ensure a secured source of income for the families in the long run. Further, since villagers in the border areas have highlighted the constant harassment faced by them from Assam, the state government must undertake confidence building measures to secure the life and livelihood of its citizens.

It is natural that when an incident like this happens, the affected community would react to express their anguish. The candlelight vigil called by NGOs/pressure groups of the state in the aftermath of the firing was a dignified way for us to mourn the loss of innocent lives, show our support to the grieving families and express our outrage at what has happened. However, the violence that followed in which so-called miscreants unleashed mayhem and at-

tacked unsuspecting passers-by and police personnel is unacceptable. Such senseless and heinous reactions, including the burning of a vehicle of Assam, will not in any way contribute to securing justice for the families. Rather they are likely to overshadow that original incident and provide the guilty Assam personnel undeserved sympathy. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident but a continuation of the racist attacks unleashed on other communities following such public gatherings. It is a sad commentary on the state of moral values and ethics of the indigenous community and reflects the collective failure of the family and society to guide our young people.

Through this column, I appeal to the indigenous youth of Meghalaya to come together and lead a principled struggle to secure justice for the families of those killed in Mukroh, but to do so in a dignified non-violent manner with truth on our side. I also call upon the elders of my community and our social institutions to play a more direct role in guiding our young people who are clearly frustrated with the ineptitude handling of economic and social crises facing our state.

Yours etc.,
Sumarbin Umdor
Via email

Shillong must uphold its cosmopolitan culture

Editor

I write to express my condolences for the lives of innocent villagers lost needlessly in the Mukroh incident -- but also to raise a concern and a question. My concern is about the needless and misdirected violence perpetrated in the aftermath of this tragedy. To quote Gandhiji, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." Whether burning effigies or attacking innocent non-tribals, none of this violence is justified. None of it resolves the issue at stake.

My question has to do with the ethnocentric nature of these protests. Certainly injustice should be protested and Meghalayan lives should matter. But are all Meghalayan lives equal? What if the lives lost in Mukroh were those of non-tribals? Would Shillong have seen any of this agitation? When will the indigenous communities of the Northeast embrace true cosmopolitanism and discover their shared humanity?

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email