

"It's a fine line between self-assuredness
and arrogance."

— Ian Gillan

The Shillong Times

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Education needs strict monitoring

REPORTS that several schools in the State particularly in Garo Hills are without teachers for several years have been left without teachers raises many difficult questions on the Education Department's ability to oversee these schools. In fact the State Government should have commissioned a quick study on the exact number of schools without teachers and why that was not detected over all the years. Every school functions under the larger supervision of the Managing Committees (MCs). These MCs are supposed to be the supervisory bodies keeping track of teacher absenteeism and the overall functioning of the schools so that all lacunae are immediately addressed. However, since the Secretary of the Managing Committee are the school principals it would be absurd for them to report on the anomalies in their own schools more so if they have been remiss in the discharge of their duties. This is one area that needs correction. Someone other than the principal and a member of the Managing Committee with an independent mind should be appointed as the Secretary and so that principals can also be monitored.

Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has stated that additional allocation of Rs 300 crore would be made available to complete the schools at the virtual launch of the Meghalaya School Upgradation Programme for upgrading and improving 50 lower primary and upper primary schools under Phase I of the project. These announcements are linked to elections and the expected outcomes from the series of promises. Unfortunately, those schools that benefit from such promises take it as a personal favour by the Government of the day without realising that implementation of those promises is a tortuous route. Not much is being said on school drop-out in Meghalaya although the numbers are rising with many kids aged between 10-12 across the Khasi-Jaintia Hills working as shepherd boys. Part of the reason why children drop out of school is because of teacher absenteeism and a lack of imagination and creativity in teaching. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data finds the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Meghalaya to have the worst drop-out rates for boys at 9.8%, 9 % and 8.7 % respectively. The children spoken to say that domestic work, economic condition and lack of interest were the topmost causes for discontinuing education. About 30.2% of the girls gave domestic work as the reason for discontinuing education and about 36.90% of boys left studies because they had to support their families. These are real issues and it is time to redesign education in such a manner that the rural students are given the kind of education they need to manage in their environment. A single framework for students across the State does not work and this is evident from the lack of interest shown by students at the primary and upper primary levels.

Significance of Gandhi Jayanti

By RV Warjri

October 2 which is the 153rd Birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi falls on a Sunday this year. Customarily, celebrations would take place in India and the world over. The most visible form being the garlanding of his bust or statue. Within India, the scale of celebration depends largely on the Central and respective State Governments and civil societies. Abroad, it lies on the initiative taken by the respective Indian diplomatic missions in those countries.

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi had launched the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' by reliving the 'Dandi March' of Gandhiji from Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad on 12th March, 2021. Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav commemorates 75 years of India's Independence. Among the activities include that of "bringing alive stories of unsung heroes whose sacrifices have made freedom a reality for us." These are stories of unsung heroes. Indeed, it's a great idea and long overdue.

The dispute however is about the list of unsung heroes. Instead of the Constitution of India being the basis and guide, ideology has taken precedence. It includes theocratic figures who were also implicated in the assassination of Gandhiji, including persons who wrote 13 mercy petitions to the British and signed as 'Most Obedient Servant.' This shows that the reliving of the Dandi March was a farce and a tokenism. Besides, embracing Gandhiji officially is one thing while allowing unofficially the leading members of the ruling party to deride Gandhiji is another. Some among them have even called for installing a statue of Gandhiji's assassin Nathuram Godse. Further, in the name of correcting the wrongs of the past all kinds of anti-Gandhian acts and statements are being spouted out. From functionaries in authority to the larger supposedly educated majoritarian population. Earlier, Gandhiji's favourite Christian hymn 'Abide with Me' was deleted at the Beating of the Retreat celebration of the Republic Day 2022.

Internationally, there are no quirks or qualms to preach to the world about Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) and telling other world leaders that the present is not an "era of war." More bizarre is the pontification at the UN that India acts as a polarizing factor internationally when there is so much polarization internally. The hate crimes, hate speeches calls for genocide, governmental bulldozer aggression, etc within India. Then the Shakespearean comedy of errors drama was staged. When bigoted fac-



wing religious fanaticism because fascism feeds on each other. Radicalization then became a popular culture. About other religions, Gandhiji had said, "I do regard Islam to be a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are." Gandhiji's favourite passage from the Bible was the Sermon on the Mount which he corresponded extensively with renowned Russian author

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he corresponded extensively with renowned
Russian author Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy had also
written the master piece War and Peace.

Nonetheless, the biggest non-material export or soft power from India to the world is Mahatma Gandhi. The proliferation of Godmen from India notwithstanding none of them are anywhere near Gandhiji. The presence of statues or busts of Mahatma Gandhi stand tall in cities and countries around the world. Mahatma Gandhi fills the pages of literature that

disagreed with Gandhiji's method to name one of his brigades as Gandhiji brigade. Another example is the charkha spinning the khadi yarn as an economic strategy to beat the textile import from Britain. The minimalist iconic dhoti and shawl attire to identify with the poor and the downtrodden. Gandhiji influenced other Civil Right leaders, the most prominent among them was Martin Luther King Jr. who

was assassinated fighting for the Civil Rights of the African American community in United States. Among its by-products was that 40 years later an African American was installed as President in the White House. Albert Einstein was voted as the Man of the century in 2000 tying in with Gandhiji. Ironically, it was Einstein who had stated when Gandhiji was assassinated, "that generations to come will scarce believe that such a man ever walked on this earth".

Among my assignments abroad as Ambassador of India to Colombia and accredited to other countries. Since the early 1960s Colombia has been afflicted with left wing insurgency groups. In the 1970s drug trafficking became widely rampant that by the 1980s it gave birth to the term narco terrorism. It means that drug traffickers were influencing Government policies and life in society through violence, intimidation and kidnapping. The growth of drug cartels foremost among whom was the Medellin cartel was controlled by the most notorious and ruthless drug king Pablo Escobar, at the time rated as the 6th richest man in the world. His action-packed biopic is serialized in the Netflix film Narcos. Escobar's overlord influence enabled him to even get elected as a member of the Congress (Parliament) with the ambition to become the President. It was the might of the US, since its population had suffered the most from the drug trade that forced it to finally get Escobar eliminated. Progressive changes in Colombia also led to the signing of a UN brokered peace treaty in 2017 between the leading insurgent group FARC and the Government. The then President Juan Manuel Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The current President Gustavo Petro is an ex militant.

Back to Gandhiji, my last historic act as Ambassador to Colombia was that together with the Mayor of Medellin we installed the bust of Gandhiji. It happened because of the relentless work of the Gandhi Foundation in Medellin started by a Gujarati Indian migrant chemical engineer Hariyadan Shah. Other events had also taken place days before the installation of the bust. I was taken on a bus tour and in the bus victims of the years of insurgencies, narco-terrorism, drug violence etc., were sitting to tell me their sordid stories. Each of them had lost one or more members of their families that included husbands, wives, sons, daughters, siblings, etc. The Mayor himself was a victim. Finally, their poignant message to me was the message of Gandhiji. "Peace is not the Way; Peace is the ONLY Way." Today, Medellin is a metaphor for the most transformed city in the world. It received the Wall Street Journal award for being the, "most innovative city" beating 200 other cities globally. The Bajaj group of industries leads the presence of Indian companies in Medellin. Those interested in finding out more about Medellin and Google for more details. Shillong and other cities in India can learn a lot from it.

(The writer is a retired diplomat).

Round The States

By Insaf

Cong Presidential Poll Rajasthan out, straight fight?

Rajasthan Congress high drama nearly turned the grand old party's presidential poll into a tamasha. Fortunately, for the Congress, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot decided to bring down the curtains and on Thursday last announced he won't be contesting for the top party seat. Not only did he take moral responsibility for the political crisis in his State, wherein MLAs supporting him defied central observers and blocked holding of a the legislators meeting, but apologised to the top command Sonia Gandhi and left it to her whether he shall retain the CM kursi. The focus has since shifted to 24 Akbar Road, AICC headquarters in New Delhi. Veteran leader and leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, filed his nomination on Friday last and his challenger will be MP and former Union Minister Shashi Tharoor. This after senior leader and former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh decided not to run for the post and back Kharge. Polling is to take place on October 17 and the winner will be announced on October 19. With the last date of nominations over, the party can heave a sigh of relief there shall be no more dramas. The big question, however, is will there be a contest at the end of the day? Or will the party, which will have a non-Gandhi elected after over two decades, opt for consensus chief? And say: All's well that ends well!

Ban on Islamic Outfit

The Popular Front of India (PFI) continues to hit headlines. Following raids by NIA, ED and state police forces across States, the Centre on Wednesday last banned the Islamic outfit for five years under the anti-terror law, UAPA, accusing it of having "links" with global terror groups and spreading communal hatred in the country. PFI's political offshoot Social Democratic Party of India has hit out against the ban saying it was part of the "undeclared emergency" clamped by the BJP-led government. It has always claimed to be a social organisation working for upliftment of Muslims, but the Centre trashes it and has even put its 8 associates in list of organisations outlawed under the Act. The NIA alleged the outfit has been extensively using social media for recruiting youths for anti-national activities, involved in anti-government propaganda, spreading the narrative that Muslims were being persecuted, taken a lead in organising anti-CAA protests, among other charges. Interestingly, while many mainstream political parties agree with the ban, some in Opposition, have asked for a similar ban on RSS, saying it too has flared up communal hatred with its radical ideology and tried to create division in society! Clearly, it's a no-go for the Centre. Now, with a tribunal being set up to adjudicate whether or not there's sufficient cause for declaring PFI "unlawful association", the big question is whether the outfit will be able to put up a defence?

Uttarakhand Infamy

It's shameful, to say the least. The murder of young receptionist Ankita Bhandari at a resort near Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, allegedly by the resort owner Pulkit Arya and two of his accomplices has sent shock waves across the country. More so, as Pulkit is the son of former BJP leader Vinod Arya, who was expelled by the party after the case, wherein it's alleged she refused to provide "special services" to 'VIP guests' brought the leader's son at the resort and paid a price with her life! Besides,

the police is accused of dragged its feet given the political clout. Predictably, it was damage control as always as the case went viral on social media. On Wednesday last, the Dhami government announced the case is to be tried in a fast-track court; Rs 25 lakh compensation to be given to Ankita's family; a revenue police sub-inspector has been suspended for alleged dereliction of duty as he didn't register an FIR despite being informed about her disappearance on September 19 itself. Be that as it may, the government would need to get its act together as this case may just be a tip of the iceberg. All eyes would be on the investigation but more needs to be done. Resorts in the hill State allegedly being run as 'dens of sin' needs to be acted upon. Better sooner than later.

'Real' Shiv Sena Battle

The Uddhav Thackeray-led faction of Shiv Sena received another setback. On Tuesday last, a Constitution bench of Supreme Court rejected its plea and allowed Nirvachan Sadan to go ahead with the hearing of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde group's petition seeking recognition as the 'real' SS and being allocated the party 'bow-and-arrow' poll symbol. The Uddhav group had sought to restrain the Election Commission proceedings. The arguments in the big battle of who is the 'original' SS are worth a mention. The Uddhav group claims 'the election symbol order can be invoked only when the claimant belongs to the same political party but claims to be of a rival group.' Plus, Shinde "is no longer in the party and membership has been given up. How does the EC hear him then?" The EC argued it's "free to decide who constitutes the aspect of majority." Governor Koshiyari counsel contended the EC "is only deciding which faction is real and be allowed to proceed with Shinde's plea." The Shinde group argued "an election symbol is not the property of an MLA and to which faction it belongs has to be decided by the EC". The issue veers around merger, defection and disqualification. A tall order for the EC and it must be above board. For it must remember: Not only must justice be done, it must also be seen to be done!

Kursi & Deity's Portrait

BJP government of Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Madhya Pradesh has a rare first to its credit! The Chief Minister on Tuesday last held a Cabinet meeting in the temple town of Ujjain and lo and behold ceded his seat to Lord Mahakal's portrait. Unprecedented indeed in the history of the State and many would simply saying 'not done'. Photographs of a large portrait of Lord Mahakal, placed in the middle of the rectangular table and on the place reserved for the CM went viral on social media. While State BJP leaders have defended and hailed the gesture with one even referring to the Ramayana, saying Bharat ruled Ayodhya with 'chauran padukas' when Lord Ram was in exile, there are many adverse reactions. Such as: "God is present everywhere. There's no need to show it exclusively in government or administration". "Ours is a secular state. Tomorrow, people belonging to other faiths will too demand the government to do such a thing". "Will the government do the same if people of other faiths demand the same?" Chouhan needs to answer. He could have visited the temple of lord Shiva with his team in tow instead to get blessings. Guess, with Assembly polls November next year the gesture would have gone unnoticed. --JNEA

Letters to the Editor

More on RSS Chief's remarks

Editor,
"All people living in Bharat (India) are Hindus" said the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat thereby implying that Khasis are Hindus. He further said we are here not to convert anyone. The response to his remarks are varied. I agree with the comment of Mr Ardent M Basaiawmoit, President of the VPP when he said one should be able to read between the lines what the statement actually means (ST Sep 28, 2022). In this respect I wish the readers would refer to an investigative article which appeared in the Tehelka magazine dated July 4, 2009 titled, "A strange and bitter crop," by Sanjana. The article mentioned 1500 to 1600 children from Jaintia Hills, Ri Bhoi, East and West

Khasi Hills were taken to Karnataka under the ambitious RSS social engineering project to bring up the children the Hindu way and make them become champions of Hinduism. The article mentioned one Tukaram Shetty (Bah Ram) of Lei Synshar Cultural Society, Jowai who was instrumental in working out this project. Mr Basaiawmoit cautioned the Khasis following the indigenous faith to be very careful and alert and not to be misled by such statements.

Yours etc.,
Torist Mark,
Via email

Purpose of Durga Puja celebration

Editor,
Are we aware of the deeper philosophies behind this annual celebration of

Durga Puja? To be honest, there is not one single philosophy. The word Durga is derived from the root word 'Durg', which means fort. Just as a fort stands tall and mighty around low-lying land, water or jungles and protects the inmates from all kinds of dangers, we look upon "Maa Durga" as our "divine protector" from all worldly evil, including invisible spirituality. We feel safe and secure in her divine embrace and feel her all-pervasive energy around us and within us. Divinity as explained by ancient sages is something far removed from tangible science, mundane logic, and facts.

Of course, the philosophy behind our worship of Maa Durga is not just an amalgamation of sundry religious rites. A rational scientist may also find many similarities in facets of Her story and modern physics. Quantum physicists are beginning to acknowledge that the

DIVINE energy, which in Sanskrit refers to as "Shakti", does have strong underpinnings in every aspect of our life, including atomic to sub-atomic particles and then subtle wave-function. That subtle divine energy is behind the entire cosmic make-up. This profound philosophy of the East has been passionately embraced by the father of Quantum Physics -- Erwin Schrodinger.

When you juxtapose this life-giving form of Maa Durga against the Trishul and the sword-wielding warrior form of the Mother Goddess, She comes across as the Destroyer. The targets of her weapons of destruction are the evil forces that she wishes to protect Her children against. So, the philosophy of Maa Durga encompasses all three incarnations in one form -- the Destroyer, the Life-Giver, and the Creator. Outside of the physical manifestations of our prayers and devotion

for Maa Durga, She also embodies the spirit and characteristics of a mother.

Well, Maa Durga is considered an epitome of Shakti (ENERGY), which is GOOD that alone can triumph over EVIL. Yes, ancient scriptures pour out a rich vein of "philosophical underpinnings" on which to lead our lives well and gradually make an earnest effort for "self-realisation" through MEDITATION, not just only hopping from pandal to pandal -- which, in fact is the "initial" stepping stone. Attaining communion with absolute DIVINITY is the final goal. Ultimately, it is the Mother's DIVINITY that encompasses the whole cosmos.

The great French Nobel laureate Romain Rolland, after realizing the philosophical depth of ancient texts, exclaimed: "Religious faith in the case of Hinduism has never been allowed to run counter to scientific

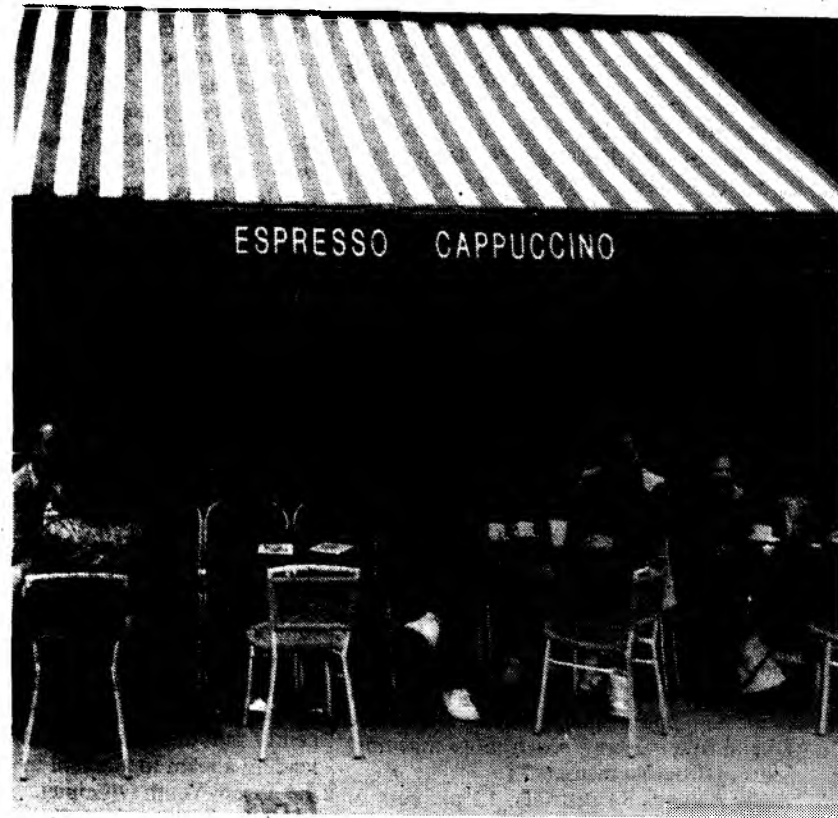
laws. Moreover, the former is never made a condition for the knowledge they teach, but there are always scrupulously careful to take into consideration the possibility that by reason both the agnostic and atheist may attain truth in their own way".

PS: All kudos to the Central Puja Committee (CPC), Meghalaya, which annually organizes the ALL-FAITH get-together. This is undoubtedly a commendable effort to send out the right message which will inspire one and all. It is through mutual love and brotherhood among all religions that we can live in peace and harmony and triumph over evil.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

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Good and bad coffee: The case of cultural omnivores



Some people who love classical music also dance to Celine Dion. Others are craft beer aficionados who also enjoy a cold bottle of mass market beer at the beach. Some love independent movies while indulging in the guilty pleasure of blockbuster franchises and "trashy" reality TV.

Social scientists call these people "cultural omnivores." Research has shown that these omnivores are economically and culturally privileged people who can enjoy both "highbrow" and "lowbrow" cultural products simultaneously.

As consumer researchers, we've looked into the phenomenon of cultural omnivores. We've studied coffee consumption in France for 7 years. That's helped us understand how people develop their omnivorous tastes.

TRADITIONAL CAFÉS VERSUS SPECIALTY COFFEE SHOPS

France has a well-established coffee culture. Paris' first cafés opened in the 17th century. Today, cafés are sociable places that welcome people from various social classes. When customers ask for a coffee (usually the cheapest drink on the menu), the waiters bring them a bitter espresso that many would call bad. But despite the coffee's quality, ca-

fés still remain as important cultural institutions.

Over the last decade, many specialty coffee shops have opened in France. Unlike the traditional cafés, these coffee shops use higher quality coffee beans, roasted by artisans and brewed by trained baristas. The coffee comes in numerous variations and complex notes. It is often also twice as expensive as coffee from traditional cafés.

French consumers who were once satisfied with the taste of café coffee first found specialty coffee unfamiliar. But once they gave it a chance, they understood why it tasted better. Still, surprisingly, they continued to go to traditional cafés. To understand why, we first need to look at the "market work" of baristas and the efforts they make to attract consumers to a new market.

RISE OF THE SKILLED BARISTA

Specialty coffee professionals establish specific criteria about what good coffee is and how to make it. These include the balance of flavours, aromatic complexity, precision and skill of creating a cup of coffee. They also include service interactions like the friendliness of the barista and their ability to give clear information about the beans to customers. These features of specialty coffee are reinforced by organizations like the Specialty

Coffee Association and events like barista championships.

Secondly, specialty coffee shops create opportunities to attract customers into their establishment and make them come back. To do this, they play on their curiosity. They might design their space as a unique way or regularly change the coffee beans on offer.

Thirdly, specialty coffee shops educate consumers about the formal qualities of coffee and encourage them to see coffee as more than just a caffeine fix or an opportunity to socialize. To achieve this goal, baristas might present the geographical origin of each coffee, describe its main flavors and explain the difference between brewing methods.

Little by little, consumers come to appreciate coffee like they would a good wine or work of art. They detect the flavors, observe the technical skills of the barista and listen to the information about the origins of beans.

CULTURAL OMNIVORES NOT ALWAYS SNOBS

You'd expect that after all this marketing, those who frequent specialty coffee shops would turn their noses up at the coffee sold at traditional cafés. Interestingly, they do not. Cultural omnivores

know that "lowbrow" coffee may not be prepared as well or taste as good. However, the taste is not the primary draw for consumers.

For them, the traditional café is still a space to enjoy the culture that surrounds it. A space to get a shot of energy and spend time with friends, colleagues and family. Although omnivores can have a lot of enthusiasm for "highbrow" coffee, they keep appreciating the energizing and socializing experience of "lowbrow" coffee.

Of course, that duality goes beyond coffee. Think about cinema, for example. Omnivores might watch independent films and appreciate their originality and complexity. But they also watch action-filled blockbusters as a way to clear their head after a long day at work. When it comes to wine, they might drink an expensive wine for its body and structure. But they might also drink a cheap rosé in summer. They might even add an ice cube to it, despite protest from a sommelier.

Omnivores appreciate highbrow activities as aesthetic forms and lowbrow activities as a way to have fun, socialize and to relax. Switching between different modes of appreciation allows them to form more democratic relationships with different cultural forms and maintain social connections with different social classes. (The Conversation)

Reviving the 'Dhaki' tradition



Dhaki also known as Bengal's traditional drummers, are now a disappearing breed of entertainers who are known for playing live music and have long played a significant role in the Durga Puja celebrations.

Dhaki is essentially a drum like instrument made from the wood of the mango tree, and is mostly played by men from the rural areas with the help of two wooden sticks also known as 'kathis'. They are known among the people of Bengal for weaving magic with the help of their instruments amid the air of festivities without whom Durga Puja and many other festivals of joy in West Bengal remains incomplete. Every year, around 2000 puja pandals come up in various localities of Bengal and in each of them, one can hear the beats of the dhak signifying happiness and enjoyment. Largely, a male dominated profession, however, during the last few years women

from Purulia have also started to play the dhak, thereby bringing about a major socio-cultural change in their community.

Tracing back their roots, one would find a rich cultural background. Back then, their ancestors, who started playing the dhaks years back in the pujas of their villages, were always viewed as artists, who like any other percussionists or musicians played their instrument after a considerable amount of training. Over the years, their legacy has passed to the next generation and for a long time they have been treated with a lot of regard and repute. However, with changing times, their importance has often been replaced with music cassettes and CDs, making this profession economically less viable for dhakis.

Raghu Nath Das, his brother Tapas Das and his 10-year-old nephew Arijit Das, represents a group of dhakis, who came to Kolkata from their village in

Murshidabad during Durga Puja this year. They are mainly farmers back at their village and come to play in the city during the festival time because of their love for playing the instrument and also to earn a bit extra out of it. When asked about why they chose this over all other jobs as their secondary profession, Raghu Nath and his brother candidly confessed their love and ancestral tradition associated with this instrument. The earning however is not very high in this work and an average dhaki is paid around Rs 3000- Rs 4000 for playing at a pandal in Kolkata.

A brief conversation with Raghu Nath and his brother gave an idea that despite of their own commitment and love for this profession, they are not very sure as to whether their next generation would be interested to carry forward this legacy.

There are a number of villages in many districts of Bengal like Hooghly and North 24 Paragans

where several families of the community of dhakis still live but due to a decline in their demand and lack of sufficient income many of them have been forced to give up their traditional profession and opt for other jobs, during the festival season.

Still, with Bengalis spread across the globe and Durga Puja becoming a widely celebrated festival, even outside India, dhakis might find put new avenues for survival. Nearly 100 dhakis travel to Delhi every year for the celebrations and few of them have also been taken to USA and UK to give a traditional look to Durga puja celebrations there.

By establishing a "Jalongi Agomoni" campaign, the fish and seafood supply chain startup 'Jalongi' organised a multi-city live Dhaki performance across pandals to promote this disappearing art and raise awareness of it among the younger generation.

"Dhaki, as a tradition will be lost to the coming generations, as many of these performers are now looking at other employment options to survive. We will be felicitating and awarding Dhaki's based on their performance that will be based on audience ratings," says Dipankar Halder, Founder of Jalongi.

The organisation has planned live performances across Bangalore, Kolkata, Thane, Pune, Hyderabad, Delhi (Dwarka) and Gurgaon.

Even though dhakis are an intrinsic part of these festivities, the art of playing dhak is gradually becoming more of a dying profession. Any form of art requires rigorous training and dedication and for a true artist their art form is very sacred but when the love for art comes in contention with their basic needs to fill their stomach and run their family, it indeed becomes a difficult choice to make for this culturally enriched community. How long they will be able to continue this tradition is quite uncertain, however, what we all know is that Durga Puja will remain incomplete without the reverberating sound of dhak. (Agencies)

Indian crime fiction writer honoured at Agatha Christie Fest



Crime fiction author Ruby Gupta, who is the Head of English Department at Indian Military Academy here, has brought laurels by being honoured as the International Writer-in-Residence at the International Agatha Christie Festival in Torquay in Britain.

Author of nine books, Ruby Gupta's mystery novels are inspired by the works of Agatha Christie.

The International Agatha Christie Festival is organised every year in Torquay in Devon, the birthplace of Agatha Christie, the world's best-selling novelist.

This annual Festival of arts and literature celebrates the life and legacy of Christie. It draws international authors of repute, renowned academicians and a global audience.

As International Writer-in-Residence, Ruby Gupta gave a talk on how Agatha Christie

inspired modern Indian crime fiction, along with British author Vaseem Khan.

She presented the prizes to the winners of the 2022 Young Writers Mystery Short-Story Writing Competition. Her stint included attending all the talks and lectures, involvement in all the festival events and visiting the landmarks associated with the life and work of Christie.

During the festival, Ruby Gupta's latest suspense thriller, 'The Secret of Leifeng Pagoda', was unveiled. This novel is inspired by the true events of the mysterious deaths of Indian nuclear scientists and is being adapted on screen by Almighty Motion Picture.

It is an intelligent, deeply-researched novel which begins with the assassination attempt on Jawaharlal Nehru and ends with the volatile India-China equation. (IANS)

Enjoy a trip to the Land of the Maharajas

Situated in the Aravalli ranges, Rajasthan is the biggest state in India and without a doubt, the state also holds the biggest place in people's hearts. From majestic havelis to breathtaking lakes, and exquisite food, from melodic folk music to adventurous sandy safaris, Rajasthan truly is a one-stop shop.

According to Agoda's indigenous travel survey, food is the second biggest motivator for Indians to travel, followed by art and culture, and Rajasthan presents the best of both worlds. From Laal Maas to Dal Bhati Churma, the food here is just a burst of flavours and you cannot get enough of it. The festive season is around the corner, and it is the perfect time to pack your bags and travel! If you are still figuring out your travel destination for the upcoming festivities, here are some top tips to enjoy a trip to the Land of the Maharajas.

Jodhpur — The Blue City

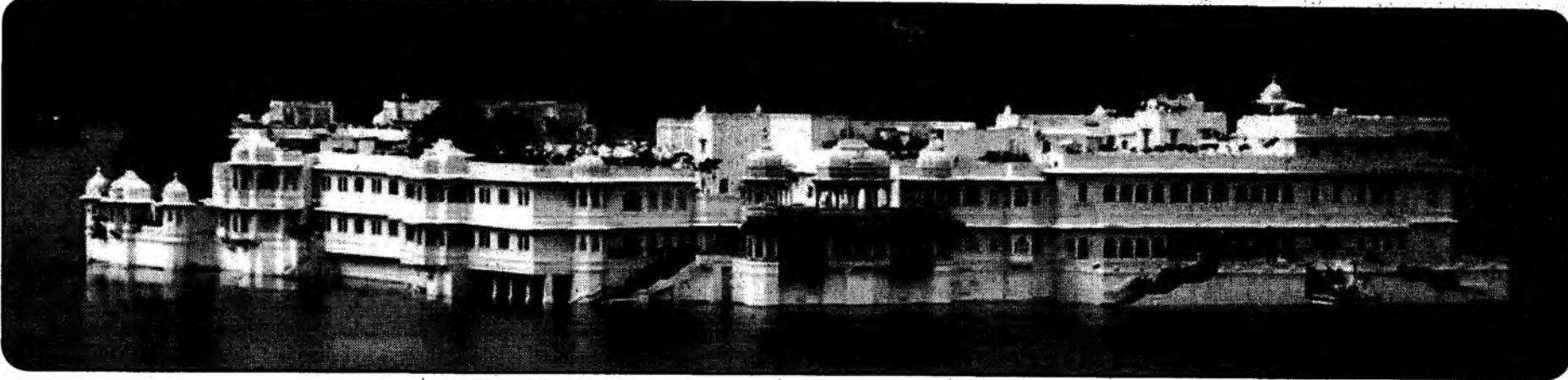
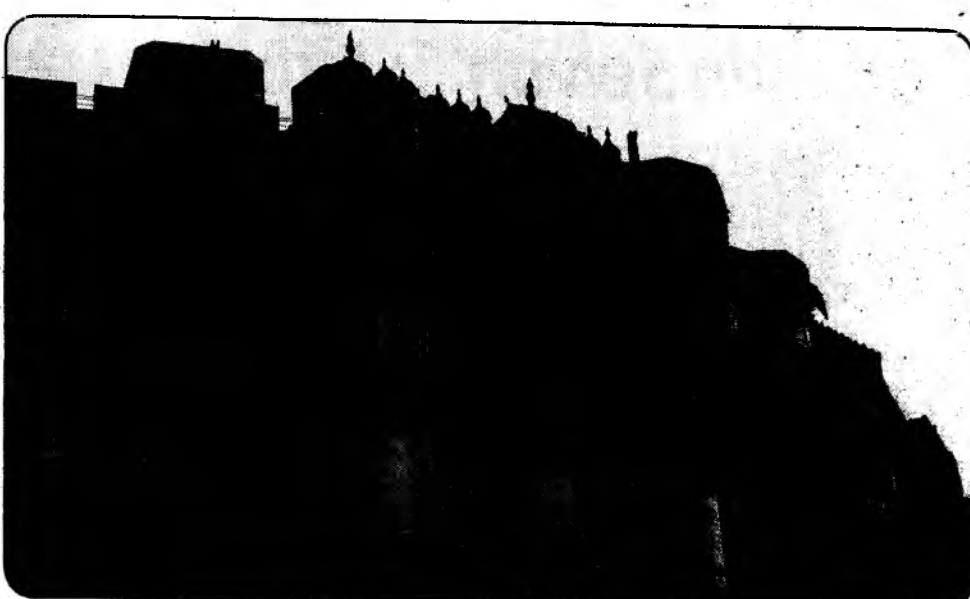
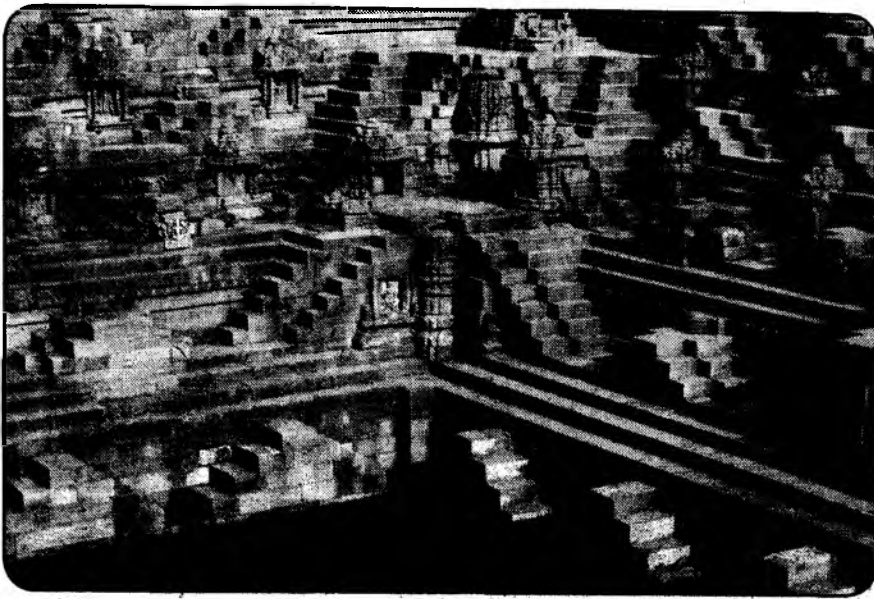
Jodhpur is the second largest city in Rajasthan and was founded in 1459 by Rao Jodha of Mandore. The Blue City's most unmissable attraction is the Mehrangarh fort, perched high on a hillside, this magnificent piece of architecture provides a glimpse of past royal life. Visit the gorgeous Phool Mahal, the glass Sheesh Mahal and Moti Mahal situated within the fort. After spending a day exploring the fort, head to the Pachetia Hills during sunset to experience the panoramic view of the entire city and the streets of Navchowkiya. Rajasthan is also known for its 'kunds' aka step-wells, and one of the most popular ones among them is the 'Toorji ka Jhalra' — an 18th-century stepwell that features intricate sandstone carvings.

Did you know that Rajasthan has its own Taj Mahal? Jaswant Thada — is one of the most famous white marble Cenotaphs. Get mesmerised by the magnificence of the Umaid Bhavan and also explore the streets of Sadar Bazaar, Tripolia bazaar, and Kapra bazaar markets. You will get lost in the vibrant colours of the flamboyant Rajasthani threadwork. Some other must-visit places include the Ranisar Padamsar lake, Rao Jodha Desert Park, Kaylana Lake and Mandore garden.

Sharing her experience, Kamiya Jani of Curly Tales, said, "Jodhpur has been at the top of my travel list! I had only 48 hours in the city but I managed to fall right into the lap of luxury, by visiting the iconic Jaswant Thada, enjoying a beautiful sunset atop Mehrangarh Fort, and making some beautiful memories at the gorgeous Panchetia Hills."

Tollywood star and Instagrammer, Samyuktha Shan, opined, "Jodhpur is known as the 'Sun City' and indeed it was, shining brightly through its culture and colours!"

Jodhpur is known for the scrumptious dal bati churma and must rank number one on your list of things to try here. There are also a number of restaurants serving authentic Rajasthani cuisine, with



massive thalis reminiscent of a king's plate and the classic Makhaniya Lassi. Street food such as dahi chaat and pani patasa are unmissable, alongside sweet delights like ghevar and matka kulfi.

Talking about her trip to Jodhpur, daily Vlogger, Gopali Tiwari, stated, "Jodhpur has sustained its heritage and culture beautifully. The people there will welcome you with a warm, big smile and feed you yummy dal bati with lots of love. Can't wait to be there again!"

Udaipur

Udaipur, which is located in the southernmost part of Rajasthan, is known by many names - the 'City of lakes', the 'Venice of the East', and rightly so. Udaipur brims with natural beauty, as the city is surrounded by seven lakes and is also known as the 'White City', due to the prevalence of Rajput-style palaces that are made out of white marble. Experience the rich culture and heritage of the city

by visiting the Jagmandir Palace, situated in the middle of Lake Pichola, the Sajjangarh Monsoon Palace, built on the Aravalli hilltop, overlooking a breathtaking view of Lake Fateh Sagar, and the City Palace of Udaipur.

Enjoy the sunset at the bank of the Fateh Sagar Lake or the Badi lake and if you're someone who loves history, head to Bagore Ki Haveli — a piece of architecture built in the 18th century which is now converted into a museum. Experience the hustle and bustle of the Udaipur streets while shopping at the Chetak Circle; find a decorative and aesthetic assortment of handicrafts. Hathi Pol Bazaar which is famous for the Pichwai and Phad paints of Rajasthan is a must-do destination for art buffs. Other must-visit places include the Ahar Cenotaphs Museum — the cremation ground of the Maharanas of Mewar and Saheliyo ki Bari — a majestic garden in the city.

Vlogger Jasminder Singh, said, "My visit to Udaipur was extremely fascinating. The forts were

well maintained, the lakes were gorgeous, and the city in itself was oozing with history -- which as an avid traveller, was very exciting for me!"

Chiming in on his time at Udaipur, Influencer Anunay Sood, said, "As a traveller who is constantly searching for views that take my breath away, Udaipur has been one of the best places I have visited. The bustling streets, calming sunsets and serene lakes all added up to the city's beauty. The hospitality of the Rajasthani folks goes over and beyond anything else to make you feel royal."

Rriyanka Sarkar further said, "Everything you visit, takes you back in time. Udaipur is engulfed with scenic beauty, culture and tales — and is a must-visit for all travelers."

For breakfast, try out the famous aloo Pyaaz kachori. The streets around Circle have a range of fabulous flavours of Rajasthan, including lamb meat aka laal maas Sand Ker Sangri, local desserts such as Gulab Halwa, or vegetarian favourites — Aloo Pethe Ka Aag and Mirchi Bada. (IANSlife)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, OCTOBER 2, 2022

Moon square Mercury on your solar return chart and it will give good results. You will be getting great results throughout the year. You will be busy with fun, feast and work all through the year. You will be heading for success in your work and business. Your bosses will inspire you to move forward in life. You will get promotional opportunities in the job. Your name, fame and prestige will go forward. There will be a warm relationship with your spouse/partner. For the success in your life, you will work hard with lot of dedication. Health will remain perfect. New sources of income will open up. You will take part in family functions. There will be some ups and downs in love relations. You will try to fix your mistakes. Your prestige will increase in your society. You will be busy in religious activities and auspicious work. Students will achieve success.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
It is a week full of gains and profits. You will overcome your difficulties and will be able to win over your enemies. You will prepare to face challenges with confidence. Your unselfish approach will win you lot of admirers. You will get new tasks and will finish them too. Your educational goals will be met. You will get the desired results. You will be never sort of funds and your sources of income will increase. Your spouse will be affectionate towards you. Husband and wife will understand the feelings of each other well. A new member may arrive in the family. You will prosper in your business. New contacts will prove influential in uplifting your fate. You will also make new friends. Your health will remain excellent.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
It is a happy and blessed week for you. You will have god's grace and will feel it too. You will help lot of people and who will be thankful to you. You will complete all your work with dedication. You will be in full command at your workplace. Situation will be in your favor in the family. Your family members will support you a lot. Conditions will improve in your business. You will succeed in getting back lost prestige. You will have monetary gains. You will look for new opportunities. As a result of which you will acquire a high position. You will demonstrate excellence. Your image in the eyes of friends and family members will increase. Some auspicious function will take place.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
Time will pass happily this week. You will devote your time to your family. Income will also increase. You will acquire a high position. You will enjoy as per your wish. You will decorate your house and also bring changes in yourself. You will be able to achieve victory in professional matters. Financial position will be strong. Time will pass in fun-frolic and entertainment activities. You will have inclination to do greater things in your life. You will also finish all your important work within specified time. This is the time for dialogue and mutual discussions. Your image before others will be good. Lovebirds will have a very enjoyable time. Life will move at a fast pace.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
You will spend your time splendidly. You will be happy and cheerful. Business will give good profits. Time is good. There will be atmosphere of joy and cheer at home. You will make correct decisions in your career. Your deeds will bring you lot of applause. Your peers and bosses will support you. Someone close will prove to be a cause of delight for you. You will also remain busy in some festival celebration. You will work in team spirit keeping your interests in mind. Expenditure and journey are on the card. Your mind will be full of creative thoughts. You will be able to meditate. You will touch new heights in your career. And could get a promotion.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
Time is to make gains in your life and move ahead. You will make profits in your business. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will get complete benefits for your work and efforts. You will also eat good food and enjoy your time with your family. Luck will support you a lot. You will be strong emotionally. You will try different measures to take time out for your work and thus all works will be completed. You will also get opportunities to prove your capabilities. You will be busy in shopping. You will enjoy wonderful time with your family. You will visit a temple or some other place in search for some mental peace or calmness. You will also think about your family behavior. You will look for things coming in the near future.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
This week will give you a mixed bag of results. The doubts, tensions you were having in your mind will come to an end. Your time will be spent nicely. Those who are planning to get married can do so. The jobless will get opportunities to find a job for themselves. You will complete your tasks with your intelligence and reasoning. You will undertake new

ventures to make money at this time. You will also get the support of your well wishers. Keep a distance from controversies. You will share good bonding with your spouse/partner. You will make best use of electronic gadgets which will make your work easier. You will also show your intelligence at your work and will shine.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)
Your time will be alright some false allegation which was leveled against you will not hold ground and you will come out clean. Guests will also arrive at your place. You will remain pre-occupied with domestic matters. You will also acquire new skills in your job and enhance your talent. You will also look after yourself well and will do gym, yoga, exercise and also eat healthy food. Parents will inspire you to move forward. You will get promoted in your job. Your prestige will go forward. There will be a warm and joyous relationship with your spouse. For the success of the work, you will take guidance of elders. Your prestige will increase. You will also win some contest or competition. You will plan to buy a new house.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
It will be a delightful week. You will be exceedingly happy and delighted. You will visit a tourist spot with your family. You will receive good money. You will buy a new vehicle. You will also feel great emotional attachment towards your family. You will demonstrate your work potential. Tension in the family will get resolved. You will bear problem of people and also resolve them. Especially your children, neighbors and community will be benefitted from your cooperation, love and guidance. Happiness will knock at your door. Love and romance will blossom. There is possibility of new projects and investments too. You will remain active socially.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)
It will be a special time for you. You will move ahead of others. You will excel in your business. You will get new contracts and business deal. Students will work hard and hence will do well in competitions or examinations. The pressure to complete targets in career or job will remain with you. Money will keep coming. If you work with a purpose your objectives will be met. You will get opportunities to associate with new organizations. You will meet exciting people. Students will focus on their studies. You will outwit your opponents with your intelligence. You will remain devoted to your family.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
The week will turn out peaceful for you. A professional matter will get resolved. You will get happiness in meeting new people. You will travel to far off places. You will get opportunities for earnings money in this journey. You will enjoy fabulous relationship with your spouse. You will come to terms with the realities of life. You will be successful in your interview you are facing. You will realize how you can analyze the situations and earn maximum profits from them. You will use your expertise in your work in such a manner that it will also give benefit to others. From the point of self respect, dignity and money, the week is vital. You will solve problems of the people around you. Your self confidence will flourish. Government matters will be sorted out.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
You will earn lot of money with your efforts. It is a week good for entertainment and prosperity in the family. You will be successful in acquiring the desired gains and success in business and work areas on account of your valor. Your enthusiasm will increase. It is a good time for students preparing for competitive exams. Emotionally you will be strong. You may be required to participate in some event or function. You will encounter problems in job or at workplace. The hurdles in the path of your progress will be removed. Your attention will be towards auspicious activities. You will plan to go on a trip with your family. You will get the support of your friends that will serve as a boon for you.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
It is going to be a favorable week. You will receive profits in your business. You will earn lot of money. You will get success in your profession too. You will plan about the future of your child with regard to his/her career, studies, financial security and marriage. Your meeting with an important person will make outline for your coming future. You will remain devoted to your parents. You will be creative in order to give new look in your work. This will make you more productive and get you more money. Time will be supportive. You will get new opportunities to earn money. You can start a new work. Love birds will have a wonderful time enjoying the company of each other.

An exhibition to remember



From September 29 through October 15, 2022, Dhoomimal Gallery will host the 31st Ravi Jain Memorial Foundation Exhibition for upcoming 100 young artists and sculptors at Dhoomimal Gallery, G-42 Connaught Place, New Delhi, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. (Sunday closed). Nearly 220 pieces of art and sculptures by sculptors from all over India are on display in the gallery. On September 29, 2022, starting at 5.30 p.m., the event preview will take place at the Dhoomimal Gallery.

Anubha Agrawal Pine Forest Oil on canvas board

The ceremony will also be attended by other dignitaries, including Rajeev Chandrasekhar, the Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Electronics and IT. The exhibition will also run from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. from September 29 through October 15, 2022.

This year, in collaboration with AuTypical.in, Dhoomimal Gallery has established a section to present the professional-level creations of young autistic artists in order to illustrate the principles of inclusion and raise awareness of autism. The oldest contemporary art gallery in India was founded in 1936 and is called Dhoomimal Gallery.

Dawalpayan Ghosh-Ragnarok oil on paper

Several young artists who are currently well-known and have made a name for themselves in the art community were honoured by Dhoomimal. We provide four scholarships each year to emerging artists (working in a variety of media) who receive the approval of our eminent jury. Renowned artists

like KS Kulkarni, Krishen Khanna, Bimal Dasgupta, GR Iranna, Pooja Iranna, Jagannath Panda, etc. have served on our jury in prior years. Reputable individuals who have received awards in the past include Sonia Khurana, GR Iranna, Nidhi Aggarwal, Hemraj and many others.

Hasanali Kadiwala --Dinner 2 Acrylic & burnt wood

Initiated in 2020, AuTypical.in serves the public interest by promoting the artistic talents of children and young adults with autism. On this internet forum, autistic artists from all over India--from small towns to major cities--have displayed their works. The inclusion of autistic artists this year will add a fresh flavour to professional art for the first time among the art galleries in New Delhi and will be treated differently. There aren't many examples of these socially beneficial events anywhere in the world.

Jayshree Singh Deo -- Untitled Lithograph

Speaking about the event, Uday Jain, Proprietor, Dhoomimal Gallery, said, "In its 31st year the Ravi Jain annual exhibition has provided a budding platform to over 100 artists and sculptors. Late Ravi Jain always believed that if the art movement is to be perpetuated in the country, we cannot rely on the seniors alone and new talent should constantly be nurtured and promoted. The participation is from all over India across all medium painting, sculpture, installation, digital and judging is done by an eminent panel of senior artists, sculptors, critics and collectors. Hence the standard of the artists selected is quite high." (IANS)

"Some single mind must be master, else there will be no agreement in anything."

—Abraham Lincoln

The Shillong Times

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Cleanliness, Cities

'CLEAN India' is a work in progress. The annual announcement of a list of 'Cleanest Cities' by the urban affairs ministry is well-appreciated. Indore, the commercial hub of Madhya Pradesh, has ranked first in these lists for the sixth time in a row; the second position going to Surat in Gujarat and the third to Navi Mumbai, a loosely planned city outside Mumbai. The seventh edition of the Swachh Survekshan Awards 2022 again missed the name of the big cities — all of which are concrete jungles in a terrible mess where people suffocate due to lack of planned infrastructure. Travel within these congested cities is by itself an ordeal. It also must be stressed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the Smart City Project have not made much of a difference to life.

One undeniable fact is the lethargy of the establishment to enforce rules and the recalcitrant hoi polloi which makes any progress difficult in this country. Politicians take the path of least resistance and refuse to take hard stances on any issue for fear of losing votes. Discipline is the first casualty and the system of democracy thrives amid the cacophony of unruly action and sounds in the streets. The Smart City Project involved 100 cities and some 5,000 sets of projects planned at a cost of over Rs two lakh crores. Its aim was to improve the quality of life and enable local area development. However, of the funds earmarked for these, half actually go towards lining the pockets of politicians and bureaucrats, with very little left to serve any real purpose. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was launched in 2014 with a promise to make India Clean by the year 2019 — marking the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. For effect, the Prime Minister took a broom in Delhi's Mandir Marg, wielded a spade near River Ganga in his Varanasi constituency and even did 'plogging' at Mamallapuram beach and gave out the mantra, 'Na Gandagi kareng, Na Karne Denge'.

Persuasion by itself works no wonders here. India's disorderly life is well-documented and hence, despite its massive arrays of monuments built in the royal era, this nation does not figure much in the global tourism circuit. It's mostly a drama other than in Rajasthan and Agra. Our water bodies have turned into receptacles for the urban and commercial filth and are so polluted that these are a shame by themselves. Irreverential dumping of bodies of dead kin into rivers like the Ganga comes naturally to an indulgent population. Religion has become the biggest excuse. Our seas throw up a lot of garbage in states like Odisha and Maharashtra. When will the rulers of this country crack the whip on polluters?

Letters to the Editor

Rising prices: The poor man's nightmare

Editor,

We know that the whole world is going through an economic crisis of soaring inflation and the danger of economic recession. However, in most western countries the governments try to stabilize prices of consumer goods because they do not want to burden the common man. This is why these governments continue to subsidize on essential commodities as much as is possible. This is a great relief to the economically poorer classes. Unfortunately, in India the government today does not show any concern for the plight of the poor. The effects of high inflation are being felt day after day with the continuous rise in prices of essential commodities. We have seen the monstrous surge in fuel prices in recent months. Today CNG price is again being hiked and who suffers from all these? It is

the poor. CNG which used to cost Rs. 500 or so, has today shot up to an unbelievable Rs 1150 and with today's further increase, it will cost Rs. 1200 and more. The vicious cycle of rising fuel prices results in the soaring prices of essential commodities. Some vegetables which used to cost Rs. 30 per kg, today cost Rs. 120 per kg. Fruits have become a menu of the rich. The poor can no longer afford to buy them.

Rising prices of commodities means extra income for the producers of these goods and who are these? They are the rich companies owned by rich Indians. What is morally wrong with these rising prices, is the fact that in our country the poor earn so little that they cannot cope up with the inflation. While the salaries of government or company employees keep increasing with each financial year, the wages of a poor mason, a builder, a carpenter or a cleaner do not increase. There is great injustice in terms of earnings in our country. This is why the poor in India will always become poorer and they bear the brunt of every economic

This article concerns the social situations in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya today. The terms "church" and "church denominations" in this context, would apply to all Christian denominations as well as to the reformed indigenous religious faith called Niam Khasi or Niam Tre under the leadership of the Seng Khasi and Seif Raj. The nomenclature "Church" is used here simply because today, the majority of Khasis are Christians.

In the past, before the advent of British Rule, the Khasis lived in numerous clan-based traditional political communities called the Raid(s). Traditional politics and religion in these communities were interwoven as political proceedings were always accompanied and sealed by religious rituals. Social norms and traditions were at the same time religious norms and traditions. Social affairs were also at the same time religious affairs, and the political authority was also the religious authority. Hence, there was no idea of separation between the Church and the State.

Religion which entailed the rites of passage of each person from birth to death, and the departure of the soul into the spiritual abode, was mainly the concern of the clan. Religion at the community level had no concern with the spiritual abode of the dead in heaven or hell, but was concerned only with the welfare of the living in all aspects of their social and economic affairs, as well as for the socio-political order of the community as a whole. Each clan had a clan religion, and each political community had a community religion; but there was no religious organization covering the whole Khasi Tribe. The social, political, and religious life of the people took place only within the jurisdiction of each clan, and within each political community. Every political community had a community graveyard where the bones of the dead were interred in the religious stone cairn of each clan. In this way, the physical welfare and the honour and dignity of each individual in the community was guaranteed within this traditional social structure.

This traditional socio-religious structure of the Khasi society is no longer extant anywhere in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills today. With the emergence of the new political and economic order, and the conversion to the Christian faith, a new social set up emerged where the individuals and the nuclear families took centre stage, and the clan receded to the background. The church took over the religious roles and functions of the clan, and the modern village with a village council called the

dobbar shnong took over the roles and functions of the Raid (traditional political community). But unlike the Raid, the modern village with its dobbar shnong is secular in nature and based on membership of the individuals and the nuclear families, where the clan has no assigned role at all to play. Hence, this new village community is a modern replica of the Raid, operating in new social situations, and has constitutional recognition as a traditional institution by the District Council under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

In this new social situation, common community religion and common community graveyard are no longer in existence. Social, spiritual and natural resources which had been under the control of the community's traditional authority are transferred by default, to the hands of the church denominations. There arose as many graveyards, cremation grounds and worship centres as there are church denominations within the same village. The Khasi society today stands divided to a great extent by numerous religious affiliations among the people that generally discourage or even forbid marriage between members of different church denominations. It is not the question of faith and doctrine that bred disputes and conflicts in the community, but it is the control over material and social resources. "Social resources", in this context means social support, human honour and dignity of individuals and families that arise from collective recognition of the society. Even though the secular-legal community under the authority of the dobbar shnong is still there in the background, each church denomination has strong psychological and social control over all aspects of moral, spiritual and social life of its own members. Hence, each village or local community is a secular-legal entity, as well as a cluster of independent church denominations that give rise to distinct subcultures within the village or locality.

Through weekly religious meetings and worship services, the people's relationship, commitment and allegiance, are much more to their own church denominations than to the secular-legal community. But this allegiance is not so much based on consideration of the spiritual destiny of life and death, but it is because the burial and cremation grounds, psychological support and social resources are owned not by the secular-legal community, but by the church denominations. The rites of passage of the people from birth to death is under the control of these church

denominations; and whoever is not a worthy member of any of these church denominations is like a spiritual outcast regardless of the position or status he/she holds as a member of the secular-legal community.

Every human person has an inherent need for material, psychological, and spiritual support from his/her family and the society at large for a respectable human existence and personal dignity all through his/her lifetime. The greatest of all these needs is ironically, not during his/her lifetime, but at his/her death: how to honourably dispose off the dead body, and assist the soul in a happy journey to the spiritual abode. It is in this death ritual which the church denominations are in complete psychological control over their members. From the moment a person expires, to his/her burial or cremation, the secular-legal community is involved with the material aspect of things, but it is the particular church denomination which takes the centre stage. In some villages, even at the burial ceremony of a person who has been declared unworthy to receive the church's liturgical burial rite, an array of church leaders would still congregate at the important seats of the ceremony to throw stones at the deceased and his/her family members by making public announcement to the multitude who came from far and near that liturgical burial ceremony cannot be performed since the deceased had not been living the doctrinal, sacramental and liturgical discipline of the church. Then followed by long sermons on how to live to be worthy of an honourable liturgical burial rite. This rubbish has to be done away with! No person will go to heaven merely because a liturgical burial rite has been performed by the church, and no one will go to hell by not performing it. Jesus did not teach his disciples that coins should be put in the mouth of the deceased to pay the boatman so that he would ferry the departed soul across the river Styx.

The liturgical ceremony is merely a social honour given to the deceased for being a diligent and disciplined member of the church, but it has nothing to do with the final journey of the soul to heaven or to hell. But, since in the Khasi traditions, the performance of cremation rites and the final deposition of the bones of the deceased into the stone cairn of the clan was the most important religious requirement in the life of every man and woman, the Khasis take this matter seriously even as Christians. Hence, what binds most of the believers to the Church

is not the question of sin and righteousness in life, but it is the fear of being denied the honourable liturgical burial ceremony at death. It is on this ground that there is a saying among the village folk, "Khristan lumjingtep" (Christians for the graveyard). This is to show to what extent the Church has taken control of the lives of the people even as members of a secular-legal community.

We cannot deny the fact that in the absence of traditional agencies of socialization and social control, the Christians denominations and the Seng Khasi/Seif Raj organizations in the villages, play a big role in guiding the society in the moral and spiritual path. However, it is also a fact that when any of the church denominations in a village is in big majority, there is tendency for the secular-legal community to be identified with the dominant religious denomination, and subject all the rest to various forms of discrimination whether of the Christian faith or the Niam Khasi/Niam Tre.

The physical security, honour and dignity of every human person from birth to death are primarily matters of universal human rights guaranteed by the Law of the State. Therefore, they are also the concerns of the secular-legal community at the village or local community level which no religious organization has the right to hijack and appropriate by default. Every inhabitant should have equal rights to the material and social resources of the community regardless of belief, faith or religion. All inhabitants, whether theists or atheists are equal members of the secular-legal community, and religious organizations should not make public declaration or pronouncement of distinctions between them on the basis of belief, faith, or religion. If there is a need to do so for their own members, let the church denominations do that privately in their own circles, but not in the public platform which belongs to all, believers and nonbelievers alike.

There is a need to reinforce the authority of the secular-legal community over the material and social resources so that oneness of the people as equal members can be safeguarded, and to stop fragmentation of the community into antagonistic groups and conflicting subcultures by multiplicity of religious beliefs. Hence, there is a need for the government of the State to make laws and regulations that every village or local community should have common infrastructures and facilities like public graveyards, cremation grounds, and social resources which are not under the control of any church denomination, but directly under the control of the secular-legal community.

reminiscing their school days, they reached college only to be left disappointed and were scolded for presenting such 'obscurity'.

College campuses and institutions should be a place for free discourse, dissent and discussion. It is places like these where the future of our nation gathers the lessons and courage to be unequivocal against anything that's detrimental and rudimentary for the society.

When we as a nation have scientifically engineered missions to Mars and the moon, here we are discussing how clothes, especially of a girl, can intimidate someone. That's a great shame for an educational institution. No wonder India ranks 147 out of 170 countries in the Women, Peace and Security Index of 2021.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

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

The Pervading Disquiet

By Roshmi Goswami

Opinions ranging from Chief Minister, Mr Conrad Sangma, Kam Meghalaya, several thinking citizens and netizens have been unanimous and rightly so in calling out against and resisting the "everyone is a Hindu" sweeping statement of the RSS Chief. As a Hindu I too add my voice to that disquiet and denouncement firstly for its far-reaching implications for all other religions and belief systems and secondly the implications for the vast diversity of beliefs and practices of Hindus themselves.

There may be many who endorse the RSS ideology and many others who are happy to be subsumed under the Sangh fold for political expediency, financial support, power or questionable insecurities but there are equal numbers of Hindus who reject the RSS ideology of Hindutva — a belief system alleged to be inspired or informed by Nazi-Fascism of Germany and Italy as pointed out by various scholars and thought leaders. Although continuously and systematically underplayed by today's sold out media there is enough resistance across the country today to this grand plan of subsumption.

Goddess! Yes, one highly values and lives with the strength and confidence of these traditions and one's ancestry. At no point of time will these get dictated to or subsumed by Nagpur or Ayodhya. The other narrative that is being strongly promoted by a phantasmagoria is that even though the RSS is an organisation that has been banned twice it has changed or is changing. The recent bout of violence in the city of Leicester UK which has sullied the reputation of India considerably, of course, tells another story but perhaps because of such like incidents a concerted effort is being made to present a more benign front. Part of Mr. Bhagwat's grand tour of the 'frontiers' (interestingly and coincidentally State elections just happen to be round the corner!) is undoubtedly part of this 'new face' mission. Some sections extol the humanitarian services of the RSS and contend that they have a real concern for humanity, which may be true to some extent but the SEVA bar for me is the one set by the Gurudwaras and the SIKH community — unconditional and agenda free. To reach there the RSS has a

All Hindus and more importantly Hindutva cannot be subsumed under the Hindutva fold and agenda for Hindutva and Hinduism are not synonymous. The overwhelming response to a recent publication by well-known Kannada writer Devanur Mahadeva which took a critical look at the ideology of the RSS and is being translated into many languages including Assamese and Khasi is telling.

All Hindus and more importantly Hindutva cannot be subsumed under this Hindutva fold and agenda for Hindutva and Hinduism are not synonymous. The overwhelming response to a recent publication by well-known Kannada writer Devanur Mahadeva which takes a critical look at the ideology of the RSS and is being translated into many languages including Assamese and Khasi is telling. At a personal level my beliefs and values come from what I have been taught by or imbibed from my parents, forefathers and ancestors while my deeper understanding of the basic philosophy of my religion is from readings and reflections on the writings of learned and respected scholars of Hinduism and others — not from google downloads, IEC materials or political propaganda of all and sundry. My inherited belief system has had enough room for critical thinking, questioning, debates, dissent, at times even humour at the cost of our multiple deities and their fables and above all a lived experience of diversity.

I have always been struck by the expansiveness and lack of the concept of blasphemy of my belief system. Today looking at the increasing levels of insecurity which I see as what underpins this tearing hurry to 'subsume' and flatten diversities I often think about the quiet dignity and confidence of my own ancestors. A self-assured self-respecting generation so different from now. I don't remember a single male family member, many of them fierce freedom fighters as well as my grandfather a learned Vedantic scholar ever needing to display any markers of their piety or their religious identity on their physical self! While markets and self-appointed gatekeepers come together to tell us what we ought to eat and how we ought to behave during this period of the auspicious Durga Puja my ninety two year old mother fondly recollects the array of meat and fish dishes that were lovingly prepared and offered to the Mother Goddess in her over two centuries old family tradition of worshipping the

long way to go. Nevertheless, as an advocate for conflict transformation and peace building I would still try and give the opposite side the benefit of doubt. In the last eight years or so there have been enough occasions where the RSS could have redeemed itself, stood up and shown caring and humane leadership, but we have heard no RSS voice anywhere — none when Pehlu Khan, Akhlaq Khan and many others were lynched, no calling out when 100 Muslim women were humiliated and defiled by the Bulli Bai App incident, no denouncement of the public call for genocide against Muslims which went out from sacred places of worship and by members of the Sangh family, no condemnation either of the depraved display of celebrations upon release of a pack of rapists and murderers in the recent Bilkis Bano case. And yet again no castigation of the horrific and gleeful reenactment of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by some members of the Sangh. This was a moment in the history of the Nation which shrouded the entire nation in darkness and unfathomable grief and to reenact it in this way is abominable and unconscionable. And yet there is this tremendous wannabe Father of the Nation — Rashtrapita syndrome catalysed perhaps by some subservient flippant remark by a political aspirant and propelled forward again by the ever-pliant media.

To reach the Mahatma's status is to first of all arrive at the Mahatma's level and depth of understanding of Truth — Satya and Non-Violence Ahimsa which needs an exceedingly profound level of engagement, commitment and sadhana. A core element of this journey is a respect for the truth of the 'other' — a respect for the 'diverse other'. The key question in this quest would be — are the myriad communities of this nation, indigenous and non indigenous belief systems and practices given recognition and space as a different 'other' and yet fully respected? Or is respect conditional on accepting the politically endorsed 'same' ideology and belief system? That indeed is the ultimate test.

"Repetition doesn't create memories.
New experiences do."

— Brian Chesky

The Shillong Times

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Awards not grounded on facts

SHOULD the people of Meghalaya rejoice over the fact that the State has won the second prize under the functionality assessment of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)? The award was given for 60% coverage category among states for which Tamil Nadu was adjudged the best performing state. When such projects are assessed the question is to ask who the assessing authority is and how credible the whole process is. Also it is important to ask if the people who are the main stakeholders in the project for whom piped water is to arrive at their doorstep have indeed benefited from the Scheme. Large sections of citizens in the Shillong city itself have been voicing their concerns over the water supplied by the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) which is murky and perhaps not potable. That aside, residents in large parts of the state, particularly in the rural areas, do not yet have piped water in their homes. The unfortunate part is that there is no agency in Meghalaya other than an educational institution which has the wherewithal to do a counter-study to reveal the ground realities and expose the tall claims of the State Government that piped water has been supplied to 60% of the population of Meghalaya. One visit to the distant villages of Garo Hills beyond the district headquarters will reveal the lacunae in the JJM mission. These have been brought out by the media time and again after talking to citizens but all these have been ignored.

The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti organized the event, commemorating the Swachh Bharat Diwas. The other question that needs an immediate answer is whether a physical verification of the JJM was made and by whom? Normally Government of India officials come and visit Shillong, meet their civil servant colleagues here and give their certification accordingly. Such assessments should be made only after talking to Water & Sanitation Committees in the villages or the Dorbar Shnong to get a grip on what's the actual situation so that the real picture emerges and the Union Ministry is kept abreast of things. The eagerness with which the MDA Government is looking for opportunities for awards is linked to the 2023 elections and this is a dangerous trend because it's like living in a fool's paradise.

In other states with a more active civil society such tall claims by the State Government on a matter that even a village close to Shillong like Mawpat is yet to experience would have been called out but Meghalaya lacks dedicated activists. Some are selective in the issues they pick up. This gives a leverage to governments and politicians to get away with delivery failure.

Letters to the Editor

Significance Of Durga Puja

Editor,
Apropos the letter, 'Purpose of Durga Puja celebration' by Salil Gewali Shillong, (ST Oct 1, 2022,) I would like to add that, according to the 'Purana' (old mythology) the word 'Durga' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Durg' a very destructive demon which was killed by the goddess of strength; and she was named as 'Durga'. (Ref:- Saral Bangla Abhidhan by Subal Mitra Pg. 612)

These days people opine that Durga Puja is nothing but mirth and merriment and involving wastefulness; that it is less religious but more luxurious and a carousel. It may appear so from the outside but the actual significance of Durga puja is far more than that. The essence of Durga Puja is the triumph of truth over untruth, good over evil, light over darkness and triumph of knowledge

over ignorance.

Durga Puja, is not only a religious ritual but through this festival, our arts, crafts, culture, our traditional heritage, our social values and custom, our hospitality are expressed in different spheres of life and living; and over and above all the eternal philosophy of life and death is lying behind the celebration. The goddess whom we welcome with joy and pleasure, bid farewell after enjoyment of three days, and mercilessly throw the beautiful idols for immersion. Here is the great philosophy of enjoyment and sacrifice!

After the immersion of the goddess, people celebrate 'Vijaya', the ceremony of victory, joy and union. In a mass prayer, hymns are uttered for universal peace, prosperity and unity. In a word, Durga Puja aims at universal welfare. Durga Puja is a symbolic expression of the socio religious life of ancient India, which aims at universal fraternity.

Yours etc.,
Uma Purkayastha,
Shillong - 4

Spirit of Durga Puja

Editor,
As a permanent resident of the State of Meghalaya and the city of Shillong, I reflect on the situation today and cannot but compare it with those dark days of 1979 down to the late 1980s when Durga Puja could not be celebrated with the gaiety and effervescence that is being witnessed today when people walk around without a shadow of fear. Meghalaya has evolved since those days which were followed by militancy in the 1990's up to about 2002. On this day I cannot help but recall the contribution of (L) Home Minister RG Lyngdoh and before that the late Mr TH Rangad. These were men of substance who as Home Ministers discharged their

duties to the best of their ability. They braved the bandhs calls on Republic Day and Independence Day and were responsible for bringing back this climate of security and safety in Shillong. For this we remain grateful to these two gentlemen who would not have allowed illegal coal mining and its transportation.

To compare the present Home Minister to these above two gentlemen would be a great dishonour to their memories. They actually gave their today for our tomorrow. Today we have a Home Minister who drags his feet in taking action against a police official who prima facie has been found to have abused his position in the Police headquarters. This would not have been tolerated unless the Home Department is also involved in this entire vehicle acquisition scam. The Home Department is crucial to the safety and security of the state and its citizens and not just that of the VIPs which

is what the police are being largely used today.

Some of our policemen lost their lives in the fight against militancy. Others, particularly a few officers, actually put their lives on the line. I still recall GHP Raju who was then the SP, East Khasi Hills and his team comprising M. Kharkrang and Claudia Lyngwa amongst others who put up a brave fight against the militants then. If not for them and for a decisive Home Minister RG Lyngdoh we would still be having to live in insecurity. It is unfortunate that a capable and competent police officer should now opt to do administrative work. This happened only once before when Mr BK Day Sawian was CEO of Shillong Municipality. I am unsure why a trained and competent police personnel in a state that's lacking in quality policing should be doing administrative work. But in Meghalaya anything and everything is possible! I am very sure that officers

like GK Iangrai would not have succeeded to do what they did if the higher ups in the Police Headquarters had their eyes and ears open.

As a senior citizen, I regret to say that the state of affairs in Meghalaya today are not at all promising. We are fortunate that militancy has been tamed else things would have taken a turn for the worse. But having said that the parameters of governance are all going south although the Chief Minister is on an inauguration spree of this or that road and sports projects galore. These are all election stunts. Whether these will be completed is the million dollar question.

That said, I wish those celebrating Durga Puja my heartiest wishes.

Yours etc.,
GR Lyngdoh,
Via email

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

International Day of Ahimsa and its Relevance

By Saji Varghese

While India refuses to be a part of voting on UN Security Council resolution condemning the Moscow-backed "illegal" referendums which are based on the violent moves of Moscow in a different territory, the next day marked the celebration of UN International Day of Non-violence. The ten remaining Security Council members voted in favor of the resolution drafted by the US and Albania, while China, India, Brazil and Gabon abstained from voting. The question still remains as to whether these days of observance of non-violence, peace and so on have lost their significance in contemporary times. "The resolution condemns these illegal referenda. It calls on all states to not recognize any altered state of Ukraine. It requires that Russia withdraws troops from Ukraine immediately," Linda Thomas Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, told the Security Council.



"My religion is based on truth and non-violence. Truth is my God. Non-violence is the means of realising Him."
- Mahatma Gandhi

Only ordinary people think that Ahimsa is not to hurt any living being physically. This is the gross form of ahimsa. The vow of ahimsa is broken even by disliking another person, by hating another person and by speaking ill of others; by backbiting or vilifying, by harbouring thoughts of hatred, by uttering lies, or

the opponent from harm even at the risk of one's life. Gandhi was also unique in distinguishing between non-violence as a creed and as a policy as well as between the non-violence of the strong and the weak.

The terms 'war' and 'peace' have a shared conceptual provenance in modern understanding of poli-

in a world which is marked by discord, dissensions, hatred, violence and war.

The UN charter aspired to become more than a complex institution. It spoke eloquently of the human values to be affirmed by the global community, human rights, universal peace, the dignity and worth of the human person, equal rights of men and women, economic and social advancement of all people and the aspiration for better standards of life in larger freedom for all mankind. The charter was to be the instrumental not only of global governance but of social progress and moral affirmation. Universal respect for human rights remains the unwavering core of our global vision.

A theorist may hold the view that peace can only be brought about by a permanent destruction of all sorts of antagonisms within society. Another may offer a quite different approach insisting that warfare can be ended only through the constructive channelization of instinctually derived tendencies toward aggression. In sum, political realism retains the emphasis of ancient philosophy on the objective causes of both conflict and harmony. The process of human alienation as it is conceived by political realism has its origins in the disassociation of men from his natural ways. In a nutshell, the philosophical problem that we confront here may be summarized in the ethical ideal of nonviolence. Whatever be the normative requirement of the modern theories of conflict resolutions and peace they cannot ignore the vital aspect of non-violence. The observance of such important days of peace and nonviolence are significant as they are a reminder of the fact that the basic nature of humans is not in their efforts to find the differences with others but of the similarities.

More often than not, conflicts negatively transform communities, and the negative transformation floods into different layers of the society. They often lead to situation of violence too. Hard diplomacy at times proves to be a failure between nations, communities etc. Meanwhile, the international peacemaking experience demonstrates that focus at the top level for conflict resolution is inadequate as they lack sufficient moral ideals. It is in this backdrop that the ideal and practice of non-violence gains further significance in the arena of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Particularly, eastern ideologies and philosophies have now been integrated well into the global notions of peacebuilding.

(The writer teaches at Lady Keane College)

Right to free food and its cost implication

By Ajit Ranade

Is the right to food a statutory right, a fundamental right or a human right? India is a signatory to the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from which the right to food is derived. So, this right has elements of being a human right, beyond sovereign borders. India's own National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has held it to be a fundamental right, linking it to Article 21 of the constitution (right to life with dignity) along with Articles 39 (a) and 47. These latter both part of Directive Principles, require the State to provide a right to adequate means of livelihood (article 39 (a)) and a duty to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living (article 47). The Commission has said that starvation is tantamount to denial of fundamental rights. It also said that proof of starvation need not mean starvation deaths. The crisis has to be recognised much earlier. The NHRC called for a paradigm shift in public policy, and to ensure adequate food and nutrition to all citizens as paramount objective. The prevalence of hunger and distress is to be interpreted as injury and requires that the State be penalised for such a state of affairs. In short, even if it costs a lot to the exchequer, removal of hunger should be a top priority.

This view of the NHRC is important in light of the government's recent decision to extend the free food grain program for another three months. That extra cost will be 44,000 crore. The Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) would be the longest running and largest free food distribution scheme in the world, running for 33 months and more if extended beyond December.

The right to food as recognised by India's international obligation, since it is a signatory to the International Covenant does not mean that the food should be given free. But a situation of grave distress manifested through starvation deaths implies that free food is an imperative. Twenty years ago, the right to food campaign started in India as an offshoot of a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court. That PIL was prompted due to the fact that State granaries then had gigantic stocks of food grain while there was evidence of starvation and malnutrition around the country.

One of the consequences of the sustained national campaign was that the National Food Security Act (NFSA) was passed in 2013. There were a lot of objections especially from fiscal hawks who were worried about the huge financial burden. There were objections from cabinet level ministers as well. The NFSA entitles each household 5 kilo per person per month of rice, wheat or jowar / bajra at 3, 2 or 1 rupees per kilo. One minister had quipped, that since it costs 20 rupees to produce a kilo of rice, and 3 rupees to get it under this Act as a right, why would any farmer bother to produce rice at all? This was not ridicule, but pointed to the heavy fiscal cost. The NFSA covers three fourth of the rural and half the urban population, i.e. nearly 81 crore persons. The poorest are given 35 kilo of food grain per family per month under the Anty-

oday Anna Yojana. With a steep subsidy there is always the possibility that recipients sell the food in the secondary market. What the PMGKAY did was to extend the food grain completely free: If there was leakage under NFSA surely the possibility exists under PMGKAY too. How is that leakage to be prevented?

The PMGKAY was started in April 2020 because of covid. India did not want a livelihood crisis to become a full-blown food crisis. It has served us well, and at a time of food inflation it protects families from food price rise. A direct cash subsidy of a fixed amount does not protect the recipient from food inflation. But the scheme has been extended six times. The latest extension to December 2022, was given because of the upcoming State elections in Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat.

There is now ample evidence that PMGKAY has given electoral benefits to the incumbent political party. Interestingly the current extension was opposed by the Finance Ministry, owing to the higher fiscal burden. The extension alone will cost 44,000 crore. Cumulatively PMGKAY has cost 4.5 lakh crore to the exchequer which amounts to 2 percent of India's annual GDP. Owing to rising oil prices the fertiliser subsidy is likely to go up to 2 lakh crore this year, although only 1 lakh crore has been budgeted. The Finance Secretary was sanguine and confident of meeting the fiscal deficit target this year, since tax collections have been very good. But his statement was made before the cabinet decision to extend PMGKAY. Also, the high advance taxes paid under income tax could lead to a big amount of refunds, which we will know only next year. The question then is to accommodate PMGKAY, will we be sacrificing something else? It was under fiscal pressure that the government had to launch Agnipathi, the short-term military service scheme for non-commissioned personnel. Even the CISF strength has been cut at some airports. Increase in support of free food means cutting back on maybe health, education, infrastructure, military or pension benefits. The government cannot escape these difficult fiscal tradeoffs.

If growth slows down, and tax collection is not as buoyant as expected, and if subsidy and welfare spending commitments increase, then how is the circle to be squared? Remember that interest rates are rising, so the cost of borrowing for the government too will go up. The debt to GDP ratio could rise to 95 percent. Interest burden alone could top 7 lakh crore or even higher. At the same time schemes such as free of subsidised food, free mid-day meals for school children, nutrition program for pregnant mothers all have a human right and fundamental right element. The beneficiaries have a "claim" on these. India is also thinking of going in for universal basic income, which will add to the fiscal burden. Walking the tightrope between free food and other government priorities will be tough.

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

"The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism."

— Norman Vincent Peale

The Shillong Times

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Self first, nation next

PARLIAMENT elections are a year and a half away – too long and too short a time, depending on how one looks at it. But, the build-up for the coming polls has begun at different levels, including also in the holding of Yatras. The rebranding of a regional outfit, the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi that rules one of the two Telugu states into Bharat Rashtra Samithi on Dasara day this week is a significant development. The professed aim is to defeat Narendra Modi and the BJP and 'grab the gaddi' in Delhi. The obvious motivation for Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao is to try his own luck in Delhi and simultaneously create a space for his son, state minister KT Rama Rao, to take over as CM. Being in power for eight years, he's flush with loads of funds. Yet, problems are he has no national clout and the EC has strict rules to designate a party as national.

Another regional chieftain in the form of Bihar's Nitish Kumar has begun sniffing around Delhi. West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee is perhaps bewildered by the entry of two more 'rivals' into the fray for the top chair in Delhi. With central agencies arresting some of her close associates carrying hoarded currency and Banerjee's attempt to turn her party into a national entity having faced odds, she is tamed a bit. It is no secret that all these CMs fancy the PM chair for the main reason that Narendra Modi showed them the way through his status upgradation in 2014. Modi by himself would not have made it to the PM post had he not had the backing from a well-entrenched national party like the BJP and full backing from the RSS. Modi by himself would have fallen by the wayside had he not had such a solid backing. He has been able to run a stable governance system at the Centre for the past eight years due to the cohesion within the BJP and the influence that the RSS has on the party.

What the regional leaders hope to do is cobble a pre-poll or post-poll alliance of regional parties with or without the backing of the Congress to form the next central ministry. Non-Congress, non-BJP coalition experiments have been a failure in Delhi's power edifice. A strong national party must take the lead. Other governments lasted only for months as the egos of the regional leaders clashed instead of a convergence of minds on leading the nation. Their tendency has been to wield power instead of govern. They aim for their personal growth at the expense of the nation's growth.

Science Education in NEHU and NEP-2020

By Dr MC Mahato

The National Education Policy 2020 is accepted, authorized, and adopted by the highest executive body (Parliament) of the country after supposedly detailed deliberations. It reflects the vision, thinking and ideology of the majority of the lawmakers of the country. We are bound to follow the policy document in NEHU. It is a 65-page long document consisting of an Introduction and the rest is divided into 4 parts titled: Part-I School Education, Part-II Higher Education, Part-III Other Key Areas of Focus and Part-IV Making it Happen. In order to discuss science education in NEHU following NEP-2020, a focus on the Introduction part and on part II will suffice.

The Introduction part is really puzzling in its logical contradiction and inconsistency. But it in a way decides the fate of science education, especially the university science education, in the country. The vision of the policy is to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen. The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this policy. For, the aim of education in ancient India was not just the acquisition of knowledge as preparation for life in this world, or life beyond schooling, but the complete realization and liberation of the self (from this mundane life in this world). I really wonder how this vision and guiding light can be in conformity with some of the principles of the policy, namely, to develop rational thought and action, and scientific temper! (Italics in this paragraph are mine.)

Some of the fundamental principles of the document are, however, relevant for our discussion, namely, (a) No hard separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extracurricular activities, between vocational and academic streams, etc. and (b) multidisciplinary and holistic education across the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and sports for a multidisciplinary world in order to ensure the unity and integrity of all knowledge. These principles are elaborated upon in Part II: Higher Education.

The higher education must enable an individual to study one or more specialized areas of interest at a deep level, and also develop character, ethical and constitutional values, intellectual curiosity, scientific temper, creativity, spirit of service, and 21st century capabilities across a range of disciplines including sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, languages, as well as professional, technical, and vocational subjects. In short, an individual pursuing higher education must not only be conversant in

all kinds of knowledge humanely thinkable in the world of our 21st century but also have acquired knowledge at a deep level in one or two subjects.

NEP-2020 policy document (Sec. 9.2 and 9.3) lists several major problems currently faced by the higher education system in India and also advances suggestions to remove the problems. Here we mention some main problems and their solutions relevant to our discussion as itemized in the following.

(a) Problem: A rigid separation of disciplines with early specialization and streaming of students into narrow areas of study.

Solution: Moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education.

(b) Problem: Limited teacher and institutional autonomy.

Solution: Governance of higher education institutions (HEI) by high qualified independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy.

(c) Problem: An ineffective regulatory system.

Solution: "light but tight" regulation by a single regulator for higher education.

Section 12.2 prescribes how to achieve such goals. First, in order to promote creativity, institutions and faculty will have the autonomy to innovate on matters of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment within a broad higher education qualifications that ensures consistency across institutions and programmes and across the open distance learning (ODL), online, and traditional 'in-class' modes. Accordingly, curriculum and pedagogy will be designed by institutions and motivated faculty to ensure a stimulating and engaging learning experience for all students. Sections 13.2 and 13.3 describes ways to motivate the faculty. As the most basic step, all HEIs will be equipped with the basic infrastructure and facilities, including clean drinking water, clean working toilets, blackboards, offices, teaching supplies, libraries, labs, and pleasant classroom spaces and campuses. Teaching duties also will not be excessive, and student-teacher ratio not too high, so that the activity of teaching remains pleasant and there is adequate time for interaction with students, conducting research, and other university activities. Before we discuss about institutional autonomy and acquiring deep knowledge in one or two subjects let us ask ourselves whether NEHU and its affiliated colleges are ready to implement NEP-2020 recommendations.

The plain truth is that at least NEHU physics department does not fulfil the most basic minimum requirements. The university does not supply clean drinking water, there is no adequate faculty or laboratory facilities. Let us examine whether the affiliated colleges are ready to start 4-year undergraduate degree course in physics. Consider St.

Anthony's College, Shillong, as an example, being one of the best equipped colleges with permanent affiliation from NEHU. The college admits about 50 students for physics major. Let us assume that 30 of them continue up to VI semester. Suppose that out of 30 only 15 opt for 4th year B.Sc. Physics Honours course. There are 7 faculty members in the physics department out of which only 3 are having Ph.D. degree and hence qualified to supervise research which is an integral component of the course. Unless the number of students opting for the course comes down to 6 or less it will be very difficult for the college to provide necessary faculty and required infrastructure to continue the course. This is no alarmist talk. I myself would find very hard to find simple problems to more than three students at a time. Because the problems have to be solvable in six months given other kinds of workload. Therefore, at least for the next five years implementing a quality 4-year degree course is ruled out in NEHU and that too unless a massive investment is made on faculty up-gradation and other infrastructure facilities.

Giving due respect to all the rhetoric about the desirability (also necessity) of interdisciplinary studies, I beg to differ in the details. I am a modest physics teacher with little exposure to teaching methodologies of the advanced countries. Yet, I can claim with confidence that if one has deep knowledge in a particular discipline it is always easier to navigate to other disciplines as and when demand arises and make substantial contributions. Such examples are many in the history of science. Many physicists and mathematicians have made fundamental contribution to the advancement of biological sciences in spite of having no prior formal training in biology. As recently as last year half of physics Nobel Prize (2021) was shared by Professor G. Parisi for his contribution to Environmental sciences. He is a hard core physicist and his contribution to the field of environmental sciences was nominal compared to his contribution to other branches. Yet his contribution was counted as worthy. A deep understanding in a particular discipline helps contribute in other discipline as well: for a meaningful success in research the necessity of a well prepared mind is a rule, serendipity is not. Therefore advocating for deep knowledge in one discipline but giving less than a minimum weightage to the discipline in favour of other interdisciplinary subjects in higher education is counter-productive. It is going to adversely affect the science education in a country where science education is gradually getting less than required support. Let us have a quick look at what NEHU is proposing for undergraduate studies.

The façade of academic

autonomy is already thrown in to the winds. We are being told to change our mindset and follow the syllabus structure recommended by the UGC.

A comparison of credit hours allotted for physics major in the present syllabus and the credit hours NEHU is set to allot in the proposed (NEP-2020) syllabus assuming that NEHU will have a three-

Year	Present Syllabus	Proposed Syllabus (NEP-2020)
1st Year	10	10
2nd Year	10	10
3rd Year	10	10
4th Year	10	10
Total	40	40

year undergraduate course is presented in tabular form. I have counted the minimum possible number of credit hours for the laboratory (P) courses in the present syllabus while preparing the table. The paper codes in the proposed syllabus are as per the recommendation of the NEHU implementation committee and for each credit 15 class-hours are allotted. Clearly, in the proposed syllabus structure a total of only 530 credit hours are permissible for a physics major compared to a minimum 1080 credit hours at the present. Even if we include 120 (unreasonable) credit hours of Introductory Vocational Courses IC(VS) as part of physics (accepting the literal meaning of there being no hard separation between vocational and academic streams) the proposed credit hours (maximum) turns out to be 650 only. My experience of post-graduate physics teaching in NEHU tells me that even with these 1080 credit hours of undergraduate teaching the students are hard pressed to cope with the present PG syllabus which itself is quite basic in nature. We shall have no other alternative but to dilute the post-graduate syllabus to a large extent. We are, in effect, going to sacrifice deep knowledge for multidisciplinary generalists in science. The claim that with the proposed syllabus structure (NEP-2020) we shall be second to none in the world in the coming years is just a pipe dream because the premise itself is wrong and the introductory preamble is coloured. In the past we at least had the academic autonomy to frame our syllabus. The time is not yet over and if we are not unduly eager to implement the recommendations of UGC dictum to the letters in a hurry we will still have some chance to decelerate the decline in science education. However, that chance seems somewhat remote given the eagerness among the academic fraternity to acquiesce to the dictum and bizarre unconcerned silence of the actual stack holders in the present-day country. I wish people like Professor Satish Dhawan were there to lend us some courage. I close this note with the heartfelt wish of not having to witness the final rote in science education.

(The writer teaches Physics in NEHU)

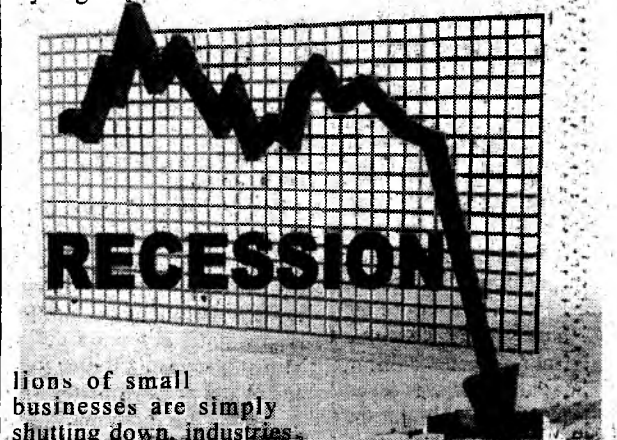
Economic crisis in India accentuating with continued job loss

By Krishna Jha

"One of the most striking results of the path of capitalist development is the concentration of Capital with economic power in the hands of big monopolies who enrich themselves at the expense of people and even other broad sections of the Indian bourgeoisie..."

These are lines from the program adopted by 22nd Party Congress of the Communist Party of India (CPI) held at Pondicherry on March 25-29, 2015. It becomes very clear that the path of finance capital moves through concentration of capital in a few hands. The fact is that finance capital takes its shape only when there is merger of various forces, which is called concentration and the system it operates in requires its centralization; that is exclusivity. No other player is allowed.

Since the devastation that came with the pandemic, resources are getting accumulated as the process of monopolization gets sharper. In the process, the small and medium industries and agriculture, centers of production in rural and urban areas that provide livelihood are dying. Mil -



lions of small businesses are simply shutting down, industries are closing down, the employment rate diminishing, millions of workers and employees have been perishing. People at a massive scale are either walking miles to meet the two ends or doing jobs that leaves them almost starving. Even the middle class employees and entrepreneurs face the same crisis as the common workers. It is not only the workers and peasants exploited, it is the entire non-monopoly section that bears the burden of such atrocities.

The unemployment situation in India remains grim. Mass exit of labour force during last few years has distorted the labour force participation in the economy and caused it to shrink to an alarmingly low level.

India's unemployment rate surged to a one-year high of 8.3 per cent in August as employment sequentially fell by 2 million to 394.6 million, according to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). This is the highest unemployment rate since August 2021. During July, the unemployment rate was at 6.8 per cent and the employment was 397 million, the CMIE data added. Quite obviously, India urgently needs an economic revival with rejuvenation in job market with employment generation.

According to CMIE data, 70 per cent of the share of wealth is today concentrated in the hands of only ten per cent. In the days of lock down and in its aftermath, as there was no relief for the larger masses, hunger, deprivations and deaths were common sight. Covid 19 has polarized productive and finance capital as never before. While world economy slipped deeper into crisis, financial giants accumulated wealth as never before, mainly through speculation. The world was never witness to such accumulation of wealth, and that too so fast, and at the same time; so much deprivation and weakening of economy eating away the roots.

the gains, and being evolving, the basic contradiction of monopoly capitalism as the corporate sector gets strengthened. It has been the evolution of dialectics, reaching out to a stage that has both the old and new features that are getting ushered in. Development is always relative, and nothing is out of the blue. Roots are there but relevant only till it spaces out for the new. As the monopolization goes further, there emerges a new socio-economic reality, which has no precedence. We are witness to each of its features.

The phenomenon is unprecedented and new. It has the new basics. The productive forces have been developing in a novel way moving towards scientific and technological revolution and democratizing the entire masses of non-monopoly sections. On the other hand, with concentration of capital, contradictions also get sharper as the capital keeps moving away from production and towards speculation and stock market.

When Lenin wrote about imperialism and finance capital, he also visualized the agony of the entire non-monopoly section of the masses and the rising need for assertion of their unity to face the challenge. His "Two Tactics of Social Democracy" was the script for the democratic revolution based on unity of all these sections.

It was on these lines that the Communist Party of India in its program adopted in 2015 carried forward the concept of democratic revolution, and said clearly, "... This... has to be anti-feudal, anti-imperialist and anti-monopolist." The 24th congress of CPI, at Vijayawada from October 14 to 18 will discuss in detail the present economic crisis and chart out a programme of action to fight the anti-people measures of the Narendra Modi Government. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Idol a wrong word for Goddess Durga

Editor
Thanks to The Shillong Times I am able to enjoy reports of festive Durga Puja events in Shillong. These reports are so well-written that readers like me feel transported – as if we are there in person, experiencing these events. But it saddens me to read the word "idol" applied to Durga and other Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon – as this term is tied too closely with "idolatry." If, instead, "icon" were used that would be so much better. Indeed iconography is part and parcel of religious practice, as are the arts. Puritanical people may frown upon both, but spiritual stalwarts have always used them. Not only music but the visual arts too are central to religious practice. If Durga represents shakti or strength, then her immersion is meant to evoke in us India's national virtue – namely, renunciation. This highest of all virtues

possesses the power to quell capitalism without firing a single shot.

But what mars the festivity for me, is the terrible contradiction between the great Goddess Durga – and the plight of young girls and women in India today. Durga is said to reside in all women – especially in the mother. Hence, Hindu homage paid to Durga also extends to a worship of mothers. Our monks worship little girls as expressions of the Great Goddess. Yet in the same country, with a Hindu nationalist government at the helm, young girls and women are tortured on a daily basis – through rapes, sexual assaults, acid attacks, domestic violence, dowry deaths, and murders. Every time a female person – especially a young girl – is thus tortured, we offend and outrage Durga, whose eternal feminine nature is also eternally feminist. We offend Durga when we abort the female fetus with impunity. In today's India, the Mahisura (bovine demon) that Durga kills with her trident, should be interpreted as the Indian variant of masculine

sadism that commits horrendous crimes against women and girls. It should also be interpreted as the feminine sadism that women inflict upon vulnerable women. Yes, the Indian subcontinent is unique in the patriarchal violence women perpetrate upon each other.

When Durga arrives, She brings not only moral strength (shakti), but also what her children represent – wisdom, success, courage, and auspiciousness. But under India's current patriarchal conditions, it is possible that Durga refuses to come, despite our acts of worship. To welcome her back, we must reach beyond these wonderful annual Durga Pujas and propitiate her, through respect and non-violence towards women.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar
Via email

The aftermath of celebrations and festivities

Editor,
Without intending to dis-

respect any religion or community, we need to be conscious of our actions, which can bear a negative impact on the environment. The streets are filled with garbage with no proper disposal system. Proper segregation of waste is the need of the hour and everyone needs to be aware of this. Festivities happen all through the year and it often leads to accumulation of waste whether biodegradable or non-biodegradable. There can only be so much regulations and acts passed with safeguards to the environment. Ultimately, it depends on our 'human behaviour and knowledge'. What we preach, and learn, and what we actually do, do not correlate at all. Planting a tree isn't enough. Waste management is a crucial need for every town and city. The waste accumulates, and clogs the drains and gutters leading to collection of water on the potholes which is not a favourable sight to anyone. The final destination down the drain are the streams, which then joins the rivers. There is no collection and treatment of liquid waste and also solid waste to a large extent. We recently

celebrated Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on the occasion of Gandhiji's birthday and a few days later, the scenario completely changes and everyone forgets their pledges. Fortunately, mother earth does not bear a grudge. The municipalities need to pull up their socks in this matter

Yours etc.,
Dorang Dekamra
M Sangma
Via email

A noisy competition

Editor,
On October 3 evening I reached home exhausted from work and was welcomed to the beat of drums from the Puja Pandal at Bawri Mansion and to the loud sermon from the Church at Malki. I was amused at times when the drum beats were in rhythm with the hymns blaring from the loudspeakers of the church. I sang along with the hymns tapping my foot in sheer joy when my thought machine suddenly clicked on a switch button and started thinking as to why the church had to have a service this evening being a Monday? I

have never heard a sermon on a Monday except on few occasions relating to death or a special service. It totally sounded like a competition as to who was the loudest!

The service, if it was necessary, could have been conducted without the loud-speakers on. The Puja festivities are held only once a year. Why do we want to spoil the tranquility and joy of the same? How would we feel if during Christmas celebrations, the Hindus started playing the drums and singing their bhajans?

The church elders should have given that a thought before having the service. They could have at least done it in a serene manner, which I think has been the norm of a Christian service for ages. I don't have any grudge against any religion but every religion has to respect the other.

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

"When hardships come into your life it breaks you for a while, but when it is done with you evolve into a new person."

— Madalsa Sharma

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 59 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2022

Teachers deserve better

EDUCATION management in Meghalaya is in a deep mess, hence the relentless agitation by different categories of teachers. There is desperation as teachers stare at a bleak future, not assured of their salaries and post retirement benefits in a situation made worse by inflation that is riding an upward wave even while the economy is in stagflation mode. Employment or the lack of it is visible across the country especially after the two-year Covid period. In the case of education in Meghalaya, more specifically the employment of teachers, some drastic systemic reforms are called for. How were contractual teachers employed? What were the terms of their contracts? If the Government is the paymaster why is it running short on funds? This aspect needs to be clearly explained.

It is a fact that Education is a Department that successive governments in Meghalaya have failed to tackle decisively. When the running of Primary Schools was taken over by the Government from the District Councils in the 1980s, the paper work remained incomplete. It was only recently that their details were updated and by then many of the teachers had retired. The present Government has only inherited the problems of the past but that is no excuse for it not to address the matter head on. After all, among the things promised by the Conrad Sangma led MDA Government in 2018 was "Change." Here was a foreign educated management graduate with all wherewithal required to manage public finances so why was the problem faced by teachers not given the priority it deserves? This is the first time that teachers have dared the government and even spent nights on the streets, despite the rains. It has been pointed out in these columns that having a Home Minister heading the Education Department is actually pulling him in two opposite directions. As Education Minister his sympathies might lie with the teachers but as Home Minister he feels he needed to tackle their agitation with an iron hand. He has lost on both counts. Teachers now see the Minister in charge of their affairs as enemy number one. They expected him to find solutions to their long-pending problems; not to be tamed by police action and tear gas. This has never happened to teachers in Meghalaya in the past. Tear gas is reserved for situations that have veered out of control and turned violent. The teachers were taking part in a peaceful protest.

Now even the United Democratic Party (UDP) - the Party to which the Education cum Home Minister belongs to is feeling the heat and asking that he be dropped from the cabinet. It is unprecedented that a political party would disown its own member. Clearly, Mr Lahkmen Rymbui is a victim of a double whammy even while the problem is that of Finance which is Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's brief!

Letters to the Editor

Kudos to the Dist Administration and CPC

Editor,
It is a great pleasure to convey hearty thanks and grateful applause to the Administration of East Khasi Hills and Meghalaya as a whole, for a very peaceful observance of Durga Puja in each and every Panchang of the city. It is remarkable this year that discipline was very strictly maintained everywhere and even during the immersion there was no untoward incident. Credit for this goes to the Districts Administration, C.P.C and specially the beautiful cordial co-operation of the general public, without which it would not have been possible.

Yours etc.,
Uma Purkayastha,
Via email
Shillong - 4

Needed a think tank for Meghalaya

Editor,
Apropos of the letter, 'Spirit of Durga Puja' by GR

Lyngdoh (ST Oct 4, 2022), I would like to similarly acknowledge the contributions made by the two gentlemen, (L) RG Lyngdoh and (L) TH Rangad vis-à-vis the current state of affairs of Meghalaya which is now peaceful. With election bells ringing early next year, the current chief minister Conrad K. Sangma is, as all knows, on an inauguration spree with tall talks of development. In fact, Meghalaya has leaped a few years back under the current dispensation led by the maladroit NPP. At the backdrop of the inhuman mob lynching in Shangpung in Jaintia Hills, police high-handedness in "eliminating" Cheristerfield Thangkiew, the murky affairs inside Pine Mount School, the continuous killings inside the rat hole coal mines in the state despite the NGT ban, the scam of vehicle obsessed GK Langrai, the messy traffic scenarios in the streets of Shillong, the situation certainly demands a change in the political dispensation post 2023. But do we have a choice? The West Bengal brand of politics can be seen in Meghalaya with the entry of Trinamool Congress - taking on the chief minister and his bunch of ministers on some issues or the other to keep the momentum going

until election day in 2023.

Many are of the opinion that Dr. Mukul Sangma was comparatively better in handling the affairs of the state than Conrad K. Sangma - under whose regime the state has only earned the status of a paper tiger. If one analyses the present situation one can actually trace the affairs of the state in the episodes of the Pine Mount School (PMS). In the latter, it is a Principal that has brought down the school to its present condition, from its glorious past, whereas the CM has done nothing better much like the Principal in running the state. The irony is that now the Government headed by the CM has appointed a Committee to look into the affairs inside PMS but who is going to evaluate the affairs inside the MDA government? Here we need think tanks like those we get to see in the USA that will independently judge the government of the day and publish their opinions. I think, given the dearth here, Asian Confluence can take a step forward in this direction instead of just being a talk shop. This third space, being a responsible think-tank, must assess the Government and governance and release blueprints as an independent agency. The Asian Conflu-

ence has to think beyond the rivers, dales, lakes, businesses, lectures, interactions and examine the government affairs starting with Meghalaya and later spread its wings to other states in this region. It can engage experts quite like the way it is doing in case of engagements as mentioned in the penultimate sentence. Asian Confluence, otherwise, is certainly filling the gap that is largely void in a sphere where it is operating and has the brains inside to evaluate the nymphs in the NPP led MDA government. Let Conrad K. Sangma be told that his method of governance has done nothing good to the people of Meghalaya; rather the stooges inside the NPP led MDA are running the state like an enterprise and pocketing all the returns.

Yours etc.,
BC Paul
Shillong - 4

Plight of teachers

Editor,
As a concerned individual I am deeply saddened to note the way the government is handling the education sector which the Chief Minister has time and again stated is "a priority sector". This present government is the only

Curse of the working class

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

sector needs govt. support" in BusinessToday. In published on the 19th January 2021 revealed that the informal sector, which constitutes workers in the category of self-employed or those who have "taken destiny into their own hands", already makes up 80% of the Indian labour force producing 50% of the GDP. More than 90% of these workers have an income of less than 10,000 rupees or below. Despite what the Government, State and Centre, claim they are not producing enough good quality jobs. Now they want to reduce the existing jobs as well.

The argument for this policy narrative is that the Government has limited financial resources or put very simply "there is no money". But is that really true? Un-

derstood simply the amount of money in the economy is represented by the size of the GDP, i.e., the monetary measure of the market value of all the final goods and services produced and sold in a specific time period. The Government appropri-

ates this value through taxes (direct and indirect), fees and other measures. Based on the argument of "there is no money" the economy should be contracting resulting in a fall of revenues for the State. However, except for the pandemic affected year of 2020 when GDP became negative, the average growth rate from 1990 to 2021 was a positive 5.91%. Compared to it, the average population growth during the same period was 1.58%. What's more, the gap between the two is growing - the population growth rate has declined from 2.16%

than being the dynamic and exciting entrepreneur, who creates jobs for themselves and others they are boring office workers with a 9 to 5 job. But that would not be, a totally fair statement as some of them are actually investing their salary into businesses

are entrusted with. But if none of these happen, should not these champions of "people should take their destiny into their own hands" concentrate on doing what they are paid for and be boring rather than trying to become dynamic and exciting. It's just a humble request. Please think about it.

When it comes to those who are already entrepreneurs, and I happen to know a few of them, things are not rosy since they have "taken destiny into their own hands". One of the common complaints I hear from them is there are certain individuals or groups who hoard all the contracts handed out by the Government. The reason is because such individuals/groups are well connected, i.e., they are part of the Burem (the word for respectable in Khasi) class who controls all the levers of power. A

very important feature of this class is that they are highly 'inbred'. They go to same schools, drink in the same bar, are related to each other and are found in lucrative government or entrepreneurial positions all over the state. Once a certain member of this class is able to attain an important position, rest assured the funds for the exciting entrepreneurial adventure will only go to their inbred brethrens. With time this concentration of resources and power only becomes stronger.

What all this also means is that social mobility in Meghalaya is very low. A member of the working class will always find it difficult to break the privilege of the Burem class making the members of this class akin to the upper castes while the rest of the population are transformed into the lower castes. As a result, the egalitarianism of our indigenous people's tribal society is getting eroded if it's not already gone. What is the way forward for the working class? I believe solidarity is one of the first things that need to be built as the Burem class enjoys pitting members of the working class against each other. For example the policemen who fired tear gas on the protesting contractual teachers, and some of whom were reported to have challenged the latter to a fight by taunting them, are also members of the working class. But because they need to earn the respect of the Burem class in order to improve their own lot they are antagonistic to the cause of their true brethrens. The way to a decent life is, therefore, long and hard for the working class. I hope this will change and I wish all of us the best for the future.

After Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka is the second laboratory of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar's hate machine. In the last nearly five years of the BJP rule, this state, which was known for its secularism and peaceful harmony between various communities, has been converted into a free playground of the majoritarian communalism. The Silicon Valley of India, Bengaluru, is witnessing continuous harassment of its minority communities. The BJP chief minister B. S. Yeddyurappa who inherits a socialist past, is just carrying out the dictat of the Sangh Parivar and their violent fringe elements. Corruption has reached a peak in the state administration and openly, the state government is being called the "40 per cent cut government".

Anti-incumbency is very strong against the Bommai government, but at the same time, the BJP is exercising total mobilisation in terms of resources, while also polarising voters along religious lines. The Congress must not only unite its leadership but also expand its support base to take on the BJP in the state assembly elections early next year. The Congress also has to align with the JD(S) to combat jointly the BJP challenge in the coming Karnataka polls. That way, the three-week Bharat Jodo Yatra through Karnataka is sure to impart a new dynamism to the Congress organisation in the state.

In fact, the Congress and the JD(S) are traditionally well positioned to defeat the BJP comfortably in the assembly elections. In the 2017 assembly elections, the BJP got 104 seats out of the total of 224 by getting 36.35 per cent votes whereas the Congress got 80 seats by getting much higher votes at 38.4 per cent. The JD(S) got 37 seats by recording 18.3 per cent votes. The Congress and the JD(S) formed a coalition government initially, but the BJP organised defections through money power leading to the fall of the

Yours etc.,
A Basaiawmoit,
Via email

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BJY in Karnataka has given a big boost to Congress

By Nitya Chakraborty

The Bharat Jodo Yatra led by the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi completed one month of its march in Karnataka on October 6. With the participation of the Congress president Sonia Gandhi, the Yatra got massive character boost, attracting thousands of men, women and even children, as also the grassroots party workers. What was significant was the show of unity by the two Congress factions of the state during the march, and this was made possible by Rahul Gandhi who took former chief minister K. Siddaramaiah on one side and D. K. Shivakumar on the other and compelled them to beat the drum together amidst wide applause from the marchers.

The Yatra which began on September 7 from Kanyakumari covered Tamil Nadu and Kerala and entered Karnataka on September 30. The marchers will continue Yatra in Karnataka till October 21. This three-week travel by the Congress workers and the common masses under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi has special significance as the message of end to hatred and bigotry is more relevant for this state compared to Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Rahul Gandhi, in the course of his Yatra and the road side meetings, is continuously exposing the BJP and the Narendra Modi government, explaining how the BJP and Sangh Parivar are acting as the fomenters of communalism and fissiparous tendencies in the country, while simultaneously destroying the longstanding institutions and the ethos of the constitution of India.

After Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka is the second laboratory of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar's hate machine. In the last nearly five years of the BJP rule, this state, which was known for its secularism and peaceful harmony between various communities, has been converted into a free playground of the majoritarian communalism. The Silicon Valley of India, Bengaluru, is witnessing continuous harassment of its minority communities. The BJP chief minister B. S. Yeddyurappa who inherits a socialist past, is just carrying out the dictat of the Sangh Parivar and their violent fringe elements. Corruption has reached a peak in the state administration and openly, the state government is being called the "40 per cent cut government".

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government and the installation of a government belonging to the BJP and the defectors.

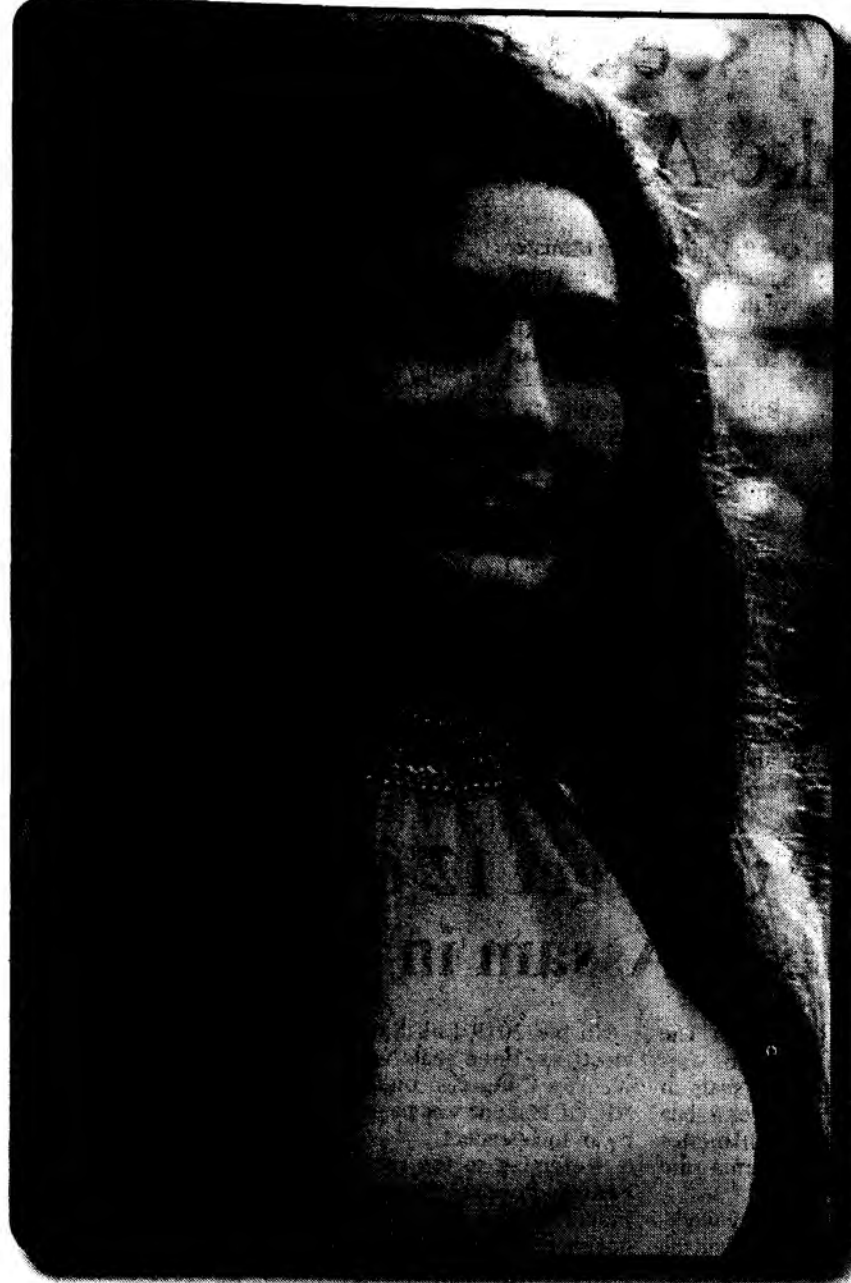
In the last rural bodies elections, both the Congress and the JD(S) performed better compared to the BJP. Since then, the BJP government's acceptability has gone down. A proper understanding between the rejuvenated state Congress and the JD(S) can beat the BJP convincingly. The BJP central leadership has taken note of the tremendous response aroused by the Yatra and they are worried that it will have its impact on the coming assembly elections. Accordingly, a meeting of the state leaders was held on Friday to take stock of the situation. Sources said that the BJP has set a target of winning 150 seats out of the total of 224 in the next elections and the party leadership will take all steps to neutralize the impact if any, of the Bharat Jodo Yatra on the electorate of Karnataka.

For the Congress Party, it is a positive development that the Yatra has got good response in Karnataka, which is going to assembly polls early 2023. However, the immediate need for the Congress is to mobilise all its resources to fight the BJP in its strongholds Gujarat and Himachal, where assembly polls are scheduled for November-December this year. So far, the Congress preparedness is abysmal. In Himachal, the party is in a bad shape. Out of the four working presidents of the state Congress, two have left and joined BJP. Early this week, a very senior leader Suresh Chandel left the Congress and joined the BJP. No major Congress leader campaigned in Himachal in recent weeks, while the Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself began the election campaign this week and all senior leaders including the BJP president J. P. Nadda are monitoring the BJP campaign on a daily basis.

In Himachal, in the 2017 assembly elections, the BJP got 44 seats and the Congress 21 out of the total of 68 seats. The CPI(M) which has strength in some pockets got one seat and two seats went to independents. The BJP secured 48.79 per cent votes while the Congress got 41.68 per cent. In the Lok Sabha polls in 2019, BJP got all four seats, but in one-by-election to the Lok Sabha, the Congress won defeating BJP. So now, BJP has three Lok Sabha seats from Himachal while the Congress has one. The BJP state party is faction-ridden for long but the central leadership has intervened and now the saffrons are working jointly. The Congress has a massive task to meet the BJP challenge in Himachal in the coming assembly polls.

As regards Gujarat, the situation for the Congress is precarious. There is no direction to the state leaders from the high command. Nobody bothers to visit Gujarat for poll campaign. The observer Ashok Gehlot is too busy keeping his chief minister's seat safe in Rajasthan after the latest fiasco over a botched party presidential poll nomination. As against this, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah are visiting their home state on a regular basis. PM will be in Gujarat for election campaigning for three days beginning October 9. This will be followed by five yatras to be organized by the state BJP covering all the 182 seats. AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal is visiting every week. AAP wants to replace the Congress as the main opposition against the BJP. (IPA Service)

Loretta Lynn: A songwriter & activist for white rural working-class women



Loretta Lynn's death at the age of 90 marks the end of a remarkable life of achievement in country music.

Her dramatic life story – retold in the 1980 award-winning film “Coal Miner's Daughter,” based on Lynn's 1976 biography – made Lynn a household name. She grew up in poverty in a small Kentucky mining town, marrying and starting a family as a teenager before reaching unprecedented heights of commercial success as a recording artist of modern country music.

But as a scholar of gender and country music and author of “Hillbilly Maidens, Okies, and Cowgirls: Women's Country Music, 1930-1960,” I know that Lynn represented more than just star power and fame in country music – she spoke to the concerns of women, especially white working-class women in rural and suburban America.

Speaking up, singing out

Lynn's rise in the 1960s took place when country music appeared tied to conservative politics. It was a time when Merle Haggard's “Okie from Muskogee,” with its attacks on counterculture, marijuana and draft-card burning, became a populist anthem for the country's cultural conservatives.

In contrast, Lynn's songwriting continued the legacy of Kitty Wells, Jean Shepard and other women in country music who were willing to speak up about the concerns of American women.

Lynn's songs defied societal expectations by connecting her musical representations of working-class and rural women to broader social issues affecting women across the U.S.

She aimed for her music to articulate the fears, dreams and anger of women living in a patriarchal society. It railed against those who idealized women's domestic roles and demonized outspoken feminists.

‘There's gonna be some changes’

Specifically, for a generation of predominantly white women in the 1960s and 1970s who did not identify as urban or college-educated feminists, Lynn's music offered candid conversations about their private lives as wives and mothers.

As Lynn stated in her autobiography, her audience recognized her as a “mother and a wife and a daughter, who had feelings just like other women.”

Loretta Lynn made the concerns of everyday American women a focal point of her work. She did this through clever and witty songwriting and lyrical techniques that combined the vernacular of her audience with her resonant voice.

Meanwhile, the song arrangements of Owen Bradley of Decca Records directed Lynn's musical talents to a broad audience.

He combined the edgier sound of honky-tonk instrumentation – electric guitars, pedal steels and

fiddles – with the polish of the Nashville sound by including the smooth sounding vocal harmonies of the vocal quartet the Jordanaires, as heard in numerous country, gospel and rock ‘n’ roll recordings.

This provided a sound of strength and conviction to accompany Lynn's bold and forthright songs, as she laid bare the double standards of gender roles.

With her assertive and resonant voice, Lynn, in her 1966 track “Don't Come Home A Drinkin' (With Lovin' on Your Mind),” warns men not to expect women to be waiting at home, sexually available for them after they'd spent the night drinking:

*Well, you thought I'd be waitin' up when you came home last night
You'd been out with all the boys and you ended up half tight
Liquor and love, they just don't mix
Leave that bottle or me behind
And don't come home a drinkin' with lovin' on your mind*

In a similar vein, Lynn, who claimed that her songs about wayward husbands were inspired by her fraught marriage to Oliver “Doolittle” Lynn, confronted the “other woman” in songs such as 1966's “You Ain't Woman Enough” and 1968's “Fist City.”

*A lasting legacy

Fully aware that her personalized accounts became political messages for her fan base of women, Lynn co-wrote and recorded “The Pill” in 1975. It was a rare foray into the topic of women's reproductive rights for country music.

In typical fashion, though, Lynn approached the issue from the perspective of a rural working-class woman:

*I'm tired of all your crowin'
How you and your hens play
While holdin' a couple in my arms
Another's on the way
This chicken's done tore up her nest
And I'm ready to make a deal
And ya can't afford to turn it down
'Cause you know I've got the pill*

The song's sexual innuendos about cavorting roosters and hens incorporated the double entendres and humor of early blues and country, while providing a frank discussion about female sexual pleasure. It also addressed the right for women to take control over their bodies and reproduction.

The song came out just two years after the Supreme Court passed Roe Vs Wade, granting women the ability to govern their own reproductive health through abortion. (*The Conversation*)

Eco-friendly Festivals

A campaign initiated in Pune city collected 15,000 kilograms of clay sludge after the traditional immersion of Ganesh idols during the recent festival. This clay sludge will be used by idol makers for making new idols. Natural clay is a non-renewable material usually mined in states like Gujarat and West Bengal and brought to Maharashtra and other parts of India to make idols. Clay mining impacts both the environment and the health of the miners.

Authorities in Pune are also reusing festival flowers and other religious wastes to make festivals more sustainable. *Mongabay-India* correspondent Manish Kumar reports

Dinesh Gole is an artisan working from Pen, a small town, around 110 kilometres away from Pune in Maharashtra, where he makes idols of the Hindu god Ganesha. These idols are Pen's main claim to fame and they travel to several parts of India and even to other countries, especially during the Ganesh Chaturthi festival every September.

Gole makes around 1,500 Ganesh idols of different sizes every year which go to the bigger cities of Pune, Mumbai and Nashik in Maharashtra. He uses natural clay, locally known as shaadu maati, as the base to make these idols.

This core raw material of the idols made in Maharashtra, however, is often mined in other states and transported here during major festivals.

“We receive the natural clay mainly from Gujarat, where it is mined. We buy it at a rate of around Rs. 150 for 35 kilograms of clay which comes in a packet,” says Gole.

Natural clay is a non-renewable, silicate mineral which is usually extracted from the ground by mining. West Bengal and Gujarat are the main states where clay is mined and then transported to Maharashtra and other parts of the country. The whole process – mining, extraction and transportation – is known to cause pollution and health hazards for those working in the mines, besides degrading the natural resources in the areas where the clay is mined.

Pune city, one of the main cities where these clay idols eventually land up, initiated the Punaravartan campaign this year, to minimise the impact of clay mining while celebrating the Ganesh festival. Voluntary

organisations along with the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) came together to establish a system of collection of clay sludge after the immersion of the idol. This material will be recycled into idols for the next year.

The Punaravartan campaign aligns with the guidelines of the Central Pollution Control



Board (CPCB) on using eco-friendly idols to prevent contamination of water bodies. The campaign collected 15,000 kilograms of clay – about the weight of two and a half adult elephants – from citizens, schools, societies and corporates in September 2022, when the Ganesh festival took place. This quantity of clay can be used to make about 15,000 new clay idols of one kilogram each, next year.

“Natural clay is a perfect material to make idols. The clay particles are fine and have

good adhesive quality. When immersed in water (a Ganesh festival tradition) the idols get dissolved within 10 minutes. This is unlike the Plaster of Paris (PoP) idols which take several months to degrade,” Gole told *Mongabay-India*.

PoP, another material which was commonly used for making the Ganesh idols, was cheaper and lighter than natural clay. It was slowly replacing natural clay as a material for the idols. But because of its environmental impact, especially on water bodies in which it was immersed, in 2020, the Central Pollution Control Board banned the use of PoP for making idols. PoP idols had chemicals like gypsum, sulphur, phosphorus, and magnesium and the dyes used in colouring had mercury, cadmium, arsenic, lead, and carbon – many of these have a harmful impact on the water bodies in which the idols are immersed and their associated ecosystem.

Manisha Sheth, the founder of eCo-exist, an environment organisation based in Pune, explained that efforts to recycle clay started in 2020, but it expanded and became bigger this year with the involvement of more people and organisations.

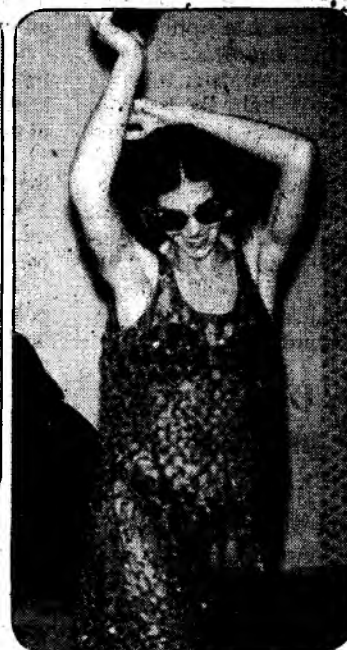
“We started this in 2020 on a small scale. We first experimented with some damaged idols to see the feasibility of recycling the clay and it worked very well. The artisans were also comfortable with the concept. We then planned to expand this and approached other environmental organisations and like-minded people. As clay is a non-renewable source, we wanted to minimise its usage. So we decided to recycle it,” Sheth said.

(*Mongabay-India/TWF*)

Sabyasachi, from Calcutta to NY



(Left) A sheer hand-embroidered tulle dress with gold-tinted paillettes.



(Right) An oversized tulle embroidered dress & details from the latest collection of Sabyasachi Accessories.

Sabyasachi is dedicated to maintaining the best craftsmanship and historical Indian arts and crafts. The New York edit does not draw inspiration from fads, trends, or current events. It is a dedication to producing contemporary heirlooms.

“The edit shamelessly interlaces the east and west, the traditional and rebellious, the precious and profane, and the sensorial with the intellectual,” says Sabyasachi Mukherjee.

A year-round collection that may be worn by people of all ages and across all cultures. It is flexible in its appreciation of beauty, tradition, and value. Its craftsmanship is exceptional, loaded with artisanal work, and honed by India's syncretic tradition and age-old cultural savoir faire.

House logos have been reworked into timeless garments like the Indian sari and traditional trench coats, shirts, jackets, lounge suits, and column dresses, layers of sheer tulle and chiffon over the finest velvets, silks, and cottons. Embroidered and applied extensively using handcraft and vintage techniques in various house styles. The Bengal Tiger symbol is disassembled using high craftsmanship and prints.

The Sabyasachi Art Foundation hand paints the tropical plants and animals of Bengal's Sundarbans and then digitally renders them into now-classic home prints. The Calcutta to New York route is mapped in the New York edit, which celebrates the decadence of Indian craftsmanship, legacy, and the spirit of a new renaissance. (*IANSLife*)

Looking beyond

Award winning film critic Shoma A. Chatterji's new book *Satyajit Ray: Frame to Frame* looks at some little known and less explored aspects in the maestro's works. The author in a tete a tete with Ranjita Biswas

Excerpts from an interview:

Satyajit Ray's birth centenary (he was 1921 born) saw many books and films built around the maestro. How does your book give an alternate/different view, if it does?

My book is an exploration of minor nuances in Ray's films flooded with but which often go unnoticed by critics and scholars. Sometimes, they are noticed but get marginalised/ignored/forgotten in the bigger scheme of things.

You have made some interesting observations. For example, in the chapter *The Hunger Trilogy* you focus on the old Indir Thakrun's constant hunger through different symbols/frames (*Pather Panchali*) in the film. Is it your own interpretation?

It is entirely my interpretation. Before this, I had written a book that studied Ray's interpretation of Tagore's literary works and how his films transcended, in a manner of speaking, the confines of the literary original through the language of cinema and lends itself to more detailed readings of the original in terms of the objects attached to the characters. The best example is from Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Pather Panchali* where Indir Thakrun's ghoti — vessel, is like a metaphor of her life — old, dented, almost useless and used only by Indir Thakrun.

In *Devi* young Dayamoyee is deified by her father-in-law which is seen as reflection of Ray's anti-superstition view (later repeated in *Ganashatru*). But apart from the inherent patriarchy, you also talk about something rarely mentioned, if at all, wondering if the widower father-in-law felt a sexual attraction to the young woman. Is there any justification for this point of view?

Actually, this interpretation is not my own but I read it in a foreign reading of the film published in a catalogue on Ray which was edited by redoubtable Chidananda Dasgupta. This idea grew on me over a period of time and when I watched the film again and again while writing this book, I agreed with this critic whose name I can't recall. If you watch *Devi* again, just notice how her father-in-law appropriates her entire time, space and relationships by placing her on a pedestal and claiming that she is a goddess which she is not. Even before this, we see her pressing her father-in-law's feet. By claiming her as a goddess, he effectively deprives her of a normal conjugal life with her husband. The husband going away to Kolkata to study law conveniently separates him

from his new bride. She can't write a single letter to her husband or use the envelopes which he had left behind with his Calcutta address as she is now a *devi* and no longer permitted access to her earlier life. There is also a scene where the older man asks her questions about her interaction with her husband which was socially forbidden during the time and place the story is set in.

In the chapter *Masculinity in Ray's Films* you have included *Parash Pathar* about a middle aged man suddenly finding a touchstone and his whole life changing. It's also a sardonic look at how lucre affects other people's view of a person. But how does he relate to this chapter's focus area?

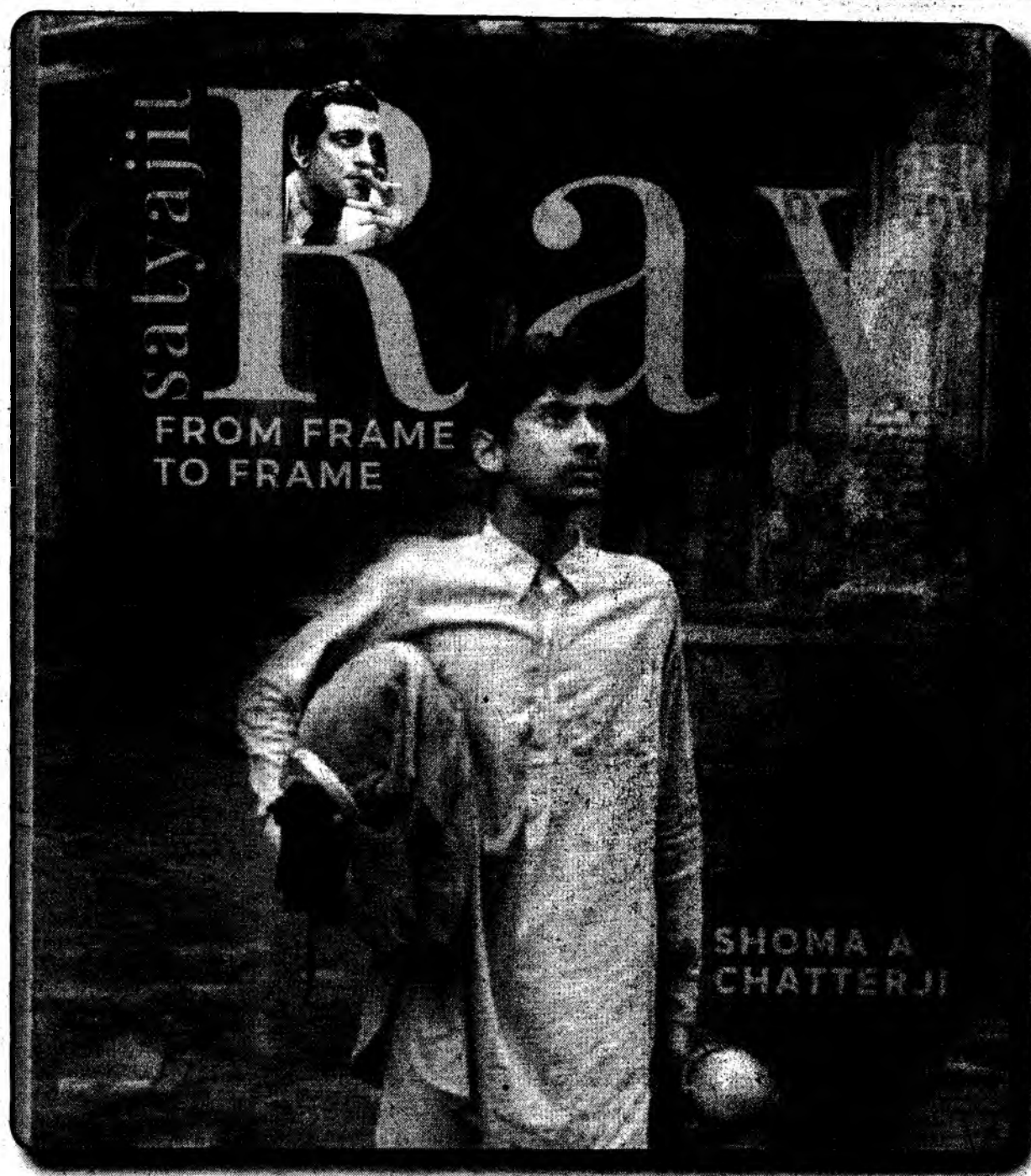
I believe that our cinema has largely presented a rather monolithic image of masculinity which is not true of any culture across the world especially in India. Masculinity is associated in cinema popularly with a youthful physique, attractive if not handsome, active and so on. Ray has given a very broad description of both masculinity and femininity. Parash Babu does not tick a single box among any of these qualities. He doesn't even fit into the box of the Bengali bhadralok who is understandably an intellectual, of high birth, genteel and also, quite arrogant. So, I noticed in him Ray's manner of understanding and respecting 'masculinity' from his perspective as a filmmaker.

As a film critic, how do you look at Ray's interpretations of great literary works?

Taking Tagore as an example, in *Nastaneer*, the original story for *Charulata*, the protagonist doesn't use any opera glasses. But Ray gives her one to present to the audience Charu's perspective of the world outside the windows of her house, of her 'distant' husband, of a boat sailing in the distance when she goes on a trip with her husband, Bhupati. The opera glasses evolve to symbolise Charu's evolution through the film. Ray's films are flush with such concrete objects that don't exist in the original story. Arati throwing away the lipstick in *Mahanagar*, Amulya's Oxford shoes dirtied in the village slush in *Samapti* and many other examples.

Any favourite?

My favourite remains *Postmaster* which was roundly criticised by many for changing the ending of the original story. Ray's answer was that Tagore had written the short story many years ago where Ratan, the teenaged girl (in the story) falls at the postmaster's feet, weeps copiously and begs him to take her with him. But when he made the film in 1960 he couldn't see Ratan's behaviour the way Tagore wrote it so many decades ago and shows Ratan not only refusing the coin but also never speaking to him again. But we see her from another angle with tears rolling down her cheeks. She is much younger than the original Ratan of the story



too. This interpretation was brilliant.

Any book in the pipeline?

Two actually. The first one that is ready to hit the market is *Through the Lens Brightly*. It takes a look at a few women directors, taking one film of each, to study and analyse how they have represented the working woman in their film. They are — 36, *Chowringhee Lane*, *Rudaali*, *Luck by Chance*, *Talash*, *Parched*, *Lipstick under My Burkha*, *Neel Battey Sannata* and *Raazi*.

Another is tentatively titled *The Male Gaze - Redefined* (1975). It argues against Laura Mulvey's theory of the "male gaze" on the assumption that

as the directors are male, as also are technicians, they deliberately use their cinematic infrastructure to use the women in their films as an object of titillation even if they happen to be the subject of the narrative. I've tried to show that in India, the 'male gaze' is mainly cultural and sociological. There are many male directors who have never used the women in their films as 'objects' of titillation, for example, Vijay Anand in *Guide*, Shyam Benegal in *Zubeida*, and so on. And look at other films made by male directors like *Mahanagar*, *Sahib Bibi Gulam*, *Aandhi*, *Ek Din Pratidin*, *Andhi Galli*, and you'll know what I mean. (TWF)

(*Satyajit Ray: Frame to Frame* is published by Vitasta)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, OCTOBER 9, 2022

Moon is eclipsed on your solar return day and will give excellent results. You will earn lot of money. You will get success in matters related to business and finance. You will look after the needs of your parents and children. If you are a well wisher you will act like a friend to your children. You will be surrounded by your loved ones with the help and inspiration of your seniors. You will look for opportunities according to your expectations and catch them. The time will be spent nicely. You will be kind and liberal. There will be success and profits from all sides. You will be on the lookout for new opportunities and will also get them. Those who are unmarried will get marriage proposals. You will do very good work at this time. Your popularity too will peak.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Since a long time you have been waiting to do some extraordinary things in your life. Now is the appropriate time. You will get positive results for your efforts. You will also develop new contacts and make lot of friends. Your enemies and opponents will remain active but will be unable to harm your interests. Money will keep flowing in your life. You will look after your parents. You will also maintain a high standard of living. Results of examinations will come according to your expectations. You will also share wonderful bonding with your spouse/partner. You will also attend some party or function. New sources of income will come up. You will receive a good news from a relative. Your health will be excellent.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Your work will get completed with the help from some person. You will be elated and your happiness will know no bounds. You will be suddenly in the news and will enjoy all the spotlight that you get. You will get success in love affairs and relationships. Be careful in financial dealings. You will remain fit and fine. You will also remain emotionally strong and take quick decisions in your work. You will devote entire time to your home and family. You will pay attention to your trade and business too. You will bring in lot of money with your efforts. Your prestige and respect will also increase. You will also bring something new for your house. Differences with your colleagues will get sorted out. Property related matters will also get resolved.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

It will prove to be a wonderful week for you. You will have luck on your side. There will never be any shortage of money. You will also be never left without friends who will give you a lot of support. Husband and wife will also understand feelings of each other. You will also enjoy cordial relationship with your bosses. Foes and enemies will be active. There will be some tension with your neighbors but matters will be sorted out. You will extend a hand of help towards a needy friend or relative. The work that you had decided will get done. You will make use of your talent and earn money with your foresight. You will also receive money in business and trade through digital transactions. You will do something new with full vigour.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

The time and circumstances are favorable for you to make good gains. You will earn lot of money during this period. There will be never any shortage of funds for your pet projects. Your friends will help you as you desire from them. You will also complete your work with lot of passion. You will also attend marriage function. Your social circle will be quite strong. You may get embroiled with someone in a tricky matter for no reason. Your guests will frequently come. It will upset your plans. But gradually life will come back on the tracks. Love birds will experience freshness in their relationship. You will be unnecessarily worried about the future of your children for no reasons.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

A matter may require your urgent attention all of a sudden. You will have to bring your skills to the fore to resolve the issue. Your peers and bosses will give you full support. You will also learn a vital lesson in your life. The blessings and support of your elders will be with you. A decision taken by you will fetch you great results. You will have monetary gains. You will get success in love affairs. You will make use of modern means to improve your business. The tension that was there between brothers and relatives will come to an end. You will get better results in your business. You will establish a better relationship with subordinates, bosses and senior officials. Your goals and vision about life will be clear.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You will be actively engaged in your work. People will acknowledge your capability and talent. You will also make investments in multiple sources. Do not meddle in affairs of other persons. Otherwise, people may become your enemies for no reasons. Your area of influence will widen. You will look after the needs of your family members well. You will also meet one of your old friends. You will be happy on remembering

some old events. Drive your vehicle carefully. You will get a chance of going to meetings and conferences. You will take your work seriously and will get favorable results. You will be financially strong. You will also remain busy with your family members.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

It is going to be an auspicious week. You have been hard pressed for money for some time now. Things will get moving in the right direction now. You will achieve your future goals. Those who are planning to go abroad for job or study will get ample opportunities. You will be in a quandary regarding your career but with the right suggestions of your seniors you will solve your puzzle. You will also keep something in your heart and not like to discuss it with anyone. Maybe this is not the right approach. It will only make you restless. You need to maintain a gentle attitude and go out and make friends. You will also enjoy time with your family members and friends. This is how you should proceed in your life. Students will study with concentration and will get good results.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Your efforts will bear fruits and you will get fruitful results. Your family members will support you in all sphere of life. You will get lot of mental peace. You will also get auspicious news. You will be busy in work related to children. A family member might get engaged to someone. You will also buy land and property. You will also spend on the sources of comfort. You will earn lot of money. You will excel in your work. All the things that you envisage will get done on time. Those connected to business will get profits. You will also get peace at home. You will also pay attention to your health. You will also develop interest in spiritual matters. You will also remain busy in social activities.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It is an amazing time period for you. You will be full of vigour and enthusiasm. You will get an opportunity to attend to some marriage function or party. You will receive happiness and joy in abundance in your love ties. You will take inspiration from someone and will easily achieve your objectives. Your efficiency and dexterity will improve. It is the time for achievements. You will also explore new avenues in your business. You will also enhance your business by talking to people. You will be sensitive in emotional matters. God's blessings will be on you. You will feel weight of problems on your shoulders but you will focus attention on your priorities and will come out winner. Take advice of your family members before starting a new work.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will want peace and calm in your life. And will get it too. Your time will be well spent in the company of your family members. There can be some big responsibility that will be given to you in your work place. You will meet your near and dear ones. You will keep earning money with your honesty and dedication. Your hard work and sincerity will bring you lot of name and fame. Because of increase in economic activities, there will be flow of money. You will meet some important personality. The results of your examinations/interview will come in your favor. The entire week will give excellent results. You will get lot of peace and happiness in family life. You will make plans to finish your incomplete plans. You will get support of one and all.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

These are very important days. You will focus on travels and business and will also get great returns. The more you meet new people the more opportunities you will get to earn money. You will find a solution to all problems with your intelligence and wisdom. Your mood will be upbeat. Women will have an issue or two with their spouse/partner but it will be sorted out. An issue might develop in your neighborhood. It will trouble you a bit. A person may try to tarnish your image. But will not get success. You also need to pay attention to your health. The hard work of students will give positive results. The youth will be quite active. Your well wishers will help you when the need arise. There will be happy atmosphere at home.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

It will be a money gaining week. Your efforts will bring in lot of money. You will have successful interactions with your clients. Business tours will be successful. There might be an increase in your salary. You will get the results of your work. You will be very busy but will have time for your family too. You will get results in your business as per your expectations. An issue might develop in your neighborhood. It will trouble you a bit. A person may try to tarnish your image. But will not get success. You also need to pay attention to your health. The hard work of students will give positive results. The youth will be quite active. Your well wishers will help you when the need arise. There will be happy atmosphere at home.

Seven movies/shows to binge watch on OTT

By Olivia Sarkar

The second half of September has brought a good mix of genres, ranging from horror fantasies to teen dramas to long-awaited biopics. We've compiled a list of new shows and films to round out your October binge-watching marathon.

DO REVENGE

Drea, a popular girl, has the perfect high school life until her boyfriend ruins it by leaking her sex tape to the entire school, and now she wants vengeance! When she meets Eleanor, an exchange student who is haunted by a rumour spread by one of her classmates, the two form a team to take down their respective nemesis. They even joke about murdering their tormentors, but will they

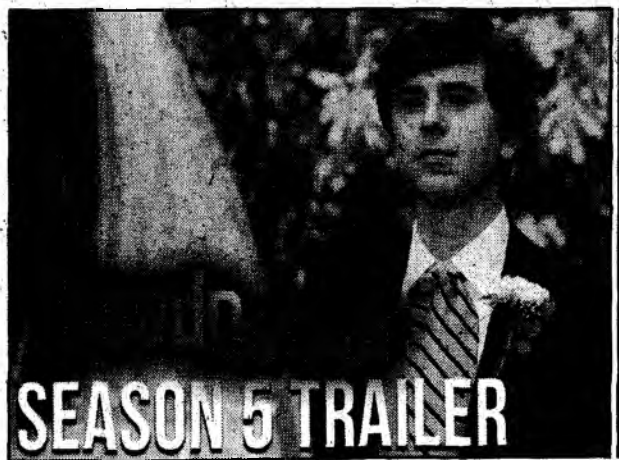
women's privileged lives, knitted in a web of lies, deceit, and fighting patriarchy," according to the synopsis.

BLONDE

The much-anticipated biopic follows the rise to fame and tragic demise of one of the world's most famous people, Marilyn Monroe. We're excited to see Ana de Armas transform into the iconic star on screen after she received a 14-minute standing ovation for her performance at the Venice Film Festival.

THE GOOD DOCTOR SEASON 5

If you're a fan of the hit medical drama and haven't seen the most recent season yet, there's no need to wait any longer. Dr. Shaun is available on Netflix. And here's how The Good Doctor Season



OFFICIAL TRAILER

go so far? You'll have to watch to find out what this crazy teen revenge drama is all about.

JOGI

When two Sikh men assassinated Indira Gandhi, public sentiment toward the entire Sikh community shifted overnight, and people became hostile toward them. Jogi, a Diljit Dosanjh-starrer set during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, tells the story of a Sikh man determined to save his family, friends, and fellow members from a massacre that killed thousands of Sikhs.

HUSH HUSH

In the upcoming crime drama, Juhi Chawla, Ayesha Jhulkha, Soha Ali Khan Pataudi, Kritika Kamra, Shahna Goswami, and Karishma Tanna star. "Hush Hush revolves around a group of women whose picture-perfect lives unravel when an unexpected event brings to light secrets from their past and threatens everything they hold dear." The story "explores the storm that brews behind the seemingly quiet facade of these

5's plot synopsis reads: "Shaun and Lea make a major life decision and are pleasantly surprised by the outpouring of support from their hospital friends."

HOCUS POCUS 2

If you grew up in the 1990s, we're sure you've been waiting for this one. After nearly 30 years, your favourite trio of witches has returned to spook you. In *Hocus Pocus 2*, Bette Midler, Kathy Najimy, and Sarah Jessica Parker reprise their roles as the Sanders sisters. What is the plot? Three teenagers bring the Sanderson Sisters back from the dead to modern-day Salem and must figure out how to stop the child-hungry witches from destroying the entire town.

PLAN A PLAN B

Tamannaah Bhatia works as a matchmaker and believes that marriage is for everyone except herself. Ritesh Deshmukh is a successful divorce attorney who harbours a dark secret. Will they fall in love when they meet? (IANS/Slife)

"It is only an auctioneer who can equally and impartially admire all schools of art."

—Oscar Wilde

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 59 SHILLONG, MONDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2022

Courting complaints

It's a sign of the times that a row has erupted amid likely elevation of Supreme Court judge Justice DY Chandrachud as Chief Justice of India. An allegation is that he was behind some orders to help a client of his son, a lawyer in Bombay High Court. Complaints are also that his order from the Supreme Court on Covid-19 vaccination led to "wrongful" profits in thousands of crores to vaccine manufacturers. The Bar Council of India, no holy cow, came up in defence of Chandrachud. BCI says that RK Pathan who raised the allegations could be one who had been convicted in the past about raising "scandalous" complaints against a judge. BCI also argues that the 165-page letter he sent to President and CJI was a malicious attempt to tarnish the "fair" image of the judiciary and Chandrachud. For one, the frenzy on the part of the Bar Council to jump to conclusions and strongly defend the judge was both suspect and unwarranted at this crucial hour. It was for the authorities including the CJI to first ascertain facts and arrive at a fair conclusion before the name for the next CJI is finalised. The BCI sought to pre-judge matters.

What was once a fair image of the Indian judiciary is being tarnished mostly from within, and not from outside. This is well-known. One is reminded of the latest instance of how Justice NV Ramana exited from the post of CJI. Soon, word spread that he took undue advantage of his position and got around 25 acres of land from the Telangana government in the name of an institution he planned to set up in Hyderabad. Quid pro quos are suspected in every such deal but are generally not proven. There were several other allegations against him, but Ramana kept projecting himself as a sacred cow during his short 16 months stint as CJI. Justice UU Lalit who succeeded him as CJI has only 74 days to occupy the post before another CJI takes charge. He has been asked by the government to name the next CJI. Chandrachud is, as per seniority, in the line of succession. If appointed, he would have three years' tenure, which is appreciable in a jiffy. Notably, he is the son of India's longest-serving CJI, who was in the chair for over seven years, the late Justice YV Chandrachud. At a time when India's value systems are being crumbled by politicians in power the Judiciary is the last hope and therefore should remain free from controversy.

Animals in a zoo

By Toki Blah

seems has hit the Jackpot!

The bunch of us then trudged on to the next enclosure which housed the primates. Our guide who seemed to know each and every animal in that pen pointed out to two hoolock gibbons who he claimed had been recently brought from the Garo Hills and who had miraculously taken over the control of the whole tribe of penned monkeys. He claimed they had huge insatiable pouches which can swallow everything and also quick sticky fingers. Whatever food was thrown into the cages was pounced upon by these two and only scraps were left for the others. Of late the interest of the duo has shifted to rolling the dice,

server of primates to come to the conclusions he had on evolution.

Time was passing and so we quickly moved on to the next enclosure that housed all types and varieties of snakes and reptiles. They slithered and slid with that repulsive movement that only a snake can come up with. Makes one's skin crawl. Our guide was and proved to be a well educated and knowledgeable person and we were spell bound by his descriptions of the different characteristics of different types of vipers. He narrated Aesop's story of the snake that bites the very hand that feeds it. Now that sounded quite familiar especially in career options that some people choose

dancing like brainless idiots. We attend all the meetings they arrange and become hysterical in our support for our favorite thlen. We lose our senses when they start throwing money at us. We swallow every hollow promise they make. On public occasions we offer them the best seats. We address them as 'Honourable or Badonburom' though in our hearts we all know it's our blood and that of our children they suck to survive. Our own future and that of our children is doomed because of these scoundrels, but what to do? The poor chap simply gaped at my outburst. He just couldn't make head or tail of it but to tell the truth, neither could I, let me confess!

Time passes by very quickly when one is on an outing and that day at the zoo the same happened. Within no time we had to return home and so we headed back to where the cars were parked. Dusk was falling and the whole zoo was filled with the shrill chirping of mynas and harsh cawing of the crows. There was all around this high-pitched, strident and piercing cacophony of bird calls that simply produced nothing but sound. I don't know why but my mind simply switched back to what was happening back home and the similarity of the discordant mixture of the sound at the Guwahati zoo that day.

Back in Meghalaya too we have the multitude of groups, pressure groups, youth associations, seng-bhalang, lypung ki seng kynthei, lypung ki seng samla, lypung ki nongsynsynshar shong, Joint action committees, synjuk ki rangbah shong and what have you. Everyone has something to say; everyone has an opinion to express; everybody, has a view he thinks is worth listening to (I include myself in this group); various groups with different beliefs; every one with an idea - everyone one speaking at the same time; calling for attention; seeking an audience. Everyone is speaking. No one is listening. Everyone one means well but it has simply resulted in a disharmony of senseless noise. No tangible substantial action has ever come of it. And that is the Meghalaya I live in 50 years after it was created. It has yet to find its voice; yet to realize its potential; yet to visualize where it is going not as individuals but as a state and most important yet to learn how to elect a leader without voting instead for a thlen.

(The author is President, ICARE)

The Guwahati zoo or any zoo for that matter is an interesting place for both young and old and as such all of us enjoyed ourselves as well as the kids who had tagged along with us. We visited the crocodile enclosure and there three or four of the loathsome reptiles sunning themselves, some with their jaws wide open displaying those rows of gruesome looking teeth. I tried to look for the proverbial crocodile tears but they were not to be seen.

betting and gambling. God only knows why. Of interest also was a short stout well-built silver backed gorilla whom the guide said was interested only in the setting up of shopping malls, building hazardous dangerous roads and brittle collapsible bridges. Strange interests these apes have!

The guide also told us that the monkey season for choosing partners was near at hand. Individuals were forming groups of their liking; some not able to make up their minds as yet, sat moping in stressful contemplation which group to join, while there were some who had been refused membership to the groups they had applied for. They were the most pathetic of the lot as they frantically tried to show off their maturity (guess all of us know how monkeys do this) for acceptance. There were a few individuals who were walking, no strutting about would be a better word, with all the confidence in the world that they would next be the chosen leaders of their troop. The guide sneeringly commented that it was not unusual that such peacocks usually came last. We came away from that enclosure with the thought that Good Ole Charles Darwin must have really been a close ob-

and run after. He also dwelt adequately on the qualities of snakes that gave them the infamous phrase of "Being a snake in the grass" which he explains is an English idiom describing a person whom one just can't trust. Damn this guide, he was simply getting closer and closer to home turf that it was getting rather uncomfortable! He then suddenly came up with the one that hit us where it really hurts, below the belt that is. He then told us, "You are Khasis, so you must be experts on snake worship and very familiar with your Thlen, that monstrous fabricated folklore snake that eats and drinks only Tribal blood?" Let me tell you this was just too much to swallow. We couldn't bear it any longer. Here was a non-tribal making fun of our beliefs and traditions. Calling them fabricated. Fabricated indeed! I gave him a piece of my mind. "Look here," I said "these are not superstitious beliefs, made up stories or fabricated yarns. They exist and we still worship the Thlen, but we are modern Khasis and so do it in a more modern constitutional manner. Once every five years we elect our own thlens, OK? When the thlens call, all of us come out of our homes and hearth, cheering, singing and

would not have treated the matter lightly or left garbage behind.

In such a situation, I am sure the Government would not have treated the matter so lightly and would not have been in such haste to brush everything under the carpet. After all, in such a scenario the lives lost would not have not have been those of hapless migrant coal mine workers who have no one to back them but of legislators!

Yours etc.,
D Nongrum,
Shillong-3

Animal lives over human lives?

Editor,

Recently, a pack of stray dogs were roaming and terrorising the streets of Laitumkhrah. They attacked several people including children. Unfortunately, I was one of them. Naturally, as residents of the locality we had to do something. So, we called the Municipal Board to handle the situation. No sooner had we called the Municipal Board when we got a call from a renowned 'Animal lover's' association. They told us that they had heard we called the Municipal Board about the situation and instructed us that it was against the law to relocate the stray animals even if they were a threat to our daily lives. We were concerned as many of us were terrified of even leaving our homes. But

even then, we tried to listen to their views and reasons. Hence we waited for them to give an alternate solution but instead they told us we should let them be, as it was according to the Court's order that the strays should not be captured and relocated.

It would seem that the Court is more concerned about the lives of these animals than the lives of innocent people. How in our right minds would we let a pack of dangerous strays roam the streets on which our children and elders commute every day? Is this right? If they were to oppose the way we handled things they should have an alternate solution ready. We asked them if they would come and pick up the dogs and provide shelter for these strays. Instead, they said they were not financially equipped to shelter the strays. So, what do we do then? Live in fear for the very lives of our families. Do the lives of these animals matter more than the lives of our children, parents etc?

I strongly believe that if these animal lovers were to oppose to the ways things are handled they should have alternate solutions - ones that endanger neither the lives of these animals nor that of innocent people.

Yours etc.,
Adriali Lyngdoh
Via email

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Citizens Committee blames centre for not doing enough to quell NE Delhi riots

Lokur panel flays BJP leaders & social media for fomenting trouble

By Satyaki Chakraborty

A Citizens Committee comprising former Supreme Court and High Court judges and a former Home Secretary of the Union Government have authored a report raising serious questions about the role of the news media, social media, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Hindu nationalist leaders, the Delhi police, and both the Union Government as well as the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, in either fomenting the North East Delhi riots of February 2020, or not doing enough to quell them.

The report, titled Uncertain Justice: A Citizens Committee Report on the North East Delhi Violence 2020, has been authored by Justice Madan B. Lokur, former Supreme Court judge; Justice A.P. Shah, former Chief Justice of the Madras and Delhi High Courts and former Chairman, Law Commission of India; Justice R.S. Sodhi, former Delhi High Court judge; Justice Anjana Prakash, former Patna High Court judge; and G.K. Pillai, retired Indian Administrative Service officer and former Home Secretary of the Union Government. Justice Lokur chaired the committee.

The report examines different facets of the violence in Delhi: the context of and build-up to the riots, the state's response through the entire episode, the polarisation created by sections of the electronic and social media, the legal strength of the Delhi police's investigation into the violence, and the larger implications of the way the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act ('UAPA') was used.

The report sets out the context of the months preceding the riots. The Muslim community was dealing with insecurity due to the potential combined effect of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act ('CAA'), 2019 and the proposed National Register of Citizens, and several members of the community had joined nationwide anti-CAA protests. BJP leaders, in the party's election campaign for the Delhi Assembly elections in early 2020, continuously painted the anti-CAA protestors as traitors, and encouraged violence against them.

This was amplified by the electronic news media and social media platforms, an analysis of the content of which between December 2019 and February 2020 shows the creation of a Muslim versus Hindu narrative centred in the coverage of these events, through the vilification of the protests, airing unfounded conspiracy theories about them, and calling for their shutdown by police force.

This, combined with hate speech spread on social media by BJP leaders and Hindu nationalist figures against Muslims, "significantly contributed to creating a climate in which a significant section of society became receptive to incitement and calls for violence against the Muslim community."

The report closely examines the days leading to the riots and concludes that hateful content purveyed in the area on February 22 and 23 by certain BJP leaders and Hindu nationalists "was designed to incite, exhort and provoke actions of violence and ... acted as an immediate trigger to the break-out."

It suggests that the violence started between the pro-CAA and anti-CAA camps, but eventually descended into a communal clash between Hindus and Muslims, as Muslim homes, businesses, places of worship were especially targeted, leading to the death of 40 Muslims, apart from 13 Hindus.

The report castigates the State's response to the violence, characterising all stages of the violence "by a frightening undermining of democratic values."

It criticises the Delhi Po-

lice for failing to reign in hate speech by political leaders in the run up to the riots, and states that the police allegedly assisted mobs and attacked Muslim civilians, indicating police complicity in the violence. It calls for a court-monitored independent investigation into the police failures.

It also calls the role of the Union Home Affairs Ministry "wholly inadequate", and demands a serious examination of its failure to respond to the violence. It claims that the Ministry did not avail of any effective steps to respond to the spread of violence, and didn't increase police deployment on the days of the riots. It holds that a "comprehensive, independent review of the body of known intelligence, total police and other security force strength, and sequence of deployment across affected areas during the days of violence, is urgently required."

It also censures the Delhi government for doing little to mediate between the two communities in conflict in the days leading up to the violence, or calm the situation. It also holds it guilty of not providing timely and adequate relief and compensation to the victims of the violence.

The report analysed a chargesheet filed by the police alleging "that there was a pre-planned conspiracy to instigate the violence which involved terrorist acts" and in which the UAPA was invoked, and finds that it lacks credibility. It also finds that the legal threshold for alleging crimes or terrorism is not met, and casts doubt on the claims made in the chargesheet.

It comes down on the police's investigation in other cases registered under the India Penal Code, for "bearing the taint of tutoring and fabrication", and describes most of the witness statements as 'unreliable'. It calls the entire direction of the investigation 'skewed', and submits that "only an impartial and rigorous investigation can shed light on the truth, ensure accountability, and do justice to the victims of the violence."

It also criticises the misuse of the UAPA by the police in order to incongruously target anti-CAA protestors for allegedly committing crimes against Muslims, and calls for a comprehensive review of the UAPA.

The report states that the committee's examination of the violence led it to "discern broader implications impacting constitutional values and the health of democracy in India. The microcosm of an engineered anti-Muslim narrative leading to the violence signals the growing fusion of hate messaging in public discourse with the actual incidence of violence. There seems to be a deafening lack of institutional will to act against hateful content."

It refers to the effective and balanced regulation of broadcasting and social media as an urgent challenge. It further reflects that "capacity for empathetic thought and action to enable harmonious interactions, and most importantly, imagination to resolve conflict are essential attributes for a plural society to last in the long run. ... The only way forward is for the state to act towards justice harboured in the conjoined practice of fraternity, equality and freedom."

It concludes by demanding the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry to probe the riots; it also points out "that the terms of reference and the choice of the Chairperson for the proposed Commission of Inquiry assure the affected communities of its independent and effective functioning." (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

The infamous dome collapse saga

Editor,
The explanations given by the CM of Meghalaya which appeared in the media as reasons for the collapse of the Meghalaya Assembly dome based on IIT Guwahati's enquiry is complete hogwash, ridiculous and belittles the intelligence of the citizens of the State. If the IIT Guwahati enquiry report says the collapse is only due to "Dead Load," ill design and lack of coordination and that no one is responsible then the IIT has not done a proper study and not brought out the reasons for the collapse or identified the people or agencies responsible for the structural failure.

This report should therefore be trashed; no money should be paid and no further studies should be entrusted to IIT Guwahati. It is extremely disappointing that a reputed technical institute like IIT has not pin-pointed the structural design lapses or the agency responsible for such designs or for that matter tested and reported on the quality of materials used for constructing the base on which the dome was to rest. It is a procedure in designing a structure that the total dead load, live load and all external loads including the seismic factor are taken into consideration to ensure that the structure itself is safe and that the ground can safely

take the load of the building. The CM's explanation of "Dead Load" as the reason for the dome collapse implies that the dome was originally not part of the plan and suddenly a 70 tonnes load was added to the structure. If such is the case, all persons responsible for the decision to add the dome should be prosecuted as per law.

However, as far as public knowledge goes everyone was aware that a dome adorned the original plan. If the dome was part of the original plan, then the collapse would be due to shortcomings in designing the structure. In that case the designing agency should be prosecuted along with all who had vetted the design.

The crux of the matter here is that responsibility has been completely diluted and therefore no one is accountable. Just some epoxy treatment, filling up of cracks at no cost and changing over to a lighter dome seems to be the quick-fix solution for the CM.

The Chief Engineer, PWD (Buildings) who is the technical head insofar as government building construction is concerned, does not seem to have any role in this project and the public glare has fallen only on an Executive Engineer. Did the CE, PWD not technically approve this structure? If not why was the Executive Engineer, PWD supervising the work? What was the role of the Departmental Technical Committee of PWD in this project?

If the CE, PWD has not technically vetted this building and the Departmental Technical Committee has not recommended for technical approval of this project or the competent authority has not examined and accorded building permission then there is serious violation of the standing Rules of State Government Manuals of PWD, the building bye-laws and the building is unauthorised and liable to prosecution as per law.

Getting external agencies for project execution is fine, looking at the performance of our own government departments but what role did the Buildings Division of PWD play in this project? Were they not supposed to check the design and to ensure that only the finest quality materials were used for construction purposes? Was there any system put in place to test and check the quality of materials used in the construction? It seems all responsibilities were abdicated by PWD Buildings and everything was left to external agencies.

Another important question is - What was the role of the Project Management Consultants (PMC)? Were they constituted only to channelise funds to beneficiaries without any technical responsibilities? Weren't there any engineers in the PMC? Weren't they supposed to coordinate between the designers, contractors and the PWD? The fact that standing rules of the State Government have been bent and the haste shown in selecting the contractor

- Uttar Pradesh Rajkiya Nirman Nigam Ltd - and subsequently allowing them to sub-contract the work to a firm that was also blacklisted, reeks of serious irregularities. It will be interesting to see what was in the original contract agreement.

The role of the High Powered Committee set up by the Government appears ambiguous and is aimed towards dilution of responsibility. While they have approved the architectural and building plan of the Assembly building they should have had no role in the technical aspects of the project or to condone any technical lapses because none of the members of the HPC are technically qualified to adjudicate on the matter. They are mere politicians.

Government projects are guided by Government rules and procedures as laid down in the PWD Manual but in this particular project the entire system has been bypassed and therefore no one is responsible or accountable. What a farce indeed! It is very important that the above-cited issues are addressed and responsibilities fixed. Otherwise, a very bad precedent has been set. If everything is hunky dory and no one is at fault in the entire incident and if everything is brushed aside casually as is being done in this case, just think of a situation, where God forbid, the collapse would have taken place when the Assembly was in session! How many lives would be lost? I am sure that in such a situation the Government

"Look up at the stars and not down
at your feet. Try to make sense of what
you see, and wonder about what makes
the universe exist. Be curious."

— Stephen Hawking

The Shillong Times

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NPP chief's condescending attitude
EACH time the Rajya Sabha MP and State NPP President, WR Kharlukhi opens his mouth to give a public statement he does so at great cost to his own Party. By spewing venom at the Opposition and deriding them in the most revolting manner, he is belittling his own stature. In a democracy the Opposition is not the enemy and a certain amount of civility is expected among politicians. Moreover, the prime duty of a parliamentarian is to represent the people of Meghalaya and speak on issues of concern for the state. Kharlukhi on the contrary has asserted his role as NPP Chief while subsuming his role as a public representative into that of party politics. Rarely has Kharlukhi been heard raising issues in the Rajya Sabha. Anyone would think that all is well with Meghalaya. Rather, other MPs not belonging to the region seem more concerned about the illegal coal mining and other developmental backlogs that plague Meghalaya. Between having to defend the several acts of omission and commission of the MDA Government led by his Party the NPP, and his role as MP, the scales have tilted towards his role as NPP President. No Party President has had to defend the Party as much as Kharlukhi has.

In contrast, the UDP President is hardly ever heard defending his Party or saying anything controversial. Not even when the Education cum Home Minister from his Party has often overstepped his brief – from the police encounter at Cheristerfield Thangkhiw's home resulting in the death of the former militant to the recent tear-gassing of agitating teachers, to the systemic corruption that facilitates illegal coal mining and transportation in broad daylight. But that is also because the UDP Chief is also the Speaker of the present House. Going by parliamentary norms, the UDP Chief should have stepped down from his post as Party President but in Meghalaya such norms are not observed. The NPP Chief has been left to single-handedly defend the MDA Government. Surely Kharlukhi is not blind to these crimes happening in the state. Add to all this the shameful dome collapse which is now sought to be buried much like a cat buries its excreta, by contracting IIT Guwahati to help do the cover-up job.

In every scam that has surfaced from the rice scam to the Saubhagya scam no one has been held accountable – not the Ministers in Charge of Social Welfare and Power nor the officers, when corruption should have been dealt with speedily. Someone must be held culpable for the acts of commission. The fact that Meghalaya has a silent citizenry has only emboldened the Government to take corruption in its stride.

Letters to the Editor

Local language & banking services

Editor,
In the 75th Annual General Meeting of the Indian Banks' Association in Mumbai, towards the end of last September, the Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs, Nirmala Sitharaman has urged the bankers to provide precedence in the space of appointments to those who mandatorily are conversant with the local dialect in their respective establishments as they're closely dealing with the public. The Union Minister has reiterated in unambiguous terms, thus, "Show inclusivity in your staff, in the way you speak to your customers. When you have staff who do not talk the regional language and who demand citizens speak in a particular language, you have a problem. Please review the people getting posted at branches; people who cannot speak the local language should not be assigned to roles dealing with customers. You must have a lot more sensible ways of recruiting persons".

Hence, knowledge of the local dialect has been attributed as the most enabling quotient in the conduct of everyday banking transac-

tions. Aply, Sitharaman has reminded that it's not the Managing Director or the Chairman of the banks, but the security guards, clerks, tellers etc., that the commoners interact with when they have any banking problems. The adverse consequences of language restrictions can lead to unprecedented loss of substantive businesses! In my personal experience while visiting many bank establishments stationed in the urban areas, I've found that a good number of key staff dealing with the customers can hardly converse in the local language, and the less we speak of their counterparts in rural areas the better.

I am much constrained to note that in the Meghalaya Rural Bank where I have some goodwill Hynniewtrep friends of mine employed, I have been given to understand that some staff, irrespective of their gender/family background have been transferred to the remote parts of Garo Hills and posted there for years on end and for many Garo dialect is Latin to them. Henceforth, I hope the management of the Meghalaya Rural Bank listens to our Union Finance Minister's advisory!

Now, turning to another coincidental perspective of our State, the Government of Meghalaya must be profusely acclaimed for having adopted a policy that for being selected as a State's Judicial

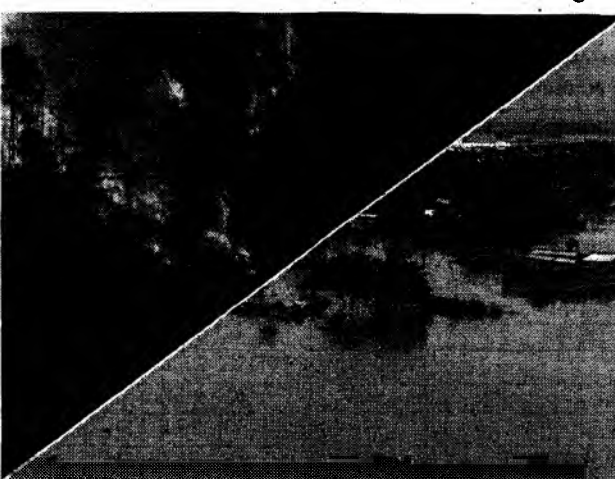
The front-page news item "Bishops in North East Raise Alarm Over Climate Change: Vows Action," (ST September 18, 2022) has touched a chord in me. I am mentally hurt, very perturbed, highly agitated and brutally wounded to witness with my own eyes the gradual disappearance of the thick virgin forests with valuable deciduous trees in many parts of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills beginning from early 1967-1968 to 1976-1979. Their rapid disappearance happened from 1980-81 onwards till 1993-94 when almost all these hills and dales turned barren except some parts of government reserved forests and a few patches of the Khasi Hills District Council plantations and some jungles in private lands.

This has serious effects on climate change reducing rainfall and shrinkage of water bodies due to depletion of water from catchment areas. There has been rampant and indiscriminate degradation of the environment through coal and limestone mining, quarrying and sand mining thereby eroding the earth's crust and causing pollution to water bodies which gradually began from the early 1970s. The pace has increased since 1981-82 and became a mad race from 1992-93 till date and has seen no respite despite interventions from the apex court. The implementation of central laws and rules in the form of ban on mining of coal and other minerals mining and their extraction has fallen on deaf ears.

For taking up this crucial issue I must profusely thank Bah Toki Blah for his splendid article which has incited me to pen this response related to the environmental crisis we face today and which has a direct impact on climate change. Toki Blah's spontaneous reaction to the above-mentioned news item has provoked me to think aloud at our collective apathy at this looming environmental crisis. I fully endorse the views of Toki Blah and agree with the suggestions given therein and I appeal to the powers that be and to stakeholders to take his valuable suggestions with the seriousness they deserve and to implement them with commitment. I also appeal to land owners with vast tracks of land as well as those who may possess smaller plots not only to grow crops but also to plant mixed species of valuable indigenous trees in those vacant lands and not to

leave any plot of land vacant in towns or villages because green crops and trees help to absorb carbon dioxide and monoxide and thereby, help reduce the thick layer of carbon presence in the atmosphere which is the accumulated cause of the increasing heat in our atmosphere and the much debated and talked about Climate Change.

As one of many who is concerned about the continued indiscriminate loot and plunder of natural resources in this land and also the criminal discharge of toxic wastes into our water bodies and air which has resulted in climate change, I feel that the 2023 elections should be based on this agenda. It is man's insatiable greed that is



behind all these environmental onslaughts. These human crimes against nature which continue unabated in spite of various resolutions adopted and declarations emerging from many Earth Summits beginning from Rio in 1992 from many other countries thereafter have seen very few countries sticking to their commitments of carbon reductions and in implementing the resolutions adopted at these earth summits.

Now, coming back to the NE Bishops' conclave in Mumbai, it is very strange that the Bishops of North East Region responded feebly and rather late in the day to the environmental catastrophe which has already taken a toll in our country and particularly, here in our own North Eastern Region. This is very shameful, highly irresponsible and reprehensible on the part of these prominent church leaders of the region. They should have been prompt in responding to the major crisis with practical actions many years back when they saw with their own eyes on how the virgin forests and other natural resources of

By Philip Marwein

this region were plundered and looted by timber merchants, mineral barons and other anti-social elements in collusion with government agencies as stated by one of the Bishops who was part of the conclave.

Other natural resources like coal, limestone, silimanite, sand stones, mica, iron ore etc., are all indiscriminately looted and the land is laid waste everywhere disfiguring the beautiful landscapes given by God to us. The Bishops' conclave on environment and climate change is nothing short of tokenism considering that the environment is already battered. In fact, these Bishops are jolly well satisfied with their cloistered dogma

natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God."

The Bishops should have led a sustained crusade for integrity of the earth and for which cause should have pushed them to lead from the front by openly denouncing the evil of looting and plundering God's gift to man, the natural wealth of the 'Common Home', the Earth. The Bishops of NER spent maximum time in spiritual exercises, contemplations, reflections on the word of god, preaching and exhorting the faithful to work hard to save their souls but have done nothing to preach and teach to the people of God on the environmental depletion, degradation, ecological crisis that pushes humankind and other living creatures to the brink of extinction from this wonderful planet.

Following in the footsteps of the Popes, the North East Bishops/Arch-Bishops should have issued many encyclicals on environmental destruction, ecological crisis and climate change. They should have been the first ones to spread awareness, teach, preach, mobilise and lead the people from the front in their respective jurisdictions in the war of protecting, conserving and preserving the planet earth from total destruction that it is facing today. Where are the pastoral letters issued by them not only on faith and morals but also on social teachings and exhortations on this vital issue of environmental and ecological crisis and other burning social issues that afflict society? Perhaps others might have seen them but, as for me, I have not seen any. In fact, the last pastoral letters were issued a long time ago by (Late) Hubert D'Rosario, SDB, DD, Arch-Bishop of Shillong-Guwahati. His pastoral letters were staunchly firm in dealing with issues of faith and morals. On the environment he called upon the faithful and all stakeholders to unitedly join hands to protect planet earth from continued depletion and degradation due to insatiable greed of man, thereby endangering himself and other living beings. Arch-bishop Rosario was intelligent and had a towering personality. He was a disciplinarian and commanded respect both from the clerics and the laity and wore an aura of authority yet he was amiable, approachable, a man of god and when he preached, he did it with authenticity and sincerity. Such men alas no longer walk this earth!

children and young ones to be good, to be righteous, to never lie, to never fear, to hurt no one, to never cheat, etc. This must be so, for, to impart such high ideals is our duty however our greatest responsibility is to practice these ideals for our young ones to observe and follow. After all it is our footprints that they will tread on.

Somebody, highly respectable asked me, what is the most precious gift that parents can give their children? The answer can be just one and that is 'Time.' In today's fast moving life, if there is anything that we seem to be deprived of, consciously or unconsciously, it is Time. We often hear one another say in conversation that we really don't have time. But the truth is that we all have time but somehow fail to judiciously make use of our time. We have actually failed to divide our time and prioritise engagements, duties, responsibilities and make time for the most important people in our lives.

These days, we are so occupied with our gadgets that we prefer to spend the maximum amount of our time with our smartphones, our laptops, ipads, etc. Be it at home, restaurants, airports, any place it's the gadgets that have become our bosom pals. Aren't our priorities here different from what they ought to be? Are we spending the right time in

O, modesty, where Art Thou?

By Abdial Susngi

Let's get things clear from the start, I am not an Anthonian! Rather, since my school days, and even now, I consider Anthonians as my rivals. However, the flak that St. Anthony's College (SAC) received these past few days from anonymous 'haters', evidently inside 'haters', demands some form of response. SAC is, with regards to the current issue at hand, in the bad spot for the wrong reasons; and this response, or defence, if I dare refer to it as such, would have not been made had the bad light shone for the right reasons; but since SAC is under attack because of what can be regarded as conservative (not traditional or reactionary) and genteel stances, I cannot be a silent and passive observer.

What SAC, and its faculty, have been facing these past days is nothing but a textbook case of the Progressives' Bully Tactics, an all too common, and even boring, play of Left - Liberals, Post Modern Neanderthals; an M. O of the bager sort, if

those who prefer to be decadent, but I assure you that I do not intend to mock, though I would not necessarily go beyond fence and gate to convince you otherwise.

It should be clear to anyone with basic reading skills, common sense, integrity, and dignity, that clothing sends SIGNALS! The attire we adorn ourselves sends messages to other individuals. It is exactly for this reason that a referee gives a red card to a rowdy footballer for a fault and does not mail the red card to the policeman handling traffic! Dress, clothing, sends signals. Therefore, it is only natural for men or women to be distracted by mixed and confusing signals sent by an individual who dresses in a manner which would contradict his or her actual location and designation. To make it simple, one cannot dress as an irresponsible tramp when entering an institution of learning, higher learning or otherwise. (Which is probably one reason why sane individuals can differentiate

"Even secular history would tell you that the first forms of clothing were adopted for the purpose of covering nakedness, because early individuals knew that fire could warm but that nakedness still brought shame, so they covered their privates."

we are to be blunt! This is also excitedly a clear example of imported and transplanted virtue signalling and irresponsible atomised individualism from the West, aided and facilitated prominently, if not entirely, by the mad craze for Western Mimicking and Delusional Assimilation of alienesque culture!

Here I will try to present here some important thoughts on the issue of modest apparel that I would hope defend SAC's position, and also hopefully strike a blow to the decadent attitudes and voices that had wasted this fine newspaper's ink and column space.

Firstly, I would like to remind the readers of the primary purpose of dressing, or clothing. Here I'll have to make a quick but unapologetic reference to Genesis 3:21, when the LORD made coats of skin to replace the sorry fig leaf aprons Adam and Eve made for themselves to cover their nakedness. Even secular history would tell you that the first forms of clothing were adopted for the purpose of covering nakedness, because early individuals knew that fire could warm but that nakedness still brought shame, so they covered their privates.

Secondly, clothing provides basic protection from the elements. "Duh! This is a no brainer!", is what any Tom Dick and Harry would say a few years back; but this common sensical observation is no longer so common anymore, hence the reminder!

Thirdly, clothing provides identity. Culture and heritage would be wanting, and even rather inconvenient, if clothing is removed from the sum total of a community's This is who we are Package. And, if we are to skip a few steps beyond ethnic tribalism and cultural roots, we will find that even in our so called modern and cosmopolitan times, clothing still carries the weight of identity: individual and professional and group identity!

At this juncture, I would like to remind of the maxim "If you're not selling, do not advertise!" One may think that this is too much mockery of

between an anime doll costume and a genuine, school uniform worn with feelings of nostalgia!

Furthermore, by dressing scantily and provocatively, one is accentuating private or sexual parts, sending sexual signals to everyone in the immediate vicinity, and may be even further; and it would be ludicrous to expect that healthy, normal men and women would not pick up these signals. Regardless, of what response such stimuli create in the persons tragically exposed to such signals, the fact remains that signals are sent and received. Some can brush it off, with the so famous Indian "side spit" or the classic Khasi "Phuit ka khlemrain!" remark, thereby informing us that sex signals do not always sire episodes of "Mental Rape", but can sire week-long spells of "Mental Puke" as well; but sadly, some cannot resist such sex signals. So, hats off to those who try to fight and push off thoughts of committing "Mental Rape" or "Mental Adultery"; at least they are trying to keep their families intact, thereby, contributing to societal stability and integrity, the family being the fundamental unit of society. Even if the effort might be at the personal, and intellectual level; it remains a principled stance! Such individuals, who were brave enough to admit their shortcomings and even confront the proverbial blackhole, that is on the path of devouring to oblivion all norms of social value and integrity, to save their meaningful relationships and families, are definitely stars in a class of their own, and such have a greater claim and entitlement to continue as productive members of society, or are on the way to becoming so.

However, the jungle and Farzan are always there for those who are yet to learn the essential meanings, values and purposes of clothing, social and individual integrity, modesty and responsibility! I only hope that people come to their senses and better nature before such careless, irresponsible and decadent attitudes of uncivilised brats and bullies strip our communities of all modesty, honour and integrity!

Yours etc.
Gordon Wahlang.
Via email

Essence of Durga Puja

Editor,
"The essence of Durga Puja is the triumph of truth over untruth, good over evil, light over darkness and triumph of knowledge over ignorance". This is a line one came across in a letter to the editor written by Uma Purkayastha during this Durga Puja Festival. These words kept ringing in my ears as words that should have otherwise been tenets and principles that should govern humans across the globe. Sadly values like truth, honesty, goodness are today lost in the deep chasm of immorality and ill health of the soul and spirit.

Here on earth we do not live in isolation but in a community. Now, what is a community if not a conglomeration of human beings irrespective of one's age, sex, height, colour, race, caste or creed, religion? Yet, it is in this very world and within this very community that we have no faith, no trust, no sympathy, no humanity, no love. What we have today is more of dishonesty, brutality, immorality, fear, suspicion, etc. As parents and elders, we teach our

Magistrate, a candidate must have the knowledge of either Khasi or Garo vernaculars. This epoch-making decision, many are convinced, will go a long way to put paid to unabated influx of doubtful citizens and open wide avenues of employment to the indigenous citizens, be they tribals or non-tribals. I hope the Khasi Authors' Society has expressed appreciation to the Government for this unique gesture!

Yours etc.
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Via email

Election predictions

Editor,
Apropos of the news item "Pala accuses UDP of making dirty money" and "Opp balloon will burst mid-air during polls: NPP state Chief" (ST October 10, 2022). Desperate Pala is trying to piggy-back ride on the UDP to influence the Sutnga-Saipung seat in his favour. The NPP State Chief's argument is rational when he says he doesn't really know who will be NPP's immediate opponent as the small opposition of 12 is divided. Data suggests that NPP is at the advantageous point and based on data my analysis indicates that NPP will return with 35 seats in a house of 60 in 2023.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

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"So vast is art, so narrow human wit."

— Alexander Pope

The Shillong Times

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Mulayam -- Rise and fall

MULAYAM Singh Yadav, whose final rites were performed on Tuesday, was among the tallest leaders of a bygone, power-packed era. He was past his prime, mostly cooling his heels after he anointed his son, Akhilesh Yadav, as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh in 2012 and lost control of his own Samajwadi Party in 2017. Mulayam was an astute politician, having started as a socialist in the Ram Manohar Lohia mould, changed parties, cobbled unprincipled ties, became chief minister thrice and functioned once as central defence minister. Until the BJP knocked him and his party down in 2017, he called the shots in Uttar Pradesh politics. Mulayam's undoing was the selection of his son as his heir apparent. The party lost its verve. Mulayam's dynastic style saw the party eventually and vertically being divided into two factions -- led by his brother and son. In fact, seasons are changing. After reaching a high, several dynasts are now falling by the wayside; the Mulayam dynasty too.

Mulayam's Samajwadi Party perfected the art of caste-based politics, set against the religion-based offensives of the BJP. In fact, Mulayam and his contemporary, Lalu Prasad Yadav of Bihar, had made huge successes out of caste-configurations in politics. Both were from the Socialist school but they ignored ideology and built their parties on the basis of a casteist, Yadav-Muslim communal alliance in the two Hindi-belt states. The Mandal offensive by VP Singh had created the right conditions for both Mulayam and Lalu to indulge. When they set the tone for 'Mandal' politics, the BJP came from behind and stole the wind out of their sails with the Kamandal offensive a la the Ram Mandir initiative based out of Ayodhya -- cited as the birth place of Lord Ram. When blame is put on Mulayam and Lalu as also Mayawati for their caste-based politics that won them power, the BJP with its religious push too shares the blame. Put together, politics in India has gone for a toss.

Today's politics is largely divorced from the politics of the past that was based on ideologies or isms. The degeneration of the Congress party, typified in the wanton greed of its leaders, was one reason for this gross downslide. Footloose regional sharks raised their heads, formed parties and grabbed power. Taking full advantage of the nation's present plight is the bureaucracy that is increasingly turning corrupt. A new generation of politicians is in command today, there are some positive vibes, but overall there still is no light at the end of the dark tunnel.

Religion and politics a lethal cocktail

By Barnes Mawrie

The ongoing sporadic attacks against the Muslims in different states of India and the recent attack on Christians in South Tripura and of Christian youth in Khandwa in Madhya Pradesh, clearly show that the Hindu right wing groups like the RSS and Bajrang Dal are at the helm of affairs in BJP-ruled states. The unwillingness of the governments in these states to take swift and decisive actions against the goons, vindicates this presumption. During this second term of the BJP-led MDA government at the centre, we have witnessed a rapidly growing religious intolerance in our beloved country. God forbid! If the same government would win again in 2024, we may witness a civil war in India or another partition pogrom.

This brings me to a reflection on the danger of linking religion to politics. Religion and politics are immiscible just like oil and water. One will only contaminate the other and just like oil

can make water inflammable, so too politics turns religion into a flame of bigotry. European history has clearly demonstrated this dangerous cocktail of religion and politics. In the medieval Europe when Christianity was at its height, the Pope was the king maker and the cardinals and bishops were princes in their own terms. It was a period when the Church was deeply involved in politics. The popes as well as the cardinals and bishops were simultaneously religious leaders as well as statesmen and politicians. In fact, each bishop or cardinal would govern his own territory not merely ecclesiastically, but politically as well. This mixing of religion and politics proved to be detrimental in every way. It led to ambition, arrogance and thirst for power which often resulted

in assassinations and military conflicts. Besides this, there was greed to amass wealth even by religious leaders and the craze for comfort and luxury. This deadly cocktail also facilitated the emergence of the crusades as they were sanctioned by the Church and patronized by Christian rulers. We know from history that even the crusades which were originally intended only to defend Christian pilgrims to Holy Land, became a tool of greed and ambition. Often the Church used political

religion. Many new religious congregations emerged as new forms of living a Christian life detached from the mundane affairs. Gradually, the Church began to segregate itself from political affairs. This was facilitated by the emergence of the philosophies of secularism, religious freedom and religious pluralism.

The French Revolution in 1789 ended the role of the Church in politics in France and state governance passed into the hands of the

powerful was the Ottoman Caliphate which reigned from 1517 till 1924. Religion's involvement in politics continues in Muslim countries. Today we have countries like Iran, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Sudan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Gulf states where Islam is intertwined with state affairs. In these states, the Sharia Law is the law of the land. Consequently what we witness in these countries is the rise of religious fundamentalism, religious intolerance, denial of basic human rights and an establishment of theocracy.

The recent events of misogyny displayed in Muslim countries like Iran and Afghanistan, are a clear proof of aberrations when religion dominates politics. Unfortunately, India under the present government, is treading the same dangerous path. We are witnessing a religious incursion into politics which is manifested in the implementation of the Hindutva agenda. Thus political campaigns these days are replete with religious themes. It is believed that the inauguration of the new Ram Temple in Ayodhya will become a vital agenda



ers to crush dissenting voices or the so called heretical groups. Religious intolerance was at its height. The Spanish Inquisition which lasted from 1478 to 1834 is a horrific reminder of this. It took a saintly man like St. Francis of Assisi to bring the Church

people's parliament. The repercussions of the French Revolution were far reaching and gradually the delinking of religion from politics was followed suit by other countries. With the signing of the Lateran Pact in 1929, the Church in Italy was relieved

in the BJP's election campaign in 2024 and people may fall prey to it. The growing persecution of Muslims and Christians in different parts of the country shows that India is heading towards a theocracy where Hinduism would be made a state religion. I fear that India is fast slipping into the medieval philosophy of "cuius regio eius religio" (the king's religion is the people's religion). If this should happen we may say that "modern India is backtracking towards medievalism."

When will our country learn from lessons of the past? It is time to vote out any form of religious fundamentalism. India is a land of religious and cultural diversity where people of every race, creed and culture live side by side as brothers and sisters.

Can we afford to give up such a beautiful legacy?

"The growing persecution of Muslims and Christians in different parts of the country shows that India is heading towards a theocracy where Hinduism would be made a state religion."

to an awareness that religion is best left to itself without being corrupted by politics. Thus by the 1300s there were many protesting voices from church leaders and thinkers regarding the danger of

of its influence in politics.

In the Middle East, the unholy marriage between religion and politics began with the Rashidun Caliphate in 632 AD. There were many caliphates The most

Prejudice, population and misguided policy

By Jagdish Rattanani

The RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat has yet again cited population growth as an important issue facing India today. At the Dussehra-day rally, he was quoted as saying: "Population control and religion-based population balance is an important subject that can no longer be ignored." Population "control" is an oft-heard phrase across the spectrum; the need for population "balance" based particularly on religion lends it a sharp and predictable political edge. But at its root is still the language of "control" to check growing numbers on the thinking that goes something like this: the more the people, the less each one gets of scarce resources, so we stay poor, remain backward and cannot march with the times. We must "control" the population if we are to do well and provide for the numbers we already have. This simplistic presentation, bought by a large section of people, is a precursor to the demand for policy action that applies to all in theory but has its worst impacts in practice on those at the bottom of the pyramid who tend to have more children. This is how the demand for the "two-child norm" would work -- those who need support, subsidies, rations and other inputs the most cannot get them if they have more than two children.

There is enough data to argue that this is not how population dynamics work to deliver the results that we may seek. For example, India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR; loosely put, the number of children per woman) has consistently fallen. TFR was reported at 3.39 (NFHS-1, 1990-92), 2.85 (NFHS-2, 1996-98), 2.68 (NFHS-3, 2003-05), 2.18 (NFHS-4, 2015-16), and 1.99 (NFHS-5, 2019-21).

Today, as many as 31 States and Union Territories, including all the States in the South, the West and the North region have fertility below 2.1, which is the replacement fertility rate (so-called because at this rate a woman and her partner would have replaced themselves). Yet, it will take some time for what is called "population momentum" to break because a large number of women are still in the reproductive age bracket. TFR is of course impacted by many factors. The number ranges from 1.1 children per woman in Sikkim to a high of 3.0 children per woman in Bihar. TFR among Muslims is higher than other religions at 2.36 (NFHS-5) but it too has been following a declining trend, going down over the years: 4.41 in NFHS-1, 3.59 in NFHS-2, 3.40 in NFHS-3, 2.62 in NFHS-4.

It is possible to use the numbers to argue in many ways but what should be reasonable to note is that there is no conspiracy among a certain set of people to grow their numbers. Demographics tells us that as the level of education (particularly of the woman) and the standard of living of the family moves up, the number of children per woman generally comes down. The gap in TFR seen between rural and urban, between poorer and richer and those with lower levels of schooling versus high school coverage points to the close connection of population numbers with development indices at the grassroots. The fertility rate therefore holds a mirror to how fast or slow the nation and sub sections thereof are moving to open opportunities for the weakest and the poor-

est. If the RSS can argue that we need to move faster on population, then the case must be for offering more opportunity to those not benefiting from India's so-called growth story. The fertility rate then takes care of itself. Muslims and Hindus, rich and the poor, educated and the not-so-educated have similar aspirations, ambitions and the desire to a decent standard of living. Some have benefited from the system; others have been left behind.

In this picture, the phraseology of "control" then works to put down the weakest. It denies State resources to those who need them the most. It turns attention away from what is urgently required in terms of development to a top-down command-and-control approach that treats people not as citizens with rights but subjects who must be controlled and punished. It refuses to recognise the approach and the language of sexual and reproductive rights and supplants it with power to bureaucrats, who understand little about the subject. One example of this is the police being used in many cases and areas of India to dictate behaviour to consenting adult couples; another recent example is that of a bureaucrat in Bihar who mocked a student and wondered if she would ask questions on contraceptives. The bureaucrat in this case later apologised.

As the late Prof. Hans Rosling, who co-founded Médecins sans Frontières and is best known for offering insights from UN population data, once said: "The world 'used to be' 'we' and 'them.' And 'we' is the Western world and 'them' is the Third World." The difference: the West had long life and small family. The Third World had short life and large family.

Well, the world has moved, and so has India. But we may be creating a new "us" and "them" problem right within our borders if the issues are not presented in a fair and reasonable manner. Worse, this might also create policies that will go on for long years to impact how India progresses and how our resources are put to use. In the quest for controlling family size in particular ways and in select areas, we may be already embarking on a massive misallocation that will live on to harm the growth prospects of the nation. In that talk, Prof. Rosling added about his students, "the problem for me was not ignorance; it was preconceived ideas." The same can be said in the case of India today.

None of this is to say that family planning must not be encouraged or that infiltration is not to be stopped. The government can police the borders, provide more contraceptive choices but without the concomitant developmental initiatives for people, none of the policies will yield results.

A good way to understand this is to read the population policy offered during the time Atal Behari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister. That policy used the word "control" only thrice -- to "control" HIV, and another to "control" diarrheal deaths and to control communicable diseases. That itself is a herculean task, and the government will do well to focus on issues such as these rather than deciding the number of children a woman might have in her lifetime.

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

Letters to the Editor

Get the CCTVs working

Editor,

I remember attending a meeting conveyed by the then S.P. Shillong at the Police Reserve Community Hall. The meeting was called to apprise the gathering comprising Headmen/ Rangbah shnongs of Shillong about installing CCTV cameras in Shillong to curb criminal activities as well as to streamline the traffic along the Shillong Roads. Everybody welcomed the move and initiative of the Government for this project.

I had some apprehensions in my mind and asked the then S.P. Shillong that it shouldn't go the way of the street signal light posts which died an unnatural death and never saw the light of day. Crores of rupees were spent on this project without any result and public money went down the drain. But the then S.P. said that CCTV cameras will be fool-proof and will be installed by a reputed company.

But as the years passed by the reality of these CCTV cameras has hit us hard. The mystery of the hit and run case right in front of the Civil Hospital Police Point is a daring example of the failure of the CCTV cameras. The culprit has not been apprehended so far. It is not known as to how many more lives will be lost like that of Biman (Moloy) Talukdar and the Police Department is yet to find a clue in spite of their claims of identifying the offending killer biker.

Before it is too late the Police Department should check and take steps to rectify the faulty cameras, as well as the non-functioning cameras and book the company for repairs etc., at their own cost as early as possible.

Yours etc.,
S.L. Singhania
Shillong

Killer drivers of Shillong

Editor,

I was in Shillong on a family visit and have just returned from there to Kolkata. This visit was undertaken after a gap of nearly three years. I was agast to see extreme deterioration in the living standards of the people. In particular, road safety has become abysmally low. Day in and day out pedestrians are being hit by cars and two wheelers. The street lighting is very inadequate causing pedestrians to get hit by two wheelers in particular. The CCTV coverage is totally inadequate and the two wheeler drivers are speeding without anyone stopping them. On September 20 last a two-wheeler hit a relative of mine, an elderly pedestrian and sped away leaving the person to die on the street. The authorities are yet to conduct a proper investigation into the matter and neither is any effort made to nab the culprit. What sort of a cruel and lawless world are we living in?

I earnestly request this newspaper to please take up the issue of road safety in Shillong with the Hon'ble

Chief Minister to make the city safe for pedestrians and in particular to arrest the killer of late Biman Talukdar. This would be a great service to society.

Yours etc.,
SK Mitra
Kolkata

Keep dogs within boundaries

Editor,

Apropos of the letter 'Animal lives over human lives' (ST October 10, 2022), I extend my full support and sympathy with the aggrieved writer. I too, am a resident of Laitumkhrah and I fear for myself and my family's lives at the thought of dogs attacking us. I have a 7-year old daughter and the recent dog attack has developed a dog phobia in me. I never hated dogs but the increasing number of dogs that move around in a pack is terrifying one and all.

To all the dog lovers concerned, if my daughter becomes a victim of dog bite (God forbid!) or any other human being, for that matter, will they come forward to empathise with us emotionally/financially? No, never because only the wearer of the shoe feels the bite! (pun intended!). And the one thing that baffles me is why dog owners allow their pets to run loose in the busy streets of Laitumkhrah. Is dog above man? I surely hope not. My humble request to all dog lovers/dog owners if you love them, keep them and keep them grounded

within prescribed boundary limits!

Yours etc.,
Mona Lyngdoh
A very concerned citizen,
Via email

Jal Jeevan Mission or Jal Stopping Mission!

Editor,

Jal Jeevan Mission is a task undertaken by the National Government to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections throughout the country. However, for Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya it is something different. It is a matter of regret that the authority concerned is not even able to provide safe drinking water on a regular basis to the old connections leave aside the new ones. Residents of certain areas of Shillong, especially Lower New Colony and Laitumkhrah in the recent period are getting water for one day and for the next one or two days the taps are dry and the excuse is that there is no water in the tank. Nobody knows the reason and no one is responsible too. Earlier in the sixties water was supplied twice a day but now it that is history. It is for this reason the Jal Jeevan Mission may be renamed as Jal Stopping Mission for Shillong. Though the mission is promised to be completed within 2024 but nobody can predict how many 2024s will be required

to provide adequate supply of safe drinking water in the said localities. Nonetheless, it has been promised by the concerned department in Meghalaya that it will complete the mission well before the deadline announced by the Central Government.

In the recent past, as per media reports an award was presented in the National capital and the presenter perhaps believed in the paper work and is unaware about the ground reality of water supply situation in Shillong. Last but not the least the concerned department seems to be least bothered and perhaps is working with the new 'motto' 'We won't correct ourselves; we are stubborn and shall remain so because we are not accountable to anyone'

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

On contractual teachers

Editor,

From reports in your newspaper, it is understood that the terminated primary school teachers have already completed 10 to 12 years of teaching service. Hence by any standard, they are invaluable assets of the state of Meghalaya. We hope that the State Government is doing all it can to include these valuable human assets in its fold. It is high time for the enlightened people of this State to consider advising the Government on how not to waste the human capital of such experienced individuals

of our society. In this connection, the letter of Ms A Basaiawmoit (ST Oct 08, 22) is "food for thought" for the Government to take note of. To add to what Ms Basaiawmoit had said it is suggested that besides allowing them to reappear for the MTET as per the order of the Supreme Court, this terminated contractual teachers may be given special age relaxation while applying for other Government jobs. Unless any terminated teacher has crossed the age of 'superannuation' vis a vis Government service, the number of years of service rendered on contractual basis may be subtracted from their actual age to meet the maximum age limit prescribed for initial recruitment, so as to make them eligible for applying for any Government service in the State. A teacher who has reached the age of superannuation may be considered for Golden Handshake in recognition of their valuable services in teaching our children, as suggested by the above-named writer. Finally, thanks to the President of MGLPSCA for calling off the agitation, we hope all your terminated colleagues will be suitably placed in the days to come.

Yours etc.,
Krishna Chettri
Shillong-2

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"To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often."

— Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

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Over-confident political parties

THE UDP, BJP, NPP who are alliance partners in the present MDA Government are all going to go it alone in the 2023 elections. This, though, is not new in Meghalaya. The UDP is not bothered who it aligns with so long as it can be in the Government. This was evident when the MDA Government was formed in 2018. During the election trail, the UDP went hammer and tongs against the BJP, calling it an anti-Christian, anti-minority party and created a fear psychosis among voters telling them to reject the BJP outright. For the electorate that did not vote the BJP, it was a bit of a shock to see the UDP, BJP and NPP sup from the same plate and continuing that marriage of convenience until the very last although the BJP has been hemming and hawing about pulling out of the government.

Power is addictive and politicians and political parties are gluttons of privilege. The prospect of being in the Opposition for five years is daunting. The desire for power also means a readiness to climb down the high horse just to cobble up a government even with a Right Wing Party whose ideologies have been critiqued and condemned prior to the elections. Such is the history of politics in Meghalaya. The State has never seen a pre-poll alliance between parties as happens elsewhere. This also reveals the character traits of a society that is highly divisive and rides high on political ego. Is it not supercilious of the UDP to say it will contest all 60 seats and that it could get a majority on its own? Not to be left behind, the BJP too has stated upfront that it would put up candidates in all 60 seats. This when the BJP hardly has a toehold in the State! However, overconfidence is no sin, so political parties can spin their delusions of grandeur until D-Day when the last vote is counted and the tally reveals the truth as it is.

The All India Trinamool Congress has not spoken much about its poll prospects. Right now the Party is unearthing all the illegalities of the MDA government and they have covered a lot of ground. Their national spokesperson evidently has a sharp legal mind and has pulled out quite a few skeletons from the MDA cupboard and even dared those in government for a public debate. The MDA Government is naturally hedging because getting into a debate with a discerning and well-armed opponent means going down a slippery slope. No government in the past has been so challenged. The TMC is actually playing the real Opposition here, where others are simply watching the MDA caravan pass by.

Can Rahul Gandhi change the tide?

By H. Srikanth

Bharat Jodo Yatra has been attracting national attention. By raising vital issues affecting the masses, Rahul Gandhi is winning over the hearts of the youth, women and minorities. Thousands of people waiting on the roads for hours to have a glimpse of Rahul show his growing popularity. When the padyatra began, the BJP national leaders scoffed at him and questioned its purpose and relevance. But seeing the increasing public attention that the yatra is drawing, BJP top leaders are now avoiding making controversial remarks. Interestingly, barring Sharda Pawar of the NCP who welcomed the yatra, other non-BJP opposition leaders chose to remain silent. There is no doubt that every leader and party in India would assess the likely impact of the possible resurgence of Congress on their political fortunes. Apart from social media, a section of national media started giving adequate space to the yatra in their news bulletins and orchestrated discussions. A couple of TV anchors, who were with the government till the other day, began questioning the BJP leaders about inflation and jobs. This one month of Bharat Jodo campaign has brought some changes in people's perception about leadership of the Congress party. But are these new developments enough to predict the victory of Congress in the General Elections, 2024? It is still premature to conclude that way. The reasons are many.

In politics, popularity matters. But it alone is no guarantee for electoral victory. Over the years, under the leadership of Modi and Shah, BJP has mastered the art of winning the elections. BJP has built a formidable organisational network across the nation - from metropolis to remote villages. It is no more a party of the banias. It made dent among the OBCs, STs and to some extent even among the dalits. The party has immense money power and corporate media support. Being in power at the centre and in several states, the BJP has gained control over the police, bureaucracy, and other public institutions. By keeping the corporate sector in good humour, the party could ensure continuous flow of funds through electoral bonds and other mechanisms. The party has the blessings of RSS and other Hindutva organisations whose cadres are ever ready to work as volunteers to create a political and ideological environment conducive to the ruling regime.

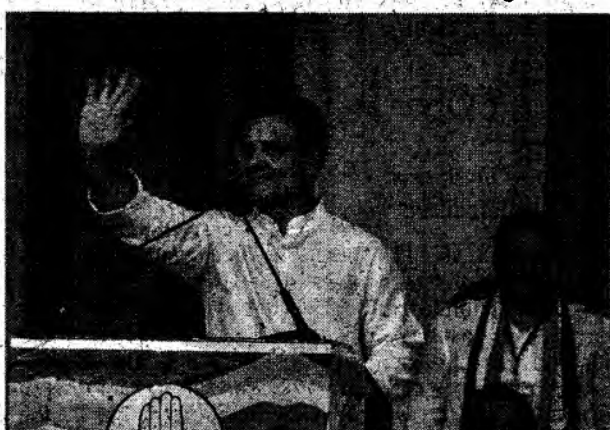
At one time the Congress party enjoyed some such advantages. But being out of power at the centre and in many states, the Congress party organization has become weak. A series of mistakes that it committed dissipated its traditional mass base among the SCs, STs and minorities. Marred by factional fights, corruption, and conflicts over leadership, the party became rudderless and lost the confidence of the rich and the poor alike. Siding with the ruling regime, the corporate media carried on a systematic campaign to vilify Congress and projected Rahul Gandhi as a Pappu, who is unfit for politics. The Congress party tasted defeat in elections after election. Even in Goa and Madhya Pradesh where the party emerged as the single largest party, it failed to form governments, as the elected representatives fell prey to enticements and threats, and ditched the party

winning new states, Congress should remain in power in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. If Congress could form governments in some of these states, the regional parties in bigger states like UP, Bihar and Maharashtra would take Congress a little more seriously. Congress party has a stable alliance with DMK in Tamilnadu and there is the possibility of electoral alliances with Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Samajwadi Party, National Conference, NCP and Thackeray's faction of Shiv Sena. Already marginalized mainstream left parties like CPI and CPI (M) oppose the Congress party in Kerala and Tripura, but they will support Congress in other states.

However, some opposition parties are averse to the idea of having any understanding with Congress. Some like BJD in Orissa go with the BJP alliance. Parties like Telugu Desam

government's economic policies. Special favours that Modi government showers on a couple of leading monopolies are no doubt detested by a section of the leading Indian industrialists. However, the corporate are hesitant to shift their support, as they are not sure of the ability of any opposition party to guarantee a stable government that protects its interests. It is not in the interest of the corporate to favour any alliance of the regional parties, where each leader assumes that he or she is a PM material. As an alternative to BJP, they can only think of the Congress party, provided the party could muster adequate support at the national level. The corporate sector is observing Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra keenly. One should take note of positive representation of the padyatra in a section of the corporate media and also Adani's offer of sixty-five thousand crore rupees investment in Rajasthan from this angle. No party will assume political power at the centre without the support of the corporate sector.

The likelihood of Congress coming back to power depends on many ifs and buts. It is a fact that Modi-Shah's charisma has faded a bit in the post-Pandemic India. The growing inequalities, unemployment and price rise have dented the legitimacy of the BJP government. Modi still has lakhs of ardent followers, whom others call 'andh bhakts'. Steeped in hatred against the minorities, these sections claiming to be Hindu nationalists, would stand by Modi on all occasions. But we also see today neutral citizens getting uneasy with the divisive politics of Hindutva and looking forward to a viable alternative: Bharat Jodo Yatra is attracting these sections of voters who view price rise and unemployment as more important than the issues of Mandir and Masjid. But that should not make Congress complacent. The Congress party should never underestimate the power of Narendra Modi. Remember how effectively he used 'Pulwama attack in 2019 and whipped up national sentiments to the party's advantage. Anything can happen a few months before the General Elections 2024 - another terrorist attack, a communal riot, a war with neighbour, some Krishna Janmabhoomi movement, or showering of freebies for the masses. The BJP's arsenal is filled with a variety of weapons for meeting different eventualities. Will Rahul led Congress be able to neutralize its adversary? Only time will tell.



and its leadership. In some states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, regional and caste-based parties became more powerful than the Congress party. In these states, for its existence, Congress had to play a second fiddle to regional parties. What was worse, instead of taking on BJP's Hindutva ideology by horns, Congress leaders toyed with soft Hindutva to win over the Hindu voters. All these mistakes or failures of the Congress party have led to its marginalization. No padyatra can help rebuild Congress, unless the leaders address its own lapses.

In the changed political scenario, Congress may come back to power only by building political alliances with other opposition parties. But for the others to take the Congress seriously, the party should win elections and form governments at least in six, seven states in India before 2024 general elections. There is prospect of Congress coming back to power in states like Karnataka, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and even Madhya Pradesh. Apart from

(TDP), Mayawati's BSP and Jagan's Party YSRCP do not want to antagonize Modi's government and play a safe game. But others like Aam Admi Party (AAP), Trinamool (TMC), and Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) oppose the BJP's rule. But these parties view the Congress Party also as an enemy. In the states where they are in power, they try to marginalize the Congress party and advocate the need for fighting both BJP and Congress. There is little chance of these parties accepting any pre-poll alliances with the Congress party. Of course, if the BJP led alliance fails to win majority seats in the 2024 elections, these parties may lend support to the Congress led alliance at the national level.

Finance is another obstacle. Congress was considered once as a faithful party of the Indian monopolies. But after the consolidation of BJP, the corporate have shifted their support to Modi's regime. Although they may not be comfortable with Hindutva politics, the corporate are quite happy with Modi's gov-

which has lost its actual impact and is only a trick to "bribe" voters to inaugurate of piggery schemes where most pigs have either died or been sold off since there has been no accountability or proper application of mind. Now even promises of developing roads rebuilding schools etc., are all aimed at gaining brownie points for the 2023 elections. The question is why are funds for the MLA scheme and other government schemes suddenly being doled out at the end of this NPP led government. Do people require doles once in five years only? Do schools require repairs once in five years and do hospitals require just cosmetic surgery in anticipation of elections? Do piggery or poultry schemes come once in a blue moon? Let the voters judge for themselves whether they can be fooled by such political patronage and what change they expect in 2023.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Via email

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Despite denials, Kharage has all the stamp of Gandhi family Shashi Tharoor with all his erudition is in a lonely battle

By Sushil Kutty

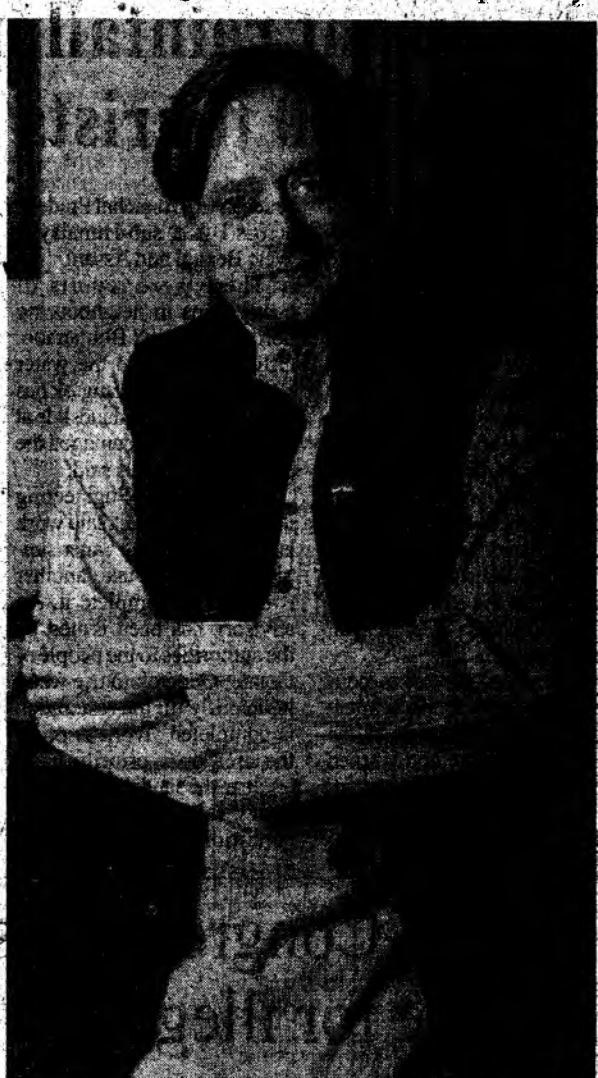
Congress presidential candidate Shashi Tharoor is getting under the other Congress presidential candidate's skin, party veteran Mallikarjun Kharge, who has to now defend himself from marketplace innuendos that his name for the top party post was "suggested" by none other than the party's interim president, Sonia Gandhi.

Whoever Sonia Gandhi supports will not only have the upper hand, but also guaranteed runaway victory. Even a perfunctory nod from Sonia Gandhi would be enough to catapult Kharge to pole position, and from there to eventual Congress President! Kharge is even

ways, Tharoor is not the sort to go without a fight even if symbolic as far as Kharge and the Congress high command went.

Tharoor says he would have withdrawn from the tussle if he had been asked to, but he wasn't. Maybe that was because the pretense of an election was a must even as a high command's choice was also a must. So the obstinate had to be given his chance. Tharoor's change agenda has a certain place, but the change initiative has to come from the high command, well-known euphemism for the Gandhi Family.

The Gandhi Family is the best example of hy-



otherwise a hot favourite, also "safe" because he will not rock the boat! The "rebel" G-23 leaders are solidly behind Kharge's candidature and that tells you the story that G-23's objection was never about Sonia Gandhi; their differences were with Rahul Gandhi's leadership style. The son was beyond their grasp and it angered them no end. Rahul Gandhi was encircled by a coterie, which was not a kitchen-cabinet, but the Star Wars command Centre!

Kharge's denial about Sonia being behind his candidature is prompted by Shashi Tharoor voicing apprehension that it wasn't a "level playing field" which was naïve of him because whoever told him that it would be in the first place, Tharoor is grown-up enough to know that he was the odd man out in the pair, and that his suave self with "change" built into the frame wasn't welcome in the moribund Congress.

That said Kharge has his self-estimation. To hear that there were rumours that he is going into the contest with a handicap advantage is insulting. Best case scenario for Kharge is Shashi Tharoor withdrawing from the race and Kharge the consensus. Nothing doing, said Tharoor, determined not to make it easy for Kharge to get his retirement plan wrapped in gift paper.

Kharge perhaps thought that Tharoor is self-righteousness clothed in indignation or the vice versa, the other way round, indignation wrapped in self-righteousness. Both

poorly at its best. And the high command goes about its business with a straight face and a clear single-point agenda. My way on the highway, except that Udaipur happened and certain key points were adopted as party profile. That said, but for Ashok Gehlot playing shark, things would have been as smooth as a dolphin's clean dive.

Now, the senior-most Congressman has to fight to save his reputation and also protect that of the party's most revered member, interim president Sonia Gandhi. For Shashi Tharoor these goings on are par for course, part of how things ought to be done in an orderly world. Kharge has denied the speculations that he is "Sonia's suggestion".

The problem for the veteran is that he cannot withdraw from the race as he could not say 'No' in the first place. Kharge is, and cannot be anybody else other than 10, Janpath's dice. Kharge has not been given a dilemma to solve, he is the coin with both sides engraved 'head'; no matter how he throws the coin, it will come 'heads up'. Kharge is a captive candidate. The election will see 9300 delegates voting and when the result is announced there will be only one winner like in all elections everywhere across the world, except that in this election, Sonia Gandhi's "suggestion" will hold through thick and thin, rain or shine. Kharge will start his tenure with "high command" written all over him. Poor Shashi Tharoor. (IPA Service)

Money can grow on trees

Editor,

I am tempted to write this letter to you with the hope that this message that I want to convey is picked up by our Forest Department and the interested stakeholders in our state who own vast tracks of land or sufficient plots of land in Ri Bhoi, Ri Lynggam and Garo Hills who can take up plantation of Agar trees (Aquilaria laccensis) plantations which are suitable and have very high commercial value for medicines and perfumes. The Agar tree demands very low inputs and management for growth and has a short gestation period. Moreover, these species are quite suitable even for intercropping adaptation.

Agar wood is very valuable and farmers or growers can make Agar chips or can extract Agar oil which are in great demand internationally, especially from the Gulf countries, USA and the European nations. Saplings or seeds can be obtained easily from Tripura where these varieties are grown extensively and many Agar tree nurseries are kept and maintained properly. The

state is exporting Agar wood products in terms of thousands of crores of rupees yearly. In fact, this financial year, Tripura expects to export Agar products to the tune of Rs 2000 crore.

In Meghalaya these types of species were found in the wilds in Ri Lynggam and Garo Hills in the early 1940s, 1950s and 1960s but not widely, only in some pockets. Later they are nowhere to be found. The Forest Department of Meghalaya is very well aware of the economic potentials of this species but even after 50 years the Department has not taken up plantation of this valuable tree species in a big way, except perhaps, by raising insignificant nurseries which have now disappeared. During the Chief Ministership of Dr Mukul Sangma, Agar tree plantations in few pockets of Garo Hills were undertaken but now there are no reports from the Forest Department and from the few beneficiaries of the good initiative undertaken as to what has happened to the plantations. If the initiative had been taken seriously, by now, Garo Hills would have been brimming with hope to see beautiful moderate height of Agar tree plantations and would

have perhaps harvested the precious oil by now.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Sr. Journalist,
Shillong-2

Rampaging dogs in Laitumkhrach

Editor,

I am an eleven-year-old boy and I was bitten by one of the dogs in Laitumkhrach about two months ago. I was bitten in St. Anthony's school basketball court. It was during the athletics testing. While I was running around a big dog came and bit me. After that he tried to bite another kid but luckily, he was holding a water bottle and he bit that instead. There was an ambulance nearby and it took me to the closest hospital. When I was in the hospital, I had to take six injections for Rabies; four in my hand around the wound, one in my shoulder and one in my thigh. It was the most painful experience in my life. From then on, I have a phobia for dogs. I love dogs and I have a huge one of my own but it's too dangerous for packs of dogs to go and bite people in Laitumkhrach, especially kids. I have a mar-

tial arts class in Laitumkhrach and every Tuesday and Friday I have to risk getting bitten by a dog. I certainly don't want children like me experiencing pain like I did. I understand that dogs are also living beings and want to have a happy life, but we can't just keep getting bitten by dogs. I suggest you can make a re-inhabitation training camp and train the alpha male of the pack because every pack has an alpha male and if the alpha male bites, then so will the other dogs. After you change their habits, they can be set free or be adopted.

Yours etc.,
Kian Peter Pde
Upper Shillong

BJP's tall claims!

Editor,

Appropos of the news headline, "BJP to contest all 60 seats in 2023" (ST Oct 12, 2022), having read the contents of the report I think there is nothing wrong in tweaking the Government of India schemes as long as it serves the people who benefit from it. The Meghalaya BJP President is not aware that the Modi Sarkar has repackaged 23 UPA Schemes which are working

better now. It is fine that the BJP will contest all the 60 seats in 2023 but given the manner in which the Party worked for the past 29 years in Meghalaya it is pathetic. This can be gauged from the performance of the BJP in the last 6 Assembly elections. In 1993 the BJP contested 20 seats and achieved zero, in 1998 it contested 28 seats and won 3, in 2003 it contested 28 seats and won 2, in 2008 it contested 23 seats and won 1, in 2013 it contested 13 and achieved zero and in 2018 it contested 47 seats and won 2 seats. These were urban seats. The forfeited deposit rate was 70%, 71%, 75%, 91%, 100%, and 68 % respectively in the last six Assembly Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly.

Yours etc.,
Gordon Wahlang,
Via email

Foundation stone spree

Editor,

The MDA Government is on a foundation stone laying spree and in some places these are being re-laid again due to obvious reasons of claiming credit. From distributing unaccounted for funds in the name of FOCUS

"Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character."

— Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

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Stirrings in space

EXPLORATIONS into Space have the potential to change the life of humanity on Mother Earth in most unexpected and fascinating ways. With NASA taking the lead in such explorations and entities like ISRO also being in the run, the future is filled with both hope and scope for unimaginable discoveries and opportunities. Orbital, sub-orbital and lunar Space Tourism on a commercial basis is already a craze and 'reservation' of seats is done for such flights that were once only a fancy. News now is of another feat by NASA—its first successful attempt to "use kinetic impact and alter the trajectory of a celestial body." World's first 'planetary defence' was achieved by the US space agency that rammed its spacecraft, DART, into an asteroid. The impact "carved" a crater in it, changed its orbit, and "nudged it" off the normal course. The relative speed of the spacecraft was 22,500 km per hour and its impact on the asteroid was 'huge'. For the first time, it has been established that asteroids heading fiercely towards earth can be forced to change their course through human intervention. Threats can, in future, be averted on condition that work for this is initiated well in advance. The present action took place seven million miles away from earth.

Space explorations had its most promising times during the Cold War season, when the then USSR competed energetically with the US on several fronts. Though Luna 2 of Russia was the first rocket to land on the moon's surface in 1959, US outwitted its rival and landed a human, Neil Armstrong, on the moon ten years later. The end of the Cold War between the two 'Super-Powers' also saw a progressive reduction in the frenzy for space explorations. An International Space Station, funded by the US, USSR and others, in later years made only slow progress. India, which occupied the third prominent position in space explorations, experienced failure when its spacecraft crashed on the moon's surface in July 2019, but progressed with Chandrayaan 3. China's national space administration, CNSA, is getting increasingly active. Some Gulf nations are also using their new-found oil wealth to engage in space explorations. Several explorations beyond the Moon, to Mars and elsewhere, are being attempted at. Space tourism is just a start. It could also lead, in future, to human habitations in Space, provided the conditions there are favourable. Explorations are the way forward. At another level, the age of space cars and bikes is for real already – China having demonstrated the test flying of a two-seater air taxi/bike at a Dubai show the other day.

As we approach the new year which is just two months away from now guess what our conversations tend to veer towards. No prizes for guessing though. So immersed is the average Meghalaya in the politics of the day that every conversation, especially at homes of the bereaved where men congregate in the living room of the deceased, automatically drifts towards the State Assembly election 2023 and its outcome. Two or three months ago people discussed the infamous crash of the dome atop the 'now under construction' Meghalaya Assembly building. That building was supposed to be inaugurated before the elections and would have been another feather in the hats covering many bald heads but the dome crashed and one of the likely reasons is substandard building materials used that were unable to take the weight of the dome.

We Khasis are great believers in the meta-physical even today. From jem daw to jem ngiew (degeneration of the human life force) to 'ka sabuit ka sakai' (someone casting the evil eye) to several other indigenous beliefs. The reasons for the dome collapse would at one time have been subject to "ka knia ka khan" – a sort of divination to pin-point the reason behind the infamous incident. But no such thing was resorted to because we now know the reason full well. It is plain and simple corruption. Indeed corruption is so embedded in society that there is no need for any divination to tell us the reason for the dome collapse. From a letter that appeared in this newspaper by a writer who is evidently an insider to the system, we have a long list of reasons showing how there has been abdication of duty and responsibility by the PWD (Buildings) and the different committees formed in order to oversee the construction of the "sanctum sanctorum of democracy."

So while the fallen dome was a hot topic for about two months it has now slipped into the zone of 'forgetting.' People no longer link the dome collapse to one of the major scams of the MDA Government. And if we care to analyse things meticulously we would have realized that Conrad Sangma the Chief Executive of Meghalaya Incorporated has been able to get away with every scam by setting up frivolous

enquiry committees whose reports we already know will acquit the Government and make fools of all of us in the media who call out corruption. By the time we arrive at the campaign period there would be so much song, dance and noise that gullible voters would have deleted all those scams from their memory banks. They will instead start dancing to the tunes of the bards and the paid singers who can construct foot-tapping melodies (kijingwai pynshongshit), depending on how much they are paid. Since we are a people that are easily (mis) led by good music, unbridled expressions of love for the candidate of our choices, joy-rides, picnics, excursions, free uniforms for football teams, money splurged on sports clubs, money distributed to destitute women on several pretexts as a one-time gift and so on and so forth, scams are just a blot in the distant past.

For those few concerned citizens who care to think of 'mundane' stuff as a long-term economic vision, employment policy, a health and nutrition policy, educational policy, the future appears bleak since these will not feature in the election manifestos of any political party. Or if they do appear we the people will not have an opportunity to ask them to spell out how to make good their promises. Hence those who desire change after every election tend to slip into that zone of "Learned Helplessness," a term borrowed from David CM Carter's book 'Breakthrough.' Carter says "Learned helplessness is the condition that most people live in. They believe 'nothing will get better' or 'it's all pointless' or 'it doesn't matter what I do, it won't make any difference.' If we slip into this 'learned helplessness' syndrome the result is cynicism and sarcasm both of which never did anyone any good.

So between now and February 2023 perhaps we could start with community conversations, something we hardly do even when society is passing through some of its most tormenting times. A society where people can share their thoughts and have deep conversations about everything that is happening around us and not just about politics will emerge stronger and be able to bring the desired

change. An empowered citizenry is a threat to politicians. They want citizens to be dependent, subservient and always needing help, hence they won't fix what's going wrong. This is what needs to be addressed. Health Centres (Sub-Centres, PHCs, CHCs) have to function responsibly and the doctor in charge should be held accountable. Take the example of Assam. Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma has the habit of making a surprise appearance at PHCs and CHCs or Government hospitals. If he finds something amiss then immediate action is taken against those found guilty of dereliction of duty. So much so, these days doctors are scared of being absent without leave and make it a point to be present at their work stations. Compare this to Meghalaya where doctors still visit the PHCs and CHCs only on market days, which is once a week.

Recently I visited the PHC at Lawbah and was happy to see a young resident doctor present there. He is a young, enthusiastic doctor wanting to give his best but lacks the wherewithal, such as trained professionals to run the X-Ray and blood testing labs. How many times has our Health Minister made a surprise visit to Shillong Civil Hospital without his baggage of entourage? It is fine for politicians to give good speeches but what is needed is action – action not for effect or for a media blitzkrieg but to correct systems that have gone wrong. And the health system in Meghalaya just like the education system has gone horribly wrong. Whereas in the Health Department we have a hyper-active bureaucracy that is trying to right the wrongs of decades, in the education sector not much is heard about correcting the systemic wrongs.

It is also time for the people of Meghalaya to take stock of governance and to ask why the State needs to hire consultants for every sphere of public governance. Meghalaya can rightly be named a Paradise for Consultants. In fact Meghalaya is a 'Consultocracy,' a term coined in the early 1990s by Hood and Jackson (1991). It has since been defined as a process, "whereby non-elected consultants are replacing political debate conducted

by publicly accountable politicians" (Craig & Brooks, 2006). Are Consultants more knowledgeable than the local people – scholars, academicians, researchers and village communities? What actually needs to be fixed is the governance process. Every level of the bureaucratic hierarchy has to be on the ground, seeing matters from close quarters instead of being holed up in the Secretariat.

Consultants cannot fix governance deficits. As private providers of knowledge and expert services, consultants have brought fundamental changes to the ways in which public administrations handle information and knowledge. When contracting out expert services, publicly owned and available information (or information that could, in principle, be publicly owned) is transformed into a private commodity. Therefore, information that is frequently used by public administrations (such as computer programs, algorithms, benchmarking data, and indicators) becomes an asset for private consulting firms. This ownership may result in information advantages for consultants and result in state dependency on them followed by rent-seeking behaviour by consultants.

Consultocracy in public administration weakens accountability. According to the traditional conception of politics, civil servants are accountable to the government, the government is accountable to the parliament, and the parliament is accountable to the people. The growing role of consultants distorts this idealized conception of accountability in ways that go beyond the larger role of expertise and technocracy in politics. Research on consultocracy suggests that consultants have become powerful because, when the new managerialist model that they advocate is implemented it tends to remove public administration from politics and thus, from public scrutiny.

We have been paying several hundred crores to consultants even in the area of sports almost as if Meghalaya is a baby needing constant caregiving and feeding by consultants. One important election agenda should be to reduce if not remove the consultants completely and put the crores paid to them to better use. A Government that does not have faith in its own people's intelligence and capability has no right to rule.

Human sacrifice trauma tarnishes image of 'progressive' Kerala

Time for law to deter such barbaric killings in the state

By P. Sreekumaran

A case of 'human sacrifice', in which two women were brutally killed, has shocked Kerala. It is difficult to believe that such an act of unspeakable barbarity should happen in a progressive state like Kerala. But that is the chilling reality to which traumatized Keralites must come to terms with.

The gruesome murders, which represent a throwback to the medieval times, happened at Elanthur in Pathanamthitta district. Insatiable greed for wealth and superstition snuffed out two precious lives. Three persons, including a couple, Bhagavan Singh, his wife Laila and Mohammed Shafi, a self-proclaimed sorcerer, have been arrested for the abduction and murder of Tamil Nadu native Padmam and Thrissur native

in 2014. The then Additional Director General of Police (Intelligence) A Hemachandran had prepared a working draft of the Bill, Kerala Exploitation by Superstition (Prevention) Act.

Hemachandran said the three instances of killings through black magic in various parts of the State led to the drafting of the 2014 Bill. As ill luck would have it, that bill also failed to become a law. The next effort came in 2019, when the Kerala Law Reforms Commission readied a draft Bill against superstition, sorcery and inhuman evil practices. The bill was submitted to the State Government, too. But nothing has come out of it so far. It may be mentioned that the late Congress MLA PT Thomas too had, in 2019,



Rosily. The women, who lived in Ernakulam, had been missing for a long time. The trio have confessed to have murdered the two women. Reports say it was the couple who talked the women, saying that the killing would bring them prosperity and wealth!

The State has witnessed as many as seven grue-

moved a private member's bill demanding a ban on black magic and superstitious practices.

The draft bill prepared by the Law Reforms Commission is said to be under the consideration of the Home Department. The task was taken up by the Reforms Commission Chairman and former Supreme Court judge KT

"The shocking murders have underlined the urgent need for a legislative deterrent against superstitious beliefs and practices. Successive governments have failed to enact a law against such barbaric killings. It is not as if nothing has been done to address such gruesome killings."

some killings over the last few years. Jolly Joseph, a native of Koodathayi in Kozhikode district, murdered six members of her family within 14 years by administering poison. The serial killings came to light in 2019. Mysore-based traditional medical practitioner Shaba Sharif was murdered by a gang, which kept him in captivity for more than a year in Nilambur. The killers had hacked his body into pieces and thrown them into Chaliyar river near Edavanna in Malappuram district. In yet another incident, 25-year-old Uthara was killed by her husband Sooraj using a cobra he had bought from a snake charmer. The shocking murders have underlined the urgent need for a legislative deterrent against superstitious beliefs and practices. Successive governments have failed to enact a law against such barbaric killings. It is not as if nothing has been done to address such gruesome killings. It was the tenure of the VS Achuthanandan-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government (2006-2011) that saw the first effort to tackle the problem. Unfortunately, the move fell through for various reasons. The next attempt was made when Ramesh Chennithala was the Home Minister in the Oommen Chandy-led United Democratic Front (UDF) Government,

Thomas. What prompted Kerala to go in for legislation was the enactments in Karnataka and Maharashtra in the wake of the killings of social activists KK Kalburgi and Narendra Dabholkar.

The latest effort came through CPI(M) MLA K D Prasen, who sought permission to introduce a bill to eradicate superstitious practices, in 2021. The Government, however, did not clear it. SC and ST Welfare minister K Radhakrishnan told the Assembly that the Government had readied the draft of "Kerala Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices, Sorcery and Black Magic Bill and the same will be introduced in the State Assembly soon.

Meanwhile, the 'human sacrifice' has evoked widespread condemnation. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan termed the incident as a challenge to modern society, rationalism, human rights and scientific temperament. The cold blooded murders were, the CM said, the product of greed, an unduly credulous belief in sorcery and delusions about making money through occult practices. CPI state secretary Kanam Rajendran stressed the importance of enacting quickly the Kerala Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman, Evil and Black Magic Act, 2017. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Open letter to South Shillong MLA, Sanbor Shullai

Dear Sanbor Shullai ji, Hon'ble MLA, 19-South Shillong Constituency, Have you ever stopped to notice the water scarcity afflicting the residents of Harisabha, Howell Road, Sylhet Para, ABP Road and other adjoining localities in these areas? The string-like flow of piped water in domestic households is attributable to a created scarcity by the plumbers – who open and close the main locks inside the community water tank located near the Sanatan Dharma Sabha, Harisabha. In Howell Road, Sylhet Para, ABP Road etc., the notoriety of the plumbers is akin to the former. Many residents of Harisabha, for example, told me that they have to be at the mercy of the plumbers operating the community water tank there whether they open the locks of all the lanes in that locality. The plumbers there tend to open only a few locks attached to the tank – that releases water to every household, instead of opening all the locks, thus creating scarcity. In the other localities the plumbers are running riot, similarly, and playing with the release of piped water every morning

and evening. These plumbers – who should be rightfully sent back to Bihar, Nepal and from where on earth they have come from, are ruling the roost with their notoriety in the above-mentioned localities in Laban. MLA Sir, you have a task at hand. Everyone knows how you take care of each and every locality under the 19-South Shillong Constituency, but this is absent in the case of the more essential supply of domestic piped water. It is in the greater interest of the people of these localities that I am apprising you through these columns of this esteemed daily. Comparatively, if Riblong – where I live and also a locality of this constituency can enjoy better water supply, what is preventing the other localities of Laban from enjoying the same privilege?

Yours etc.,
BC Paul
Shillong – 4

Crime against women

Editor, We often roar that there is a rise in crime against women. But what have we done to stop this apart from making a few laws – "Significant rise in crime against women, children in 2021: NCRB data" (ST August 29, 2022)? Honestly speaking, these few laws and police lathis are

absolutely "unable" to keep down the libido of males. With each passing day, an increasing number of sexual predators are up to hunting for easy prey – resulting in deep-seated trauma in the victim's life thereafter. Well, how do modern times explain the rise of excessively "abnormal" sexual behaviour? Who is blameworthy for this sex explosion that is going to irreversibly pollute society, nay, the sanctity of households in "multiple" ways?

What is a most serious concern here is that now minor girls are also not "safe" even at home, let alone in schools. Whom will they turn to if fathers look upon their kids as sex objects – cases reported too frequently these days – "Man arrested on charges of raping minor daughter" (ST, October 4, 2022)? Nothing could be as shocking and despicable as this. It seems, like a virus that infects a computer and corrupts its entire files, the filthy virus must have infected the minds of such "evil people". Their thought process is completely corrupt. They fail to differentiate between right and wrong and moral and immoral. We need not go far – in the home state at Waktieh, Nongrah Nonglum, two kids were murdered by their father about five months ago.

Such criminal and sexual "abnormality" must have its roots in the upbringing of the

child in the wrong environment, like the extreme climate crisis of modern times has its roots in the ceaseless emission of greenhouse gases. What happens in the outer landscape also happens in our mindscape. We may not want to agree but the law of "cause and effect" determines the working of all phenomena. Look at how war video games have made countless children insensitive and cruel.

What is worse is that now even our small children are fully exposed to a whole lot of dangerously vulgar videos/images/chats on the net/mobile sets. That may have an extremely harmful effect on their psyche from an early age. Its adverse effect will be more clearly noticeable after ten years from now. One strongly feels that now we should be concerned about the "mental ecology" as much as the ecology of the biosphere, as pointed out by an American ecologist Eugene Odum. Amidst such a "horrific" situation, a disillusioned Canadian actress Pamela Anderson also once said – "This is a public hazard of unprecedented seriousness given how freely available, anonymously accessible and easily disseminated pornography is nowadays". Should we still keep silent? Are we so unconcerned about the future of our children and the new generation? I will not say much, but our silence will

allow the unbridled lechery to take away the sanity of our civilization. Wake up before the pervers alone have the last laugh.

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
Shillong

Of killer two-wheelers

Editor,

It is with great agony and regret that I want to draw the kind attention of the Administration in Shilllong through your esteemed newspaper that road safety in this city has become precarious, to say the least. It is from my recent visit to the city that I observed deterioration in this very critical issue for the common citizens. Speeding two wheelers are causing havoc to pedestrians and are proving to be a danger to the lives of citizens. Over and above that the CCTV coverage is almost non-existent and wherever they are put up they are non-functional. Hence two-wheeler drivers have a free for all. They hit pedestrians and run to escape being caught. The authorities are also making no serious efforts to nab such culprits.

One such incident happened on September 20 this year when a renowned senior citizen – Biman Talukdar, a resident of Riblong got hit and killed by a speeding two wheeler right in front of

the Civil Hospital. He had dedicated his life for social causes and had helped many needy people of Shilllong in many ways. His widowed wife who is a retired teacher of a Government School in Shilllong, is now in a helpless situation.

Through your esteemed newspaper, I call upon the Chief Minister of Meghalaya to put pressure on the Police to nab the perpetrator of this heinous crime and to ensure that there are speed breakers at critical junctions in the city for safe pedestrian movement. There is also a need to install more CCTVs and to ensure they are in working condition. Also, considering the precarious condition that the unfortunate widow of Late Biman Talukdar is in, she should be given all help and support including financial help, especially considering that she is a senior citizen and had retired after a long and dedicated service as a teacher in the State Government School.

These steps will immensely help Talukdar's widow as well improve the safety of the citizens of Shilllong.

Yours etc.,
Sima Mitra,
Via email

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

*"In order for the light to shine so brightly,
the darkness must be present."*
— Francis Bacon

The Shillong Times
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Of Expert Panels & Water Issues

AFTER much nudging by the High Court and the serene Umiyam Lake now being termed the city's septic tank the State Government seems at least outwardly and for public effect trying to do something with its water bodies. Now Meghalaya is never short on experts and consultants on every issue under the sun. Interestingly the River Rejuvenation Committee (RRC) was formed way back in 2019 but no cation has been visible since then. So which river was rejuvenated between 2019 and 2022? On the face of it these Government-led bodies with fancy names have never delivered much in Meghalaya and the reason is because communities are never involved in the processes. If the communities around the water bodies are turning them into garbage dumps, free for all car washes, septic tank outlets and worse even places for discarding dead animals and syringes used by drug pushers among others then that community has to come forward to vow not to violate these water bodies. A Government committee, expert or otherwise is a top-down way of addressing issues and it has never worked and will not work in the future too.

After two years the 'expert' committee is only now in the process of formulating the action plan for restoring polluted water bodies. The expert committee has given ten days' time to the districts which ostensibly submitted distorted figures about water bodies. According to the list prepared by respective district administrations there are 10,201 water bodies across the state. It is noteworthy that the seven rivers mentioned namely the Umkhrah, Umshyrypi, Kyrhokhla, Nongbah, Umtrew, Lukha and Myntdu are also the most polluted rivers. The RRC was formed as per the directives of the National Green Tribunal. But Meghalaya has a history of repeatedly violating the NGT orders.

In 2014 the NGT banned rat hole mining of coal and ordered the state to take stock of the coal already mined and to transport that vide a transparent policy. Interestingly the transportation of the coal assessed then has not been completed eight years hence and it continues to be transported even today. So, what's the worth of the NGT directive if monitoring is so weak? The NGT can only order the state to do certain things which actually are the within the ambit of state governance. To keep the rivers clean is the constitutional brief of the state. But the state of Meghalaya has repeatedly failed to live up to its constitutional duties for which the NGT steps in every now and again but without much success. It is rightly observed that when the state does not want to resolve an issue it forms a committee which is nothing but a cul-de-sac with an entrance but no exit.

In his seminal book *Imperilled Frontiers: India's North-Eastern Borderlands*, the legendary administrator of India's "forgotten outpost," Nari Rustomji has written *My years of frontier service* were years of unbounded happiness. Regrettably, civil servants and statesmen of Rustomji's calibre and comprehension no longer abound in the enchanted frontiers. Indeed, the majority of officers from the central services who are posted in the region—the author is referring to the officials who are from outside the region—consider an assignment in the North East as harsh and one which has cast them to the nation's fringe. Such a perception is unfortunate. North East India is not India's periphery. It is central to not only the country's security, but also to its identity as a nation that seeks to showcase unity in diversity. Indeed, few other geographical regions in South Asia possess a miscellany that merge so skillfully into such an entity, and with a geo-strategic imperative that is so vital. But, whether it is due to the relative isolation, which cartographical design has placed the North East, vis-à-vis New Delhi, or as a result of a mainstream detachment for the "perimeter," the fact of the matter is that the region has not received the due that its essence deserves. It continues to be characterised—in some sense—as a frontier outpost of a forgotten empire.

While this outlook is in some measure due to the colonial British policy of excluding the region from its primary administrative ambit, later day guiding principle, too, has not completely abandoned the standard that the alien rulers had adopted for administering the imperilled frontiers. The geo-location of the North East has not only accorded the region with the nuance of a defence zone, but has, as a result, led New Delhi to view it, for the most part, through the prism of security, circumscribing the urgencies of development. Indeed, even after seventy-five years of independence, this rainbow region, home to a joie de vivre that few other regions in the sub-continent possess, has not quite attained the respect of an able partner in India's nation-building enterprise. Correct integration and trust have eluded the region, compelling the North East to bemoan the insensitivity to which New Delhi continues to subject her.

While sound integration has not taken place for a number of reasons, one of the primary explanations for the continued disaffection is New Delhi's lack of trust for the region. While there is no dispute in the fact that a frontier—especially one as strategically placed as the North East—would perforce have to be administered with some caution, especially when discourse pertains to

security, an attempt to comprehend the underpinnings of even this crucial aspect has not adequately been gone into. Insensitivity continues to navigate the desks, files and policies in Raisina hill and thereabouts. Moreover, the intermittent centrist condescension that is exhibited, in order to display its "sincere intentions," has only aggravated the situation, with images of disdain overpowering even the occasional genuine concern. Clearly, the North East yearns to be understood, and aspires for a place in the greater Indian dream. But hope turns into disappointment, frustration and pain, degenerating—on a number of occasions—into revolt when the rightful vision is denied.

Insensitivity also exhibits itself in the perception that the region is a mere appendage to a sub-continental giantism, and consequently neither the political realities nor the social undertakings in the constituency affect the rest of India. Among the dissenting refrains that are heard, the most important ones pertain to the durbar in New Delhi and the region's representation in its conduct. "Would our paltry share of 25 MPs make a difference to the high politics of New Delhi?" Or, even, "would one of our representatives ever be vested with an important ministerial portfolio?" Also, certain unfortunate baggage of history continues to be carted and unwrapped when tales about New Delhi's insensitivity are narrated. Therefore, Nehru's statement of 1962, in the wake of the Chinese aggression, "my heart goes out to the people of Assam," continues to hurt, adding to alien encouragement that the North East is dispensable to New Delhi. The unfortunate aspect in the matter is that even if the lament about the "loss" of Assam to the advancing Chinese forces—as would be expected from a personage of Nehru's judiciousness—was made in appropriate dismay, observers continue to talk about the statement in a light that is not charitable to the first prime minister of the country. Indeed, there is derision for the manner in which Assam was sought to be included with East Pakistan at the time of partition as well, and indeed, were it not reported for the intervention of the Mahatma, the erstwhile East Pakistan's present war for "lebensraum" in the North East would have been over seventy years ago.

The problem is so overwhelming that New Delhi has neither made amends nor attempted to clear a misunderstanding. Or perhaps it does not know how to do so, and is content—as a senior army general once told the author—with the policy of "not having a policy" for the region, or even to be educated about it. The region, for in-

stance, despite a modicum of homogeneity, is not a composite whole, and an Ao of Nagaland has as much in common with a Khasi of Meghalaya, or a Karbi of Assam, as have a Kashmiri pundit of Jammu & Kashmir with a Namboodiri Brahmin of Kerala. All the three former communities owe allegiance to a tribal denomination in the same manner that the latter two are from the Brahmin fraternity. But the differences are apparent.

New Delhi's tactlessness also comes to the fore in other curious ways. A relatively undemanding instance—culled from an incident that took place a decade and a half ago—showcases this aspect of North Eastern grouse. In January 2007, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) which was united at the time, not having undergone the split of 2010, targeted Hindi-speaking people—primarily the labour class from Bihar—with forceful effect. It was one of the worst pogroms carried out by the ULFA and it showcased the hypocrisy of an organisation that had come into being as a militant manifestation of the student's agitation against illegal migrants from Bangladesh. After all, there was clear irony in the observation that the ULFA has never targeted the Bangladeshis in Assam—quite clearly because of the geopolitical compulsions that it was faced with, primarily that it had safe havens, training grounds and even lucrative businesses in Bangladesh. But the ULFA had no problem eliminating people from Bihar. In fact, it suited its agenda of "attracting New Delhi" in the hope that the latter would become more amenable to its demands. This author used to term the acts of violence against the Hindi-speaking people in his presentation and lectures as "mails by bombings"—attempts by the ULFA to relay the news that it is a force to reckon with. In any event, the deaths of the Hindi-speaking people led to widespread remonstrations, and Assamese intellectuals, students and womenfolk came out in their numbers to protest, expressing solidarity with the people from Bihar who were being targeted. In the immediate aftermath of the incidents, a slew of leaders from New Delhi descended on the state, to provide succour (as indeed it was required) to the affected people. Companies of paramilitary forces were hastened to Assam and ex-gratia payments for the deceased were announced with alacrity—a responsible dispensation acted in the correct manner. However, comments that began to be heard in the sitting rooms of Assam at the time was "where were these leaders when death stalked the North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong, or for the

matter when children were killed in Dhemaji?"

A similar sense of alienation was felt in Manipur in June 2005, when the All Naga Students' Association, Manipur forced an economic blockade in the four Manipur hill districts of Tamenglong, Chandel, Ukhrul and Senapati. The blockade cut off Manipur from the rest of the country, leading to immense economic hardship for the people of the state. An LPG cylinder, normally priced at Rupees 300, was selling at Rupees 600, and prices of essential commodities soared. But the blockade, which could have been resolved had New Delhi the interest to do so, was "allowed" to continue for 52 days, bringing life to a standstill in the state. The perception in Imphal and thereabouts at the time was that New Delhi could not care less were the blockade to continue for another 100 days. If such trends continue, even economic alienation from the rest of India would ascertain that the region begins to look elsewhere, and away from the mainland. Of course, the fact that news about such blockades or fratricidal killings in the region is almost never printed in the national media is yet another manifestation of the indifference, ramification of which can be dire.

But, an aspect that a mainland has not quite comprehended is that although there is considerable grouse in the minds of the North Easterners, the fact of the matter is that despite the two percent that physically joins the North East to the rest of India, claiming thereby that the emotional bond is as slender, the truth is that a majority among North Easterners—in their heart of hearts—do not believe that "Hanoi is closer than New Delhi." Despite the dissonance and the insensitivity, New Delhi continues to determine almost every aspect of life in the region. Therefore, be it aspiring managers and civil servants in the region, who seek an entry into Indian Institute of Bangalore or St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, aspirants for the Indian Administrative Service or the Indian army, people seeking medical aid, business entrepreneurship or even a place as a stewardess in Delhi's Kitty Su, the refrain is that the Rajdhani Express from Guwahati or for the matter the airliner from Imphal leaves for Delhi. But, the flames that have engulfed the frontier are not mere outlying bush fire, but fire that has the ability—were heed not paid—to start a prairie fire that can set a nation's existence ablaze. It is strange, therefore, that this critical expanse should continue to be viewed with an insensitivity that is incapacitating.

(Jaideep Saikia is a celebrated conflict analyst and bestselling author)

Letters to the Editor

Helplessness and Consultocracy

Editor,
The article, "Are we victims of learned helplessness?" by Patricia Mukhim (Shillong Times Oct 14, 2022) makes painful reading. It shines a light on the pitiful predicament of our tribal society in Meghalaya. Helplessness has become ingrained in our tribal psyche. It's an acquired mindset, imposed on us by dominant societies, and self-accepted by us in acquiescent resignation.
We are unable to think for ourselves, decide for ourselves, and take charge of our destinies. We expect charity, reservation, and sympathy. We expect to be spoon-fed. We do not value or demand agency and autonomy. We are unable to mobilise ourselves, and the influencers among us cannot make a dent in our social inaction.

Why does Meghalaya have the lowest acceptance of Covid vaccination in the country? There is no collective thinking or action to change such self-harming behaviours. Unable to persuade the people in his village to accept vaccination, a headman phoned me late at night to vent his frustration. Tongue in cheek, he ruefully suggested that we call a white preacher from Europe or the USA, to thunder the benefits of vaccination from the pulpit. That would work, according to him.

This helplessness, unwillingness and inability have been taken for granted by the government. This is one of the reasons that leads to consultocracy. This is a new word for me. It describes a growing tendency of political governance to bring in high-cost outsiders. Even where local expertise is available it is not called upon. We have little faith in our own people to deliver the goods.

Not only government, academia is also culpable.

We unwittingly or knowingly collaborate in research or field projects, playing second fiddle in spite of our expertise. Data is collected, published in international journals, attributed and credited to outsiders, while local partners are hardly acknowledged. Worst of all copyright over precious data is lost from our custody. Such data is packaged and owned by outside agencies and actors, and sometimes sold back to us.

The editorial pointedly asks the question, "Are consultants more knowledgeable than the local people—scholars, academicians, researchers and village communities?" Social and cultural inputs are important in any sphere of human endeavour and local inputs are invaluable to any project. These cannot come from outsiders.

Such depreciation of local expertise weakens democracy and deprives people of their rights to participate. Collaboration is often beneficial, and we are not advo-

cing a policy of isolationism. Local human resource capital can be built up by providing opportunity, and at the same time we must measure up to professional expectations.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor,
Via email

Reminiscing Shillong's oldest Puja pandals

Editor,
In the Sunday Shillong (ST Oct 2, 2022) there mention was made about some of the oldest Pujas pandals in Shillong which is very informative. Here I would like to add one or two more names to the list of the old Durga Pujas of Shillong. One is the Durga Puja of Shillong Hindu Dharma Sabha (Jagannath Mandir) Thana Road which is also very old dating to over a hundred years of

its celebrations. I think next year will be the 125th year of its Puja celebration. The second Durga Puja which comes to my mind is the one at the Rup Rekha Parishad (Asamiya Namgarh) lower Jail Road just adjacent to the Umkhrah river which as far as I remember is also a century old Puja.

While coming to the reminiscences I am an octogenarian resident of Shillong and remember the idols were brought from Guwahati (then Gauhati) by the only private transport company the commercial carrying Company in covered trucks having 2 or 3 compartment each one for one idol so that there would not be any damage to the idols. In case of minor scratches the sculpture would be accompanied by a vehicle carrying someone to mend the damaged or scratched parts of the idol. I have witnessed the day of "Navami" when "Bali" of buffaloes and goats were sacrificed at the Gorkha Puja Luckier Road which used to be held in the premises of the present

football ground. I have also seen the "Bali" performed at the Shillong Police Reserve on that day where goats etc., were sacrificed to appease the Goddess.

Further I also remember the day of immersion. The idols would be carried on bamboo platforms by the people and many used to assemble at the Police Point for the onlookers who flocked to the area and took their seats on the lawns of the hillock of the old Meghalaya Assembly building. From there the procession would move in batches of 5 or 6 idols at a time to be immersed at the Umkhrah river on the foothills of Pasture Institute.

These are some of my reminiscences of the Old Durga Pujas of Shillong until the day of immersion.
Yours etc.,
S.L. Singhania,
Shillong

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

Inflationary trends in cost of of domestic cylinders in Meghalaya

By Willibertstar Diengdoh

Inflation hits the poor the hardest but we are hardly aware and least of all protest against these inflationary trends. We wonder how the poor can cope up with the steep increase in prices of essential commodities. Yet the elected representatives hardly spend time to talk of price rise. The steep hike in the price of LPG cylinders now makes it difficult for the poor to use it for cooking, thereby making a farce of the free LPG cylinders for BPL families.

From the data given below it may be noticed that the inflation in pricing of domestic gas in Meghalaya is not being addressed by elected representatives in the State. The main intent of this article is not to make issues, but to address the matter seriously. In most of the cases people from different professions and housewives in particular

cook meals for breakfast/dinner or prepare tea or boil water for bathing. This is why we have agitations and demands for increase in salaries and pay enhancement which is a genuine demand by the people in the State.

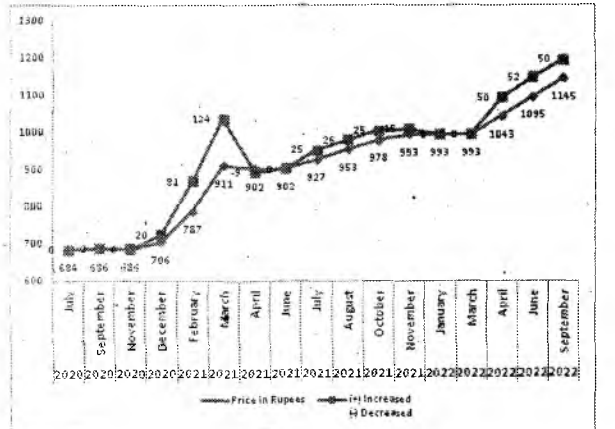
Fuel is one of the components that is measured and calculated to determine the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The below facts & figures confirm that there is an inflation that is going on in our State which needs to be addressed to mitigate the problems of the citizens. Only then will the government be able to improve the welfare of the people in the State. To ascertain that the figures below are genuine and not based on assumptions, kindly validate the same by verifying it on our own card (LPG card column name "Retail selling price").

In the table below column of Price Increased/

Table: 1 Detailed of Price Increased in households Cylinder Gas (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) in Meghalaya For the Year 2020 - 2022					
Year	Month	Price in Rupees	Price Increased/Decreased	Cumulative Price Increased/Decreased	% of Increased/Decreased
a	b	c	d	e	f
2020	July	684	0		
2020	September	686	2	2	0.29%
2020	November	686	0	2	0.29%
2020	December	706	20	22	3.12%
2021	February	787	81	103	13.09%
2021	March	911	124	227	24.22%
2021	April	902	-9	218	24.12%
2021	June	902	0	218	24.12%
2021	July	927	25	243	26.21%
2021	August	953	26	269	28.23%
2021	October	978	25	294	30.06%
2021	November	993	15	309	31.12%
2022	January	999	0	309	31.12%
2022	March	999	0	309	31.12%
2022	April	1043	50	359	34.42%
2022	June	1095	52	411	37.53%
2022	September	1145	50	461	40.26%

residing in the urban and rural areas of the State would agree that there is unregulated inflation which is ignored by the governing authorities. For preparation of food, thermal energy is one of the main elements to be considered especially for the urban residents. We totally depend on the availability of LPG and not on the availability of firewood, since burning of wood for preparation of food affects the health of the person involved in

Decreased, the depicted value is circled RED when it is greater and equal to 100, when value is lesser than 100 and greater and equal to 0 then it is Yellow and when value is less than 0 or negative it is GREEN. An assessment has been made that price rise in most cases which occurs on a frequency of 17 months, is below Rs 100; that occurs 15 times, more than Rs 100 is 1 time and less than 0 Rupees occurs 1 time, which is -9.



the process. Also time is wasted in collection of firewood and cooking on it.

The prevailing situation in our State is not so good; since almost all essential commodities are becoming costlier by the day and the consequence are not promising. Therefore, regulation of prices is very important so that uniform growth will take place in the society.

Let me give some examples: Lets us try to compare three persons A, B, C on the potential of purchasing power. Let's consider that all the three persons are eager to buy products of the same origin. Person A is an Officer earning Rs 50,000 per month while Person B is a clerk earning Rs 35,000 and Person C is a labourer earning Rs 15,000 per month. As per the data below, if the cost of an LPG per cylinder is Rs 684 but the price has suddenly been increased to Rs 1145, who will the price increase affect the most? Naturally the one earning the least! That is why poor people will have to sacrifice and start prioritising whether to boil water to drink or

In the table below column of Cumulative Price Increased/Decreased, the depicted value is circled RED when it is greater and equal to 100, when value is lesser than 100 and greater and equal to 0 then it is YELLOW and when value is less than 0 or negative it is GREEN. An assessment has been made that most of the price rise that occurs on a frequency of 17 months is from July 2020 to September, 2022, the value which is greater and equal to 100 (occurs 13 times), the value less than 100 and greater and equal to 0 (occurs 3 times) and value less than 0 or negative (nil). A graph has been plotted from the base year and month of July 2020, where the rate of the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) was @ Rupees 684, till September, 2022 where the rate was @ Rupees 1145, with a cumulative increase @ Rupees 461, and the total percentage of price increase is 40.26% (Forty Point Twenty Six percent) almost double the price rise in the span of 2 years from July 2020 to September, 2022.

Top cardiac surgeon shortlisted for BBC Earth photo contest

Mumbai-based leading cardiac surgeon Dr. Ramakanta Panda has been shortlisted for the prestigious Sony-BBC Earth Photography Contest-2022, an official said here on Friday.

The theme for this year's contest was 'Thrill of Life' and photographers worldwide were invited to send their entries in categories like landscape, adventure and wildlife.

After a detailed shortlisting process, the voting for the finalists started last week, with Dr. Panda - who pursues photography as a passionate hobby - figuring among the finalists.

"It's a privilege to be shortlisted for the award... Photography has always been a 'stress-buster' for me," said Dr. Panda - who heads the Asian Heart Institute (AHI) here - with a smile.

Unknown to many, Dr. Panda's heart beats for nature, flora and fauna which he pursues on weekends in Maharashtra and other states or even Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa blessed with a large variety of wildlife.

An avid wildlife photographer, who easily sheds his sterile surgical gloves, gown and scrub caps for coarse jungle outfits, sophisticated cameras, zoom lenses and prowls around in the jungles for birds, animals, reptiles or other fascinating things to 'shoot' on film.

Besides, he is also a philanthropist in the wildlife sector and had announced setting up an eco-friendly holiday resort for tourists the proceeds of which would benefit around 2,000 poor forest workers in Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh.

IANS had first featured this in detail and other such initiatives of Dr. Panda implemented in Kanha National Park and Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary (May 15), benefitting thousands of forest workers.

As he awaits the final announcement of the photography contest, Dr. Panda is also preparing for an exhibition of his photographs at the Nehru Centre, London in July 2023. (IANS)



Celebrate Diwali with hemp-based recipes

What better way to celebrate Diwali, which is just around the corner, than by cooking something special and delectable for your loved ones? Make delicious and nutritious Diwali sweets with hemp to fill your home with a beautiful aroma during this festival of lights.

Santosh Tamang, Head Chef at The Hemp Factory, shares some delectable and healthful recipes for Diwali sweets:

Hemp Besan Ladoo

Ingredients:
1 Cup Besan/Gram Flour
One fourth Cup Ghee
Half Cup Powdered Sugar
1 tsp Hemp Hearts
Half tsp Cardamom Powder
1 tsp Hemp Powder
10 Almonds for Garnishing

Process:
Dry roast the besan on medium flame for about 10-15mins, keep stirring. Its raw taste should not be there.

Add ghee and mix well. Cook the besan till fat separates for about 8-10 minutes and turn off the flame.

Add sugar cardamom powder and hemp powder. Mix well so that there are no lumps.. Let the mixture cool completely. Once the mixture is cool, add hemp hearts.

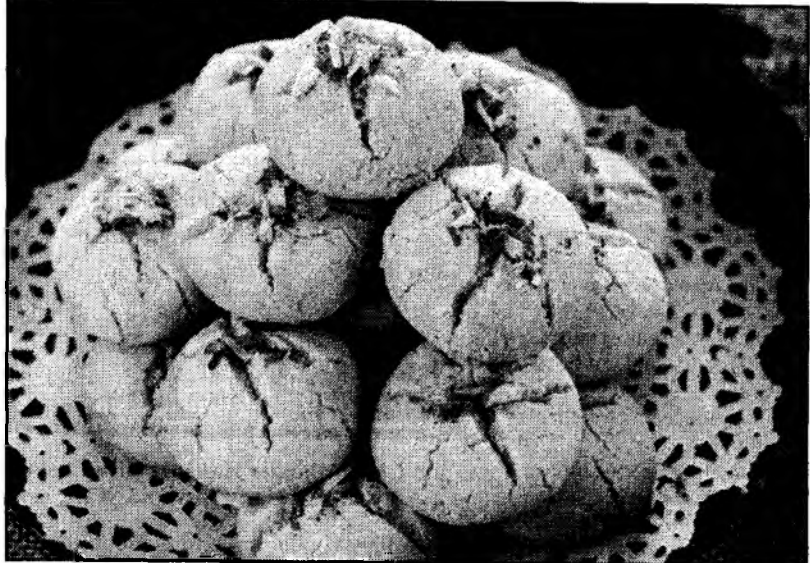
Grease your hands with ghee and start forming laddoos. Make smooth and round laddoos. Decorate with Almonds.

Serve or store in an airtight container.

Hemp-infused Nankhatai

Ingredients:
1 fourth cup all-purpose flour (175 grams)
2 tablespoons fine rava (semolina) 25 grams
1 tablespoon Hemp Flour
Half cup powdered sugar (80 grams)
Half cup ghee (115 grams)
Half teaspoon salt
Half teaspoon cardamom powder
2 teaspoons slivered pistachios or nuts of your choice
1 tablespoon Hemp Hearts

Process:
In a bowl, sieve maida (all-



purpose flour). Keep it aside.

In a bowl whisk ghee and sugar with a spoon or whisk until creamy, light, and pale.

Add all-purpose flour, Hemp flour, Sooji, salt, and cardamom powder into the ghee-sugar mixture.

Combine everything using a spatula, then use your hands to bring the dough together. Do not knead the dough.

If the dough looks dry, add a teaspoon of ghee and gently work the dough until it comes together.

Rest the dough covered in the fridge for at least 30 minutes.

Mixing ghee and flour for nankhatai dough

Pinch a lime-sized portion of the dough. Roll it between your palms to form a smooth round shape. Flatten them slightly.

Place it on the baking tray lined with parchment paper.

Repeat with the rest of the cookie dough.

Place them 1 inch apart since they will expand on baking.

Using a knife, make a criss-cross pattern in the middle. You can also make a little indentation in the center instead of a criss-cross pattern.

Refrigerate again for another 15 minutes. Preheat your oven to 190 degrees C.

Bake in a preheated oven for 15 to 16 minutes. It might take a little less or more time for you. Keep an eye out after 13 minutes.

Sprinkle some slivered pistachios and rose petals and Hemp Hearts

Double Chocolate Chip Hemp Heart Cookies

Ingredients:
Half cup liquid coconut oil
Quarter cup almond, soy or rice milk
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 cup coconut or brown sugar
1 cup Hemp Seeds, divided
1 cup chocolate chips (semi sweet or vegan)

2 cups gluten free OR all purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
Half teaspoon kosher salt

Process:
Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Place coconut oil, almond milk, vanilla, coconut sugar, 3/4 cup Hemp Seeds and 1/2 cup chocolate chips in a blender and puree for 30 seconds or until small pieces remain, but mixture is creamy.

In a separate large bowl whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt.

Add the chocolate mixture into the flour mixture and stir until ingredients are totally combined. Stir in the remaining chocolate chips and Hemp Seeds.

Using a small ice cream scoop or 2 tablespoon measure, place cookies on a silpat or parchment lined baking sheet.

Use the heel of your hand to gently press cookies down and form into circles.

Bake cookies for 11 minutes for softer cookies and 13-14 minutes for crisper cookies. (IANSLife)

Nobel Vision of Civil Society

The crusade for civil rights has once again been globally recognised with the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize 2022.

The term civil society goes back to Aristotle's phrase *koinōnia politikē* in his politics, where it refers to a 'political community' commensurate with the Greek city-state (*polis*) characterised by a shared set of norms and ethos, in which free citizens on an equal footing lived under the rule of law.

The telos or end of civil society, thus defined, was *eudaimonia* often translated as human flourishing or common well-being, as man was defined as a 'political (social) animal'. The concept was used by Roman writers such as Cicero, who referred to the ancient notion of a republic (*res publica*). It reentered the Western political discourse following one of the late medieval translations of Aristotle's politics into Latin by Leonardo Bruni who first translated *koinōnia politikē* as *societas civilis*.

One may or may not like it from the political point of rulers everywhere, but the Peace Prize is a victory for civil society, particularly in the home country of the person or persons awarded. Be it Ukraine or Russia, humanist values are trampled every day and millions become victims of militarism and dictatorship. The 2022 Peace Prize, honouring the Nobel vision of peace and fraternity between nations, has been announced for human rights advocate Ales Bialiatski from Belarus, the Russian human rights organisation Memorial and the Ukrainian human rights organisation Centre for Civil Liberties.

Through their consistent efforts in favour of humanist values, anti-militarism and principles of law, this year's laureates have revitalised and honoured Alfred Nobel's vision of peace and fraternity between nations. This noble vision is most needed in the world today. We all sense the ever-present corruption, the centralised power, and the empty slogans. But very few among us are fearless enough to stand up and fight.

The individual winner, Bialiatski has been detained without trial in Belarus since last year. He founded the human rights organisation Viasna in 1996 after Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko rammed through constitutional changes that gave him broad authority to dissolve parliament, leading to mass protests.

Until the mind is free, the body is enslaved. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."

Viasna, or "Spring," supported the jailed demonstrators and their families. A quarter-century later, the organisation continues to defend free speech and liberty. It has kept a spotlight on thousands of protesters and dissidents in Belarus, who have been jailed and beaten since Lukashenko stole the 2020 presidential election and forced the true winner, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya into exile.

Also honoured was Memorial, the human rights organisation synonymous with the democratic hopes of the late 1980s and 1990s in the Soviet Union and Russia, and which the Russian authorities forced to close. In addition to tracking human rights abuses, Memorial created a vast and treasured archive on the victims of Joseph Stalin's repression, out of the conviction, as the Nobel Prize announcement put it, that "confronting past crimes is essential in preventing new ones." In the same spirit, the award also went to Ukraine's Centre for Civil Liberties, which has attempted to "identify and document Russian war crimes against the Ukrainian civilian population."

Reports have emerged that three Indians, Alt-News co-founders Pratik Sinha, Mohammad Zubair and Harsh Mander, have been nominated. According to *Time*, the co-founders of fact-check site *AltNews*, Sinha and Zubair, are among those who could be considered to win the prize based on nominations that were made public via Norwegian lawmakers, predictions from bookmakers, and picks from the Peace Research Institute, Oslo. The two "have relentlessly been battling misinformation in India" amid accusations of discrimination against Muslims "and have methodologically debunked rumours and fake news circulating on social media and called out hate speech", the publication said.

There were about 343 candidates - 251 are individuals and 92 are organisations - in the running for the Nobel Peace Prize 2022.

Although the Nobel Committee did not announce the names of the nominees, neither to the media nor to the candidates, a Reuters survey found Belarusian opposition politician Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, broadcaster David Attenborough, climate activist Greta Thunberg, Pope Francis, Tuvalu's foreign minister Simon Kofe, and Myanmar's National Unity Government are among those nominated by Norwegian lawmakers.

The chosen few Peace Prize laureates have for many years promoted the right to criticise power and protect the fundamental rights of citizens.

They have made an outstanding effort to document war crimes, human rights abuses and the abuse of power. Together they demonstrate the significance of civil society for peace and democracy. "The Norwegian Nobel Committee wishes to honour three outstanding champions of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence in the neighbouring countries Belarus, Russia and Ukraine," said the committee.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Memorial grew to become the largest human rights organisation in Russia. In addition to establishing a centre of documentation on victims of the Stalinist era, Memorial compiled and systematised information on political oppression and human rights violations in Russia.

The Peace Prize laureates represent civil society in their home countries. Berit Reiss-Andersen, head of the Nobel Committee, announces on October 7 the winner of this year's Peace Prize in Oslo. By awarding the Nobel Peace Prize for 2022 to Bialiatski, Memorial and the Centre for Civil Liberties, the Norwegian Nobel Committee wished to honour three outstanding champions of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence in the neighbouring countries Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

With the rise of a distinction between monarchical autonomy and public law, the term civil society gained currency to denote the corporate estates (*Ständestaat*) of a feudal elite of landholders as opposed to the powers exercised by the prince. It had a long history in state theory and was revived with particular force in recent times, in Eastern Europe, where dissidents such as Václav Havel as late as in the 1990s employed it to denote the sphere of civic associations threatened by the intrusive holistic state-dominated regimes of Communist Eastern Europe.

The first post-modern usage of civil society as denoting political opposition stems from the writings of Aleksander Smolar in 1978-79. However, the term was not in use by the Solidarity labour union in 1980-1981.

After conferring the Nobel Peace Prize this year to civil society activists, the term will get a new lease on life. It will encourage the fight against injustice and injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere and this is what the Nobel Committee recognised this year.

(Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee is a senior academician and columnist)

Sustainable ways to create surreal fashion

The second day of the Lakme Fashion Week x FDCI was dedicated to sustainable fashion.

Several designers presented their collections, brought to shape through eco-friendly practices.

Industry veterans like Anju Modi, Abraham and Thakore, and Satya Paul to young talents like Diksha Khanna, Swati Kapoor and Rina Singh launched their latest line created with environmentally conscious thoughts and requirements.

The collection included the double ikat handwoven silk houndstooth saree in black and amla acquired by The Victoria & Albert Museum in London, presented in 2011 for their collection called 'Masculine and Feminine'. The collection was inspired by classic men's fabrics and aimed at creating a sharp look for a new generation of women.

Alongside, they also gave a sneak-peek of the Spring-Summer '23 collection and a few of their archival pieces. The range extended to daywear, workwear, and occasion-wear in colours like sage, carmine, earthy beige, and brown, splashed with a hint of shimmer. There were saris, textured and 3D jackets, kurtas, kaftans, tunics, palazzos and churidars in fabrics like organic cotton, habutay, and mashru silks, lenzing eco Vero, and Tencel. Additionally, there were co-ord sets, shirts, jackets, vests, and pants, loungewear and accessories for men.

Anju Modi's collection "Damayanti" created in association of TENCEL fiber was inspired by the paintings of Indian artist Raja Ravi Varma. The outfits reflected the western techniques and styles used by the artist to paint his muse Dayamanti.

Satya Paul's collection "A Stranger Thinks" focused on athleisure along with formal wears. There were clean and contemporary silhouettes in fabrics like satin, organza, cotton, viscose and silk. The colour palette was inspired by colours of the sky, space and cosmos.

Rina's collection "It's Only a Dream" took inspiration from the story of Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll. The designer has experimented with an exploration of block prints on hand-woven fabrics like cotton and cotton silk, Kota, linen and blends, Jamdani incorporated into cotton and cotton silk silhouettes. (IANSLife)

Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë & the case of the 'real-life Heathcliff'

When Emily Brontë published *Wuthering Heights* in 1847 under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, outraged Victorian critics deemed it savage, indecent and immoral. One described it as “a compound of vulgar depravity and unnatural horrors”.

After Brontë’s death, when the novel began to find success, many were surprised to find that such a tempestuous gothic romance had been written by a quiet parson’s daughter. But did a real-life romance inspire Emily Brontë’s only novel? According to Frances O’Connor’s new film, *Emily*, the answer is yes. But the historical picture is far more murky.

The film presents a romantic origin story to account for Brontë’s iconic novel. While reclaiming Emily as a rebel, misfit and the weirdest of the “weird sisters”, as Ted Hughes memorably called them, the film departs knowingly from historical fact, mixing biography with Brontë mythology and dramatic invention to present a very different picture. Australian-British director O’Connor has described her film as putting Emily at the centre of her own story.

This Emily is a rum-and-gin-drinking, opium-fuelled young woman, whose life was, in O’Connor’s vision, a version of *Wuthering Heights*. As one reviewer put it, “Emily isn’t a biopic of Emily Brontë but a fantastical retelling of her life.”

Because the bond between the novel’s Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff is widely considered one of the most passionate stories in English Literature, people doubt whether an unmarried clergyman’s daughter could have written it without experiencing romance first hand.

O’Connor’s film suggests that a passionate but tragic affair between Brontë and the local curate, William Weightman, is the source

for Cathy and Heathcliff’s bond. Their romance is portrayed as a heated one, with the couple’s sexual intimacy troubling Weightman’s religious beliefs.

Who was William Weightman?

Weightman has featured prominently in stories of the Brontës’ romantic lives. He was assistant curate to their father, Patrick Brontë, at Haworth’s St Michael and All Angels’ church between 1839 and 1842, and a friend to all the Brontë siblings.

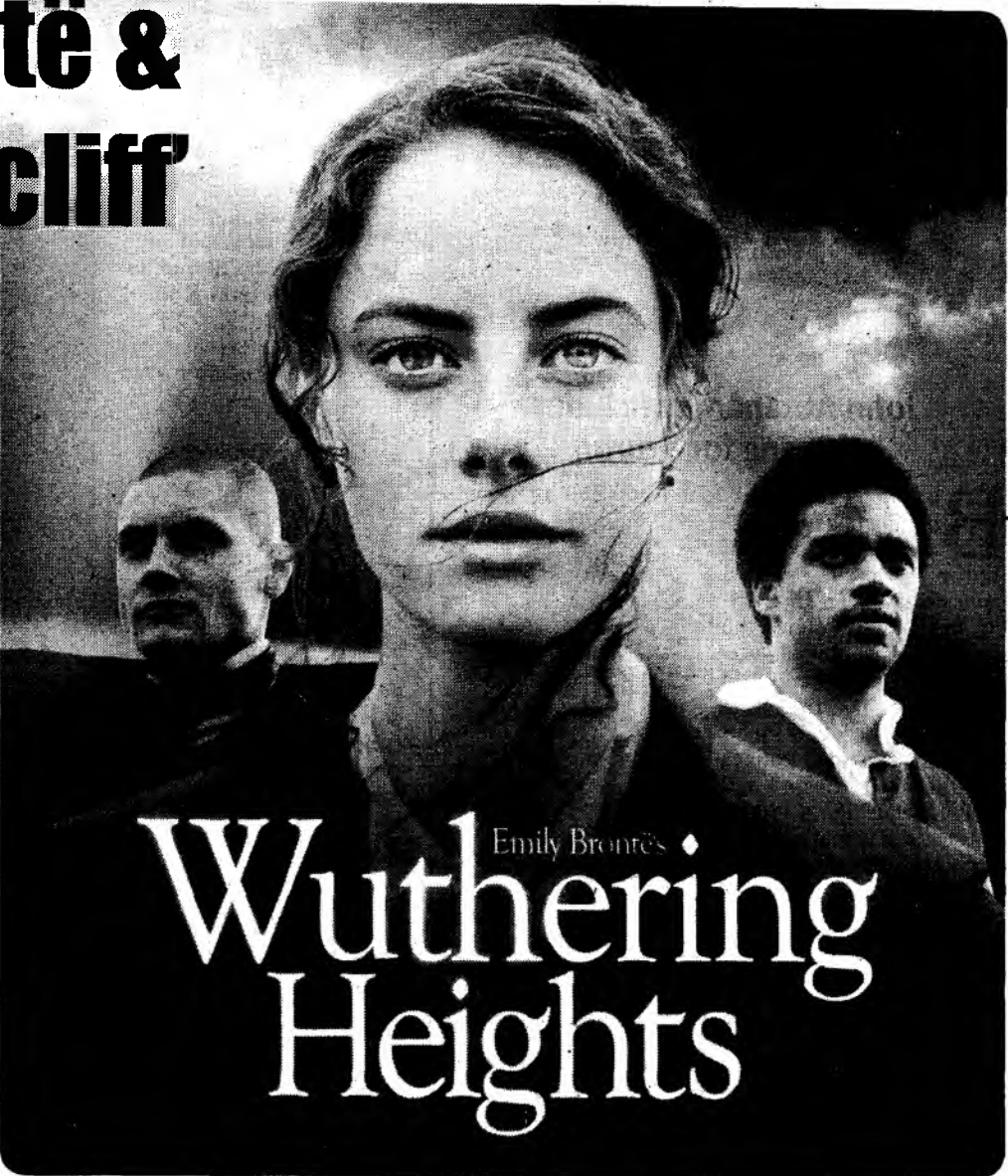
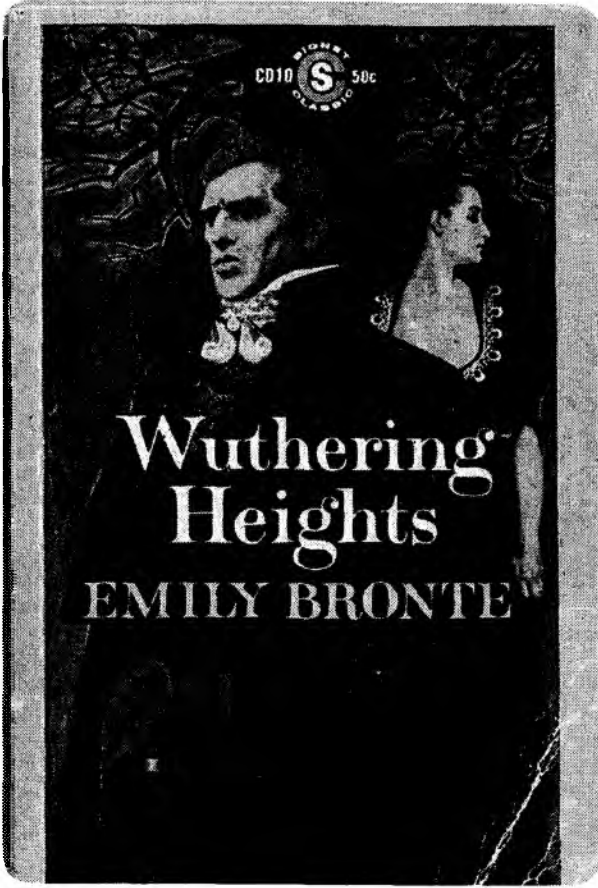
But despite the fervent story in O’Connor’s film, there is no factual evidence to support the idea that Emily had an illicit liaison with Weightman. If anything, she is the one Brontë sister who is not associated with Weightman romantically. Both Anne, Emily’s younger sister, and Charlotte, her older sister, are said to have been infatuated with him, particularly as he charmed them and played with their affections.

As the film shows, in February 1840, Weightman discovered that neither the sisters nor Charlotte’s best friend, Ellen Nussey, had ever received a Valentine’s card, so he playfully sent them all one, walking ten miles to post the anonymously written tributes.

Historically, Weightman is remembered for being both extremely popular and exceedingly handsome. Thankfully, because Charlotte drew his portrait, his likeness is preserved.

It is Anne Brontë who is most associated with Weightman romantically. Charlotte wrote in her letters that he sat “opposite Anne at church sighing softly and looking out of the corners of his eyes to win her affection – and Anne is so quiet, her looks so downcast – they are a picture”.

Following Weightman’s early death from cholera in September 1842, Anne wrote the poem *I will not mourn thee, lovely one*. Some biographers have speculated



wildly that, along with Anne’s representation of curate Edward Weston in *Agnes Grey* (1847), the poem is proof that Anne was in love with Weightman and that he returned her affections.

Emily’s imaginary lovers

O’Connor’s biopic, however, is not the first source to suggest that Emily Brontë had a lover, and several other figures have been proposed over the years as candidates. For example, because Emily liked to visit the library at Ponden Hall, a site claimed as the inspiration for Thrushcross Grange in *Wuthering Heights*, it has been suggested that she shared a bond with resident Robert Heaton and that he even

planted a pear tree in the Hall’s garden in her honour. A Heaton descendant claimed that the connection between the lovers was widely known but that family differences forbade a union.

Likewise, in 1936, scholar Virginia Moore stated that a close reading of Emily’s poetic manuscripts identified a mystery lover: one Louis Paresnell. Sadly, not only is there no historical evidence for the existence of any such person, but Moore had misread the manuscript. *Louis Paresnell* was actually the words *Love’s Farewell* and it was a title for a poem proposed by Charlotte when she was editing her sister’s verse for publication in 1850, following Emily’s death in 1848.

Moore also claimed that Emily Brontë was a lesbian, an idea later explored by both feminist academic Camille Paglia and Brontë biographer Stevie Davies, even though there is, again, no evidence to support any firm conclusion on the matter.

Elsewhere, others have misinterpreted the close bond between Emily and her brother, Branwell, suggesting that they had an incestuous relationship and that this informed the representation of Cathy and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*.

Beyond written texts, the new film is not the first screen biopic to offer a possible lover for Emily. Curtis Bernhardt’s 1946 film *Devotion*, starring Ida Lupino

as Emily, proposed that another curate stole the author’s heart: Arthur Bell Nicholls, the man who would go on to marry Emily’s sister, Charlotte Brontë, in 1854.

The origins of *Wuthering Heights* can actually be found in Emily’s poetry, particularly her verse emerging from Gondal, the imaginary world she co-created with Anne. But even in the absence of evidence, many persist to attribute the novel’s magnetism to an imaginary lover for Emily Brontë rather than to her own powerful imagination. William Weightman may be the current candidate in the frame, but he will not be the last.

(The Conversation)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, OCTOBER 16, 2022

Mercury is parallel to Jupiter on your solar return chart and it will give excellent results. You will get a good news related to your job. Your business too will prosper. There will be happy atmosphere at home. Your earnings will be good. You will also remain healthy and fit. You will also be in a position to take right decisions. You will feel peaceful. Your business situation will also improve. Your government related works will get done with ease. Students will work hard and they will get good results. Those who are in technical fields will get good results and opportunities. You will also share wonderful bonding with your mate. You will have the full support of your life partner. You will also plan to go on an outdoor visit. You will also get full profit of your efforts. Auspicious functions will keep taking place. You will make good progress in life.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It will be an enterprising week. Your meetings with the high officials will be quite fruitful. You will have monetary gains. There is a chance of getting promoted too. You may remain busy in the preparation of some festival or function at your place. You will realize your life goals and your ambitions will be fulfilled. Relations with your partners will improve. You will not adopt any foul means to achieve your goals. You will be very practical in your approach and there is no room for any carelessness. Success in business is possible. The tide will be favorable. You will avoid risky ventures and use soft tongue to get your work done. Don't take any advice from an elder member in family in a casual manner. You may feel upset due to a financial matter but it is only temporary issue.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It is a wonderful week. You will work with much peace and contentment and will not be in the rat race for making quick money. Slow and steady wins the race and you will be satisfied with what you have. An important work will get done during this phase. You will be never sort of funds. You will also plan decoration and renovation of your house. You will be quite happy with your performance and your boss and seniors will be happy with you. You will have a secret liking for a person working in your office. A pleasant surprise is waiting for you if you make a move to propose him/her. He/she will come closer to you. You will give respect to your seniors. You may also get good money unexpectedly. You may also realize your held up money.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

The week will prove auspicious for you as you move on with the things. Results of examination will come up to your expectations. Your image will improve before others. You will also have good bonding with people. This phase will be full of hope and expectations and you may get higher education. Youth will take interest in studies without adding any pressure. You may get opportunities for progress in your work. With zest, zeal and dash you will complete your projects. Those connected with agency work, distribution, publicity, media or TV may gain. A transfer to a place of your choice is very much on. You will also get welcomed as a guest at your relative or friend's place. You will enjoy good connect with your partner. You may enjoy good food, shopping spree and a swell time in every way.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Things are looking brighter. You will accomplish some auspicious work and will get lot of name and fame for the same. You will also love to spend a lot of time with your family and friends. You will also love your kids and will pamper them. You will also have gains in your business. You will get pleasure and bliss in life. But there will be some testing times too. Relations with your parents and progeny will get better. You need to avoid day dreaming or you may lose some vital gains. Your outspokenness will also harm your interests. You will undertake business trips with lot of hope and confidence. Relief from tension is also indicated. You will work and study with full concentration. Your hard work will be duly rewarded. You will enjoy the weather. And will meet someone interesting and charming. Love relations are on the cards.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

A favorable time awaits you. You will be enjoying marvelous success in your work. You will also accomplish your targets as per your plan. Your name and fame will rise. You will also like to broaden your social circle. You will also cooperate with your subordinates in your official matters. You will also be very considerate to your parents. You will be busy in your work and will be working on various projects simultaneously. You will be under enormous pressure to complete your deadlines. At times you may feel quite perplexed too. You will also indulge in a bit self assessment. Those who are without jobs for sometime now will get employed. You need to come out clean in your love matters. You will work quite methodically and shall complete some of your projects easily.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You will earn a lot with little efforts that you put. You will also make a good assessment of the things and will take decisions accordingly. You will be a live wire at work and work with lot of pride and dedication. Your income will grow with the new avenues of income opening before you. You will enjoy a wonderful love-life and good relationship with your

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You will be kept busy with your work. Your prestige will be at stake and you will be under pressure to finish off your work in time. You will come up to the expectations of one and all. Property related disputes will get resolved with mutual consent and understanding. Need to take care of your health which may turn delicate. You will move ahead in life with positive thinking and balanced outlook. You will show love towards your partner. The shortcomings that were there in your relations will come to an end. Implementing of something new at the workplace will be successful. You will spend lot of time with your family. There will be tendency to do creative work. You will experience improvement in your health. You will get rid of problems and difficulties. Blessings from elders of the family will be received.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will take some solid and important decisions regarding your business. You will get results in the near future. You will witness positive changes in your life. Your boss will be pleased with your work. You will make even impossible position with your hard work. Higher officials will have expectations from you. You will be busy with decoration works. There will be inflow of money Jupiter will bring positive changes in your luck. Your life style will also undergo a change. Before money comes in, there will be a way out. Students will get success in competitive exams. The money that was about to be received may take some time to be received. A meeting with some important person will fill you with enthusiasm and energy.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

The week will start with auspicious events and end with positive results. Your name and fame will rise. You will be very popular among your colleagues. Your family and relationship will be a priority. You will get lot of mental peace. You will need to be watchful in business and financial deals. A person known to you can turn out to be disloyal to you. Some government related problems are going to be settled. You will get success in government matters. You will also not take rest until you finish off your work. There will be some new addition in your family. You will also take some new work in your hands. You will also make contact with higher officials. Your financial position will be quite strong. You will have continuous inflow of money. You will also get back an old loan. You will get help from friends and relatives.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The time is right. You will be at the peace with yourself. You will reassess your priorities in life and reorganize the things again. You also want to establish mutual respect and love among your family members. You will walk on the path of progress without any hitch. You will also plan to buy property, house or vehicle. You will do well in your business. Your search regarding job will come to an end and you will get a good job offer. There are also strong chances of marriage and romance at this time. You will also plan to go abroad for job or higher studies. You will have no visa and passport problems. You will be totally dedicated to your work and will be rewarded for it. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time in the company of each other. You will feel blessed in your life.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The timing is perfect to start new things in your life. You will get what you had always wanted in your life. Money, name, fame and respect will come your way. Providence is supporting you fully. Even your friends and family members will support you fully. Celebrations for some festivals are in order and there will be new addition to the family. Your professional contacts will prove beneficial. Buying and selling, beautification and renovation will gather speed. Plans for travels can be made. You will meet your loved ones. Success will be yours. You will strengthen your family ties. You will get success in love matters. Meetings with friends and relatives will give you freshness and energy. Your seniors and colleagues will assist you in your work.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You will get stability and security in your life. You will be able to do your work smoothly. The circle of your friends and admirers will increase. You will also do noble deeds. You can also feel tremendous attraction towards anything. All kinds of partnerships and relationships will be important to you. You will also earn a lot of money. You will be relaxed with your goal and be very close to achieving success. Your honor will also increase. You will meet good people and they will help you in completion of some work. Husband and wife will have wonderful bonding. You will feel relaxed and easy going. You will forget all the problems and get involved in the work. Students will study hard and get success in exams/interview.

Le Jeune: A collecting legacy by Christies

Christies will present works from a collection that has evolved across the decades of one family’s story and is among the most important of its kind in Benelux. Le Jeune, A Collecting Legacy will be offered across a series of 20th/21st Century sales.

Jacqueline Le Jeune and her husband Mark began buying art in the late 1960s. Jacqueline resolved to support practicing artists, and built what would become a major collection of both Belgian and international works. Jacqueline’s passion would also have a formative impact on her descendants.

Their collection is similarly diverse, ranging from works by Banksy and Gilbert & George to Yoshitomo Nara, and a major pastel by Nicolas Party, as well as a large number of Belgian artists.

Pauline Haon, Senior Specialist, 20th/21st Century Art, Christie’s Belgium, said: “Le Jeune, A Collecting Legacy celebrates the ground-breaking vision of a collecting dynasty whose guiding principle was to support emerging artists, spanning multiple generations. Forging deep friendships with those whose works they acquired, their collection includes early examples by pioneering artists who would go on to become hugely influential. Christie’s is honoured to showcase the diversity of this collection in a series of our 20th/21st Century sales, beginning in London during Frieze Week.”

Lucio Fontana and Gunther Uecker represent pioneering European Modernism with examples from the early 1960s presented by both artists. *Concetto spaziale, Attese* (1961, estimate: 1,000,000-1,500,000 pounds) is a pure and elegant example of Fontana’s celebrated ‘tagli’ with four pristine strokes. Gunther Uecker’s *Organische Struktur* (1962, estimate: 400,000-600,000 pounds) is from a series of 12 works that represent an important chapter in the evolution of Uecker’s early Nagelbilder (Nail Paintings).

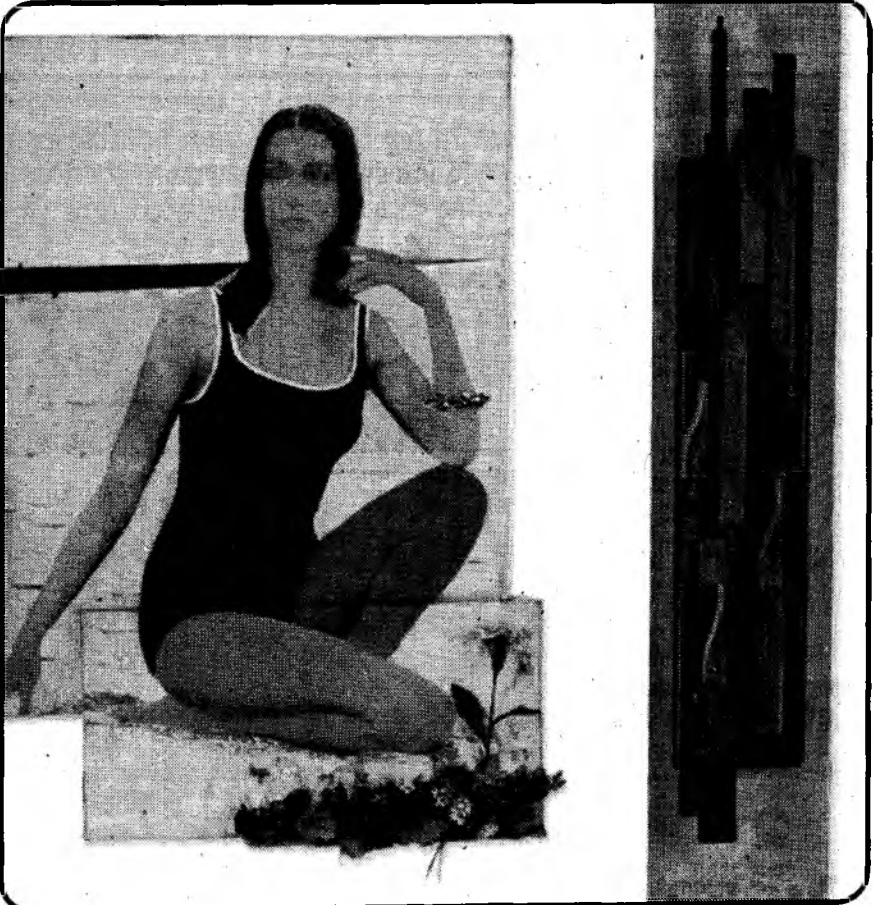
Bien sur le petit bateau (1963, estimate: 400,000-600,000 pounds) is a subversive celebration of sun, colour and beauty by Martial Raysse. The painting

depicts a woman posing on a beach, taken from a swimwear advertisement, which was photocopied and blown up to monumental scale before being laid down on canvas and overpainted.

Keen to continue engaging artists across multiple generations, they were driven by discovery, focusing on early moments in the careers of contemporary artists. Nicolas Party’s *Landscape* (2016, estimate: 500,000-700,000 pounds) is a vivid, otherworldly vision drawing together the legacies of Surrealism, biomorphic abstraction and European landscape painting.

Yoshitomo Nara’s *Girl with a Knife* (1999, estimate: 250,000-350,000 pounds) is an early example of the artist’s graphic, punk-inspired aesthetic. His cast of children, with distinctive exaggerated features, would become global icons, often styled as tiny rebels carrying miniature weapons.

Luc Tuymans’ *De Wandeling (The Walk)* (1991, estimate: 700,000-900,000 pounds) represents a touchstone in Tuymans’ early oeuvre, capturing his complex dialogue with themes of history and memory. (*IANSlife*)



"War does not determine who is right - only who is left."

—Bertrand Russell

The Shillong Times

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Poverty amid plenty

PREDICTABLY, the Indian establishment has begun doing chest-beating, accusing external forces of attempting to tarnish the (fair) image of India – as the Global Hunger Index (GHI) ranked this nation low yet again and in a more affirmative manner. India, this time, ranked 107 on a scale of 121 nations in the annual GPI review, with nations like Pakistan faring much better. India's GHI score has decreased from 38.8 points at the turn of the century to an alarming 29.1. The report has admitted however that the country made "substantial progress" on several counts but areas of concern were many, as in the case of child nutrition.

Nearly one fifth of the children in India are undernourished and under-weight, presenting the highest global concentration of such kids. Undernourishment of children is direct proof of the poverty at home. Banishing poverty, per se, does not limit itself to mere sustenance with free quotas of ration, which the BPL families across the country are now entitled to. The central and state governments are virtually "feeding" not just the BPL families but others too by way of subsidies and other gratifications, many of which might even appear as unwarranted. Rather than helping people with means of livelihood, the governments are engaged in the freebies-subsidy raj, in the hope the poor multitudes will reciprocate such gestures with votes.

One might be confused by the fact that global rating agencies are presenting contradictory pictures about this nation. India is certified to be the world's "fastest-growing" economy. There was a lot of talk in the past about India nearing the economic Super Power status, which is proving to be a mirage. The 'Mamohonomics' had projected a 'trickle down' theory wherein the economic empowerment of the upper layers of the society would see wealth percolating down to the lowest levels. In the process, though, what happened was the gap between the rich and the poor grew like a monster. The poor are getting poorer and the rich few are getting richer. A sizable middle class is caught in between. Giving the poor free or subsidized rice meant too little in the evolving social contexts. Generations ago, filling the belly meant a life of contentment. Not anymore. Governments cannot afford to spoon-feed its people or employ them in large numbers. What they can rather do is create opportunities for a means of livelihood to all individuals. The virtual stagnation in the small and medium enterprises sector meant there is much less of employment generation today. Income from small farms means too little for sustenance. This is the tragedy of this nation today.

Who Are We?

By H H Mohrmen

It was the man from Nagpur who woke us up from our slumber, made us think, and try to understand who we are as a tribe. Many were compelled to react to the statement that we are all Hindu because it questions the tribe's unique identity. It was also in a way a call to rediscover our identity as modern "Khun u Hynfnew Trep Hynfnew Skum." So credit also goes to the gentlemen who compelled most of us to try to rediscover ourselves in response to the statement.

The tribe is unique and it evolves with time
No man is an island so the saying goes, and we no longer live just amongst ourselves, untouched and unreachable by the modern world. No matter how much we wish that remain authentic, we are being influenced by the outside world and evolve with time. And in the fast-changing world we live now, the question that we need to ask ourselves is what does it mean to be a "Khun u Hynfnew Trep Hynfnew Skum" now? In the situation that we are in, who are we? And what defines us as a unique tribe?

We are different yet we are one
Time changes and the Hynfnew Trep people have adopted different religions in the way they worship God. Some were steadfast in their beliefs in the traditional religions, and some had chosen to follow other religions. Yet we are one monolithic group of people united by our belief that we belong to the same tribe. We may use the different common names – "Khasi, Khasi Pnar, Khun u Hynfnew Trep Hynfnew Skum or u Ynfiaw wasa Ynfiaw wasung", the fact remains that we all believe that we are one. So the question that begs the answer is what defines us as a tribe? Or what are the aspects of the tribe that are common to all the groups? Or what unites us as one race or 'jaidbyriew'?

We are because of our culture
We are the same tribe because we follow a matrilineal family system where the lineage is taken from the mother's line. The entire tribe follows the three cardinal principles, "kamai ia ka hok, tip-briew, tip-blei and tip-kur tip-kha." And kinship through clan cut across the group variation that we have. People also still believe that every member of the community is responsible for the welfare and wellbeing of society. Knowingly or unknowingly in almost everything we do, we all work for "ka bhalang uba bun balang or ka bhalang ka imlang sahl-ang" or the wellbeing of the community that we belong to (Mohrmen HH, The Cultural History of Jaintia hills in Stories Stones and Traditions, 2021 unpublished).

A member of the 'jaidbyriew' is also governed by the principle of life that one is also expected to be honest and upright "ba tip-hok tip-sot" or a man or a woman of his words who lives honestly and truthfully.

Our food is different

Like any tribal people of the region, the Khyntiam, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyngnam eat different kinds of meat. Fermented beans and fermented fish are the other food items that are common to all the groups. Rice is the major crop of the people and they make many snacks from rice like Putharo, Pumaloi, etc (ibid). Jadoh dohkhleh is a must-have item in every feast, picnic, or important gathering of the people be it a birthday celebration, wed-

ding, or church gathering. A feast will also remain incomplete without 'doh nei fong, doh fong or doh sei'.

The other food habit that all the groups have in common is the tradition of eating wild edibles that they forage from the forest. The wild food one collects may be different depending on the regions where people live, but the tradition of foraging food from the nearby forest is the tradition that is still alive in the villages. But the most important food item that people have in common irrespective of the regions they live which also has a story of its own is, "kwai and tynpew". Betelnut and Paan leaves are an integral part of people's culture, it is the first sign of their hospitality and they play a very important part in different rituals and traditions of the people.

We speak the same language
The language the Maram the Lyngnam speak may be unintelligible to the other groups but scientifically, the roots of all the dialects that people speak are the Austro-Asiatic Monkhmer group of language.

Our festivals are our pride
The different indigenous groups of the Khasi and Jaintia hills celebrate different festivals, but all the festivals are connected to nature and the different seasons in the year. Festivals are also connected to the crop that people depend on to sustain their lives. In Jaintia hills festivals are not only about rice or paying obeisance to the divine but it is also about migration. It is about homecoming and returning to the roots of the people who share the same origin (ibid).

The Monolith culture and the grand megalithic structure
The different groups un-

der the Hynfnew Trep tribe also share the common monolithic culture which is being practiced in some places today. In Jaintia hills they even have a megalithic structure that is unique to the people only. In the tribe's tradition, every monolith is unique and every stone has a story to tell. Monolith is not only an integral and significant part of our culture it is the most obvious symbol of the tribe (ibid).

We are because of our stories

We do not have epics like the Mahabharat or the Ramayana nor do we have holy books like the Bible and the Koran but we do have our own stories. The tribe is unique from the other tribes because of our stories (ibid). We have our creation stories and in fact, the lives of the hill people revolve around stories that we have in abundance. Everything from hills, to rivers, has stories connected to it. One will not be able to understand the people in the Khasi and Jaintia hills if one does not understand the different stories that they have.

Our creation stories and us
The name of the tribe that is common to all the groups is "ki khun u Hynfnew Trep Hynfnew Skum or u Ynfiaw wasa Ynfiaw wasung". This has a connection with the creation story that all the different groups shared. Although there is a slight variation in the story in the Khasi and Jaintia hills, the element and the core of the story are the same.

When I was asked if I really believe in the creation story, and whether we originated from the seven huts? My answer is that like all creation stories, our story also falls under the category of etiological/aetiological stories.

Throughout human history, different races struggle with three important questions, which are (a) where do humans come from? (b) Where do people go when they die? (c) Why do we live in this world? Or what is the purpose of life? The Hynfnew Trep story like the stories in the book of Genesis is our ancestor's response to the question of where we come from. It does not have to be true, but it tells us about our ancestors' profound wisdom in trying to provide an answer to the very important question which still haunts the human mind today.

We are because we are unique
Therefore the Hynfnew Trep cannot be put under any group or category because we are unique. We cannot be tagged with any collection of people because we are different. Our identity is not a label that one can just stick on our forehead to define us. Our identity is the combination of our culture and our traditions and more importantly our stories. We are not what people think we are, we are who we are and we continue to evolve with time.

The Monolith culture and the grand megalithic structure
The different groups un-

What Are the Lessons from the UK Policy Crisis?

By Ajit Ranade

The United Kingdom has had four Prime Ministers in the last six years. Their most recent Chancellor of the Exchequer (i.e., the finance minister) was sacked in a record 38 days after presenting his mini budget. This, even though the budget had plenty of tax cuts and fiscal package to help families meet rising energy costs. The financial markets instead of cheering tax cuts announced, brought the financial system dangerously close to the brink of collapse. The government had to intervene in the bond market to prevent a bottomless fall. This is not exactly expected in a country which houses the world's biggest global financial centre. There are more such anomalies.

The Conservative Party has been running the government for the past twelve years. Yet contrary to the image of conservatives who stand for tax cuts, the taxes have actually risen. Perhaps the present government led by Prime Minister Liz Truss was obliged to swing toward far-right policies of drastic tax cuts, to undo the tarnished image of conservatives as high tax supporters. Or perhaps the PM believed that tax cuts would lead to a boost in economic growth. Or maybe she believed that cutting taxes would increase tax revenue, a view attributed

they had to inject liquidity to refill (called "margin calls"). The refill money was to be collected by selling liquid assets, i.e. bonds, aggravating the bond selloff. This was spinning out of control, and the government of the UK had to step in to avert the bottomless fall. This intervention was to the tune of 62 billion pounds, which would be unheard of in a developed country. The financial system had come close to collapse. Even the International Monetary Fund, which is usually diplomatic, was blunt in its criticism of the budget proposals. At a time when inflation is at historic high of 10 percent, it was fiscally reckless to announce drastic tax cuts and fiscal expansion. This policy would only aggravate inflation. Hence the government has had to make a U-turn, and postpone, if not cancel the tax cuts. The new Chancellor has his work cut out. Even the Prime Minister may lose her job if the instability continues.

The lessons to learn from the UK crisis is as follows. At a time when income and wealth inequality has risen sharply you do not resort to trickle-down economics. That is you do not award large tax cuts to the income earners at the top end, hoping that their increased spending will eventually trickle down

The lessons to learn from the UK crisis is as follows. At a time when income and wealth inequality has risen sharply you do not resort to trickle-down economics. That is you do not award large tax cuts to the income earners at the top end, hoping that their increased spending will eventually trickle down as new jobs and incomes for those at the lower end of income earners.

to supply side economists. The now ousted Chancellor's proposal was to reduce the top tax bracket from 45 to 40 percent and reducing overall taxation from 20 to 19. Even corporate tax rates were to be kept at 19 and not move to 25. The problem was that the bulk of tax gains, nearly half of it was going to the top 5 percent income earners. This looks bad when inequality is increasing, and it is not even clear that the tax rebate would lead to fresh investment. Indeed, the corporations are likely to just show higher profits, and not fresh investments into new projects. Higher profits could increase their share price but not the GDP. Despite the supply-side mantra of tax cuts leading to increase in tax collection, we have seen in many countries, including in India, that at moderate levels reduction in tax rates do not increase tax revenues. It might make sense when you have absurdly high marginal tax rates like 95 percent, which India had in the 1970's. But when marginal rates are around 25 percent, the phenomenon of the Laffer Curve (named after Arthur Laffer who propounded the theory of tax cut leading to increase in tax revenue) is unlikely to work.

The proposed tax cuts by the Truss government were thus the most drastic ones in the past fifty years. Hence to make up for the anticipated shortfall in revenues, the Chancellor also announced a fresh borrowing program of nearly 60 billion pounds. These tax cuts and increase in fiscal borrowing got a thumbs down from financial investors. You can't fool the financial investors, especially if the budget is not credible. There was a bond sell off, and the value of bonds went down sharply. This means that those funds which have bond portfolios on their balance sheets lost value. This affected large pension funds, which tend to hedge their interest rate risks using derivatives. With sharp fall in portfolio values,

as new jobs and incomes for those at the lower end of income earners. When there is so much uncertainty, not just because of the unending war in Ukraine, it seems unlikely that the rich would redirect their tax rebates into fresh investment. Secondly when inflation is raging, you do not pursue further fiscal expansion. This is something which India's Finance Minister also has indicated as a possible guidance about India's forthcoming Union Budget in January. Thirdly, at a time when oil prices are very high, instead of a cut in corporate taxes as announced in the mini budget, it would be better to slap windfall gains tax, which has been tried in the UK itself. India too is experimenting with windfall gains tax on oil companies. Fourth, the fresh investments will have to come from public investment in infrastructure, which can crowd in rather than crowd out private investment. Hence fiscal resources should be saved for these fresh investments, rather than frittered away in tax cuts. Fifth, much attention has to be paid to the stability of the financial system. The UK experience showed that derivative exposure of pension funds led to big calls for making up the shortfall, causing the bonds to fall further, triggering a vicious cycle. This means that the financial system's resilience must be greater. If there is a huge stock market selloff in India, will there be a domino destructive effect via balance sheets, and margin calls? Are banks too leveraged or over-exposed or have concentration risks? These are some of the lessons to be learnt. The silver lining in the UK is that the government in its U-turns has been seen as responsive and quick learner!

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

Letters to the Editor

Simply trying to even up the odds

Editor,
I know the Meghalaya Assembly General Elections are coming. I have been watching such events for the last 50 years and why should I even try to lie. It's all there for everyone to see how the elected rich have gotten fantastically richer and how the elector has been fed the crumbs that happen to fall from the high tables of the rich who got rich with our money. So the following story (its true and I just want to share it with you all) is about the proletariat's down to earth way of leveling the odds.

I am a poor retired government babu. My wife and I have never enjoyed a holiday in our lives and so we decided to go for a planned trip to Bangkok, away from home. We have children working there. To cut the story short, there was no one to look after our house if we were to leave it. We were afraid that, if a thief broke into our house, the

house would be ransacked and maliciously damaged if he rummages through boxes, cupboards and cabinets and the thief at not finding any money might in his frustration damage stuff we love. Not that there was much of it anyway. So, on humanitarian grounds and keeping with my principle of natural justice for the oppressed, I decided to keep one thousand rupees in cash on the centre table and left a small note for the anticipated thief. It said:

"Dear Mr Thief, I feel really sorry that you have to work so hard at odd hours to earn a livelihood subjecting yourself to so much risks. As it is I am a poor middle class government retiree, and my wife and I live on a meagre pension, which is so grudgingly given. It's unfortunate that you took the strenuous effort of visiting our humble empty house. Alas to find nothing and I am afraid that you might have wasted your time, energy and effort. So respecting your risky profession, I have set aside Rs 1,000 for you as a working trip gift. There is also a piece of leftover snacks and half a bottle of Old Monk brandy

in the fridge just in case you are feeling tired, hungry and thirsty. Just don't break our furniture.

Mr Thief, if you however wish to expand your harvest and have a risk taking appetite I can share some vital information. You see eight houses down the street is a luxurious mansion where a former youth leader lives. He became a cabinet minister and now lives there. Opposite him is the palatial house of a former PWD contractor now a prominent church leader. On the other side of the street where I live is that huge green apartment block occupied by former cabinet ministers and high ranking officers from the administration, Police and the Judiciary. I think that all these people have money which, even if stolen, they would hesitate to report to the police. This is of course just public information and I wish you all the best and a fruitful harvest. Do Take care."

A month later, when we returned home, I was pleasantly surprised to find that there was Rs.1,00,000 in cash on the centre sitting room table with a hand writ-

ten note which read: "Thank you my dear retired friend for your invaluable tips. The mission was successfully accomplished and the harvest has been sweetly fruitful. So, as a token of appreciation I leave Rs 1,00,000 for you to express my heartfelt gratitude. In the fridge I have left some chocolates, a kg of dry fruits and two bottles of Black Label. I hope You will continue to share more such lucrative tips in the future. Thank you for such valuable intelligence inputs for better economic development of the downtrodden and the State. God Bless, stay safe and have a Happy Dipavali.

Yours etc.,
Abhijit Das,
Via email

Innovative use of non-biodegradable waste

Editor
Solid waste management is a serious problem for all major towns and cities, municipalities and corporations around the globe. Particularly the plastic pollution pressure has been an acute problem

plugging up sewage and drainage system; and due to their long non-biodegradable nature they stay in our ecosystem for a long period of time disturbing the natural biogeochemical cycles. Unfortunately we have become accustomed to use of plastics, synthetic rubbers, aluminium foils and other non-biodegradable solid waste so intimately that they have become a part of our lives. The packaging industry uses these raw materials to produce numerous packets that we need as well as containers and other daily use materials that have occupied essential needs of our modern human life across the globe. Hence, the amount of daily global solid waste generated is alarming and severely polluting our sensitive natural ecosystems, biomes and environment.

But can anyone think about producing wealth from waste; like using discarded thrown away plastics and aluminium foil to produce serious art objects. This impossible achievement was demonstrated by acclaimed science communicator and artist, Dr. Sima Mukhopadhyay from Kolkata. Her meticulous craftsmanship integrated

with a great passion for nature has shown us all for the first time how to convert single use plastics, aluminum foils and other solid waste products into intricate art pieces to reduce the plastic use in our society and to recycle them efficiently. She has nicely demonstrated that such waste plastic materials can be used and reused about 2-3 times; and then finally dumped at any designated recycling centre. This is a simple yet highly innovative and superbly eco-friendly concept. It will teach little children to be innovative as well as be sensitive and responsible towards our environment. Thanks to Dr. Mukhopadhyay for her outstanding contribution to both arts and crafts as well as to our society with her incredible ideas, sincere hard work and immense passion for the protection of our environment.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Kolkata -45

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*"We cannot be more sensitive to pleasure
without being more sensitive to pain."*

— Alan Watts

The Shillong Times

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DoNER and NESIDS Projects

THE Ministry for the Development of the North Eastern Region (MDoNER) was created in 2001 after it was seen that the North Eastern Council (NEC) had failed to get development projects off the ground. Several projects lapsed as the money could not be utilised in time. The NDA Government led by AB Vajpayee created the Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NL-CPR), mainly to prevent the finances provided by central ministries for development projects from lapsing and the funds diverted elsewhere. This has helped get many infrastructural projects off the ground and to be completed at a timeline that was feasible for the North Eastern States that suffered from remoteness and where the monsoons often stood in the way of timely completion of projects.

The NLCPR was discontinued in 2017 and was replaced with a new scheme called North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS). During the first NDA Government under PM Vajpayee the Union ministries were mandated to spend 10% of their budget allocations for development of the North Eastern Region. If the states failed to spend the said amount for development purposes, those unspent funds were diverted to the NLCPR. This was a nuanced and timely intervention which came about as a result of a study conducted by a team led by Lok Sabha Secretary General and political scientist, Subhash C Kashyap. This after it was found that the NEC had failed in its mission to speedily develop inter-state communication projects. Today the NEC is more of a regional planning body working under the MDoNER. Since 2017, 22 projects worth Rs 885.44 crore have been selected for funding under the NESIDS for different states of the region. During the last two financial years of 2019-20 and 2020-21, 54 projects worth Rs 1320.49 crores were sanctioned under this 100% central funded schemes. As far as number of projects under NESIDS are concerned Assam and Nagaland have the highest at 13 each with Assam getting Rs 397.85 crore and Nagaland Rs 233.68 crore. Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura have 7 projects each with Rs 182.89 and Rs 228.05 respectively. Manipur has 5 schemes and Mizoram 4 at Rs 111.06 and 61.35 respectively. Meghalaya has only 3 projects and Sikkim has 2 at Rs 59.16 and 46.45 respectively.

The question is why does Meghalaya with so much road and infrastructure backlog have only 3 schemes under NESID? This has been Meghalaya's problem in the past too. When there is 100% central funding why is the State not keen to tap these resources? Is it because MDoNER under the present dispensation is keeping a close watch on funds utilisation and monitoring projects very minutely and because Meghalaya has consistently failed to complete projects on time? The two proposed medical colleges and the Assembly building are cases of inordinate delay in completion, although they are not MDoNER funded. These questions need answers!

As election 2023 to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly approaches, the question is where our hopes lie. A glance at the performance of the present MDA government does not instill any confidence of targeted development in the near future. But what options do we have as far as which party should lead us to a path of targeted development within a limited time span?

Let's have a look at parties from a layman's point of view. NPP: It is a party that believes to have an edge which gets exhibited in the language of its leaders with a disturbing sense of pride and arrogance. I hope they are mindful that in politics, things can change very quickly and often pride comes before destruction. It will carry a huge anti-incumbency factor and being accommodative towards deserters from other parties, is bound to add to it. People are yet to see innovative thinking on several fronts pivotal to overall growth of the State. Apparently, health, education, road transport, nepotism, corruptions, etc. did not receive serious attention under the current MDA. The ISBT episode, collapse of the dome of under-construction Assembly building, poor roadways almost across different parts of the State are few apparent examples. Moreover, the NPP giving the party ticket to a former engineer who supervised these faulty building structures, which has brought so much shame to the State and huge loss of already-depleted public money, only goes to show the lack of seriousness of NPP when it comes to accountability and corruption.

UDP: It has been part of several governments as small partners in the past and hence can't shy away from collective responsibilities of the failures of different governments over decades. Being uneven partners have never allowed them to assert or provide necessary checks and balances and accountability to the larger partners in successive governments. In these circumstances, it's quite perplexing to believe that it can deliver the much need development with transparency and honesty and should we put our faith in the party is a big question.

PDF: The new party is in power in MDA but it has not made serious efforts in the last 4 and half years to expand its support base barring the 4 constituencies where they have MLAs. A look at their profile and conduct, particularly in the Assembly proceedings, one finds them wanting on numerous occasions and therefore, failing to attract new energy in the party. Chances are very high that some of its leaders will

shift parties in anticipation of greener pastures by the time election comes.

HSPDP, NCP, KHNAM: These parties are dwindling and its leaders are hunting as loners and hence do not find support in the absence of better preparedness on several serious issues which they have raised inside and outside the Assembly. It's quite unlikely for them to make significant gain due to lack of outreach to new grounds since the last election.

Congress: The party is busy in rebuilding itself, from being the largest single party with 21 MLAs in the last election to virtually nil today is quite ironic and unique in itself. The party is a victim of the eternal restlessness of our leaders when they are out of power, catalyzed by some ill-timed decisions at the highest

level. Party loyalty and ideology, particularly in difficult times, is a very flimsy and dispensable entity among our leaders across parties. What will be the elements of newness that Congress party will bring to the table, is worth speculating and can the current leadership in the State reinvigorate its cadres at the grass roots level is a million dollar question.

"The ISBT episode, collapse of the dome of under-construction Assembly building, poor roadways almost across different parts of the State are few apparent examples. Moreover, the NPP giving the party ticket to a former engineer who supervised these faulty building structures, which has brought so much shame to the State and huge loss of already-depleted public money, only goes to show the lack of seriousness of NPP when it comes to accountability and corruption."

TMC: The party is the main opposition with 12 MLAs without even fighting the last election, thanks to the Congress party. While they have been very successful in West Bengal in spite of stiff resistance, TMC's presence on a pan India scale is missing. Will they change the landscape of the polity in Meghalaya is a question that everyone is asking in day to day causal conversations.

BJP: This party has not been tested as far as governance in Meghalaya is concerned since it never had numbers to assert itself and thereby could not provide checks and balances to any government including the current MDA. Although, several Central schemes are highly successful, even in Meghalaya, the party failed to capitalize on them so far. Adding to their woes are the

infringement of Fundamental Right-Right to Freedom of Religion as guaranteed under Article 25-28 of our Constitution. No one should be condescended to believe a particular ideology. What baffled me as an ordinary citizen is the unnecessary wastage of our precious time and energy in things that are unambiguously settled under the Constitution, which are binding on every citizen of our country.

This issue is not going to remove the apparently eternal problem of underdevelopment of Meghalaya in almost every sphere of life even after 50 years of its formation. We hold the dubious distinction of having a State for ourselves for more than half a century now with no State-run-Medical, Pharmacy or Engineering college or a University. Thanks to the Central government, at least we are getting some affordable higher education in NEHU, IIM-S, NIT, NIFT, etc. and Health care facilities in North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS), North Eastern Institute of Ayurveda & Homoeopathy (NEIAH). Our leaders seems to be keener to cater to casino lovers than

focus on other pertinent issues such as ever-swelling unemployment among educated youths, rampant corruption, nepotism, unpaid teachers and health workers, plight of casual/adhoc workers, drinking water scarcity, polluted rivers and streams, poor roads, air infrastructure, etc.

Election comes and goes and Meghalaya remains where it was and in decades, you can count on your fingers what has changed over time. Perhaps, we have to blame our tribal mentality which does not allow us to think beyond mundane things that is localized within a small area rather than the holistic view of Meghalaya as one entity. Getting out of our primitive or medieval thinking and standing out firmly together as Meghalayans to fight for our share of rapid development is the need of the hour. Tribal mentality also does not allow us to raise critical questions to authorities who are supposed to carry the governance at every level and bring in overall development. The essence is, unless we get united as a community and raise serious questions on issues plaguing us collectively, we will continue to be like this in the next 50 years.

We have to realize that religion does not make good or bad leaders otherwise majority of our leaders in the last 50 years belong to a particular religion but look at where we are as a State, far away from average growth. Our SGDP is nowhere close to acceptable rates. However, given a choice, I would like to see the growth of the personal properties of our public representatives in the last 50 years, on election to election basis, and assess whether it matches with their known sources of income. Who is ready to bite the bullet and change the course of how we should do politics in the State, should be the question this coming election. So far none of the parties have come out with anything novel, imaginative and feasible which can attract our attention as voters.

Let us not allow money to do the talking and become smart voters. On this 51st year of our Statehood, we cannot afford anymore to prove people like Bah Prestone right, who publicly announced that people can be fooled election after election with a meagre sum of money. For once, can we have leaders and parties who can show us the roadmap of targeted overall development of all parts of our State with a timeline in exchange for our precious votes?

(The author teaches in NEHU and is the President of Meghalaya Tribal Teacher's Association-NEHU (MeTTA-NEHU) and NEHU Teacher's Association (NEHUTA).

Genesis of oral tradition among the Khasis

By Barnes Mawrie

It is true that most primitive societies in the world started with oral tradition in the early years of their civilization. Gradually, these communities developed their own script and started writing on stone tablets, in caves, on stone walls until finally they began writing on papyrus. With the invention of paper, writing on paper became common. It is interesting to note how the Khasis persisted with oral tradition until the arrival of the Christian missionaries in the 19th Century. In fact records show that the Bengalee script was introduced by the Baptist missionary Sir William Carey of the Serampore Mission, sometime in the early part of the 19th Century. It was only in 1841 that the Methodist missionary Rev. Thomas Jones introduced the Latin script in Khasi language.

We may be surprised why the Khasis did not have a written script earlier when they were surrounded by other communities like the Ahoms, the Manipuris, the Bodos and the Bengalees who already had their scripts and were using them. Were our ancestors so unwise as not to develop their own script or at least adapt the scripts of their immediate neighbours? This is a logical question that is in every Khasi mind. I do not presume that our ancestors were so stupid as not to do that, but probably they had reasons not to do it. Conversing with some very elderly Khasis whom I met years ago, the reasons seem to be the following.

First of all every Khasi knows that our ancestors had a script like any other group of people. There is a popular Khasi folktale which says that at one time when a river was in spate, the Khasi and his foreign friend had to cross a river by swimming across. The foreigner tied the scroll of his script on his forehead with his long hair and swam across without losing his scroll. The Khasi man who had short hair however kept the scroll between his teeth while swimming. In the midst of the torrents of water, the scroll melted into pulp which the Khasi accidentally swallow it along with some water. Thus he reached across the river without the scroll. This folktale probably depicts the real historical fact of how the Khasis lost their script. Thus there is a saying among the Khasis that we have swallowed the script and therefore our knowledge springs from within (namarba u Khasi u la nguid ia ka kot, sa tuid ki khatantang na dohnud jong u).

This story explains how oral tradition originated among the Khasis. At this point should we say that our ancestors had forgotten about that script? Could they not have recalled at least some of it and then re-invent the rest of it? If they did not do that, it would mean that they lacked basic intelligence and wisdom, which we are not inclined to believe at all. Therefore, there were genuine reasons why our ancestors preferred oral tradition right from that period of time.

Why our ancestors chose oral tradition, could be explained by the fact that oral tradition unlike written tradition, is indestructible and can be passed on from parents to children and so on. Let us not forget that the Khasis being the first inhabitants of this region perhaps from pre-historic age, had witnessed the destructive forces of nature like volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, heavy rains and floods. They had realized that such forces had erased much of their material accomplishments. This led to their conviction that oral tradition would be the best way to preserve their history and culture. This is the reason why among Khasis we have different modes of oral tradition, like:

a) Khanatang (Sacred stories) – These would be what we call myths in English. They are grand stories about mythical events which are related to the origin, history and life of the community. For these reasons, they are considered as sacred stories and they have been passed on from one generation to the next. Some of the famous Khasi myths are: The Golden ladder on Sohpetbneng Peak, the Diengie tree on Diengie Peak, The four Durbablei (divine assemblies), the Iewluri-lura (Market of Chaos) etc. These stories are essentially related to the origin, history and culture of the Khasi people.

b) Purinam – The equivalents of these in English would be legends. These are stories of famous persons or events in the history of the community. Such persons or events are usually historical in nature but in the course of time they had been embellished with exaggerated interpolations so much so that they have acquired a sort of superhuman characteristic. The Khasis have such legends like U Ramhah (The Giant), U Woh Ryndi and Ka Li dohka, U Marphalyngki, U Monbhat, U Adadak and his companions, Ka Pashyntiew, U Manik Raitong, U Thlen, Ka Nohkalikai and many others. Legends of recent origin are those of U Barli, U Sajar Niangli, U Kohja, etc.

c) Puriskam – These are folktales which are stories connected with the animal world, birds, trees and plants, mountains and rivers etc. The Khasis have a huge collection of such tales which have been passed on from times immemorial. Thus we have tales about U Kyllang and Symper (two mountains), Ka Umiam, Umngot and Umkenh, U Rynfiaw, Ka Phreit, Ka Tyngab and many others.

d) Sneng tymmen – These are wise sayings of the elders directed at the younger generations in order to educate and discipline them. The Khasis have a rich collection of such wise sayings and idioms which have been handed down by our ancestors. They serve as a code of conduct and a sure path towards a respectable and dignified life. They are usually communicated around the family hearth.

There are scholarly discussions today on whether the Khasis had any kind of cryptography like peoples of other civilizations. I believe that the early Khasis did practice cryptography on stones and cave walls etc. However the unrelenting forces of nature did not spare any of these. Probably all traces of cryptography have been buried underground by frequent earthquakes or erased by heavy rainfall and damp climate. Unlike the comparatively dry, climate of Europe which favours the preservation of ancient monuments, the wet climate of our region does the opposite. Probably it was this hopeless situation which compelled the ancient Khasis to give more importance to oral tradition than spend their time on wasteful exercises of writing and carving.

Moreover, there were certain factors in Khasi society that favoured oral tradition like: the strong kur system (kinship) which facilitated interpersonal communication, the family hearth education which proved to be very effective in transmitting knowledge to the younger generations, the great veneration for elders and adherence to their words and the prodigious memory of our elders.

In conclusion we may say that the genesis of Khasi oral tradition was a deliberate choice of our ancestors and not because we did not own a script or some sort of calligraphy. Unfortunately, Archeology in our state is almost a non-starter and thus we remain ignorant about our own history. Perhaps one day archeologists may discover ancient art and calligraphy of the Khasis.

Letters to the Editor

Mawkhair C High School – Doom looms over classrooms

Editor,

It is a well-known fact that Mawkhair Christian High School- MCHS (also called Mission Shynrang) is among the oldest and most renowned schools of Shillong. The students of this school come from different backgrounds of society - their parents holding different jobs & positions in the government (e.g blue collar jobs & white collar jobs in govt offices) and in society/business, etc. (e.g business entrepreneurs, teachers, church elders, members of legislative assembly, etc). The school has always taken extra care to ensure that children of those neighbouring localities (e.g Umsohsun, Paltan Bazar, Wahthapbru, Mission compound, should get a chance to study here.

This school has produced many brilliant students who secured top positions in the HSLC examinations. It's alumni includes engineers, doctors, professors, au-

thors and other well known members of the society. The school has also represented the State of Meghalaya in the Subroto Cup football tournament.

While looking back at the past, we cannot but remember those eminent teachers/headmasters, the likes of Babu Wilson Reade (ex-Chairman UK&JHDC and ex-CEM KHADC), Babu Carlton Reade, Babu Erning Kharmawphlang and so on, whose works and contributions in the field of education has earned them an unprecedented respect and recognition from the government as well as from the society.

As I recall, during my years as a student of MCHS (Class-IV in 1974 to Class-X in 1980), the school was run by the Headmaster along with the teachers, under the administrative supervision of the Managing Committee which reported to the owner of the school i.e The KJP Synod. I had a strong belief then, that the Headmaster, the teachers, the Managing Committee and the owner of the school, were equipped with the conviction that the school was an educational institution and not otherwise. Due to my employment com-

mitment, I have been living away from my home state for the past many years, yet I am not able to erase the fond memories I have of my school.

During my recent short visit to Shillong, I happened to pass by my alma mater but what I had envisioned about my school was totally different from the vision in front of me. I was shocked to see that a shop and an office space have "invaded" the classrooms of our MCHS school building. The sight was so offensive that I seemed to have had a nightmare! A portion of the frontage has become a commercial space! Contrary to this, I recall when we were in Class-VIII, we used to grumble and feel distraught over the proximity of the Synod market complex to our school. But now the story is different - the market has entered the school!

I would like to know if any of the other old schools in Shillong are doing away with some class rooms and renting out space for commercial purposes. Even if they are, that should not be taken as a guideline for the Managing Committee or the owner of MCH School to follow and defeat the purpose of

the school.

There is a saying - A School building, besides being a structure, is made from memories, successes, failures, part of everyone's childhood. A school is a building which has four walls with yesterday and tomorrow inside. And above all I remember our school motto - "Mut ia kaba bha, Kren ia kaba shisha, Leh ia kaba dei."

Yours etc.,
Allan Lyndem,
Via email

Durga Puja in Kolkata

Editor

The Durga Puja in Kolkata and across West Bengal is a national socio-religious event that has been celebrated with pomp and grandeur for the past several centuries. This national event over the years have manifested into an international event drawing both national and international tourists to the City of Joy in massive numbers. It is not only a national celebration of the Bengali communities; but, an event of socio-cultural unity, diversity and integrity of India that attracts people in large unimaginably massive numbers to join this celebration. Recently UNESCO has granted World Heritage tag to the Durga Puja celebration adding to a monumental international feather to the cap of the city of Kolkata; as well as for the state of West Bengal and India as a nation. This is the first World Heritage tag bestowed to the continent of Asia on a city for a sociology-religious event with international heritage, making Durga Puja an international festival like the grand Carnivals of Central and South America and the Caribbean Islands.

However, amidst this grand celebration we tend to forget the plight of our sick, injured, physically or mentally challenged individuals, young children and senior citizens who are unable to participate in this due to several socio-cultural, medical and logistics limitations. But two brothers, Kshitij Shah and Shahil Shah have designed a wonderful website for everyone to be able to see the pictures of Durga Puja of Kolkata (West Bengal, India) at <https://durgadarshan.org/>.

One can not only navigate across all the major

and minor pandals across the City of Joy through this user-friendly site but can also enjoy the 360° view of Puja Pandals across Kolkata from the comfort of your home. For those who could not do pandal hopping during the festive days or those who are located outside Kolkata or West Bengal or India can now watch and enjoy the pomp and grandeur of this international festival from their desktops, laptops, palmtops, tablets and smartphones connected to an internet. The online and offline modes of enjoying the Durga Puja this year crowned with the UNESCO tag is a monumental achievement for us all to celebrate this year! I sincerely believe that this Puja has brought to all the joys of success and diminished the sadness, sorrow and darkness of our life replacing them with peace, unity, integrity and prosperity for all.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Kolkata - 45

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"The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once."

— Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

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Congress, democracy

ON a day when the Congress party releases the name of its elected president, it's time to rejoice irrespective of who wins from among the two contenders – Mallikarjun Kharge and Shashi Tharoor. In the past several years, no political establishment here had attempted such a transparent exercise in the selection of its leader even as every party swears by all the fundamentals of democracy. The massive electoral exercise the Congress took up now – the first this century – has seen over 9000 delegates from across states participating in the voting on Monday. It's amazing the party that has 'dynasty' at its core chose to opt for such a transformative step.

It was clear as sunlight that the quiet support of the Congress high command was with Kharge, a long-time leader from the South who fits in well with the established Congress culture even as he hailed from a laid-back Dalit community. In the last two weeks of the campaign, flamboyant Tharoor -- who joined the party only a decade ago after his long engagement with the UN -- raised "change" as his mantra and expected sizable backing from the new generation of Congressmen. The status quoists were not enthused and openly turned their back on him in a virtual gang-up. They cold-shouldered him in state after state including his native Kerala. Yet, if the lot falls on Tharoor, the Congress will be wedded to a new political culture. Winning the 2024 Parliament polls will still be a far cry as both PM Modi and the BJP are unlikely to yield substantial ground to their rivals.

The campaign trends showed Congress leaders across the nation, and perhaps many ordinary Congressmen/women, want the "first family" to continue guiding the party rather than handing it over on a platter to a "casual entrant" like Tharoor. They say he's "yet to fully imbibe the Congress culture." Tharoor by no means can be a rubber-stamp president. He has his individuality and a mind of his own. If he wins by any chance, he would likely be assertive. The same cannot be said about Kharge. Kharge's strength is that with his long years of experience, he would not adopt a confrontationist posture with the first family and be accommodative to all. If he wins, fears are that even the present democratic exercise in the Congress might not result in an effective revival or restructuring of the party. After five months of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, Rahul Gandhi is bound to be more assertive even as he does not want to be the president.

Election is democratic: Candidates are feudal

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

feudalism basically refers to a social system whereby commoners are allowed to stay in the property of a feudal lord in return for taxes in cash or kind and if required also fight militarily for their master. The movie Robin Hood is a good example. Feudalism is a measure of wealth, power, arrogance, control, exploitation, etc of the majority by a few. In Meghalaya, many candidates have wealth as a

feudal lords can go to the extent of bribing prospective candidates to not contest the elections and to step aside. They also go to the extent of making dummy candidates contest just to break-up the votes of a constituency to their advantage. Meghalaya's poor development is because of these feudalistic candidates.

In an interaction with senior citizens, an attempt was

"According to the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Meghalaya (dated January 25, 2022), the total electorate is around 21 lakhs (an increase of 54,712 in a year) with more female voters compared to males. This is the measure of Meghalaya's electoral democracy. The power to change rests in the finger of these 21 lakh voters."

means to fool and manipulate the voters. Most of the candidates are feudal in their mindsets and their wealth ranking. The constituency is their property and the voters their subjects. They have money power and as a result they hold all the bargaining chips. For example, a politician has done nothing for the betterment of the constituents in 5 years; no roads, no interventions for the poor, no interventions for the

made to find out as to when money started to play a role in Meghalaya politics? Most of them opined that it was in the late 1980s. Of course, that time the quantum of money was less. But the point is that in the context of money, politics and feudal candidates; sadly, Meghalaya has come a long way. It is a disappointment. It is high time that the voters realize that they cannot continue to remain as pawns in the

"In medieval Europe, feudalism basically refers to a social system whereby commoners are allowed to stay in the property of a feudal lord in return for taxes in cash or kind and if required also fight militarily for their master. The movie Robin Hood is a good example. Feudalism is a measure of wealth, power, arrogance, control, exploitation, etc of the majority by a few."

youth, etc, but yet still, he/she talks boastfully and behaves as if winning is a surety in 2023. This is because these feudal lords know that even if election is inherently a democratic process, their money power is enough to change the conviction of the voters. Feudalism in politics has come to a stage where citizens with good intentions and wonderful ideas have no chance of winning or even contesting an election. The

hands of the feudal lords. If the trend is not reversed now, one shudders to think of the future outcomes.

The starting point of the solution is the voter as an individual. It would be wrong to think that the voters are not aware of the games the feudal lords play during elections. We are all aware, but somehow when lured by the colour of money, there is a tendency to give up on strong convictions and just accept trinkets

Supreme Court bench behaved in a bizarre manner in prof. Saibaba Case

Special sitting on a Saturday despite case listed for next working day

By K Raveendran

The Supreme Court of India has added very little to its credibility by holding a special sitting on a most uncommon Saturday morning and setting aside the Bombay High Court order for the release of human rights activist G N Saibaba, the wheelchair bound former Delhi University professor, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment in 2017 for alleged Maoist connections.

Special sittings are held only in exceptional cases when any delay will result in miscarriage of justice, such as infringement of personal liberty, or situations involving constitutional dilemmas such as the holding of trust vote in a state assembly, which could not have waited for the next regular sitting of the court. But in the case of Prof Saibaba's release, the special sitting was held to facilitate the infringement of his per-

sonal liberty rather than the opposite.

The circumstances under which the special sitting was called for an off-day of the court in the instant case does raise doubts. Within hours of the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court issuing the order on Friday for the acquittal of Prof Saibaba and five others, the Maharashtra government approached the Supreme Court for a stay, which was refused by a bench comprising Justice D Y Chandrachud, who has since been appointed the Chief Justice, and Justice Hima Kohli. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who appeared on behalf of the Maharashtra government, had sought an early listing for Monday morning. While rejecting the plea for stay, the bench, however, agreed for the Monday listing.

But curiously, later in the day the Supreme Court registry listed the appeal to be taken up for hearing on Saturday, otherwise a holiday for the court, by a bench comprising Justices M R Shah and Bela M Trivedi, as if the delay till Monday would have led to serious consequences for national security or miscarriage of justice. The new bench promptly set aside the Bombay High Court order for acquittal.



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Prof Saibaba and his five co-accused had been charged with involvement with the activities of the banned organisations CPI (Maoist) and Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF), a known Maoist front. They were arrested between 2013 and 2014. According to police, many documents, a hard disk and pen drives were seized from Saibaba's residence. The professor was granted bail by the Bombay High Court on health grounds in May 2015. He was jailed again before being granted bail by the Supreme Court in September 2016. In 2017, however, he along with the five others were convicted.

Prof Saibaba's family has been repeatedly demanding his release on his serious health condition with about 90 per cent disability. He was apparently suffering from 'blood stools' suggesting that there was bleeding

the Supreme Court came to the conclusion that this was a question that could not have waited till the next regular meeting of the court and a special sitting was required to be called on a court holiday.

Supreme Court holding special sittings outside the regular office hours is a rarity. In 2014, the court had held a post-midnight hearing on September 9 and stayed the execution of Nithari serial killer Surinder Koli, who had confessed to killing and eating the flesh of several children at a house in Noida's Nithari village, after he moved an urgent plea for his review petition to be heard in open court.

On the other hand, in a mid-night hearing in July 2015, a three-member bench of the Supreme Court rejected 1993 Mumbai blasts convict Yakub Memon's appeal against death sentence just two hours before he was to be hanged. Similarly, the hanging of four Nirbhaya convicts in March 2020 was preceded by an early morning sitting of the Supreme Court, which rejected a plea on behalf of one of the convicts having been a juvenile at the time of committing the crime and threw out an appeal against that decision, all between 2.30 am and 3.15 am when the court upheld the rejection of a second mercy petition by the President.

The Supreme Court had held a rare midnight hearing to consider a plea by Congress to prevent BJP leader B S Yeddyurappa from being sworn in as chief minister on the basis of an invitation from the governor although he did not seem to have the required majority in the house. A three-member bench refused to grant a stay, but the chief minister had to bow out as he failed to muster enough support. Similar cases have now become almost routine for the apex court.

But the grounds on which the court held a special sitting on a Saturday to consider the Maharashtra government appeal against the appeal of Prof Saibaba and others and the favourable decision remain largely unexplained. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Mental health cannot be neglected

Editor

October 10 is observed as World Mental Health Day. Do we know the state of our mental health? All of us pay attention to physical health only. Most of us are unaware that we should take care of our mental health too and since we pay little or no attention to our mental health we are observing an epic rise in mental illness which impact our social and family life as well putting stress on the existing medical infrastructure. Most under-developed and developing countries like India do not have the bare minimal infrastructure to deal with the challenges of mental health. We do not have enough qualified and experienced psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, mental health trained nurses or medical personnel and staff to tackle the challenges of both patients and would be patients.

In the past two years we have been through the global pandemic and many got impacted due to acute isolation for months together. Not only did we experience social, cultural, economic and physical challenges; but we have been also severely impacted emotionally too. This has been a challenging time for all of us; more so for our numerous helpless senior citizens and countless

babies and young children who lost their lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic around the globe. Although now the COVID-19 infection graph is going downhill, but cases of mental health have taken an accelerated growth across the planet as a long term impact of this devastating pandemic. This has affected people across age and gender. I am sure many of us would have understood and learnt lessons on mental health.

Psychologists have cautioned on the long term impacts of human mental health across developed and developing nations. But we have failed to take appropriate measures as we were too focused on the physical side of the illness and treating them. But effective treatment of mental health is still a distant goal.

Undoubtedly the pandemic has brought many positive changes and people have started cultivating good habits. To be mentally healthy we should engage in positive activities and have a friend's circle or be part of a peer-support group. To do so we need good social and communication skills to interact with other people outside our comfort zone. It is very important to meet and greet other people physically; and not just virtually. It is also important to know our close and distant family members and neighbours. Helping others in need is good for mental health as studies have shown. There are people around

us that are looking for company and a listening ear. We can be their comfort by lending a listening ear. An active life that includes some free hand exercises, yoga, pranayam and brisk walking can bring positive changes for our mental health if we are suffering from anxiety, depression, frustrations, anger, emotional outbursts, irritability and melancholy. A daily cycle of meditation for at least 5 minutes in the morning when we wake up or before we go to sleep can start showing positive impacts on our mental health. A regular life style with food low in carbohydrates but rich in seasonal fruits and green leafy vegetables are very helpful. Let's also avoid addition to tobacco products, hard and soft drinks, tea and coffee or addiction to TV, smartphones and laptops. Instead let's take up reading books as a habit. It will help us sleep better.

It is so important to have a hobby that engages us mentally, physically and intellectually such as watching good movies, reading quality books, traveling, or any kind of sports or writing diary, poems, stories or novels or anything else that we love doing. Those will vary from one individual to another. When we feel low or depressed it is good to seek help from a qualified mental health practitioner. Let's not neglect mental health issues. We owe it to ourselves!

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Kolkata - 45

Alarming rise in stray dogs & a complacent Municipality

Editor,

The recently published letter captioned -- "Rampaging dogs in Laitumkhrah" (ST, Oct 13, 2022) by an 11-old boy, Kian Peter Pde, must put the Shillong Municipality office and so-called 'Animal Lovers' to shame. This sportive boy put across to all the Shillongites how even small children are regularly bitten by stray dogs and the pangs and trauma thereafter. Perhaps Master Pde has become the youngest contributor to The Shillong Times. This also shows the "desperation" of parents who must have asked their son to write to The Shillong Times to reveal the ground realities. Now the question is, has this letter woken up the Shillong Municipality from its slumber? As yet, nothing has been heard.

Well, Master Pde could afford the rabies vaccines, but what about the children of the daily laborers/vendors who do not have even Rs 500 in their pockets? This is the practical reality. On a daily basis, they become the victims of crowds of canines. Will Shillong still turn its deaf ears to this growing threat? Often people raise money in the locality to help those poor victims for their vaccination. Similar angst and anger

has also been expressed by another resident Adrialli Lyngdoh through her letter -- "Animal lives over human lives" (ST, October 10, 2022). She underlined how alarming the situation has become due to the increasing number of stray dogs and how animal lovers never bother to press the alarm bell when people fall prey to stray dogs. Of course, it sounds apparently hypocritical.

One gentleman retorts: "Why do those animal lovers shed tears only for dogs and not for other animals? It is completely illogical and unethical too. I believe goats, cows, sheep, horses, birds and dogs should be treated with equal sympathy and compassion. Even the ecologists say that. I do not subscribe to non-vegetarian animal lovers (pun intended)." It is very clear that we need to have more shelter homes. Animal lovers should rather put consistent pressure upon the government for that.

I find it worthwhile to quote what a concerned mother, Mona Lyngdoh said in her letter (ST, October 12, 2022). She burst out in anger -- "To all the dog lovers concerned, if my daughter becomes a victim of a dog bite (God forbid!) or any other human being, for that matter, will they come forward to empathize with us emotionally/financially? My humble request to all dog lovers/dog owners- if you love them, keep them grounded within prescribed boundary limits!"

Of course, public safety has become a serious concern in the town. Parents shudder in fear when their kids run out of their homes these days. In many localities, people have to risk their lives to reach home at night as packs of dogs might attack them on the way. About three months ago, in one week's time at Upper Mawprem and Jhalupara, more than twenty people were bitten by stray dogs, especially at night. The situation is utterly frightening.

At this critical juncture, if the Shillong Municipality still loaf about and remains complacent, the authorities who are running it will be fully culpable. Their incompetence will then be questionable, and they should be replaced with competent officers having a sense of responsibility, humaneness and compassion.

Also, appropriate action must be taken against those pet keepers who leave their dreadful pets out. The owners must be heavily penalized if their dogs bite others. Let's love human beings as much as we (pretend) to love animals.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
(Member of the International Human Rights Commission), Shillong

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*"Respect for ourselves guides our morals,
respect for others guides our manners."*

—Laurence Sterne

The Shillong Times

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MCCL enters dangerous territory

THE news that a team of officials led by the Chairperson, Mawmluh Cherra Cements Limited (MCCL) Wailadmiki Shylla will be visiting Kolkata to check out the firm Bhavika Commercial Private Limited (BCPL) before signing an agreement with them to run the cement company on a joint venture has created serious doubts about the process engaged in before zeroing in on the Company. On checking out the credentials of BCPL it is learnt that this is a private company registered on January 7, 2011. It is a non-government company registered at Kolkata with a share capital of Rs 2 lakhs only and a paid up capital of 176,750. Information on the internet says that this company is involved in non-specialized retail trade in stores. In a particular link where there is an interactive session about the creditworthiness of BCPL where a question is asked: If you were to leave Bhavika Commercial Pvt Limited what would be the reason? The answer given by a former employee from Orissa who was the Area Sales Head is "They don't have the capability to pay salaries."

Bhavika Commercial Private Limited's operating revenue range is under Rupees 1 crore for the financial year ending 31 March, 2020. Its earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) has decreased by 12.71 % over the previous year. At the same time, its book net worth has increased by 0.61 %. The revenue/turnover of Bhavika Commercial Private Ltd is under INR 1 crore. It is also worth noting that the net worth of the company has increased by 0.61 %; the total assets have increased by 19.62 % while liabilities of the company have increased by 868.30 %

The Jowai MLA and MCCL head has provided the alibi that this proposed joint venture has the concurrence of Chief Minister Conrad Sangma after the firm made its presentation and that the CM had instructed him to visit the Company plant to find out its credentials and whether it has the expertise to manage and operate MCCL. After the visit Shylla will be presenting his report to the CM after which it will be tabled before the Cabinet which will then give approval for the joint venture pact with BCPL. Shylla said that three firms had applied against the expression of interests (EOIs) for the joint venture to operate the MCCL but only BCPL came forward to give a presentation before the MCCL Board. Meghalaya has this uncanny habit of attracting the worst venture capitalists, whether we look at the Medical Colleges or other infrastructure project. There is always an opacity in the government's dealings in matters of public sector undertakings. How can a firm with a revenue turnover of only Rs 1 crore take on MCCL with an authorized capital of Rs 17000.0 lakhs and paid up capital of Rs 16282.8514 lakhs? Will Government clarify this matter?

Letters to the Editor

Influx & illegal immigrants a threat to tribal communities

Editor,
India shares 4096.7 Kms of its land border with Bangladesh of which Meghalaya alone shares 443 Kms. The entire stretch of the borders consists of the riverine, jungle or hilly areas with hardly any natural barrier. Bangladesh borders the South and South-Western side of the state. These border areas are heavily populated, and at many stretches the cultivation is carried out till the last inch of the border. Many villages of the state share their borders with Bangladesh. The BSF camps out there are just a name, where in the past few months, Bangladesh nationals were spotted in the jungle adjoining the unfenced international border near Kuliang, Pyrtakuna and Borsara villages.
A few of the Bangladeshis

nationals were apprehended with the help of the Village Defence Party (VDP) of Kuliang village; by the Khasi Students' Union (KSU), Narpuh Circle, Khliehriat Circle and the East Jaintia Hills District Unit (EJHDU). These illegal migrants are a threat to the tribal population of the state, as we have seen that Tripura has been affected by these immigrants, where now 80% of the population are Bangladeshis.

Meghalaya on the other hand, has experienced many disturbances due to the illegal settlers and with these illegal immigrants sneaking in, it will pose a great threat to the tribal population. The tribal population of our state form 2.4 % of India's tribal population as per the census 2011 and 86.1% of the State population is tribal, but with these illegal settlers and illegal immigrants we will become a minority in our very own State.

Meghalaya is rich in culture and tradition. We are proud of our rich cultural

The letter entitled "A noise competition" was published by this newspaper though the person withheld his identity because the editor probably saw that the letter has a point (ST Oct 7, 2022). The writer was drawing his attention to the supposed fact that churches organised their own programmes on Durga puja days this year. The singing and the prayers and the preaching were on loudspeakers while the puja celebrations, accompanied by drum beats and chants, were going on. This, according to the letter, "spoils the tranquility and joy" of the festivity. The author also wonders as to how the Christians would feel if Hindus beat their drums and sing bhajans on Christmas Day. There is nothing wrong with parallel celebrations but quite obviously there is a bit of disrespect for each other here.

I know for certain not only in Shillong but in other places as well that churches arrange religious programs during Durga Puja holidays. As pointed out above these pious packages are fine but the main intention is to prevent the flock, particularly the youth, from visiting puja pandals fearing that the faithful might be influenced in some way. I have advice from leaders like, "Don't visit the idols", "Hindus are idol worshippers" ('nongman blei thaw' in Khasi and 'mte olakigiparang' in Garo). If functions are for spiritual growth they are blessed occasions. But if the main reason is only in view of Durga or Eid or any other faith's celebration then a bit of introspection is needed. If visiting a Durga Puja pandal or others' place of worship is to be shunned then one is really unsure of oneself. Branding "Hindus as idol worshippers" is certainly a disrespect and an acute lack of understanding of Hinduism.

Though we see Hindus worshipping 'gods and goddesses,' Hinduism teaches that there is only ONE Supreme and Ultimate Being, Brahman. The multitude of gods and goddesses are only an expression of the Supreme Reality. As ordinary human beings cannot comprehend the abstract Being, God reveals himself concretely in the form of gods and goddesses; the most common of which are Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva or Shakti. Durga, meaning "the Inaccessible" in Sanskrit is one of the principal goddesses who represents Shakti or the strength of the All Powerful. Besides power she stands for protection, motherly care, victory over evil forces, liberation of the oppressed - all Godly qualities. Someone wrote a piece on the significance of Durga puja so a repetition is redundant. My point is: we often label people without making an inch of effort to

know their faith, belief, culture and background.

Catholics are often accused of being 'idol worshippers' for 'worshipping' Mary and the galaxy of saints and their statues and images. Even the cross and crucifix is seen as an idol by detractors. Catholics, of course, vehemently deny such charges. We staunchly defend that we only show respect to Mary and the saints and do not worship them. Kneeling before their statues and images is like bowing before the pictures of our parents and elders. Paying respect to statues of the Virgin Mary and the saints is akin to bowing to statues of great leaders and personalities. Esteem is paid to the persons. Statues are only their representation. Veneration is done because

The concern that the writer cited is appreciated. But one hopes that people like him or her speaks for Christians in other part of India as well. In Meghalaya and the North East people had a peaceful celebration. There was no report of any untoward incident. In Shillong politicians were seen dancing and singing with the Hindu community. Their videos have gone viral. Political patronage was visible. Can the same be said for Christians in the 'mainland' India particularly in states where Hindutva fanatical groups rule the roost? In Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh on 3 October the RSS, Bajrang Dal and VHP activists stopped buses carrying Christian tribal youth alleging baseless religious conversion. It was never a conversion convocation. It was an annual youth convention.

these persons represent the holiness and virtues of God. They are in a sense His manifestation. Hence they are worthy of reverence. It is not worship. Worship is reserved for the Almighty alone. Then why find fault with the adherents of Hinduism? Why condemn them as idol worshippers?

The Trinity in Christianity is the greatest mystery. It is a complicated dogma. How do we try to understand it? One way is through imagery. Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva or Shakti are compared to the Three Persons of the Trinity. Do we mind it? We at times mock when the goddess Durga is taken in procession to be submerged in water. According to the believers the goddess is really and truly present from the time the idol is installed in the venue of worship till the time when it is taken out to be disposed of. According to some Christian denomination Jesus is present in the 'bread and wine' (Eucharist) as long as the ritual lasts. Thereafter, Jesus vanishes from these two

species. The species cannot be preserved for future use. This is one similarity among many others.

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taudi, Uttar Pradesh during Christmas eve celebration, the disruption of the Christmas midnight mass in Silchar, Assam are a few instances of the activities of the Hindutva fundamentalists. Their intimidation and threat is always accompanied by chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' slogan and their favourite ambiguous allegation is conversion.

Barnes Mawrie the other day enumerated the rising cases of persecution of Christians and Muslims by people who proclaim to be passionate followers of a particular religion. They are emboldened not only because of the tacit blessing of the establishment but also Hindus do not speak loud and frequent enough against such religious bigots. Rarely is condemnation heard. Then why take aim at church singing and preaching that coincide with the Durga festivity? Church programs on Durga vacation might not be a competition. There may not be any ill-intention. They could be just a matter of convenience. The Durga puja days may be the only available and suitable days. The Durga Puja break is utilised for religious purposes. Non-Christians may do the same during Christmas days off. There is no issue. But Christians have issues if their celebrations during Christmas and pujas are disrupted. We have concerns if we are attacked for no fault of ours. We want the larger community to stand for us and for all minorities.

Even if the majority of the majority community do not agree to be counted, the Church should. But has it been so? What happened in Khandwa has not been condemned by the Church authorities. Only the leadership of Indian Catholic Youth Movement (ICYM) has expressed outrage. This is not strange any more. Even the series of attacks during Christmas last year did not wake up the Church from its slumber. The Catholic Bishop Conference of India (CBCI) was a mute spectator. In the North East not a single organisation had a word of denouncement. The powerful bishops' body in Kerala had nothing to say against the anti-conversion law in Karnataka because some of its members are in league with the Sangh Parivar. The Church in the southern state had to fight its battle alone.

The soul of this article is not about condemnations. It is about our mutual respect. Ideally nothing should happen so that the word condemnation disappears from the dictionary. Christians believe in one God, Muslim in Allah (God), Hindus worship the Supreme Being. Buddhists have no object with that. Then ultimately all have the same faith. All the drama that is going on in the country is more political than religious, much less spiritual.

Force (BSF) personnel are seizing cattle, cosmetics, and other smuggled items and I applaud their effort to prevent such crimes and smuggling. But they should also look into infiltrations as these Bangladeshis tend to sneak through the jungles and unfenced stretch of Indo-Bangladesh border to cross over into Meghalaya and to other state's illegally.

Yours etc.,
Shibaitlang Rymbai
Law Department, NEHU

Meghalaya needs policy makers

Editor,
We are nearing the 2023 state assembly polls and as most columnists have opined that the state lacks policy makers and it is for this same reason that this subject has been brought up again for deliberation. We cannot expect pressure groups to become permanent torch bearers of all the ills that plague the system

of governance in Meghalaya, since there would be a conflict of interests. We cannot expect IAS or MCS bureaucrats to draw up policies for the state because they have been trained as administrators and not policy makers or innovators. We cannot even expect much from politicians to draw up a policy because they are elected as legislators to legislate laws. Hence to have a robust, vibrant and flexible state policy across all sectors is the work of professionals, intellectuals, grassroots workers and academicians to frame out a state policy. Whoever gets the majority in 2023 needs to keep this very important factor in mind so that policy making does not only happen within the walls of the State Secretariat.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Via email

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Home Ministry granting release of 11 rape accused is preposterous

Prime Minister makes mockery with pro-women speech on August 15

By Arun Srivastava

The truth is now in the public domain. While admiring "Nari Shakti (women's power)" on August 15, from the ramparts of the Red Fort, Narendra Modi resorted to uncanny act of concealing the fact that 11 rapists of Bilkis Begum and killers of her seven family members would be released the same day at the direction of the home ministry of Amit Shah. Bilkis Bano was five months pregnant when she was gang-raped during the riots of 2002. Her three-year-old daughter was among the seven family members killed.

While he visualised manifold contribution of Nari Shakti, he did not utter a single word of condemnation on the release of his rapist members. He preferred to maintain impassive silence. The only tenable reason for his silence was to allow the opportunity to smear his iron posture. But he could not succeed in keeping the issue under the wrap for long. The petition filed by four courageous activists CPI(M) leader Subhashini Ali, Revati Laul, a journalist, Roop Rekha Verma, former vice chancellor of the Lucknow University and TMC MP Mahua Moitra, before the Supreme Court and consequently the court issuing orders to place the facts before it, has brought out the real face of this government towards women.

What really came as a brute shock was the fact that Amit Shah's ministry had agreed for release of the rapists at least thirty-five days before Modi's solemn claim of respecting the women's "mann aur samman" (prestige and dignity) on Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav on August 15. Notwithstanding his vows and pledges to preserve and protect the prestige of the women Modi's government preferred to stand by the side of the rapists.

Senior Supreme Court lawyer Abhishek Singhvi rightly said "There are many compromises in politics. But the BJP has made the greatest compromise of all: a sacrifice of the last shred of conscience that separated them from those craven and venal elements who prize solely their own political survival over all else". There is no denying the fact that Modi government conspired to hide critical facts about its role in the release of the convicts. The facts have come to light only after intervention of the Supreme Court.

The action of the Gujarat government to release them was being questioned by the political parties, intellectuals, academics and social activists. But the Gujarat government was maintaining a mesmerising silence notwithstanding the evidences candidly pointing to its deep involvement in the design.

Interestingly while defending its action Gujarat government said that it was in consonance to the 1992 remission policy since they had completed more than 14 years in prison and their conduct was found to be good. It also clarified the convicts were not granted remission in consonance with the circular for grant of remission to prisoners as part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebrations.

The government cleverly avoided the fact that a Supreme Court had ordered that a person convicted for committing rape or murder would not enjoy the benefit of remission. Gujarat conveniently cited the 1992 remission policy. The state home department said all the convicts had completed more than 14 years in prison under life imprisonment. On its part the Gujarat government approached the ministry of home affairs vide letter dated June 28, 2022, and sought the orders of India. Amit Shah's ministry gave its clearance despite aware of the Supreme Court's order.

What is most intriguing is the Home Ministry headed by Amit Shah gave the permission notwithstanding the objections by the Superintendent of Police, CBI, Special

Crime Branch, Mumbai and the Special Civil Judge (CBI), City Civil and Sessions Court, Greater Bombay. This action is testimony to the fact that Narendra Modi and Amit Shah are out to exonerate the RSS and BJP cadres and activists found to be involved in crimes like murder and lynching.

Quite interestingly while the Supreme Court is sieged of the matter, the Gujarat government is making its last ditch effort to prevail upon it and make sure that it does not rescind its action. This is revealed in the remark of apex court which says Gujarat government's reply to pleas challenging the remission granted to 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano gang-rape case is very bulky wherein a series of judgments have been quoted but factual statements are missing.

"I have not come across a counter affidavit where a series of judgments are quoted. Factual statement should have been made. A very bulky counter. Where is the factual statement, where is the application of mind?" a bench headed by Justice Ajay Rastogi observed.

Gujarat government also blamed the petitioners of having no locus standi as they were directly not related to the case. Affidavit had said, "the petitioner being a 'third-party stranger', has no locus to challenge the remission order passed by the competent authority as per applicable law in the instant case under the 'garb of PIL'. What is indeed shocking is Modi never condemned criminal action of the rapists. He never tried to goad or caution any of its leaders indulging in politics of hatred or threatening the minorities, especially the Muslims. Earlier BJP leaders Kapil Mishra, Praveesh Verma, Member of Lok Sabha and even MP, Anurag Thakur made some hatred speech. But Modi never pulled them up.

Modi, the iron man, has the dubious distinction of not speaking on key issues those particularly relate to Muslims. Bilkis case is not the first such illustration. He used to accuse former PM Manmohan Singh of keeping silent even as allegations of scams broke one after another. There are many instances when he resorted to golden rule of keeping silent. Speaking would have exposed the character of the government.

Some time back 13 opposition leaders had expressed their anguish and questioned Modi's silence on the issue of communal violence at several places in the country during celebrations. They were hurt at the "polarisation" of society and the growing number of hate speeches. Their joint statement said; "We strongly condemn the recent outburst of communal violence witnessed across several states in the country. We are shocked at the silence of the PM, who has failed to speak against the words and actions of those who propagate bigotry and those who, by their words and actions, incite and provoke our society."

No doubt Modi's silence is motivated. His silence is also a device to let the police and state administration resort to brutal repression on the dissenting people and activists. His silence is also a gadget to force the government machinery and institutions to fall in line. He never bothers to take seriously the voices of caution from the opposition parties, civil society leaders, writers, scholars and common citizens forewarned to put an end to Islamophobia. An insight into his silence would unravel the candid truth that it was a strategic manoeuvre to strengthen and encourage the Hindutva protagonists. Opening mouth will prove to be a major deterrent for the Hindu bigots, which Modi dislikes. (IPA Service)

"Every wave, regardless of how high and forceful it crests, must eventually collapse within itself."

— Stefan Zweig

The Shillong Times

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Family plus Kharage

THE collective conscience of the Congress party found eloquent expression in the election of its president—a remarkable credit and achievement for a party that had turned into a dynastic-run political enterprise. It was with commendable grit and determination to have a turnaround and to lift the party from the abyss it has fallen since 2014 that the Nehru family gave the nod for organizational revamp and presidential poll in a democratic and transparent manner. This effected a change in the leadership structure in an exemplary manner. The family knew there was no other go for the Congress to ensure its survival. Rahul Gandhi himself created the conditions for this by affirming in 2019, after the party's second electoral defeat, that no one from the family would be the president. The BJP, the other national party, are far from being democratic in their organisational structure. The party functionaries are selected with a nod from the RSS. The Communists, led by a set of foot-loose hypocrites, are far from being democratic even as they are in the forefront of verbal fights against "anti-democratic" acts of governments. They simply need more freedom to indulge. The regional parties are props of dynasties. It is here that the greatness of the Congress party to change itself in commendable ways must be seen and hailed.

To be frank, however, the election of Mallikarjun Kharage as party chief may not mean much. He might, as he progresses in the presidential seat, mostly be siding with the first family. The election showed Congressmen wanted it that way. In a fair poll, 90 per cent of the votes went to Kharage, which demonstrated the overwhelming support the family enjoyed among the Congress rank and file. The maturity on the part of Congressmen is evident as it would be foolish to wish the family away. The Nehru-Gandhis carry with them the symbolic weight of generations, reinforced by the sacrifices they made for the nation. These had culminated in the assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi for their upholding of the national interests, be it against the Khalistanis or the LTTE. No one can wish these away. Credit must also be given to the Congress to have elected a Dalit as its president, which even the "most proletariat" Communist humbugs would never even think of doing. While Kharage's would, to an extent, be a puppet show, the family itself can be trusted to change and be more accommodative. Rahul Gandhi has made this clear. After the results, Sonia Gandhi chose to reach out to Kharage and not the other way round. India needs the Congress now more than ever.

The acts of omission and commission of the MDA Government have been astutely brought out by the Meghalaya High Court in its latest order pertaining to illegal coal mining and transportation in the State. Since illegal coal mining has happened much before the present DGP and Chief Secretary had taken over their respective posts, it would be appropriate to surmise that those who sat in those respective chairs in the past years since the NGT ban on coal mining should also be held liable. Never have such flagrant violations of legal directives happened in the past when there was yet some semblance of the rule of law. Since 2018 this rule of law has eroded rapidly. Every person in Meghalaya knows and sees that truckloads of coal are being carried out of the state on a daily basis and they all smirk at the fact that police are part of the racket in allowing the trucks to pass unchecked and unhindered. The previous Home Minister who also held Power Department lost both his portfolios on account of this blatant disregard for the rule of law in both Departments. Power then went to the Deputy CM and Home to the Education Minister who now seems to have bungled big time on both departments.

The present Home Minister continues to turn a blind eye to illegal transportation of coal. In fact, those privy to inside information, mainly coal transporters say that the cost paid per truck for being allowed to illegally transport coal has only gone up under this Home Minister. This same Home Minister also turns a blind eye to the vehicle scam in his Department and keeps dishing out alibi about there needing to be more substantive evidence against the earlier AIG (A), GK Langrai who worked under the direct supervision of the retired DGP as his staff officer. There is almost a sort of conspiracy to waylay the enquiry report into the infamous vehicle scam. And this in a Department meant to ensure the rule of law! There cannot be a more egregious violation of the rule book than this! How does the State then expect to implement the fundamental laws that govern an orderly society?

The rule of law constitutes the basic and general principles of the Constitution. It is characterized in the words of Max Weber

as — "legal domination as an idea of government of law rather than an idea of men." In essence therefore the rule of law means that everyone from the government to its officials, together with citizens should act according to the law. Where the rule of law prevails no person can be said to be above the law, even the functions and actions of the executive organ of the state (the government) shall be within the ambit of the law.

In the case of Meghalaya the law has been violated to the point that a section of the enforcers of the rule of law have become a laughing stock. Where the High Court had directed that trucks carrying load beyond certain



capacity would not cross the now feeble Umiam bridge we see the 16 tyre trailer trucks

speaking up except that they have no hard evidence to produce to nail the corrupt

"In the case of Meghalaya the law has been violated to the point that a section of the enforcers of the rule of law have become a laughing stock. Where the High Court had directed that trucks carrying load beyond certain capacity would not cross the now feeble Umiam bridge we see the 16 tyre trailer trucks struggling up the Mawiong to Mawlawi road crossing the Umiam bridge, obviously after paying money to some cop."

struggling up the Mawiong to Mawlawi road crossing the Umiam bridge, obviously after paying money to some cop. A section of the police are so morally decrepit that everyone knows they can be bribed yet no punitive action has ever been taken against any corrupt cop so far, including in the latest case where the officer is guilty not only in one scam but a series of them. One begins to wonder at the hesitance of the Government to take stringent action against this officer. What does he have which is so volatile Government has to defend him and even elevate him to a post he is least worthy to hold.

The presence of one such person in the Police Department

since exchange of money between people is always a secret deal.

In a statement given by the PDF MLA and Minister for Sports and Agriculture said both his departments are free from controversy and that the onus for all the scams that have surfaced under the MDA must be the on the bigger party in the coalition — the NPP. This minister is obviously unaware of the concept of collective responsibility. None of the coalition partners in the MDA Government — the NPP, UDP, PDF, HSPDP, NCP, BJP are free from blame. They are all part of a corrupt system and they have all remained apathetic onlookers.

A cursory glance at the

Budget of Meghalaya 2022-23 would raise very serious concerns. On the liability side the loans taken or to be taken from the open market is to the tune of Rs 11,000 crores. There are also loans granted by NABARD and other agencies. Government officials feel there is nothing to worry about open market loans since they are underwritten by Government of India. But what happens if the loans are recalled by the lending agencies which they will do at some point considering the recessionary trends that have hit the entire world. It would also be interesting to know where all the money from open market borrowings are being deployed.

Chief Minister Conrad Sangma is in a money distribution spree in the façade of all kinds of schemes. Where is all this money coming from and why does cash have to be distributed to different people and groups? Isn't this an election-winning gimmick? It clearly is! What will farmers do with a one-time pre-election gift of Rs 5000?

The state also has a gender budget but whether that is even understood by the Departments implementing various schemes is doubtful. Women heading households single-handedly are given Rs 500 a month. How far does Rs 500 go in this world of high inflation? Clearly there is a huge gap between budget making and the situation on the ground.

There are many who sigh that if this government with its partners returns in 2023, Meghalaya is headed for disaster but they don't see the alternatives emerging clearly as yet. Have we really arrived at a point when we have to re-elect a bunch of oligarchs whose wealth ranking has gone up substantially in the last four years? How have the human development indices been in these last four years? Have they gone up or has there been a downside? Remember that development is not just about infrastructure. Without the development of the human person, material development is a sham. That sort of development is aimed at diverting funds to private pockets since every road or building project involves a cut.

The very fact that the NPP cocks a snook at all allegations of scams and decides to give the party ticket to an engineer who supervised the construction of the Meghalaya Assembly building is in itself a callous expression of the arrogance of power.

Absolute power does corrupt absolutely!

Congress has a golden opportunity to reunify and rejuvenate the party

Kharage has to lead from the front to take on BJP in 2024 polls

By Sushil Kutty

Suddenly everybody is an advisor to the newly elected Congress President Mallikarjun Kharage, advising him on how to go about running the 137-year-old party, which, if it had life of its own, will know the constant that nothing changes in the Congress till the Gandhi family wants it changed. Kharage knows this and the vanquished Shashi Tharoor knows this, too.

Shashi Tharoor after his "blunt" speaking for days leading up to Election Day lost more than just the election, his mojo, too. The progressive lot, which rooted for him are now coming up with a different slant of headlines: "Why Tharoor matters even in defeat?" and "He's what the Congress needed".

Life has come full circle for Shashi Tharoor. But the vibes aren't comfortable. While efforts are ostensibly being made in not make him feel dis-jointed in defeat, there is also talk that Shashi Tharoor would be shown his "place". The fact that as many as 1072 delegates voted for the Thiruvanan-

thapuram Member of Parliament has left the "high command" shaken.

Left to their devices, the 1072 represent a nebulous font of dissent. Tharoor got 11.42% of the total votes cast and these are men and women who did not want Kharage as "President", and are not likely to accept or endorse him as "President". Also, their votes went to Tharoor after Rahul Gandhi himself staked his reputation on it and made it clear, even as counting of votes was on, that "Kharageji will decide my position in Congress".

Kharageji was the Gandhi family's choice. The decision was already made. Everything that transpired thereafter was a show put up to game the system in accordance to the script written for the family, of the family, by the family. Inner-party democracy in action! If so, it was nicely done. Now, nobody can scapegoat anybody, much less any member of the Gandhi family.

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Rahul Gandhi's statement on election day when counting was still on that "Kharageji will decide what position I'll hold..." told the story that the high command was in total control. But Tharoor went a bit too far with his quips, including "not everybody gets a level-playing field". They will now return to bite him. Shashi Tharoor will be naive if he expects a "position" in the party structure anytime soon.

Shashi Tharoor will have to wait for the "high command" to take a call. Just like Rahul Gandhi said "Kharageji will decide on my position", Tharoor's position in the revamped Congress will have to wait for the Gandhi family's hand and wouldn't on his own decide on whether there's a place for the radically different Tharoor in the new scheme of things.

The "soft-spoken Kharage" has always bowed to the wishes of the Gandhi family. It was Rahul's hand on his shoulder

in the larger scheme of things.

The last couple of weeks has shown that Tharoor can mobilize people, both Congress workers and Congress leaders, and the general hoi polloi. He isn't a loose cannon like so many others are. He is charismatic and speaks fluent Hindi, and his English rocks even if his Malayalam is still underway. The man is also a magnet for the aspirational middle class, and the media, other than the "Republic", enjoy a good rapport with the man who wanted to be Congress President.

Kharage's challenge will be to win a couple of states for the Congress and retain the two already with the Congress, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, both of which will go to polls in 2023 along with a few other states. And, then there will be the "Big One" in 2024, which is where Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra is heading for a climax. Kharage could do with all the help coming his way and Tharoor is not a man of intrigue which tells a lot about the man and his politics. Rahul Gandhi with his Bharat Jodo Yatra is building up a storm in favour of the Congress even as the BJP is fighting strong headwinds of its own making. The remission given to Bilkees Bano's rapists and India's poor ranking in the Global Hunger Index have dealt a body-blow to Modi, and this is the time to strike because the iron is hot, really hot for Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. The Congress should not allow the opportunity to slip. Above all, it shouldn't allow itself to be wracked by differences because the "high command" could not keep itself to itself, and fractious factions have taken hold. The one refrain heard ad verbatim is how can there be "Bharat Jodo" when Congressmen are doing their best to "Congress Today"? That should be a thing of the past as the Kharage-led Congress prepares to fight the BJP in the coming elections. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Pine Mount School

Editor,
It's been a few months now since the teachers along with the students of Pine Mount School have come out in the open about the mismanagement and the deteriorating condition of Pine Mount School highlighting the deplorable condition of the toilets, boarding, to name a few. The State Government did constitute a Committee to look into the matter but the Committee has not yet come up with its report. Hopefully, the report of the Committee will eventually see the light of day.

However, I was immensely joyed to read in your news daily, that the Chief Minister, the Education Minister, as well as the Chief Secretary paid a visit to the school and witnessed the dilapidated condition of the school which requires immediate attention and execution of the repair and reconstruction work on a war footing. This visit appeared like a silver lining, a ray of hope

for the students, teachers and the school. Let this visit be made more meaningful. Right the wrongs and rid the school of all that is putting it and its glory in jeopardy. Pine Mount School must shine in all spheres!

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Need for urgent electoral reforms

Editor,

We are all aware that during the election campaign period a lot of group clashes take place among the supporters of rival political candidates. The state of West Bengal has already earned notoriety for such aggressive fighting among the canvassers, which usually leaves behind a trail of casualties and destruction of private and public properties. Thankfully, such incidents have not been reported in Meghalaya. But there is

no guarantee that such an eventuality will not occur here in future or as the matter of fact in this forthcoming state assembly election. We all know that such group clashes do take place when the processions/rallies taken by one party happen to meet the canvassing group of the opposite party. This primitive way of canvassing by way of shouting slogans and loudly appealing to people to vote for so and so, by the crowds in a frenzy may not be necessary in modern times. Voters are knowledgeable these days; they know whom to vote for and we should let them have peace of mind to exercise their judgement. Taking out rallies in the already congested streets unnecessarily causes traffic jam besides causing law and order problems and also loss of lives and properties.

The Election Commissioner (EC), by taking note of above facts, may consider banning rallies, processions, shouting slogans etc., during election campaigns EC may, however, allow political parties or candidates to hold

election meetings, make speeches, debates etc. in a designated place or site away from busy streets.

Yours etc.,
Krishna Chettri
Shillong-2

Valuing solidarity in sisterhood

Editor,
Most of us search for recognition of our value in our both personal and professional space. Being a female, I would not deny enjoying the feminist powers and privileges in the workplace. While most of us are aware about sexist notions of womanhood wherein we seek attention to the male dominance over female autonomy, independence, rights and equality; but can we really call ourselves a powerful, self-actualised woman?

I try to unmask the presence of jealousy and competition which are naturally present in several female bonds wherein we feel threat-

ened by the reality that other 'she' might be more gifted, attractive or more valued by the virtue of youth. We cannot solely attribute the patriarchal culture for our own low-self esteem which develops mutual annihilation among our ladies.

Our stench of envy clearly becomes visible to the society when we can't affirm or accept other female's successes and start stating excuses for excluding, policing and criticising certain women through evading them from our class by classifying their achievements to sheer luck, looks or extra privileges. The truth can be any, as one might be born out of riches, beauty and luxuries, however it should not come out at the cost of the projection that some of us are being victimised. If we can't support other women owing to our own fears and hatred for other females, then we should also not indulge in bad-mouthing, deprecatory accusations and vicious attacks. All these acts clearly give evidence of our lack of self-acceptance and failure to embrace negative

accounts of ourselves and our reality.

We can never gain attention from anyone including men when we try to diminish the value of our own female peers. I remain a great fan of Bell Hooks who rightly expressed in Communism, "Part of the process of becoming a feminist wasn't about what we shared in common - things like periods, obsessive concerns with our looks, or bitching about men - it was about women learning how to care for one another and be in solidarity, not just when we have complaints or when we feel victimized."

Yours etc.,
Shivangi Wadhwa,
(Development sector professional working with Meghalaya government on "Community Based Forest management" JICA Project).
Via email

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

"There's nothing like rejection to make you do an inventory of yourself."
— James Lee Burke

The Shillong Times
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Building norms flouted with impunity

THAT the High Court has had to come down yet again on the Khasi Hills District Council for granting permission to build within 300 metres of the highest flood level of the Umiam Lake. The High Court of Meghalaya has now ordered all construction activities around Umiam Lake to be kept in abeyance till the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) and the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) come up with a more detailed report on whether it would be permissible to allow the construction to be completed. The High Court passed the order after a report filed by the KHADC after a joint inspection conducted with the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) last month found seven establishments had constructed buildings within 300 m of the highest flood level (HFL) of the lake. But the question crying out for an answer is - who gave the permission for construction of those commercial complexes right by the ridge adjoining the lake when it is evident that all the effluents and kitchen waste water would flow directly into the Umiam Lake which in any case of highly polluted and silted.

Even ordinary passers-by are aghast at the fact that someone should be constructing commercial complexes so close to the Lake. Is there any hill station anywhere that has a market at a viewpoint? Only Meghalaya has that dubious distinction of allowing markets to come up at every tourist spot, thereby marring the beauty of the place. At the moment there are several prefabricated cabins that look like little shops that are placed near the viewpoint. With so many shops around there is bound to be garbage and the people manning those shops would need latrines. It is inevitable that the areas around the ridge of the Umiam Lake would be the go to areas. At this rate how can the Umiam survive the human onslaught?

The KHADC has said that the permission for construction of commercial buildings that look like restaurants around the Umiam Lake were given by the local authorities which means the Dorbar Shnong and interestingly by the MSPCB. Since when has the Dorbar Shnong become the authority for granting environmental clearance for buildings to be constructed right next to the Lake? The High Court ordered that no future construction in or around the Umiam Lake, at least within 1000 metres from the HFL, will be allowed before strict norms for such construction and treatment of effluents are put in place. The Court has also ordered that a no-construction buffer zone of about 500 metres from the HFL should be put out by the appropriate authorities. This notification when it comes out must be strictly enforced.

The Draft Mental Health Policy: A Window of Opportunity

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

Many health workers, doctors included, pussyfoot around mental health. They would prefer to focus on physical and physiological medicine, leaving mental illness on the fringe of the discipline. Of course, there are admirable individuals and organizations who engage head on with mental illness. The initiative to forge a mental health policy by the health department of the state government is to be highly commended.

One can comment on the process and content of the draft and some of that will be covered in this article. But health professionals and civil society must proffer a constructive and positive approach. The health department is one of the few well-functioning departments in the state. It is led by able officers, who steered the state through the Covid pandemic in an efficient and effective manner, in spite of inherent hurdles and pockets of resistance.

The Covid crisis in mental illness

Even before Covid, the burden of mental health outweighed all other diseases. In 2019, 1 in every 8 people, or 970 million people around the world were living with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depressive disorders the most common. The prevalence of mental illness is highest in age group 25-34 years and suicides are highest among those aged 15-29 years. About 200 million Indians (14%) suffer from a mental disorder. One DALY (disability-adjusted life year) represents the loss of the equivalent of one year of full health. India has one of the highest DALY rates for mental illness in the world.

The number of people living with anxiety and depressive disorders rose significantly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial estimates show an increase in depression by 40-60%, and a 28% increase in anxiety. There has been an increase in mental illnesses among vulnerable groups such as youth, disabled persons, health workers, and LG-BTQIA+. Domestic child abuse has risen. According to the WHO, "the world is failing in our duty of care for mental illness and well-being of health workers".

Focus on mental health needed

Unfortunately, The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 has only a definition of mental illness, but does not contain a definition of mental health. A focus is thus maintained on illness and the provisions kick in only after a mental illness sets in. A more important priority is to ensure mental health and well-being.

The WHO has a comprehensive definition of mental health saying that "it is critically important for everyone, everywhere, and goes beyond

the mere absence of a mental health condition. It is integral to well-being, enabling people to realize their full potential, show resilience amidst adversity, be productive across the various settings of daily life, form meaningful relationships and contribute to their communities. Physical, psychological, social,

world in an annexure, one of which is a disease from India called 'dhatu'.

The Diagnostic Statistical Manual, (DSM) is the official handbook of psychiatric disorders issued in 2013 by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). It includes a table of more than eighty mental disorders with cultural

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cultural, spiritual and other interrelated factors contribute to mental health, and there are inseparable links between mental and physical health. Promoting and protecting mental health is also critical to a well-functioning society. It fosters social capital and solidarity, which are essential during times of crisis."

Culture and mental illness

The WHO definition of health focuses on physical, mental and social well-being, and its definition of mental health includes cultural fac-

issues. The APA recommends that a culture-related interview, relating the patient's social and cultural context and history, be included to arrive at a correct diagnosis. The DSM describes the entities of "culture-bound syndromes", "folk illnesses" and "culture-specific disorders."

All tribes and even other ethnic groups have cultural illnesses. Examples of these among the Khasi-Jaintia tribes are "thlen", "taro" and "niangsohpet". These illnesses are grounded in

"The word 'culture' is mentioned 84 times in the draft policy. The word is often diminished to a buzz word or to lend a trendy veneer to an academic or government narrative. There are no specifics in the draft policy, only vague ideas. Outside of the department of art and culture, the word is not on the radar."

tors, stating that culture is inseparable from mental health. Current health systems mostly focus on physical health. Mental health doesn't receive the importance it deserves and social health is hardly ever mentioned. Along the way, the role of culture in social and mental health has been neglected.

The word "culture" is mentioned 84 times in the draft policy. The word is often diminished to a buzz word or to lend a trendy veneer to an academic or government narrative. There are no specifics in the draft policy, only vague ideas. Outside of the department of art and culture, the word is not on the radar. Even in health sciences, culture is hardly studied as a significant factor in health.

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD) issued by the WHO in 2016 includes a section titled "culture-specific disorders," and has recommended that mental health practitioners include a separate category for cultural syndromes. The ICD has already included 20 such diseases from around the

belief systems, which may have spiritual dimensions and discussion of these illnesses must deal with sensitivity. The fact is that these illnesses are prevalent in our society and have physical and mental symptoms, and as such need to be included in the health discourse.

The inclusion of traditional healers in a pluralistic health strategy is recommended by the WHO. The report on Tribal Health in India, 2018, issued jointly by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Tribal Affairs recommended the study, documentation of health traditions and traditional medicines of different tribes. Another important recommendation is to integrate tribal medical practitioners into primary health care.

Khasi and Garo traditional medicine are used by a majority of the tribal population and believed to be efficacious. It is also accessible and affordable. Unfortunately, the ten thousand healers in our state have no official status, and their services are not supported by policy or schemes.

They can be integrated into the health system to deliver both traditional and modern health services.

The Protection and Promotion of Khasi Traditional Medicine Act was passed by the KHADC in 2011, and signed by the governor. It has four main features: the registration of traditional healers, the establishment of a training institute, the setting up of medicinal plant sanctuaries, and the protection of intellectual property rights. Sadly, there has been little progress in implementation.

Research

The mental health policy should provide for specified areas of research. Two areas are of important focus. The first is to investigate the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that are associated with the high birth rate, low use of contraception, low vaccination rates, and high oral cancer prevalence seen in Meghalaya. The second area of study would look at cultural factors and cultural illnesses.

In anthropology, the term liminality literally means the ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rituals. In a larger sense, it indicates the transition stage of a tribe standing at the threshold between their previous way of structuring their identity, beliefs, and traditions, and the new way of thought, values and behaviours. Our tribes in Meghalaya are at such a junction in their continuing evolution and our uneasy engagement with traditional cultural beliefs is an example of this liminality. In this transition we have to reassess these things, without being unhinged from our roots.

A final review

I suggest that the draft policy be reviewed by a committee of experts from various stakeholder groups, especially those with cultural experience, which outsiders will not be able to comprehend. The implementation plan should include specified contributions from various stakeholders, especially those in civil society and educational institutions. There should be annual reports and reviews by stakeholders.

Mental health should be integrated into general health. Continuing the focus separately on mental illness or even mental health invokes stigma. We have moved away from words like "mad", "hysteria", and "lunatic", and we need to continue the attitudinal journey to looking at mental health in the holistic context of health and well-being. Those of us who may consider ourselves on the front lines of liberated thinking, still have to take our fellow tribes along, with due respect to traditional beliefs. Especially because these are not disjointed beliefs, but have implications for physical, mental and social health.

Both centre and the state governments have failed India's hungry children
Bragging about high growth only exposes the distorted economic policies

By Sushil Kutty

As if the remission to the "Gujarat gang-rapists" and the showboating from the ramparts of the Lal Qila weren't enough, now there's India's humiliating 107 out of 121 ranking on the Global Hunger Index, too, indicting the Modi Government. Only the morally-corrupt and the ethically-challenged will not balk at children wasting and stunting because of widespread hunger, and lack of balanced diet!

This in a country which boasts of the highest GDP growth rate, and the fifth largest economy, with potential to overtake Germany and Japan and become the third largest economy by 2028. Also, what good having the second richest man on the planet in your bailiwick when millions of undernourished children and their equally underfed mothers have to scrounge for one meal a day?

Then, for the all-powerful 'One', with the 56th chest, to brag of 'Azadi-Ka-Amritkaal', and 'Mahakaal' - Kuch Bhi India's "bhookhe-nange bachche" are star-crossed. The Modi government has virtually left them to fend for themselves. For, that is what happens when the government refuses to accept the GHI ranking, questions its validity, and dismisses it as yet another attempt to "tarnish" India's fair image.

The Global Hunger Index lists countries by "hunger", from the "serious", to the "alarming". Some developed countries are deliberately kept out of the GHI because "developed" by definition

with empty platitudes. When Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said poverty is a "state of mind", it was dismissed as a "Pappu joke". Turns out Rahul correctly defined "hunger", which is tied with poverty. Fact is, nobody gets a free lunch, and hunger is a symptom of serious development issues.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman live an esoteric existence. Over the last eight years, Modi's "balanced diet" is often the talk of some distant town. There have been unhealthy references on social media on Modi's own "glowing skin" courtesy "Singaporean mushrooms".

Modi's diet should be made public and every Indian should get its advantage. Modi grew up allegedly dirt poor on a largely chai-ka-diet. And from chaitwa to Pradhan sevak, it's been worth the breathless climb. Today, Prime Minister Modi keeps the tricolour flying talking of everything but India's stunting and wasting children, hunger gnawing at India's intestines.

According to reports, the Modi government has done away with statistics and "statistical models" to explain poverty and hunger. Also to allegedly cover-up death tolls and economic disasters. In fact, the Modi dispensation is allergic to facts and figures, especially data. If the real unemployment and job data were to surface, Modi and



rules out hunger. Unfortunately, India has a long distance to go. For now, India is in a trough of "serious, and sharing the depression with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

Come to think of it, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sharing photo-op with G-7 heads of state is an incongruity—a slap on the face of India's hungry and emaciated children, the pictures of whom are slowly vanishing from the Getty cache because poverty and hunger are pariah in the 21st Century though the reality is quite another story. Acute hunger stalks India, the next global economic powerhouse.

The Global Hunger Index ranks India 107 out of 121 countries. Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are all better placed. But unlike these countries, India has no dearth of foodstuff. The silos are choc-a-bloc with wheat and paddy, pulses and what have you not.

The problem is Modi's 'New India' is ridden with joblessness, with the Great Unwashed left lame and limping for want of purchasing power. No wonder India's GHI ranking has been consistently slipping since 2014 when Modi became PM on a plank of 'ache din'. Today, eight years on, lakhs of children born in and after 2014 are stunted and wasted, low in weight, and short in height, their spirits massacred by hunger pangs.

India's '107' GHI ranking would put a child to shame, but the Modi government doesn't show concern, nor remorse. Hunger is primordial. Hunger does not go away

Sitharaman wouldn't have a tongue to talk.

The revelation that India has more stunted and wasted children than Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka is humiliating. To put it strongly, it is criminal. It is a slow death visited on innocents. The Modi government can ignore GHI ranking only at its own peril. Instead of ranting and raving, the Modi regime should ask itself why India's GHI ranking is "serious", why now, and why not when UPA ruled India.

Why cannot India come up with an alternate set of credible data? What's the National Sample Survey doing? What about NITI Aayog, and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; what about Smriti Irani's Ministry of Women & Child Welfare? Sitting on imaginary laurels will not do a child or mother any good. Anaemic mothers can hardly give a running start to their newborn. Also, what's on the menu matters? Why hasn't the anganwadi system delivered best results? Whatever has gone wrong with the mid-day meal scheme in schools? Food choice and food habits have to change.

Both the Centre and the states have failed India's hungry children. Poverty is at the root of India's poor GHI. India's per-capita GDP sucks. Modi hasn't paid attention to controlling the population as he does to winning elections. India's hungry children have to get their stomach's fill, and the government an ear-full. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

On MCCL joint venture

Editor,
It is learnt that the Government is going to ink an MOU with a Kolkata based Company - Bhavika Commercial Pvt. Ltd. (BCPL) and the CM has asked the officials of Mawmluh Cherra Cements Ltd (MCCL) along with Jowai MLA, W Shylla to visit the firm at Kolkata to find out the details of the firm.

Before signing any agreement the Government must look into the credibility of the intending firm and check the following credentials.

- 1) Whether the firm is in the cement manufacturing business or not.
- 2) Whether the firm has the required technology required to run a cement plant.
- 3) Does the firm have any agreement with any other cement factories to run the business
- 4) Whether they have the financial capability to run the factory amounting to thousands of crores of rupees

or more.

If the firm does not meet the above requirements then the Government should not sign an agreement with it because it would not fulfil the requirements needed. This also makes us wonder why the Government cannot approach the existing cement companies in Jaintia Hills who have made a niche for themselves in this business and established credibility with resounding success and earning crores of rupees annually.

Now it is up to the Government to receive the report of the committee visiting the Kolkata firm. The visiting committee should not succumb to the hospitality of that firm and present a transparent report on the matter. As apprehended the editor of this newspaper has in the editorial (ST Oct 20, 2022) categorically mentioned the details of the firm's credentials and that they don't seem to have the working capital required to run the MCCL. The Government should not accept the proposal of B/CCL as it seems to be of a dubious nature.

Yours etc.,
SL Singhanina,
Via email

Meaning of Diwali

Editor,

For long I have been thinking about what Deep-avali or Diwali or globally recognized as India's famous Festival of Light really means to us all. Is this simply a day of celebration and festivities filled with trills of lighting numerous lamps (diyas), burning crackers, worshipping Laxmi-Ganesh to pray for health, wealth, prosperity and wisdom (across North, Central and West India) or worshipping Goddess Kali (Eastern India) as a symbol of victory of virtue over vice?

Diwali is celebrated with pomp and grandeur across India and abroad with an air of rejoicing, hope, festivity, glamour and celebration. But we need to remember that we actually light the diyas and candles all around the house to break the silence

of the night and celebrate the emotional sparkle of spiritual and emotional bliss. We worship Goddess Kali, incarnation of the Goddess Durga representing eternal power, energy, strength and courage. Kali is believed in the Hindu mythology to be the divine Supreme Creator and Destroyer of the Universe. SHE also represents time and space that continues to move forward infinitely.

We worship our Gods and Goddesses not just for money and success on this auspicious day; but to extend our sincere gratitude and thankfulness, for the all-round well-being and happiness of our loved and dear ones, for receiving divine bliss, mental peace and solitude from our mortal pains and worries and to rejuvenate our spirits with love, hope, compassion and empathy for all around us. It is the celebration not of an external light; but a rare festival or occasion every year to rekindle and recharge our own exhausted soul with the light of knowledge, wisdom, gratitude and humility.

Let Diwali celebrations

this year be the most grand and memorable for all!

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Kolkata - 45

Appeal to respect religious sentiments

Editor

The religious festival of Bhai Tika Bhai Photna or Bhai Dhooj falls on October 27 this year. This is a very important festival for Hindus. On this day sisters pray for the well-being and prosperous life of their beloved brothers and exchange gifts among siblings. Also on this day, particularly in the Gorkha families, sisters put on Tika on the forehead of their brothers and brothers in turn offer gifts to their sister and until this ritual is over, the sisters continue to be in fasting. So, this day is eagerly awaited by Hindus and its reverence can easily be visualized by any.

Incidentally, this day is not declared a holiday by both state and central Governments. So not being aware of the religious feelings of this day, some schools in Shillong are holding their final examinations on this day. This deprives the student/teacher of the school from availing leave of absence on this day. This has marred the festival mood of some students and teachers of the schools.

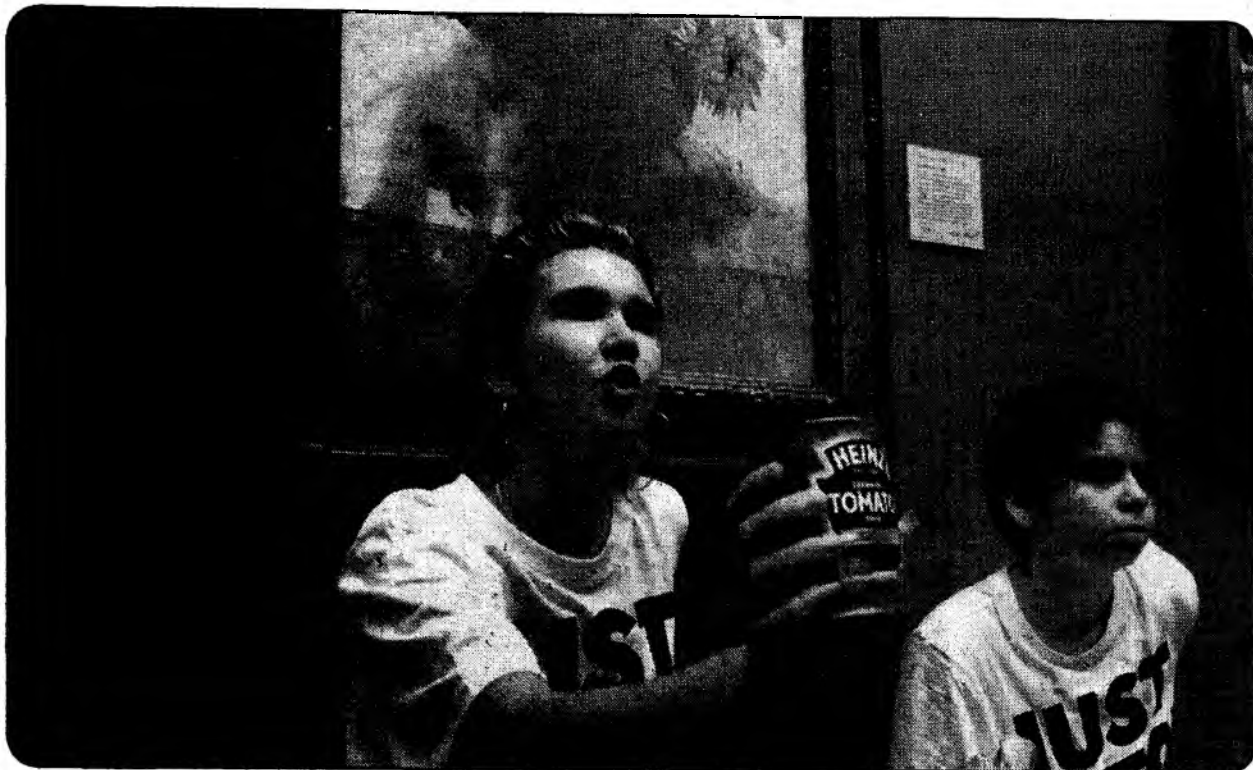
Thus, in keeping with the spirit of camaraderie and also respecting the religious sentiments of all, the school authority may like to either bring forward or postpone the exams to be held on this auspicious day to some other suitable date. This gentle reminder to all schools is submitted through your esteemed daily.

Yours etc.,
Krishna Chettri,
Shillong-2

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

Just Stop Oil: A protest turned radical

Do protests turn public away from a cause? Here's the evidence



Members of the protest group Just Stop Oil recently threw soup at Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* in the National Gallery in London. The action once again triggered debate about what kinds of protest are most effective.

After a quick clean of the glass, the painting was back on display. But critics argued that the real damage had been done, by alienating the public from the cause itself (the demand that the UK government reverse its support for opening new oil and gas fields in the North Sea).

Supporters of more militant forms of protest often point to historical examples such as the suffragettes. In contrast with Just Stop Oil's action, when the suffragette Mary Richardson went to the National Gallery to attack a painting called *The Rokeby Venus*, she slashed the canvas, causing major damage.

However, many historians argue that the contribution of the

suffragettes to women getting the vote was negligible or even counterproductive. Such discussions often seem to rely on people's gut feelings about the impact of protest. But as a professor of cognitive psychology, I know that we don't have to rely on intuition – these are hypotheses that can be tested.

The activist's dilemma

In one set of experiments researchers showed people descriptions of protests and then measured their support for the protesters and the cause. Some participants read articles describing moderate protests such as peaceful marches. Others read articles describing more extreme and sometimes violent protests, for example a fictitious action in which animal rights activists drugged a security guard in order to break into a lab and remove animals.

Protesters who undertook extreme actions were perceived to

be more immoral, and participants reported lower levels of emotional connection and social identification with these "extreme" protesters. The effects of this kind of action on support for the cause were somewhat mixed (and negative effects may be specific to actions that incorporate the threat of violence).

Overall, these results paint a picture of the so-called activist's dilemma: activists must choose between moderate actions that are largely ignored and more extreme actions that succeed in gaining attention, but may be counterproductive to their aims as they tend to make people think less of the protesters.

Activists themselves tend to offer a different perspective: they say that accepting personal unpopularity is simply the price to be paid for the media attention they rely on to "get the conversation going" and win public support for the issue. But is this the right approach? Could activists be



hurting their own cause?

Hating protesters doesn't affect support

I've conducted several experiments to answer such questions, often in collaboration with students at the University of Bristol. To influence participants' views of protesters we made use of a well-known framing effect whereby (even subtle) differences in how protests are reported have a pronounced impact, often serving to delegitimise the protest.

For example, the *Daily Mail* article reporting the Van Gogh protest referred to it as a "stunt" which is part of a "campaign of chaos" by "rebellious eco-zealots". The article does not mention the protesters' demand.

Our experiments took advantage of this framing effect to test the relationship between attitudes to the protesters themselves and to their cause. If the public's support for a cause depends on how they feel about the protesters, then a negative framing – which leads to less positive attitudes toward protesters – should result in lower levels of support for the demands.

But that's not what we found. In fact, experimental manipulations that reduced support for the protesters had no impact on support for the demands of those protesters.

We've replicated this finding across a range of different types of nonviolent protest, including protests about racial justice, abortion rights and climate change, and across British, American and Polish participants (this work is being prepared for publication). When members of the public say, "I agree with your cause, I just don't like your methods," we should take them at their word.

Decreasing the extent to which the public identifies with you may not be helpful for building a mass movement. But high publicity actions may actually be a very effective way to increase recruitment, given relatively few people ever become activists. The existence of a radical flank also seems to increase support for more moderate factions of a social movement, by making these factions appear less radical.

Protest can set the agenda

Another concern may be that most of the attention obtained by radical actions is not about the issue, focusing instead on what the protesters did. However, even where this is true, the public conversation opens up the space for some discussion of the issue itself.

Protest plays a role in agenda setting. It doesn't necessarily tell people what to think, but influences what they think about.

Last year's Insulate Britain protests are a good example. In the months after the protests began on September 13 2021, the number of mentions of the word "insulation" (not "Insulate") in UK print media doubled.

Some people don't investigate the details of an issue, yet media attention may nevertheless promote the issue in their mind. A YouGov poll released in early June 2019 showed "the environment" ranked in the public's top three most important issues for the first time.

Pollsters concluded that the "sudden surge in concern is undoubtedly boosted by the publicity raised for the environmental cause by Extinction Rebellion" (which had recently occupied prominent sites in central London for two weeks). There's also evidence that home insulation has risen up the policy agenda since Insulate Britain's protests.

Dramatic protest isn't going away. Protagonists will continue to be the subject of negative media attention, which will lead to widespread public disapproval. But when we look at public support for the protesters' demands, there isn't any compelling evidence for nonviolent protest being counterproductive. People may "shoot the messenger", but they do – at least, sometimes – hear the message. (*The Conversation*)

Six Fun Ways To Celebrate Diwali Safely With Your Kids This Year!



By Mansi Zaveri

This is the season of celebration and there's joy, light and happiness everywhere around us. As we look to take a break from school and work to spend time to indulge in the festivities, the idea is to have a good time, together, with family and friends while devouring our favourite treats and reminiscing our childhood memories!

Celebrate the Diwali break with your kids in a way that is relaxing, engaging, entertaining and safe. Go ahead and bookmark these points.

Choose Comfort Over Style

Yes, Diwali is all about those designer lehengas, sherwanis, sarees and dhotis. Go ahead, pamper yourself and the family and opt for a sustainable designer wear brand and get the photos done and out of the way. But after it is done, choose clothing that is comfortable. Especially when bursting fire crackers say yes to comfort and safety, and no to over flowy dresses.

Join Hands With Your Li'l Masterchef

Step into the kitchen with your children and share the joy

of cooking with them. Sit and mould ladoos in perfect and not-so-perfect ways but create memories in the process!

Bond Over Rangoli

Another safe and fun way to engage kids is to bond over colours – another beautiful custom we have in Indian culture. There's some serious focus and dedication kids learn when they design colourful Rangoli or the simpler alternative – Kolam in South India. Hand them over a pack of colours, and some Rangoli stencils and give them a dedicated space. If they are too

young, a corner of their room would do. For the older ones, trust them with the space near the entrance of your house. They will feel happy! P.S – remember not to deck them with the prettiest or newest clothes when doing Rangoli!

Book Your Time For Movie Nights

After a tiring schedule of celebration, parties and endless selfies, wind the day with the best activity with your kids. Bookmark a list of the best family-friendly movies you can watch with the kids on OTT. There's nothing better than cosy cuddles with your kids and a bowl of makhanas or popcorn – try it!

Create Best From Waste

From discarded pista or groundnut shells to old leaves and flowers to pencil sharpenings, there is just so much we can do to decorate the house and the child's room, to proudly display our attempts! Try it, it is a lot of fun!!

Answer Their Whys

Kids need answers. All the time. Every time. When they see you making those ladoos, or the Laxmi Pooja or lighting so many lamps – they are going to be asking you all the questions about why we do what we do.

Why not answer it in a language they understand? Tune into kids podcasts or watch exclusive kids videos on YouTube with a puppet show on Ramayan to answer their questions.

Read books on Diwali, listen to podcasts on stories that answer the whys and hows. Search for the I Am Not Bored podcast that answers all of your child's questions and addresses that curiosity. (*LANSLife*)

Festive Fashion the Bollywood Way



Bollywood style

Inspired by celluloid and Manish Malhotra, opt for a bling kurta with a dupatta to make heads turn, Varun Dhawan style!

The Pathan

Choosing a classic pathani kurta and shalwar, King Khan proves he's the frontrunner when it comes to fashion too! The actor prefers to keep his clothing stylish.

The Punjabi affair

Vicky Kaushal's striped kurta pyajama set teamed with Kohlpuri sandals and shades is perfect for a day of festivities.

Dapper dude

Bollywood's "chocolate boy," Ranbir Kapoor, has the physique to wear Indian clothing flawlessly, and this textured kurta teamed with silver rings shows that men can flaunt jewellery with confidence.

Style Nawabi

The Pataudi never fails to grab headlines for his minimal looks and always manages to look chic. When it comes to fashion he's always got his right foot forward. (*LANSLife*)

A bandhi & shades

Ranveer Singh, is well renowned for his taste in clothing, looks dashing in this ethnic ensemble. The actor wore off-white kurta, a burgundy Bandhi with matching glares.

All white ensemble

If you don't want to go overboard, this outfit is understated yet still ideal for the festive season. RajKummar Rao looks sharp in complete white.

Prints galore

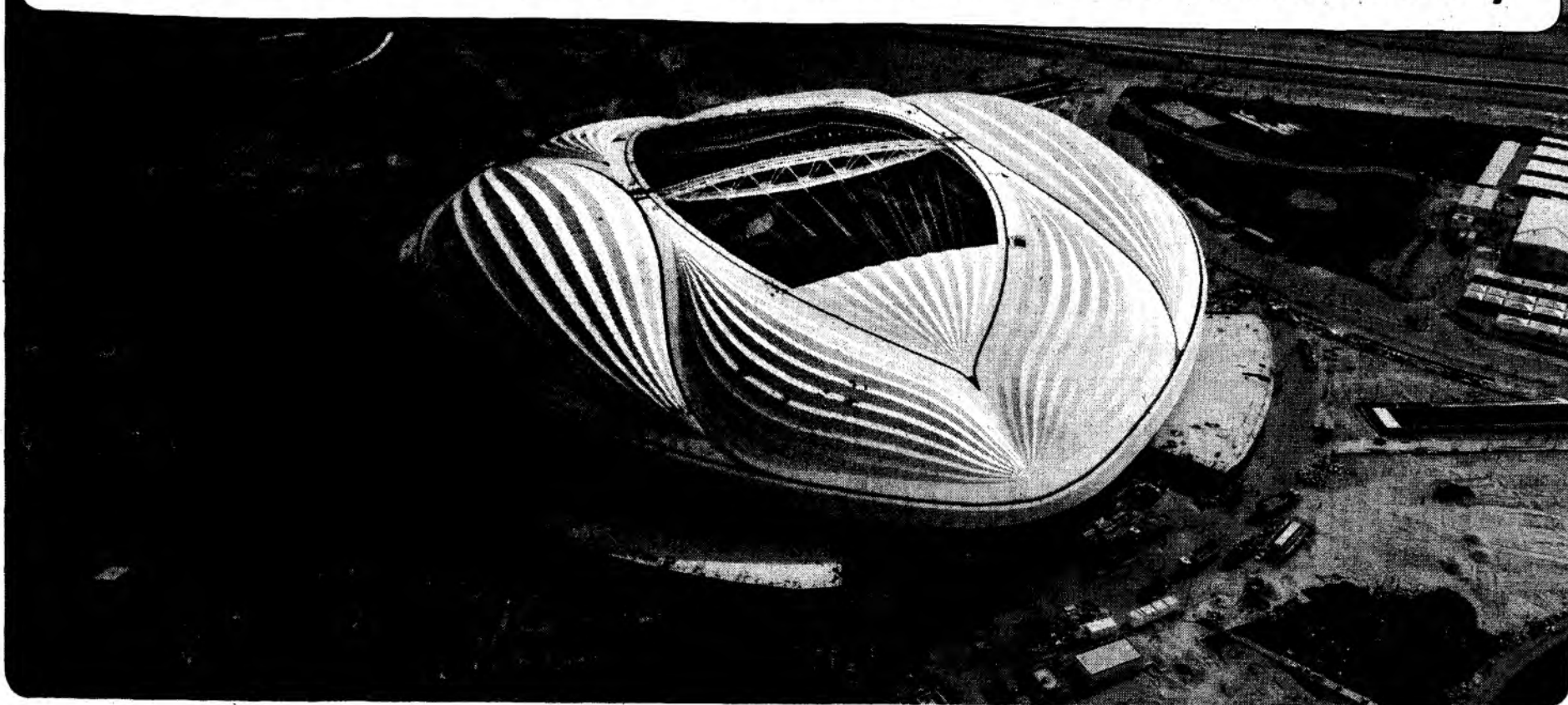
In this printed and textured kurta, Shahid Kapoor looks dapper. The matching scarf, velvet boots and white pants complete the look.

Jewel tones

Sidharth Malhotra wears a smart jewel toned blue kurta with off-white thread embroidery. The look is young and chic.

FIFA 2022 WORLD CUP

Qatar's frantic countdown to a tournament full of controversy



people will travel to Qatar over the period November to December.

For a country with a population of 3 million, this is a huge influx which will test the resilience of critical infrastructure, including roads, public transport, water supply and sewage capacity. Already, some immigrant workers have been told to leave Qatar and only return once the tournament is over. Government workers have been told to work from home during the World Cup, and schools, colleges and universities will be closed.

Fearful of congestion, the Qatari government will stop traffic from entering Doha on a Friday (often the busiest day of the week) and is currently testing 700 World Cup branded electric buses in anticipation of potential transport issues. And, as I discovered on a visit in September, with just weeks to go before kick-off, significant sections of Doha's streets are inaccessible as the country belatedly seeks to upgrade its water and sewerage system.

During that trip, I was struck by the scale of infrastructural development that has taken place since I was last in Qatar before the pandemic. The city seemed a lot quieter than before, which a taxi driver told me was because local people have been instructed to either leave the country or stay away from the capital as final preparations take place.

In some places, roads were still unfinished, as were several areas where football fans are expected to congregate. Among some migrant workers I spoke to, issues remained of long working hours and low pay. But both they and others talked, almost without exception, of their excitement about the tournament.

That many of them will be unable to afford match tickets will not concern the Qatari authorities. Its 12 years of planning for the World Cup have been about nation-building ambitions, projecting soft power and changing international perceptions.

As it races ahead with final preparations, there is not long to go before the Doha government decides whether its massive gamble has paid off. (IANS)

When Denmark play at the men's FIFA World Cup in Qatar this winter, their shirts will mask the name and logo of their sponsor, the sportswear brand Hummel. One of the strips is all black, which Hummel described as the "colour of mourning".

The company explained the unusual design by directly referencing migrant construction worker deaths in Qatar, as well as the state's much questioned human rights record. A social media post said: "We don't wish to be visible during a tournament that has cost thousands of people their lives."

It added: "We support the Danish national team all the way, but that isn't the same as supporting Qatar as a host nation."

Hummel's criticism of Qatar was not the first, and as the tournament gets closer, there will be more to come. Former Manchester United star Eric Cantona has said he won't be watching the competition, and some French cities have banned screenings of matches in their public spaces.

But the response from Qatar to Hummel's view seemed to demonstrate a change in tactics. In the

past, the Qataris have often been slow in reacting to such criticisms. Yet within hours of Hummel voicing their concerns, the organisation responsible for organising the event had issued a robust statement.

In it, the country's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy claimed that Qatar had implemented significant labour market reforms, adding that all countries, Denmark included, should focus on promoting human rights.

Such a strident response was noteworthy, appearing to mark a development in the nature, tone and speed of communications coming out of Qatar. Officials have clearly been readying themselves for an intense period of scrutiny and activism at one of the most controversial World Cups in football's history.

They have also been preparing for the possibility of the event being disrupted, buying in everything from Moroccan police officers and American surveillance equipment, to Turkish drones and Italian frigates. It remains to be seen how these resources will be deployed, or whether they might be linked to the recent announcement that alcohol will be sold

for up to 19 hours a day.

When it comes to logistics too, Qatar has been practising. It has hosted several high-profile, mass-attendance events to establish its level of preparedness, including the Fifa Club World Cup in 2019 and the Fifa Arab Cup in 2021. Both tournaments were staged without major incidents. But a recent test event at the Lusail Iconic Stadium (which is due to stage the final match on December 18) was less encouraging, with water shortages, faulty air conditioning, and the need for hour-long walks to the stadium in 35°C heat.

Such obstacles are not insurmountable before November's opening game between Qatar and Ecuador. But there is little margin for error in staging sports events of this nature. In March, the F1 Grand Prix in Saudi Arabia was almost cancelled after a Houthi drone attack, while in May, crowd management issues caused serious problems at the Uefa Champions League Final in France.

GAME ON

A major challenge could simply be the volume of visitors, with some suggesting over 1.2 million

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, OCTOBER 23, 2022

Mercury time Saturn on your solar return chart and will give wonderful results: The upholding works will get momentum. You will be in a hurry to finish them off. Love, romance and adventure will be in your life. You will go along with your partner well. Husband and wife will have wonderful bonding. Those who are unmarried will plan to get married. You will get unexpected profits in your business. Planetary situation will be favorable. You will be able to focus totally on your work. Time will be best for financial matters. There will be profitable situations. There will be auspicious occasions at home. Students will focus on their studies. You will do every work after much thought. Your courage will grow. Additional sources of income will be explored. Time is best for students and professionals.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



The entire week will be fabulous. You will excel in your work. You will have days marked with victory. Your efforts will bear fruits and you will work harder and harder. You will complete your financial matters at this time and get desired results. You will be surrounded by loveable people who will give you lot of support and care a lot about you. People will be attracted towards you because of your strong personality. You will enhance your prestige. You will get promoted in your job. You will also make progress in business. You will also spend happy moments with your parents and family. You will also plan an outing with family. You will also get full support from your officials.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



Your efforts will bring in lot of money. You will receive lots of love from your family members. Even your peers and bosses will support you a lot. New business orders will prove to be profitable. A change of plan according to time will be good. Jupiter will be beneficial and peace giving. Your boss will praise your work and will be happy with your performance. Keep your important developments carefully. So that your opponents are not able to harm you. Students will focus on their studies. The time is to move forward. You will be serious towards your career and will make changes in your office. You will make failures as your strength. You will sacrifice a thing or two dear to you. It is time to look forward in your life.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



You will make an outline of your work and plans. It is time to correct a few things. You will also plan your budget and spend money accordingly. You may feel the need to keep your expenses under control. A new addition to the family will bring joy. You will experience bliss in family ties. Results of examinations/ interview will be favorable. The impossible will also be made possible. Your image will be positive. Your success will astound the world. The health of your partner/spouse may worry you a bit. You need to take financial decisions carefully otherwise it may cause you a loss or two. Your entire focus will be on your goals. You will also study and read a lot. You will also be capable of bridging the generation gap and bring your family closer.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



Your weakness could prove to be your strength. Just we need to make repeated efforts in the same direction to get success. It is also said failure is the stepping stone to success. You have the strength and capacity to reach the top. Your health will be fine. You will also be sympathetic to your near and dear ones and will guide them properly. The results of your efforts will bear fruits. There will be an increase in your prestige. You will be successful in doing hard work and will be far ahead of others in terms of achievements and ideology. You will make profits in mutual funds, saving and stock market. Married life will be full of charm.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



The time will be in your favor. You will face difficulties but will overcome them with ease. Your expenses too will rise but you will take care of it. You will work with a lot of patience and wisdom. You will spend time with your family and will get mental peace. Love birds will have a wonderful time. Husband and wife will come closer to each other. You will have the energy to complete your work. You will also take out time for entertainment. You will also feel like doing some new work which we were earlier afraid to take up. You will also work with full patience and sincerity. You will have faith in your own abilities. You will take career related decisions with a lot of thinking and with the advice of your friends.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



You will win at whatever you do. You will get good business offers. You will also progress in your job. Your prestige will also increase. You will have monetary gains. You will feel more satisfied and give yourself grand results. You will think of change in order to improve yourself. You will also start a dialogue with your colleagues to resolve an outstanding matter. You will also go on a business trip which will prove beneficial to you. You will also make lot of new contacts. You will be more rich and wealthy than before. You need not tell others about your plans. It can

prove to be counter productive. You will reach the pinnacle of success in your career. Love birds will have a wonderful time. Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



You will discharge your responsibilities at your workplace efficiently. You will also enjoy your life fully. You will establish a balance between official and domestic activities. Your bosses will be aware of your capabilities and help you to grow in your career. You will be the recipient of some amount of money. You will also travel a lot and make profits. You need to be aware of sweet talking and sycophants. They may try to influence your judgement. You will move in the right direction in your career. You will receive costly gifts. You will also be a guest in a marriage or birthday function. There will be peace and calm in the house. You will stick to your work and your professional agenda. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. You will give a stinging reply to your critics.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



These are excellent days. You will do your work with great skill, care and efficiency. Your marital life will be blessed. Husband and wife will share amazing bonding. Newly wed couple will understand each other's feelings. Works that had been planned will get completed. Do not be scared of responsibilities, if you want to make it big in your life. You will feel neglected in friends circle and for this your own behavior is to blame. You need to interact with one and all nicely. You will make good progress in your studies. You will also be interested in doing some welfare works. You will also do your work with enthusiasm. You will take advice of experts in legal matters. There are strong chances of improvement in your financial position.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)



Things will be looking better now as your desired targets will be achieved. It will make you happy. Your hurdles will get removed. You need to cut down your costs in business to make profits. You will enrich your knowledge. Students will remain devoted to their studies to utilize their time properly. Your financial constraints will get removed. Your mental and physical strength will see you gain supremacy in your work field. With your friends help you will complete a complicated job. Your honor and reputation will get a boost in your society. Your rising fame will make you an important figure in media, sports, cinema and politics. You will get success in all your government related cases. You will get good results in all your achievements.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



It will be a wonderful week. You will have a pleasant time. Your decisions taken in time will now give excellent results. You will plan an outing with your family. Your pending jobs will get completed. You will be fully affectionate towards your dear ones. You will remain busy in keeping yourself in a fully mood. You will pass time in exchanging jokes and having fun with your close ones. You may buy some gift for your spouse. You will have warm relations with your siblings. You may go out to attend a gala party. You will try to tackle your problems with confidence and prudence. Patience and contentment will help you pass your time with much solace.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



You will share your feelings with one of your friends. Your meeting with an influential person will pave the way for success. You will do your work with all sincerity as a result of which you will get promoted. You will also face some headaches and tensions. You will have monetary gains from somewhere all of a sudden and you might be given a new responsibility at work. Love mates will come closer to each other. You will reach new heights of success on the basis of your creativity. You will recover money that was given to some person. You will meet an old friend or relative and feel happy. You might attend a family function. You will establish a good balance between your house hold activities and business.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



Your work will be completed easily and you will also get the support of senior officials. You will be very ambitious at this point of time in your career. You can see clearly the growth that you can expect in coming days and months. You will be highly charged and will be raring to go. You will be more than busy in family programs and functions. You will also take out time for romance, hobbies and entertainment. You will be making plans for something big and special in your life. You will also get marital bliss and happiness. You will get money from somewhere. Your attitude towards life will be positive and your hopes and expectations will soar. You will receive some good news about a relative. The atmosphere in the family will be cheerful. Your efforts will be fruitful and in the right direction.

British Indian writer Preti Taneja wins Gordon Burn Prize



Indian-origin British author and academic Preti Taneja has won the 2022 Gordon Burn Prize for *Aftermath*, her "unflinching work of narrative non-fiction".

The Gordon Burn Prize celebrates the year's most dazzlingly bold and forward-thinking fiction and non-fiction written in English.

Aftermath was selected by a panel of judges, made up of sportswriter and columnist Jonathan Liew, author Denise Mina (chair), broadcaster Stuart Maconie, artist and poet Heather Phillipson, and writer Chitra Ramaswamy.

The book strives to make sense of the London Bridge stabbing in 2019, when Usman Khan, 28, was a convicted terrorist who spent eight years in prison and went on to kill two people, Saskia Jones and Jack Merritt.

Taneja realised she had taught Khan creative writing when he was in prison, and Jack Merritt,

one of the victims, was her colleague.

Aftermath is a profound attempt to regain trust after violence and rebuild faith in human compassion: a powerful recommitment to activism and radical hope.

Taneja is a professor of World Literature and Creative Writing at Newcastle University. Her first novel, *We That Are Young*, a translation of *King Lear* set in contemporary India, won the Desmond Elliott Prize 2018.

Taneja receives 5,000 pounds as cash prize, and is offered the opportunity to undertake a writing retreat of up to three months at Gordon Burn's cottage in Berwickshire along the borders between England and Scotland.

She has been shortlisted for several awards, including the Republic of Consciousness Prize, the Prix Jan Michalski, and the Shakti Bhatt Prize. (IANS)

If we want our children to value education, then we must show our appreciation for knowledge.

—Brad Sherman

The Shillong Times

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Power-packed Xi

WITH Xi Jinping's re-election as head of Communist party and head of government for the third five-year term, China is the nation to watch more closely on the world stage. The orderly manner in which the red nation carries itself forward is also a commentary on the compactness and efficiency with which the Communist Party (CPC) functions. There is practically no scope for dissent; and when it arose as in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, brutal force was employed to restore order. The dictatorship of the party is now transforming itself into a dictatorship by one individual, Xi. His election for the third term is making him a leader with the same dominant status as of founder leader Mao Zedong.

China has its problems with its neighbours including India, and more prominently with the US and the West. It waged a full-scale war with India in 1962, resulting in a long standoff. Large swathes of land seized from this country remain with the red nation. During the time of Rajiv Gandhi, India and China decided to concentrate more on the positives and thus began a new era of cooperation. This was followed by the age of globalization and liberalization, which helped China capture India's huge markets. Yet, China keeps giving pinpricks to India as it did in Galwan Valley in May 2020, which the Modi government handled with tact. Meanwhile, China cozied up to Pakistan, tied it to the CPEC economic corridor project to open an access to the sea on the eastern side and financed Pakistan's Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea. A situation was also created by the red nation wherein, if need be, both China and Pakistan can jointly take on India militarily from the western and northern borders.

China today has five times India's military might and it is the world's second top economic super power. This is a lethal combination. The Covid19 hit is keeping China under some control, though. What India can do is to either wait and watch, keep strengthening its economic and military might, and/or enter into a military cooperation pact with the US. Fast-paced progress for India is impossible. Once the leadership takes a decision in China, it is implemented even with brute force. In India, the political class is constantly in a fight to retain or grab power. Courts are here to halt any governmental step by citing rules. Amid the luxury of individual freedom, governance moves at snail's pace. At the turn of the century two decades ago, India and China were on equal ground. Weak leadership and systems work to India's disadvantage.

No doubt tourism in Meghalaya grown and developed by leaps and bounds but certainly not because of government intervention. From tourism which focused only on the three locations Sohra, Smit, and Shillong now tourist spots have emerged elsewhere in the state too. This goes on to prove that tourism is one economic activity that can help create employment for the people and help improve the economy of the area and the state. But the question is whether the government has done enough to promote tourism in the state?

Tourism and Festivals
Autumn and spring are seasons of festivals in Meghalaya as different kinds of festivals are being celebrated during these times of the year. But the traditional festivals were not given as much consideration and promotion as the government-organized festivals. Neither are the region's flora and fauna considered while naming the festival in the state. Despite Meghalaya having unique flowers endemic to the re-

gion, the government sees no reason in promoting these native plants as the festival's logo or mascot. The government organises the Cherry Blossom, Meghalayan age, and autumn festival but no festival with a local name.

Pitcher Plants
The Pitcher Plant called the giant flower "tiew rakot" in Khasi and the fly-catcher flower "Syntu tymmoh phare" in Pnar and Nepenthes Khasiana the botanical name is endemic to the few regions of Meghalaya. This rare plant is also under threat but there is no effort from the government to conserve it. It is also interesting to note that tissue culture has been done on the plant in the other states and it is now being cultivated in the campus of Nagaland University and elsewhere in the state of Nagaland, while the Government of Meghalaya has done precious little to conserve this very important plant. The plant is also believed to have some medicinal properties and it is being used as medicine by the locals, so apart from conservation, the government should also explore ideas for the sustainable use of the plant. Just a thought though, the government is naming one of its tourist festivals Cherry Blossom festival but why not Pitcher Plant festi-

vals or other orchids flowers for that matter?

Orchids
Meghalaya also has many varieties of orchids and these flowers too can be promoted and the government can explore the idea of making a tourist product out of the plants. Recently a friend from another state suggested that in an area where the flowers are found in abundance, one can start an Orchid trekking trail to promote tourism in the area. Since the plant is also found to be used by the locals as an economic activity, the government should also start doing tissue culture on to encourage sustainable use of the plants.

Cave Tourism
Meghalaya is known for its intricate cave system. These consist of the longest and the deepest caves in the country. Yet except for the caves in Sohra which are used for pilgrimage tourism, cave tourism as such is yet to be considered by the government. There is no ef-

fort from the government to explore the idea to use caves for adventure tourism. Even though the state is also fortunate to have an association like Meghalaya Adventures' Association which has not only helped survey and map all the caves in Meghalaya but is also the only NGO which is specialized in caving, yet the Government is not taking the opportunity to take their support to promote cave tourism.

Agri-tourism
Agri-tourism is a recent idea, I very recently came across an article where the activity is promoted in a certain part of India. Then I thought of trying out this idea in the area where we work. Promoting Sohmymting as a tourist destination has been on my mind for a long period now. Knowing that the village has huge potentials to attract tourists, Ebormi Lynchang and I wanted to do something but decided to wait for the right time. Then the idea of Agri-tourism came and along with a few other youths of the village who are members of the village tourism society we started working on the idea.

A brainstorming session was conducted in the dorbar hall of the village on August 20, this year, and the idea of using rice harvesting as a

tourist product came to the fore. The first outcome of the session was to arrive at the USP of the village and the consensus is to promote the village as a sustainable eco-tourism destination.

Traditional farming system and Tourism
The Pnars of Jaitia hills have a rich culture of wetland rice cultivation and of course, rice is also being cultivated on the slope of the hills. In Pnar culture, rice cultivation is not just a means of growing rice to satisfy people's hunger but there is a rich culture around rice cultivation.

Rice is not only the most prominent crop here since a large part of their lives revolve around rice too. Almost all the festivals are connected to rice cultivation either during the ploughing sowing, weeding, or harvest time. The unique tradition called "chu-nong" is part of rice cultivation. Chunong is the community's support mechanism where members of the community help each

other when all the farmers are busy doing the same activity. It is a way in which farmers donate (at least) one day's labour to work voluntarily on the field of another member of the community. The community takes turns in working at the different member's paddy fields till the fields of all the families are done. The tradition is being followed wherever rice growing is a culture and it starts from ploughing to sowing, weeding, and harvesting.

It is promoting an indigenous farming system
Agri-tourism cannot happen without understanding the indigenous farming practices of the people of the area. It is therefore an opportunity to showcase the rich traditional farming practice of the indigenous people of the area. It will make the locals proud of their local food system and offer their guests the same food that they eat. In doing so they are also providing guests with healthy snacks like boiled yam, and boiled sweet potatoes which are farm fresh.

Kayaking
Recently there was a report in the press about a kayaking expedition that was held somewhere in Meghalaya.

The event has attracted many tourists from the country and abroad and many rivers in the state can be used for kayaking.

The Megalith trail
West Jaitia hills district also has the potential of another trekking trail which also has historical value. "Ka luti syiem" or the Royal path is an ancient path that connects Nartiang in the hills with Jaaintapur which is now in Bangladesh in a potential trail that is worth exploring. The trail is unique because there are many monoliths along the path and more importantly there are three megalith stone bridges on this path.

Tourism Potential is yet to be maximized
There is no doubt that tourism has helped create employment in the many tourist spots in the state. Tourists from Assam are thronging spots like Shnongpdeng Darang, Krangshuri, Phephe, and Thlumuwi, and now there are tourists from across the border from Bangladesh too who visit these areas. A cyclist from Sylhet had recently cycled to Nartiang and other places. Hopefully, the next government will take advantage and capitalize on the recent development by promoting tourism to help develop the different areas of Meghalaya.

these children exhibited. The program started on time. The parents and a few well-wishers were the only VIPs. Each event occurred seamlessly and the knowledge that it was an outcome of an hour's practice after school hours for a paltry few weeks made it all the more appreciable. The children didn't lose any classes for the practice and parents were hardly inconvenienced. Each and every student in the school had a part to play and the sense of participation that this created was an involvement that created a bond unlike any other.

And the simple arrangement of the play into two shows with separate sets of students, ensured that everyone could participate and the children and their parents to boot were spared from having to be occupied for the entire day. This speaks a great deal about the practicality of the Principal and the teachers and highlights the love and affection they have for their wards. It was only too evi-

coming up, but all these will never cater to the real needs of the people.

I hope this government begins to open its eyes and see where the priorities of the state lie.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,
Via email

Shillong Public School

Editor,
It was a warm balmy autumn evening. The warm sunlight filtering through the dappled leaves added a feeling of peace and calmness to the venue of the regal auditorium of the State Central library, named after the torchbearer of Khasi poetry, U Soso Tham. The occasion was a musical play Aladdin to be performed by the students of the Shillong Public School.

What an evening it was. The entire performance had us all mesmerized at the sheer quality and talent that

dent that the entire staff right from the top to the bottom be it the security guards or the cleaners were total in their involvement.

Carrying out such a complex exercise with so much elan be it the solo singers, the choirs, the exquisite dancers and the music from fusion, rhythm or the harmony was but a reflection of the hard work put in by the teachers. The pure and raw energy in carrying out their performances and the talent which they showed gave a feeling that the future generation were giving us a glimpse of what can be achieved if given the space and opportunity. The performance was at par with any professional show.

Hats off to you Shillong Public School!

Yours etc.,
Dr. Tridib Kakoty
Via email

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

The rise and rise of Xi Jinping : The strongman of China

By TP Sreenivasan

Ever since 2007 when the Communist leaders picked up Xi Jinping as a potential leader not only for his pedigree and record of service, but also for his lackluster personality, his rise has been meteoric.

Born into a family of red aristocracy, he could have remained in the corridors of power in Beijing, but he followed the dictum that the educated youth should get reeducated by the poor and he moved to a province as a young aide to a General Officer Commanding dealing with anti-corruption measures.

By 2012, he was President and by 2017, during his second tenure as President, his 'Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' got accepted as the manifesto of the Party, making him the next helmsman after Mao. He was also designated as a Core Leader, taking charge of the Party, Government, civilian life, the military and the academic world.

When the National People's Congress amended the constitution to remove the term limit for President, it was obvious that it was specifically for Xi, who had become the strongman of China. Xi applied restraints on gigantic companies and the newly rich corporate heads with the slogan "Socialism and Common Prosperity for all." Photo: Reuters/Carlos Garcia Rawlins.

He consolidated his position step by step, particularly by applying brakes on economic liberalization of the country. He applied restraints on gigantic companies and the newly rich corporate heads with the slogan "Socialism and Common Prosperity for all."

Vision 2035
Although there were rumours of a coup immediately after his first visit abroad after the pandemic, he was the very picture of self-confidence when he inaugurated the 20th Party Congress on October 16, 2022.

He had no doubt that he would continue as head of all the top bodies in China for five years more, if not longer.

Even before the Congress approved his third term, he laid out his decade-long vision for China.

He recounted the challenges he faced nationally and internationally and how he dealt with them successfully. Even before the Congress approved his third term, Xi laid out his decade-long vision for China. Photo: Reuters/Jason Lee

As for the future, his vision for 2035 was "to significantly increase economic strength, scientific and technological capabilities and comprehensive national strength."

China would join the most innovative countries with great self-reliance and strength in science and technology, strengthen national security and achieve basic modernization of the armed forces.

Taiwan policy
He spelt out his Taiwan policy because of recent events like the US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit and China's stern actions in response.

He said that China would never promise to renounce the use of force, which was directed solely at interference by external forces, although Beijing would continue its efforts for peaceful reunification of Taiwan.

US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi attends a meeting with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen at the presidential office in Taipei, Taiwan August 3, 2022. PHOTO: Taiwan Presidential Office/Handout via Reuters He said that resolving the Taiwan question and realizing China's complete reunification is, for the Party, a historic mission and an unshakable commitment.

The wheels of history are

rolling on towards China's reunification and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, he said.

Neighbourhood ties
On China's relations with neighbors, Xi said that he would seek enhanced friendly ties, mutual interest and converging interests.

"We will enhance the military strategic capabilities for defending Chinese sovereignty, security and development interests," he said. Considering that China is being accused of expansionism in the neighborhood, including India, Xi was cautious about dealing with the subject, but he made it clear that it would enhance the military strategic capabilities for defending itself against any aggression.

Gloomy global outlook
Xi's assessment of the global situation was more pessimistic than in 2017. He said that the world was in a flux and listed backlash against globalization, unilateralism and mounting protectionism as negative trends. China would oppose the forming of blocs and exclusive groups that leave out particular countries.

This was obviously a reference to the Quad, consisting of the US, Australia, Japan and India, but there was no mention of the Indo-Pacific, where China's penetration is sought to be countered by the Quad.

Unease in Sino-India relations

India did not figure in Xi's speech, but his aggressive posture against India came to light when a video clipping of the conflict between China and India in Galwan Valley was shown at the Congress.

The fact that no meeting took place between Xi and Modi at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting in Samarkand was a clear indication of the continuing tension between India and China. File Photo.

A PLA Commander, Qui Fabao, was shown with his arms outstretched facing Indian soldiers in Galwan, where there were casualties on both sides. Moreover, Qui Bao himself was present at the Congress as a Chinese hero. If China is sincere about friendly ties with its neighbours, such an episode should have been avoided.

Even though disengagement has taken place in some sectors in Ladakh, tension prevails in Damchuk and Depsang. The fact that no meeting took place between Xi and Modi at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting in Samarkand was a clear indication of the continuing tension between India and China.

The question whether the emergence of Xi as the helmsman in China augurs well for India is not clear.

Though Xi and Modi spent considerable time among themselves in the informal summits in Wuhan and Mahabalipuram, the Chinese aggression in Ladakh showed that those conversations made no impact on Chinese policy towards India.

In fact, China violated all the principles of cooperation agreed between the two countries under Xi's watch and there is no desire on China's part to make amends. Xi's continuation for another decade is not a good omen for India.

Of course, much will depend on the outcome of the Russia-Ukraine war, the consequent geopolitical changes and the Russia-China partnership.

A power struggle in China is still possible as Xi has manipulated his way to be the helmsman for life. His vision may be adopted by the Chinese Communist Party, but it is not at all clear that there will be no revolt against Xi in the coming years.

(The writer is Former Ambassador of India and Governor for India of the IAEA)

Misplaced priorities of Government

Editor,

It is a great relief to everyone that finally the notorious Crowborough Hotel has seen the light of day with its inauguration under the new avatar Hotel Vivanta, on October 14. This is the first five star hotel in Meghalaya, something we can take pride of. Definitely, it will serve the needs of thousands of tourists who are looking for standard accommodation. The Chief Minister has rightly boasted of his NPP-led Government's accomplishment. At least, the ghost of this "shame project" has been put to rest once and for all.

However, looking at this from a critical point of view, I am inclined to bring to the notice of the public that the Government's urgency and decisiveness to complete the hotel, is quite missing in matters of greater im-

portance. For example, I do not see the same sense of urgency on the part of this Government to have a full-fledged medical college and engineering college in the state, let alone all other professional institutions that the state really lacks. When it comes to technical education, had it not been for the contribution of the Catholic Church, the state would have none.

The Crowborough hotel had been delayed by 33 years, but the medical and engineering colleges etc, have been delayed by 50 years and the delay continues. Here is what I see as "misplaced priorities of the government." What is more important to the youth of Meghalaya, a five star hotel or a medical or engineering college? What could ensure a better future for our youth than to receive professional education? Today our state needs more doctors to fill in so many rural PHCs or CHCs which are presently running haplessly, putting rural health

care in shambles. The vicious cycle is that we cannot have more doctors since the state does not even have its own medical college to absorb more local youths who aspire to become doctors.

The availability of professional institutions in the state would ensure that we have trained human resources. This in turn would attract many national and international companies to the state. Why do states like Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Telangana and others attract many foreign companies? It is precisely because these states have an army of professionals who graduate from various institutes of their own states. When it comes to Meghalaya, the picture is so grim and hopeless and the Government does not seem to have the political will to address this life and death issue. Should not the government have converted the Crowborough project into a medical college? There are other fancy projects of the government which are

"Prayer is the key of the morning
and the bolt of the evening."

— Mahatma Gandhi

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Of rank opportunism

MEGHALAYA is infamous for its political turncoats. People join one political party even before they have understood what it stands for and whether they agree with the intrinsic ideology of the party they join. Within a few months the same people leave the party they have joined and jump into another one. Are ideologies so fluid that people can join one party some months ago and change thereafter? Isn't this rank opportunism? But India as such is a durable disorder where democracy is just a fig leaf for oligarchy and feudalism. Political parties themselves too are unsure about what they stand for. A classic case is that of the United Democratic Party (UDP) which is now asserting that it has no hand in any of the scams in the present NPP-led MDA Government. Is this not a deception of the highest order? People who have been partners in crime for four years now want to declare that they carry no burden of that crime! For what is corruption if not a crime against humanity. Corruption is to deprive the citizens of their rightful dues by siphoning off money to the pockets of political and bureaucratic elite. This has happened in Meghalaya for too long a time. And there appears to be no remedy to the congenital ailment.

The UDP has asserted times without number that it would go it alone in 2023 and will have no pre-election truck with anyone. This is typical political ego and rank opportunism. Right now the UDP is telling the NPP that the latter was just a means for them to be in power for five years which is better than being in the Opposition — a cold and dark place with no opportunity whatsoever to make money. The ruling party is where the money is and so the UDP wants to be in that place even in 2023. The UDP believes it will not have to deal with anti-incumbency since the NPP was the leading partner in the coalition. This is nothing short of taking the voters for imbeciles who don't understand that a coalition government and collective responsibility are synonymous. In fact, the UDP's political bravado has shot up a few rungs. The Party is firm in its belief of getting a majority on its own. And if it falls short of a few seats then the smaller parties will be its coalition partners. This assertion is far-fetched when we consider that the NPP which has a wider appeal in both Garo Hills and Khasi-Jaintia Hills is also going it alone. The scenario building up is of the NPP securing more seats and might therefore not need the UDP; it will try and cobble up a majority with the smaller parties. Meanwhile the people of Meghalaya wait and watch the drama unfolding.

Letters to the Editor

Bharat A Secular Nation: SC

Editor,

It is most refreshing and reassuring to note that at least in my lifetime, for the first time, none other than the Supreme Court of India has taken strong exception to some of the most vitriolic hate speeches which some of our political and religious leaders have made the "order of the day." Such speeches are bound to spread hatred among people following different religions as we have observed since the last several years. Those making hate speeches have repeated their acts with impunity yet roam free and are totally unaccountable, unchecked, unhindered and unpunished as if it was a basic fundamental right guaranteed to them by our Constitution! It is because of such leaders that the seeds of communalism are sinking deep and we are going to reap the harvest if they are not prosecuted.

They very conveniently choose to gloss over the age old time-tested dictum, "United we stand, divided we fall!" They also gloss over what Dean Swift had once very famously stated, "We have just enough religion to make us hate one

another but not enough to make us love one another."

In the fitness of things we see that the Supreme Court of India in its most laudable judgment titled *Shahane Abdullah vs Union of India & Ors in Writ Petition(s)(Civil) No. 940/2022* delivered as recently as on October 21, 2022 has made it abundantly clear that there cannot be fraternity unless members from different religions/castes are able to co-exist harmoniously. The root cause of all problems is dirty politics.

India was divided in 1947 only because of divisive politics encouraged by the British whose favourite slogan was, "Divide and Rule" as they never favoured a united India. Now it is politicians who never want India to stay united and pick up one cause or the other to boost their own narrow vested political interests at the cost of our national interests.

It's a national tragedy that these very politicians who swear to protect national unity have no compunction in raking up controversial issues and delivering hate speeches. They seem elated when big business tycoons like Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi among many others very conveniently siphon off lakhs of crores of rupees in connivance with such powerful politicians. Now these billionaires are comfortably

settled in the UK which had split India in 1947 and are leading a luxurious life there with court cases dragging on for decades.

The key issue in this brief, brilliant, bold and balanced judgment authored by the SC Bench of Justices KM Joseph and Hrishikesh Roy is that it is a landmark judgment. The case for the petitioner was taken up by Kapil Sibal whose impeccable reputation we all know. He has completed 50 years of distinguished practice in the Supreme Court with distinction and was also the former Union Law Minister of India! Even his worst critics take him seriously!

The Apex Court bench states that, "The complaint which has been raised in the instant writ petition appears to be very serious. It relates to the growing climate of hate in the country. This is attributable according to the petitioner to an unending flow of what is described as hate speeches being made by various persons against the Muslim community. The instances are chronicled, though in an abridged form, in the writ petition. The complaint of the petitioner is one of despondency and angst arising from the perception that despite suitable provisions in penal law being available, there is inaction or rather total inaction."

What is significant is what is pointed out by the judges that, "The Constitution of India envisages Bharat as a secular nation and fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and unity and the integrity of the country is the guiding principle enshrined in the Preamble. There cannot be fraternity unless members of community drawn from different religions or castes of the country are not able to live in harmony. The petitioner points out that there are appropriate provisions such as Sections 153A, 153B, 505, and 295A of the Indian Penal Code. He voices his concern that no action has been taken even after this Court has been approached in the matter and the transgressions have only increased."

Equally significant is what forms the cornerstone of this learned judgment - "We feel that this Court is charged with the duty to protect the fundamental rights and also preserve the constitutional values and the secular democratic character of the nation and in particular, the rule of law." If courts don't speak up then who else will? If courts shut their eyes then who will control these hate speeches and those who deliver such hate speeches will roam free and be at large without any fear of being prosecuted and due to this others too will be

abetted to follow the same course!

The Bench gives interim directions to the Commissioner of Police, New Delhi, Director General of Police Uttarakhand and Director General of Police, Uttar Pradesh to file a report as to what action has been taken in regard to such acts as are the subject matter of this writ petition within their jurisdiction.

Most commendably, the Bench then minces no words to make it indubitably clear that the respective respondents (police officers) are to ensure that immediately as and when any speech or any action takes place which attracts offences such as Sections 153A, 153B and 295A and 505 of the IPC etc., suo moto action will be taken to register cases even if no complaint is forthcoming and proceed against the offenders in accordance with law. Police officials who are respondents in this case will have to issue direction(s) to their subordinates to take appropriate action as per law in law at the earliest.

The Bench further hastens to add that, "We make it clear that any hesitation to act in accordance with this direction will be viewed as contempt of this Court and appropriate action will be taken against the erring officers."

Last but not the least, the Bench concludes by stating, in the final para, "We further make it clear that such action will be taken irrespective of the religion that the maker of the speech or the person who commits such act belongs to, so that the secular character of Bharat as is envisaged by the Preamble, is preserved and protected."

To conclude, I fall short of words to express my deepest satisfaction on going through the best judgment I have ever read in my life! It is short but enough to convey the real intent! The bottom-line of this notable judgment is that there must be zero tolerance for all those who dare to indulge in hate speech and they must be promptly arrested by police by taking suo motu action without waiting for any complaint as is the modus operandi adopted by police in such cases. It certainly merits no reiteration that this hogwash must stop once and for all as directed so very commendably, cogently and convincingly by the Apex Court in this leading case!

Yours etc.,
Sanjeev Sirohi (Advocate)
Via email

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Time for a Meghalaya Wine Board

By K.N.Kumar

Meghalaya can justifiably boast of an extraordinary diversity of fruits. The state has a very unique set of indigenous fruits, some of which are still in the wild. Since the potential value of these fruits is yet to be unlocked, the world of commerce is largely ignorant of them. While the good news is that some of these fruits are highly amenable for making very nutritious and tasty wines, the bad news is that there is no enabling institutional structure to promote wine entrepreneurship in our state. Peaches, Plums, Pears, Sohmon, Sohiong, Strawberries, etc. are all abundant, and tragically for the farmers, an estimated 40% of all our fruits and vegetables perish before they can reach the market. If we can create an entrepreneurial ecosystem around Wine, the farmers will be happy, the young entrepreneurs will be happy, the wine aficionados will be happy and, of course, the tourists will return happy with a bottle or two of locally made wine. The Government too gains because of the increased tax revenue and the wealth thus generated circulates within the local economy.

Definitionally, fruit wine is an alcoholic beverage made from the fermented juice of an organic material that is NOT grape. Why do we use the expression organic material here? Because these wines do not have to be made out of fruits alone. For e.g., the ginger wine is made out of root and the Japanese Saki, of Rice. We are aware that the traditional societies of the north-east have made beverages out of the available cereals, millets and even potatoes. The conventionally held myth that grapes are the best fruits to make wine, arguably because of the near perfect balance of acids and sugar in them needs to be busted. Why? (1) Because there are 2000 different edible fruits on the planet, of which the western world knows or uses only about 10% of them. So, till the suitability of all the remaining fruits is fully researched how can anyone elevate Grape to such an exalted status? (2) Grape is native to Europe and the Mediterranean region so it makes enormous commercial sense for the

Europeans to research and promote Grape which they did successfully over the last 1000 years. Indian Wine industry slavishly obsesses with grape so much, that today 98% of all wines made in India are grape-based. Our Nashik wine-makers still import some machinery and additives from Europe. Not just that, they also import different grape plants/varieties

to anyone for want of an enabling legal framework. The policy, approved by the Government of Meghalaya in September 2020 finally closed the long-pending demand for legalising local wine-making. The 'Manufacture and Sale of Home-made Fruit Wines Rules, 2020' authorize the excise department to issue licences to the local

between the departmental tracks and no department owned the idea of promoting Fruit Wine industry in the state.

The Farmers' Commission had to step in, because our singular focus is the farmer, the end beneficiary who is struggling to market his produce. We seek to enhance the local demand for horticultural commodities. So, we took upon the responsibility of organizing a week-long exposure visit to 28 current/potential wine entrepreneurs of Meghalaya to Nashik and gave them the necessary network of service providers, and a deep exposure to the intricacies of the wine industry of the country. The Nashik returnees are now fully charged and aware of the sector's importance for the country and how best we can occupy the fruit-wine space that no one has ventured into so far. We also followed it up with wine tasting sessions during the Buckwheat global initiative at Shillong. Our target was to combine both Wine and Buckwheat, to help both — the farmer who produces the Buckwheat



fruit wine makers of the state. A step forward, but it is still just a beginning. And there is a lot more ground to cover.

The impact of the policy is still very small. To begin with (1) there was not enough extension or awareness about the law — so, our potential entrepreneurs still have no idea as to how to obtain licences to make or distribute or sell fruit wines (2) the complex and sophisticated art of making commercial quality fruit wines is still to be figured out by our amateur local wine makers (3) there is a definite lack of clarity even at the national level with regard to the food safety standards for the fruit wines and (4) the logistical difficulties in procuring high quality ancillary supplies like bottles, caps, corks, labels, etc. are one too many. In other words, while the de-regulation was absolutely necessary it was still insufficient to make any big impact. The fruit wine sector needed much deeper governmental support — of a kind that is beyond the scope or competence of the Excise department, which at the best of times is a regulatory department and not really meant to promote. The issue therefore, had fallen in be-

and the entrepreneur who makes fruit wine. It appears to have worked. With all these experiences, I now come up with an argument that goes beyond what the Commission has done so far.

I argue that Meghalaya has to deepen its involvement in the fruit wine sector. The state urgently needs the institutional infrastructure that will facilitate the growth of the wine industry in Meghalaya. To make that happen, I propose that the government establishes a Meghalaya Wine Board. Karnataka, having done something similar, is emerging as the next grape wine destination after Nashik. It is time we demystified wine making and it is also high time we brought the fruit wines into the hearts of the wine enthusiasts of our country. Let us prove to the world that the best wines are not necessarily made of grapes. Just as Nashik is the capital of grapevines in the country, Shillong should emerge as the capital of fruit wines. What do we need? A steely resolve, an unwavering commitment and of course, unstinting support of the government.

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

Mulayam Yadav: Chronicler on the turf

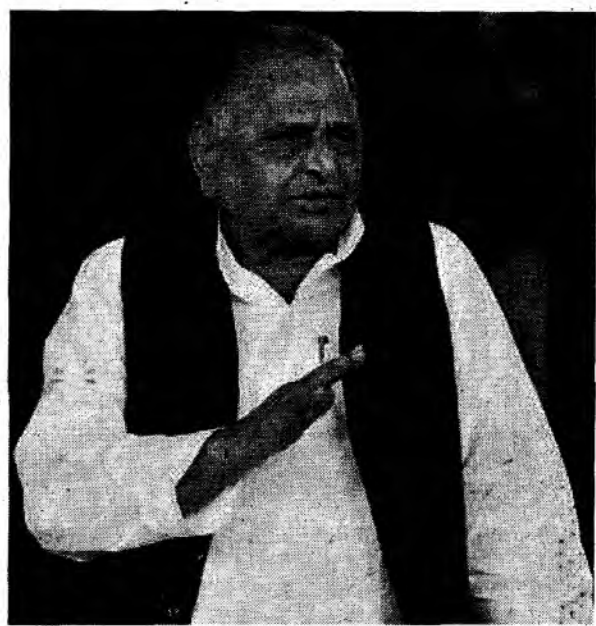
By Chiranjib Halder

Politics makes strange bedfellows and Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Samajwadi Party patriarch and an astute politician stayed true to this adage throughout his chequered career. In his valedictory speech in parliament prior to the 2019 general elections, Mulayam Yadav alias Netaji gobsmeared the entire opposition by lauding Prime Minister Narendra Modi and wishing him a second stint. It was a furore in parliament that stirred a hornet's nest and stunned all and sundry. A flustered UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi did not know how to react; Akhilesh Yadav, son and successor to the Samajwadi Party supremo was bemused, his party cadres blaming Netaji's failing health and selective amnesia for the gaffe.

Mulayam Singh Yadav was undoubtedly a stalwart among Indian leaders who metamorphosed the arid landscape of cow belt politics for ever. He was more of a pugilist and less of a wrestler in the complex matrix of regional satraps, one whose appropriate punch-

his party's interests. He agonised electorally by wielding the cops on kar sevaks at the height of the Ram Janambhoomi movement and even earned a pejorative sobriquet 'mulah Mulayam'. But being a secular votary to the core, he perched himself as a true saviour of the Constitution cobbled a symbiotic Muslim-Yadav combo that paid him rich electoral dividends. The undivided Uttar Pradesh assembly was a different ballgame with 425 seats in 1989 and the Congress was hit below the belt in India's most crucial poll-bound state.

The noteworthy clean finish in Mulayam Yadav's political wrestling came prior to the 1993 hustings. To take on the BJP which had blurred caste lines and united masses on majoritarian lines, the Samajwadi Party dealt a masterstroke. It was an assembly poll in which a classic lesson in social engineering played to the gallery. Orchestrated by Mulayam, the experiment pitted Yadavs, Muslims, Scheduled Castes along community chasms in a unique mandate against



es carved out a roadmap which led to successes and failures with equal finesse. A staunch Lohiaite steeped in socialist ideology, Mulayam hit the turf as a giant killer exhorting the marginalised to unite and create new caste equations. The Congress for its moribund, waning state and BJP's valiant call for an India sans the grand old party post-2014: both owe a lot to the rise of Mulayam Singh Yadav, the arch strategist.

Though he donned the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's mantle thrice from the mandal kamandal kinship days but lady luck betrayed the SP supremo as his prime ministerial ambition was waylaid by the skulduggery of coalition politics. The spoilsports were two Yadav chiefs Lalu Prasad Yadav and Sharad Yadav who frenetically opposed Mulayam's name for the top slot when he was tantalisingly close. Again, it was Mulayam Singh Yadav who tacitly prevented Sonia Gandhi from becoming Prime Minister citing her foreign credentials after the Vajpayee-led NDA government lost the trust vote in 1998. Thus despite his criticism of dynastic democracy, many bitter critics of Mulayam Yadav accuse him of anointing his son in an opportunistic move as successor.

The Samajwadi Party patriarch was also witness to a bitter family feud between his son Akhilesh and brother Shivpal which took its toll on the organisation. His entire political career proved repeatedly that there are no permanent friends and foes in politics. Like a chameleon, Mulayam Yadav often dived with unintended somersaults to nurture

the BJP's upper caste positioning. The BJP had won a sizeable 177 seats but the SP's cosiness with Kanshi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party duo ensured Mulayam's return as Chief Minister. It was a restless alliance, an entente of two different social awakenings, led by leaders terribly suspicious of each other and keen on expanding their party base but one that worked.

One must evaluate Mulayam Singh Yadav's political ascendancy amid tumult in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh. The Congress has never been able to return to power since he became Chief Minister in 1989 and the party's nose-dive in the heartland has more to do with the stature of Mulayam's chieftainship. The rejuvenation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and sharp communal polarisation post the Babri demolition are also offshoots of this ferment that was synonymous with the SP supremo's rise and stronghold. While forming the Samajwadi Party in 1992, Mulayam Yadav had asserted that winning an election was 'kharcha, charcha and parcha' (expenditure, canvassing, campaigning). As a socialist, Mulayam had always championed the cause of Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and minorities, augmenting the vast political swathe vacated by Congress in the Hindi heartland. Through the ebb and tide of politics, Mulayam Yadav prioritised political expediency above everything else, a quality he has passed on with the mantle to Akhilesh Yadav.

(The writer is a commentator on politics and society.)

The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just.”
— Abraham Lincoln

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 75 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2022

Signals from Sunak

THE wheel has decidedly turned full circle. The British ruled India for nearly a century via direct rule of the British Crown. Now the bells have tolled for exactly the reverse. A young leader of Indian origin with Punjabi blood in him takes over the reins of Britain or what's rechristened as the United Kingdom. Situations conspired to put Rishi Sunak in the saddle, the youngest Prime Minister in 200 years, edging out stalwarts like former PMs Boris Johnson and Liz Truss. While Sunak had narrowly missed the bus a month ago, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer has bounced back to the top position by virtue of the massive support he garnered from the Conservative MPs. Without doubt, the UK is passing through a period of political instability as is reflected in the frequent change of governments and PMs, a situation accentuated by economic woes, the Brexit issues linked to the European Union and the absence of a powerful personality like Margaret Thatcher to lead the nation. The Covid19 mess added to the internal woes. Liz Truss in her less than 45 days in power erred at the very start, adding to the worries of the Brits on the economic front.

The start of the era of Globalization in the early 1990s had signaled a new world order – of oneness, raising the prospects of borders withering away and the entire humanity living without barriers in the form of a global village. That frenzy was undercut at its initial jab itself by the arrival of Islamic fundamentalism, the bombing of the US by the Al Qaeda and the wars in Afghanistan and Iran. Islamic nations in the West Asia region have been turned into breeding grounds for Islamic terrorists. The Russia-Ukraine conflict further divided the world. Nations thus have no choice other than to stand apart, strengthen their borders and regulate the movement of people from one nation to another. Divided we stand. Yet, the spirit of unity and the urge to see the parts as the whole are slowly showing up. A quarter of a century ago, it was unthinkable that a Black person would be an American President; equally unfathomable was that someone of Asian origin could lead the UK as its prime minister. The US has a vice president in the form of Kamala Harris who is of mixed African-Indian parentage, who could someday even become the President. The destiny of such large economies and super powers are being reshaped now by young leaders like Sunak aged 42, a Stanford University Fulbright Scholar, and Harvard-bred Attorney Harris, 57. Old hats in India should take note.

Did giants exist in Khasi-Jaintia Hills

By Barnes Mawri

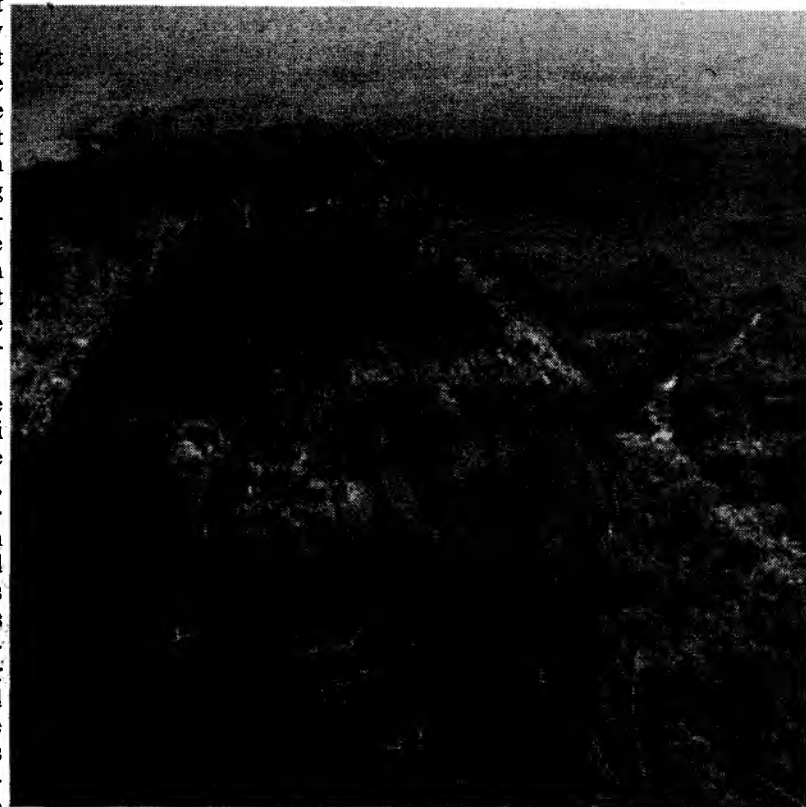
(giants) who fought against the Olympian gods. In the myth of Perseus we come across the one-eyed giants known as Cyclops who

the existence of giants, by logical conclusion we may say with great certainty that they did exist. I am convinced that in

“The existence of giants is found in every human civilization. If we go through the ancient writings of many great civilizations, be it the Greeks, Egyptians, Romans, Indians etc, we will come across stories of giants or humans with superhuman strength. The Bible itself has references to such persons.”

forged the instruments of the gods. In Indian mythology we have giants known as daityas

keeping with evolution, humans who existed in the pre-historic era had less de-



who also fought against the gods. In the Basque region of Spain we have ancient stories of giants called Jentils. Geoffrey of Monmouth, who

veloped brains but greater physical strength. This was essential as they had no technology but their brute strength to defend themselves

“Olympian gods. In the myth of Perseus we come across the one-eyed giants known as Cyclops who forged the instruments of the gods. In Indian mythology we have giants known as daityas who also fought against the gods. In the Basque region of Spain we have ancient stories of giants called Jentils.”

in circa 1136 wrote Historia Regnum Britanniae (The History of the Kings of Britain), describes how early Britain was inhabited by giants and the last surviving giant was called Gogmagog. The popular British fairy tale of Jack the Giant Killer which was published in 1711 tells of the existence of giants in a land beyond the clouds. If every civilization on earth has myths and stories about

against huge and ferocious wild animals. It would not be surprising that humans with extraordinary physical powers whom we might call giants, did exist then. Therefore, the claim that giants existed in Khasi-Jaintia Hills in ancient days, is not a fanciful idea but it could be a historical truth.

In Khasi mythology we have accounts of giants (ramhah). For example, we have

the story of U Ramhah who used to carry a huge cane basket. The people of the village had to feed him every day for fear of his wrath. When they realized that it was too expensive to feed him for the amount he required, they concocted a plan to dispose of him. So they ground fine glass pieces in his food and gave him. The giant ate the meal and died thereafter. Tradition says that the huge singular rock below Mawmsai popularly known as Khoh Ramhah, was his carrying basket petrified for centuries. Then we have the well-known myth of U Adadak and his companions. U Adadak was definitely a giant who possessed great physical strength. He had three giant companions, namely, U Puh-shilum (one who could dig a huge mountain of mud with one strike of his spade), U Khwai-shynreh (one who could pull up a huge mass of materials with his hands) and U Kynting-mawsan (one who could pick up huge boulders and toss them in the air like pebbles). These four persons were undoubtedly giants by every definition.

There is yet another undeniable fact of the existence of giants which is proven by the presence of huge footprints on stones in different parts of our land. I for one have seen two such footprints, one in Lum Sohpetbneng and the other on a big boulder on the roadside from Umplung to Itshyrawat. Unfortunately, we are

known as people who lack a sense of history and so these footprints have never been preserved and they are lost for good. I am sure there may be some giant footprints in some parts of our state. Can the State Museum not take up the task of preserving them in the museums? Tradition in Nartiang says that it was Luh Lyngshkor Lamare a giant, who actually carried a huge flat stone from Raliang using it as an umbrella to shield himself from the rain and then planted it in Nartiang. Another tradition says that most of the monoliths in Nartiang were erected between 1500 and 1835 by U Marphalyngki (a trusted lieutenant of the Jaintia King) and his friend U Luh Lyngshkor Lamare. Probably most of the huge stone monuments which are found in every part of Khasi-Jaintia Hills, were erected by giants who existed in those days. It would be an interesting study for Khasi scholars to delve deep into the Khasi mythology of giants as well as study the physical evidence of their existence.

A steady hand as Congress braces for 2024

By Jagdish Rattanani

The election of Mallikarjun Kharge as the first non-Gandhi family President of the Congress in the 21st Century is good news not only for the Congress party but also the nation as a whole. Kharge is a silent worker, a grassroots person and one who knows what it means to serve in the long run and not raise ill-founded noise like his opponent has done on losing the party election. The significance of this change cannot be overstated, and makes for a double Deepawali celebration this time as the Congress works to present a cogent front against the BJP onslaught. It indicates that despite all that is said about family control in the party, which is not unfounded criticism of the Congress, the party and the family have been able to, albeit at a slow pace, rise to the occasion and bring change. True, this is only a beginning but change can begin small and carries the potential to become sweeping over time. Kharge may or not succeed. But we must wait and watch as we applaud a new beginning.

The more significant aspect of the change is the failure of the attempt to foist on the party non-leaders like Shashi Tharoor, representative of a set of people who have contributed almost zilch to the Congress and are now busy putting on display an unseemly sideshow to distract and take attention away from a big moment for the party. It comes as no surprise that Madhusudan Mistry, the head of the party election process, slammed Tharoor for claiming irregularities in the elections, calling him two-faced. Tharoor cannot, indeed is incapable of, being a well-wisher of the party he sought to lead. He spends time now in whipping up unnecessary controversy, with a limited and narrow band of followers who are equally unschooled in the idea of service, uncharitable to the Congress and its deep contributions to the growth of India and unwilling to honour a process that allowed a candidate like Tharoor, who should never have been on the ballot, get his chance. Tharoor lost the election, and doubled up by losing grace as well. There are many including those in the media who see him as suave, articulate and a voice that is valuable because he allegedly stands against the Gandhi family and seeks change – whatever that change may mean. But the politically smart among them (not excluding those from the BJP who would probably like to see him head the Congress), know that he is the perfect candidate to further help extinguish whatever fire is left in the party. A player for the Twitter universe and stand-up comedy artiste is the perfect way to annihilate the Congress from within. But that threat has passed, at least for now.

The second is the concerted attempt underway to discredit Kharge himself, calling him a “rubber stamp” or a Gandhi family stooge, even though his contribution over the years has been significant, his conduct through the process of the election has been impeccable and he has kept up dignity in the face of a candidate who hasn't exactly a record of any serious or meaningful contribution to any institution over the years. Kharge is a follower of Babasaheb Ambedkar and the 12th century philosopher-poet Basavanna, who professed gender equality, fighting for a just cause and was committed to social reform – all qualities that we need today and more so in

Kharge's home State of Karnataka which is caught in a vortex of communalism, an example of which was the hijab row that was recently kicked up.

Where does the Congress go from here?

The challenge before the Congress, and the nation, is unprecedented. Kharge will need to quickly take charge, assert himself and begin a stitching together of coalitions that will be needed as the BJP continues to flog the narrative that 2024 is in its bag already. If that game is not to be conceded even before the battle begins, the Congress will need to quickly move on three fronts boldly and firmly.

First, the party will need to have a programme to go back to the people, a nation-wide hitting-the-road that is not unlike the Bharat jodo yatra that Rahul Gandhi has undertaken and is bringing a rather upbeat response from ordinary citizens, particularly the youth. Many will agree that this yatra is making a dent. Even the BJP would note that that this walkathon has turned out well for the Congress. Kharge may take a cue and ensure that every State has the machinery in place to run similar mini-yatras in the local areas to bring up burning issues before the people. There is nothing like a mass mobilisation call for a party that was seen as getting moribund. Secondly, there will have to be work beginning now to stitch reasonable alliances that the Congress must build with like-minded parties. Here, it will need an approach that recognises that much has changed in India. The party can deliver some positive surprises if it reads the leaves well. Maharashtra is a good example of what the potential is. The way the Shiv Sena was broken has left a poor taste in Maharashtra. The breakaway faction led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, bolstered by the BJP, does not have a narrative to explain to the masses why he stayed in power under Uddhav Thackeray and suddenly turned sides. The Congress will have to work with the Sena, which is a very different party today and is shaping up with narratives that are anything but communal and very different from what the Sena was known to be in its earlier avatars. Sharad Pawar's NCP will also have to be a part of the coalition, and in this the seniority of Kharge will help navigate the path. Fixed thinking of the past must change to carve new paths for a future in a nation where the poison of communalism is eating away at our ethos and traditions. Thirdly, Kharge must also assert himself, strike an independent path and must quickly bring in younger players into the party leadership. New faces, forceful voices and committed secular candidates can help bring in a sense of urgency and energy that will be required as the party heads into 2024. As he settles into the role, Rahul Gandhi must continue to be away from Delhi and spend his time at the grass roots. This is important if the message to every Congress worker is to do the same.

Doing all this and more does not indicate that a Congress revival is assured but it is the best bet on a journey that the party must undertake at this crucial time when the nation faces threats that it rarely has before.

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

Letters to the Editor

UDP should read the signs

Editor,
Apropos of the editorial “Of rank opportunism,” and the news “Sunak is first Indian-descent UK PM, youngest to take up the chair in 200 yrs” (ST October 25, 2022), the editorial is an excellent piece on the current political developments in Meghalaya. I agree 100 percent with the editor that the scenario building up is of the NPP securing more seats and might therefore not need the UDP. Again, I would like to reiterate that the NPP is going to cobble up 35 seats.

As for the news item referred to above Laura Beers in the CNN on October 24, 2022 brilliantly stated, “Changing leaders twice in the course of a parliamentary term without consulting the British electorate is the political equivalent of whacking your brother just because he annoyed you. You just can't do it and expect to get away with it. This is especially true when, as in the current political moment, there have been

dramatic reversals of party policy since the previous general election. Britain is facing inflation, rising borrowing costs and predicted deficits on a massive scale which will likely require either significant tax increases, spending cuts or both. The policy decisions taken in the next few months will have implications for years to come. There is a political imperative for Britons to be given a say as to how their leaders should tackle the current crisis. By ignoring that imperative, the Tory party would risk further eroding faith in Britain's democratic process, at a time when democracy is under significant threat around the globe.”

Yours etc.,
Gordon Wahlang,
Via email

Rishi Sunak & identity politics

Editor
Many from India and from the Indian diaspora are celebrating the success of Rishi Sunak, the first prime minister “of colour” (as they

say here in the west) in the UK and the first Indian to be elected to this highest office. If anything, his success points to the taciturn nature of History. Who would have dreamed, a hundred years ago, that a person of Indian origin would become the prime minister of the same country that colonized India? But this speaks perhaps more about the praiseworthy attributes of British voters and about how far the pendulum has swung away from European colonialism and neo-colonialism – than about Mr. Sunak, or India.

While Rishi Sunak may indeed turn out to be an excellent leader, our reasons for celebrating his success smack too much of identity politics. Drawing from egoism and narcissism, identity politics is usually blind to the moral character of the individual beneath the layer of identities. In a leader, what matters most in the end, is not the mosaic of identities he represents, but his moral values and character. Is he in touch with conscience? Does he possess a personal sense of justice? Does he feel for those suffering at the bottom

of the social hierarchy? Is he honest? Is he detached from power? Is he empathetic, yet firm? Instead of being blinded by identity politics, these are the kinds of questions we should be asking of any leader – whether Rishi Sunak, Kamala Harris, or Narendra Modi.

To use the political success of a single member of a minority group as a measure of the upliftment of the whole group is troubling – because it buys into the tokenism that serves the ruling majority so well. Almost the only sure means of removing oppression is to alter the heart and mind of the oppressor – not by buying into his Citadel of power, but by converting his heart. A politics of envy, emulation, and power fails altogether in bringing about this conversion. Perhaps the most important questions to ask of a leader from a minority group are, how do you see your own people and their overall status in society? What will you do to help them?

Given how entrenched hatred can be in the heart of the oppressor, perhaps a more practical means of

changing him is mass scale success of the oppressed group – whether defined by class, caste, gender, or any other criterion. For example, almost all Hindu savants have protested the caste system vigorously. Without being cynical or doubting their power, I cannot help but wonder if the capitalistic market system will not be more effective. Mature capitalism may remove caste prejudice faster because it presupposes a certain social mobility that abhors restrictions like caste prejudice.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar
Via email

Why target the Bengali community?

Editor,
In the recent Netflix advertisement captioned, “Cherrapunjee Ki Diwali,” a well-known pressure group has blamed the Bengalis for the name “Cherrapunjee” and said that the name was given to Sohra by Bengali

Chamchas of the British. I just don't understand how the Bengalis have become ‘CHAMCHAS’ of the British masters! I strongly protest the use of such grotesque and derogatory words against our community – the same community whose stalwarts fought for the liberation of India, our motherland and sacrificed their lives for it. Does it mean that persons like Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, Swami Vivekananda among others are also Chamchas?

This deep-rooted hatred against our community is very painful and unwarranted.

We need to introspect now and think for the future of our children. Many Bengalis have already abandoned this place and more will leave in the future.

Yours etc.,
Anjan Kumar Das,
Shillong 6
CAMP: New Delhi

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"Problems are not stop signs,
they are guidelines"

— Robert H. Schuller

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LKV No. 76 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2022

Disaster Unpreparedness

DIWALI this year could not be solemnised with the usual spirit of fun and gaiety which this day is associated with. October 24 happened to be a dampener with cyclone Sitrang playing spoilsport. What was intended to be a joyful celebration of the Festival of Lights turned instead into a cold and rainy evening. No candles or crackers could be burnt for the first time ever on a Diwali evening.

Cyclones occurring in the Bay of Bengal directly affect India's North Eastern states, West Bengal, Odisha and Bangladesh. The above regions have always borne the brunt of such cyclones. With Climate Change staring humans in the face the frequency of cyclones has only gone up leaving behind a trail of disruptions and destruction. In Meghalaya, the Garo Hills are most affected because of their location. Cyclone Sitrang has uprooted trees and homes and left Meghalaya without power for over 24 hours in some areas of the State and longer in others. In the month of May this year, Cyclone Asani had created havoc with very heavy rains leading to massive landslides and floods in parts of the State. The reason for creating the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and state level bodies is to ensure that people are forewarned before any disaster. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) announces the arrival of a cyclone well in advance for the State Disaster Management Agencies to get their act together. For states like Meghalaya the precautions that can and should be taken are to warn people living in downstream areas which are prone to flash-floods and to evacuate them to safer areas. Torrential rains cause landslides hence vehicles travelling along landslide prone areas should be warned but not just that; there should be rescue teams placed in these areas in case of emergencies.

The heaviest casualty during cyclones is when trees fall over electric poles or when the poles collapse due to strong winds leading to complete power outage as has happened during the onslaught of Cyclone Sitrang which left large parts of Garo Hills including the Chief Minister's constituency without power for over 36 hours. Power outage also means that drinking water cannot be pumped to households so there will be a water emergency for those without adequate storage facilities. Above all those dependent on technology and working from home are worst affected. Cyclone Asani claimed several lives in Meghalaya and the entire region as houses and humans were carried away by flood waters. But every cyclone comes and goes without lessons learnt. There is an urgent need for convergence of departments such as the Power, PHED, Health, Transport, Police and Disaster Management so that each one knows what its role is in case of a disaster and also how to work together. Normally the MeECL workers are left burning the midnight oil to restore power. Linemen must be trained to better respond to crises by regularly checking out the stability of electric poles and reducing the number of trees around power stations and transformers.

Letters to the Editor

Shillong traffic jams defy solution

Editor,
The Meghalaya High Court has taken a very strong stand against the inability of the State Government to regulate traffic and ensure that the commuting public is not put to inconvenience. IIM Shillong appears to have been tasked to come up with a blueprint to address the perennial traffic woes that afflict Shillongites on a daily basis. Most cities suffer the same predicament but nowhere does traffic come to a standstill as it does in Shillong City. Most of us know precisely what the reasons for the traffic jams are. Let me list them out one by

one. First and foremost is the size of the roads which are in direct contrast to the size of the vehicles. The road size cannot be expanded because of the biggest elephant in the room — land belongs to the people and those land owners have themselves encroached towards the roads. Second, public roads are not meant for parking vehicles as this reduces the size of the road but try telling that to Shillongites many of whom own vehicles but have no parking space inside their compounds. There have been many suggestions that this with no parking spaces will not be allowed to register their vehicles. But no government has had the spine to implement this important rider. Third, there are too many vehicles on the road during school hours in the morn-

Shillong Governing Authority, is a must!

By Rudi Warjri

Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Shillong had held a series of Symposium October 14 – 26, 2022 on Improving Mobility in Shillong. The Chief Justice of the Meghalaya High Court had also participated in one of them. Earlier, the High Court had asked the State Government to draw plans to ease the traffic congestion in Shillong.

Why was it necessary for the High Court and the IIM, Shillong to get involved on a subject like traffic congestion? The answer is obvious! It is because of the apathy of the State Government (both present and past). The present Government in failing to even start addressing the problem and past governments in failing to visualize the worsening of the problem. The indifference of the

galore offering solutions to the Shillong Traffic dilemma. The participants instead were to give their own precise thoughts on rubrics such as infrastructure, governance, socio-economic aspects, administration, community role etc., which explained why the symposia was about mobility rather than just about traffic per se. The participants were then divided into three groups. Each group had to come out with their conclusions on three bullet points namely - Challenges that the group sees; expectations from other stakeholders; what each of one us can offer to improve the situation. The three groups reassembled after which the moderating professor read out what his group saw and felt on the

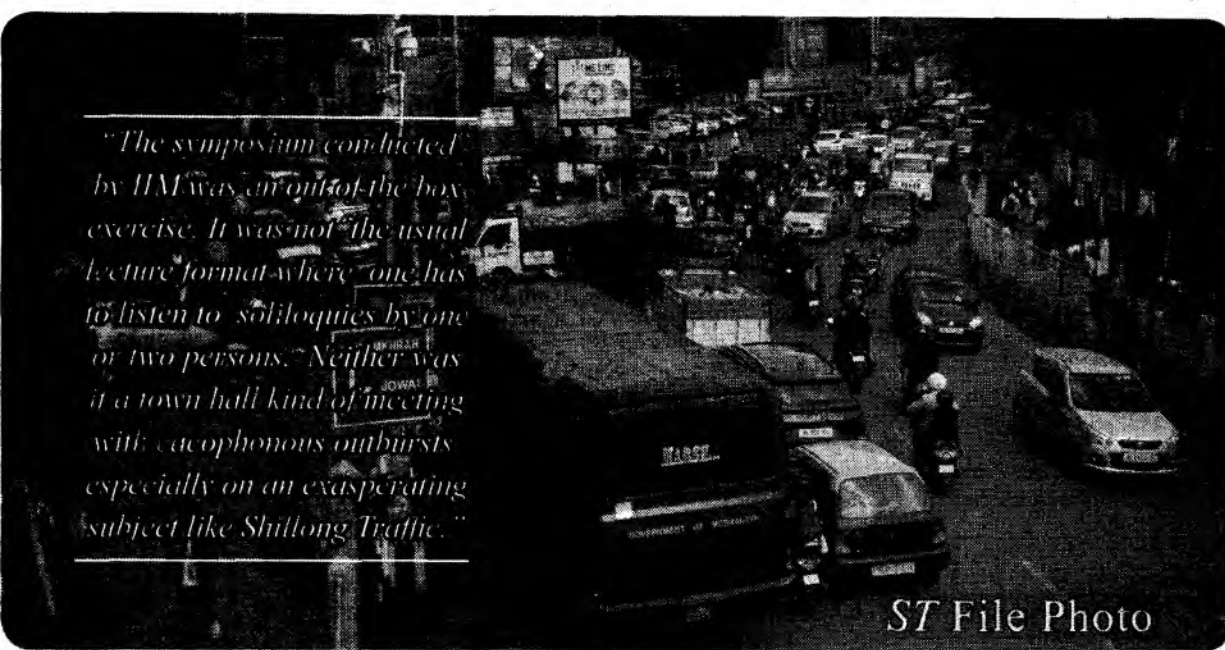
official gave a power point presentation on the progress pertaining to several infrastructural road constructions etc.

Dr Pasricha's talk was a combination of his experience as the super cop on traffic in a metro city like Mumbai and his academic work on the subject of traffic management. The propositions were professional, rational and candid. It was both a learning experience and entertaining as well. Some may have sounded radical but imperative in the context of Shillong Traffic.

Dr Pasricha said Meghalaya is known for tourism and so it should start with infrastructure like good roads. Otherwise, the consequence, is congestion and safety. He

As far as the Regional Transport Officers (RTOs) are concerned they should insist on driving tests before giving out driving licenses. Traffic police should also ensure strict enforcement especially of dangerous overtaking, overloading with protruding materials, bad parking etc. However while enforcing the law public goodwill should not be forfeited. Hence dignified behaviour is important. He stressed the importance of educating trucks and taxi unions and involve sponsors comprising companies, social organizations, Rotary clubs, Lions clubs etc.

Dr Paricha also spoke about the mindset of motorists. My own observation as far as Shillong is concerned is that vehicles with ML OI registration, especially the maroon buses, taxis and



"The symposium conducted by IIM was on a totally different exercise. It was not the usual lecture format where one has to listen to soliloquies by one or two persons. Neither was it a town hall kind of meeting with cacophonous outbursts especially on an exasperating subject like Shillong Traffic."

Government as the executive had already been seen, since the Court had to step in into issues like illegal coal mining, repairing of roads, scams, etc.

In October and December 2018, IIM Shillong had initiated a brainstorm that resulted in a white paper captioned, "The Burgeoning traffic congestion in Shillong." There were presentations by the Traffic Police and other concerned Government departments. A list of recommendations were finally submitted to the Deputy Chief Minister in June 2019, in the absence of the Chief Minister. But nothing happened!

The symposium conducted by IIM was an out of the box exercise. It was not the usual lecture format where one has to listen to soliloquies by one or two persons. Neither was it a town hall kind of meeting with cacophonous outbursts, especially on an exasperating subject like Shillong Traffic. It turned out to be an exercise in brain teasing and testing combined with self introspection. One felt as if one was being reschooled. In the end every participant came away with a feeling of some guilt since every citizen in the city is as responsible for aggravating the traffic jam in Shillong. The professors who spoke were guiding rather than teaching. There was a crisp outline of how and the day would proceed. Also a reminder to the participants that there were already reports

three bullet points.

My memory tells me that the biggest challenge the groups commonly saw was lack of political will. Indeed political will is the fundamental point and the bottom line. Tonnes of research, expert advice, suggestions for solutions, reports etc., mean nothing unless there is a political will to act.

The highlight of the post lunch afternoon session was a talk by Dr P S Pasricha, Director General of Police, Maharashtra and a PhD in Infrastructure and Logistical Management. He was also the Deputy Commissioner of Mumbai Traffic Police when he introduced several schemes to improve traffic management in Mumbai. He also authored a book on road safety and traffic management. In the session were also senior officials of the State Government representing policy as well as operational officials from the district administration and the police. There were consultants on infrastructure and headmen from some of the localities in Shillong.

The headmen shared very valuable information and inputs which they saw and experienced from day to day. They also offered suggestions specific to their areas as per density of educational institutions, government offices, commercial establishments, banks, markets, roadside vendors and hawkers, etc. A senior State Government

urged the authorities to provide buildings with ramps for street parking at the mouth of busy centres and restrict movement of vehicles. Being a hill station land is scarce and roads are narrow. Provision for pedestrians is required. He suggested entry fees into the state which could be introduced to raise funds. Patrolling on small motorcycles and emergency vehicles have to be considered. On highways where traffic volume is generally high, toll ways should be introduced. Contingencies for frequent landslides, lay byes, set backs be provided to allow overtaking, manoeuvring etc. He suggested strong that stone guard railings be constructed and also retro reflective signs be put up. Other traffic control devices such as lighted bollards, cat eyes, delineators etc., are also helpful. Precautions at constructions/repairs sites are also of paramount importance. There should be barricades, solar flash lights and warning signs well in advance. For physical stops vehicles must come to a halt at least 50 metres in advance. He proposed that within the city, concrete roads desirable and the most ideal gradient is 1:20.

Dr Pasricha was amused by his experience of speed breakers while entering and driving in Shillong. He said 90% of them have no signs and some of them are more of vehicles breakers.

expensive private vehicles behave as if they own the road and stop anywhere at any moment without any signals. This implies that most of them have licenses procured with the help of dalals (middlemen). As a scholar Dr Pasricha recognized that Meghalaya is largely under the Sixth Schedule where respective institutions play their roles. At the same time the realities of the present and future have to be taken into account. He suggested the need for a single institution to manage Shillong. My own experience in both developed and developing countries is also in sync with Dr Pasricha. Most well run cities are managed by a Mayor and his office is accountable for everything, be it traffic, infrastructure creation, waste disposal, electricity, law and order and safety and even job creation and employment. The problem with Meghalaya is the existence of multiple agencies leading to proliferation of countless power centres comprising both State and non-state actors. Hence bottlenecks occur not only in traffic management but in the interlocking web of institutions themselves that make it difficult for cohesive action. A single institution to manage Shillong could be a model to other upcoming cities like Tura and Jowai.

A Shillong Governing Authority may be the answer! (The writer is a retired diplomat)

CPC's power politics and consolidation of Xi's grip on China

By Dr Nsungbemo Ezung

The power struggle among the factions within the Communist Party of China (CPC), the paramount ruling political party of China, became evident to the world as Hu Jintao, the former President and immediate predecessor of the current leader Xi Jinping, was forcefully evicted from the stage in a full media/public glare at the start of the closing session of the 20th National Congress of the CPC at the Great Hall of the People at Beijing this October. While the official position of the CPC was that Hu Jintao had to leave the session to receive medical attention as he was going through a health issue, the footage of the unceremonious exit of the former president that was captured by the media and that eventually went viral clearly suggested that the reason of Hu's exit from the stage was more than just on health ground.

Hu Jintao no doubt did not appear healthy as he showed up at the 20th National Congress of the CPC, nevertheless examining the footage of the dramatic exit of Hu revealed two critical facts. First, he was showing reluctance as a steward/security struggled to lift him to lead him out of the stage, and one more steward and one member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) seated on his left side had to join in an effort to successfully ensure that Hu exits the Hall as the world probably will never know under whose order they were forcefully evicting an elderly Chinese statesman bringing him utter disgrace and humiliation. Second, during the course of the entire on-stage power melee, the remaining officials, including Xi were seated on the stage and the entire delegates inside the Hall remained motionless showing no signs of concern as if they were strictly instructed to remain seated and not to react to the unfolding drama. The reaction of the CPC's officials and delegates would have been surely different had Hu's eviction been on health grounds.

And if health issue was not the reason for Hu's forced eviction, the million-dollar question for the world is what could be the possible reason/s for the manner under which Hu was removed with the full presence of both the foreign and domestic media. Within the culture of CPC where politics and power struggles are usually played out behind closed doors, where selection and removal of officials are done in well-guarded secrecy and where media are generally allowed only in party events which are ceremonial in nature for approving the order of the top party leadership, it was extremely unusual that CPC's 20th Congress saw a sort of a power tussle on the stage between the incumbent leader and his immediate predecessor. If Xi and his loyalists within the CPC were suspicious about the loyalty of Hu, the latter should have not been permitted to take the stage in the first place. Because they knew very well that any sort of glitch on the stage during such a highly publicized and intensely monitored event would invite intense international scrutiny.

One can draw two possible case scenarios for the dramatic turn of events that had taken place at the closing session of the Congress. Firstly, Xi might have been confronted with a last-minute surprise. Remember, this was the session from where CPC's delegates will be voting for a resolution to give Xi an unprecedented third term to lead the party and the country, a break from the CPC's tradition of setting term limits for the leaders. And Xi would

want nothing less than a unanimous approval from the delegates, and he might have begun to suspect or have been informed that his immediate predecessor could be on the course to spoil the whole picture of unanimity by showing dissent to the proposed resolution. This should force Xi to take the unprecedented step of removing his predecessor from the stage. The second case scenario could be that the entire drama was a well-scripted one as usual. It was part of Xi's ploy to humiliate his potential political opponents publicly, thereby sending a clear message to everyone that dissent and opposition in any form to his leadership, both within CPC and China as a whole, would never be tolerated. This kind of situation, if created, would be a return to Mao's era of authoritarian rule where the purging of political opponents and non-tolerance of dissent was a norm.

In any case, Xi had emerged as a big winner from the power politics that had plagued the CPC during the last five decades. After the death of Mao Ze Dong in 1976, although CPC had consolidated its power grip on China, the CPC had become faction-ridden as party men had to compete with each other for power. Two of Xi's immediate predecessors represented the two most prominent factions within the CPC. Jiang Zemin who ruled China from 1989 to 2002 belongs to an elite faction commonly referred to as the "Shanghai Gang". Members of this gang are composed of children of former high-ranking officials. Hu Jintao who succeeded Jiang Zemin in 2002 belongs to the "Communist Youth League" whose members are moderates and populists in character. While the Shanghai Gang represents the country's entrepreneurs and emerging middle class, the Communist Youth League represents the interest of the vulnerable social class such as the farmers, the migrant workers and the urban poor (Anja Manuel. This Brave New World. India, China and the United States. 2016, Page 48).

Xi perfectly manoeuvred the CPC's power politics as he climbed the ladder of the party's power pyramid. Originally belonging to the Shanghai Gang through his origin he associated himself with the Communist Youth League during his early years in politics. In fact, he belongs to the children of once powerful leaders during Mao's reign who were all purged for being disloyal to Chairman Mao and the party, in Mao's version, and were expelled from the seat of power in Beijing and sent to villages to work as farmers. Xi, therefore, has the unique experience of being a son of a high-ranking official who had to live and grow up as a poor farmer in a village. As such, when he was anointed as Hu's successor in 2012, leaders from both factions saw him as their potential ally whom they can use to assert their authority. Instead, ten years later in 2022 Xi had finished them off, neutralized all factions, dismantled all the power structure of the CPC, rewritten the party's constitution to suit his interest and he will now rule the party and country along with his group of loyalists with virtually no oppositions.

The leadership overhaul during the 20th Party Congress also suggested that Xi is yet to anoint any potential candidates to be his successor which indicates that he still has a plan for the party and China well beyond 2027, the year in which the next once-in-five-year National Congress of the CPC will be convened.

where everything moves at snail's pace. So woe on us commuters who have to get stuck at this place too every single day.

Unless the Government decides to take harsh steps like odd-even numbers plying on alternate days or reduce the number of taxis; stop roadside parking; expand the road size, insist on school buses, repairs all the roads and think of flyovers at vantage points, traffic chaos in Shillong will continue.

Yours etc.,
Delizia Sohtun,
Via email

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

permits on the plea of livelihood. The State has a duty to ensure public order. Traffic jams add to chaos and public disorder. How many taxis can the Shillong roads take and also their indiscipline driving and stopping wherever they wish to allow disembark passengers to disembark.

Before I conclude let me also state here that the bad roads, full of potholes in the heart of Shillong city, especially in certain localities like Mawlai, Pynthorhab and Langkyrding slow down traffic. At Langkyrding right next to the BDW International school a small bridge which is less than 500 meters is being built. It is now over 8-10 months but the work continues. I can't understand why it should take so long but this is Meghalaya

gassing the irate public.

This has been stated ad nauseum and I am only repeating it. The schools located in and around Laitumkhrar and Dhankheti areas create the most traffic jams because these schools harbour the elite of Meghalaya's society that have no dearth of SUVs. Ten or twelve years ago these schools were told to use school buses but no, they are adamant not to do so. Isn't there a law that can tame such belligerence? Or is the entire establishment and administrative machinery and the politicians as well on the side of these schools because their wards study there? This class system in society is what creates lawlessness because the law is applied selectively.

There is a limit to how many taxis can be granted

"No good work is ever done while the heart is hot and anxious and fretted."

— Olive Schreiner

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Sonia as 'saviour'

THE Congress party is set for a change – and, as Sonia Gandhi stated at the leadership transfer event in Delhi, change is the order of the world. She led the Congress ably, raising much beyond the expectations of ordinary Indians and even die-hard Congressmen as she held the reins of the party in two phases for 13 years. During her term, the first defeat for the Congress in 2014 came after the party ran the government for two terms in succession and anti-incumbency was natural. The party suffered the second defeat after two years of leadership by Rahul Gandhi and the blame cannot be put on her. As she quits the (interim) party chief post for good at the ripe age of 75 this week, the nation's standing ovation for her leadership qualities are well in order. The grit and determination with which she held the reins of the party and guided its governments from behind were unique and she rose much beyond the normal concept of a leader. She spoke less and acted firmly. This was unlike the image of footloose Indian politicians known for their indiscipline and loud mouths. The political class here has a lot to learn from the way Sonia Gandhi as an outstanding leader conducted herself. Without Sonia being around, the grand old party would have collapsed like a pack of cards.

All these are not to ignore the stigma she carries with her vis-à-vis the perpetuation of corruption in the party and government directly under her watch. She hardly ever wielded the stick or tried to cleanse the system. The UPA ministers, of the Congress as well as the allies, were mostly corrupt even as Manmohan Singh as prime minister might not have had such proclivities. By contrast, there is a general sense of satisfaction about the Modi dispensation vis-à-vis corruption at the ministerial levels – at least as far as we know. Yet, the graphs of corruption at the bureaucratic and regional parties' levels are skyrocketing and systems are subverted by them today in gay abandon.

Sonia Gandhi, unlike Modi, had no administrative experience when she ventured into politics. She did so as a call of duty imposed on her. Sonia could have been the prime minister but chose not to. Her lack of experience in governance and the soft nature of Manmohan Singh were perhaps the reasons why there was wholesale corruption under the two UPA terms. The bandicoots in politics naturally took advantage and made hay. To err is human. The good qualities of leadership displayed by Sonia Gandhi merit appreciation.

Women in farming: Innovations and setbacks

By Patricia Mukhim

Farming has been the prime occupation of women in rural North East India. The agricultural sector employs nearly 80% of economically active women in the country. Women make up 33% of the agriculture labour force of which 48% are self-employed farmers. What is abysmal is that only 13% of such farmers own land or have land rights. The Economic Survey 2017-18 identifies an increasing feminisation of agriculture as more and more men migrate to urban centres for work or take up non-farm work as agriculture is proving to be a difficult proposition with uncertainties posed by climate change.

India's Northeast is a biodiversity hot-spot and therefore more susceptible to climate change. A study conducted in 2015 by this writer and Dr Govind Kelkar, Executive Director, GenDev Centre for Research and Innovation, found that some crops which women farmers had grown traditionally had stopped producing the desired quantity per capita and therefore they had to shift to other crops. These women farmers had experienced climate change manifested in unpredictable rainfall or periods of dry weather and the adverse impacts on their crops. They also rely heavily on the Agriculture Department for what they call better yielding varieties of vegetables. However, climate change experts have expressed their reservations on this heavy dependence on high yielding varieties of rice and vegetables (many of them genetically modified) saying that they are more susceptible to pests and to the vagaries of weather whereas the indigenous variety of crops were more resilient.

Initially seeds were gathered at the end of every season and conserved until the next planting season. In recent times however, with the assistance of NGOs for instance CARITAS, and NESFAS, seed banks have been set up and managed more professionally so that seeds are properly dehydrated and do not rot while storing. Another example of positive intervention is found in Nagaland under the global development co-operation project 'Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Agrarian Landscapes' implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, and funded under the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry

for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) and the Federal Foreign Office (AA). In this instance, learnings from a GIZ assisted rice seed exchange programme translated into a gene pool and a livelihood project funded by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India which is implemented in five districts of Nagaland.

However, such assistance by NGOs and development cooperation projects has to be upscaled as these seed banks are few and far between. In addition, there is a need to educate farmers to come together and make the seed banks more sustainable. Seed banks moreover help to facilitate the farmer's access to markets and give them more choice over what they grow. Professionally managed community seed banks enable rural tribal farmers to exercise their choice to go in for indigenous seeds and not on genetically modified high yielding variety of seeds that are highly dependent on expensive inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides.

Women farmers at Marwah and Khrang village still rely on jhum (shifting cultivation) to feed their families as well as to sell what is beyond their consumption levels to the markets. The beauty about jhum fields is that they provide a variety of food crops from ginger to millet, perilla seeds (rich in Omega-3) to protein rich sweet potatoes, tapioca, cucumber, turmeric and tomatoes. All these vegetables grow adjacent to and nourish each other. Women cultivate in a particular plot for two to three years after which they have to leave the place fallow for about five years before they revisit the place for another cropping cycle. This traditional wisdom that the women engaged in shifting cultivation possess could be significantly complemented by jhum optimisation and intensification measures such as those being taught to the farmers of Khawrinim village, Mizoram. These measures are aimed at increasing the cultivation period, improving fallow management to restore soil fertility and soil moisture recharge for improving underground water and creation of secondary forests for economic yield of trees. Apart from being biodiversity-enhancing land-use practices in agriculture, these measures will also help generate subsidiary income for women farmers. This is especially important with the transformation of land

ownership patterns in North-east India.

There was a time when land was still a community asset so women could move from one place to another for their cultivation. However in large parts of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram there is an elite capture of land – the so-called absentee landlords who acquire rural farmlands for contract farming and grow rice and vegetables or fruits for the markets.

Even in the face of these present-day changes, traditional wisdom continues to serve women farmers and it would be worthwhile to document this astuteness of our women farmers. For instance, when women grow maize they would also grow beans alongside. The reason is that maize depletes the soil of nutrients while beans replenish the nutrients by fixing nitrogen.

Besides vegetables and crops, women farmers also rear pigs and chicken in their homesteads. Meat is an important source of protein in the North-eastern states. Studies have shown that out of the total food expenditure 15% in rural areas and 18% in urban areas is spent on meat. Unfortunately, although meat (essentially pork and beef) is a staple food of the people of Northeast India, the eight states have had to import meat from elsewhere as they are not able to produce enough meat internally (as per data by the National Sample Survey Office dated 2010). Only in recent times women have been trained by the Veterinary Department on pig rearing. High yielding varieties of imported pigs which are reared mainly for piglets are now being imported from the Myanmar border. These pigs known as Meishan China can produce about 22 piglets at one cycle. The local pigs reared earlier are insufficient to meet the growing demand for meat especially since pork is a meat of choice in all the tribal states of the Northeast.

Also, North Eastern Council (NEC) has been trying to encourage farmers to rear pigs and cattle since the climate is suitable. A few progressive farmers have got into the business of cattle rearing in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills and also in the Garo Hills. In the other North-eastern states, pig rearing is becoming a profession for several families. However, the feed still comes from outside the state since the possibilities of producing pig feed internally has not yet been explored.

This is the case with poultry feed and fish feed as well.

In Meghalaya's Jaintia Hills women have formed self-help groups and engage in growing turmeric. Lakadong Turmeric which is grown in Lakskein, Jaintia Hills has a curcumin content of 7.9% which is the highest in the world. With the help of the horticulture department and the Farmers' Commission this turmeric is now branded and sold online. The requisite machinery for drying and grinding ginger and even the machines for measuring the curcumin content are available locally. This has empowered women farmers and given them a mission on which to proceed so that they are able to supplement their family incomes and invest in the education of their children.

What is a matter of concern is the loss of rice species due to invasion by the high yielding variety of rice seeds supplied by the Government. An intervention to set up seed banks and enable women to manage these banks efficiently is the need of the hour. In addition, it is important to document traditional wisdom in farming which is gradually being lost. The herbs and indigenous mushrooms that are part of tribal cuisine and culture are also gradually ousted out in favour of more exotic varieties. This loss of diversity in food habits and the rapid commercialisation of agriculture for economic survival need to be balanced with conservation of the indigenous crops and herbs as in case there is crop failure in monoculture farming, we would still be able to harvest some food crops from the jhum fields. Moreover, the women farmers cultivate carefully managed farms with crops that do not require too many fertilisers or pesticides.

There is nothing more valuable than farming for food self-sufficiency and food sovereignty which institutions like the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) are pursuing assiduously. In this regard, women farmers in Northeast India, whose agricultural traditions are steeped in centuries of organic and agro-bio diverse practices, are primed to take the lead. They just need support and encouragement.

(The writer is a Journalist and Women's Rights Activist. Views expressed are personal)

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this article are personal and do not represent Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH as an organisation.

Assam Govt sealing Miya Museum is a case of vendetta State BJP forcing Bengali speaking Muslims to capitulate

By Ashis Biswas

With the Assam Government sealing the newly opened museum devoted to 'Miya culture' within hours of its opening in Goalpara district, clearly the targeted marginalisation of Bengali speaking Muslim settlers is set to intensify further. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma personally spearheads the offensive, describing the community as not indigenous.

The anti-Muslim push has continued for some time in Assam. The government has closed down some 600 official Madrasas (also old 'tols') where religion and related issues were being taught, overriding widespread protests. The state government then embarked on a drive to clear out illegal settlers from government-owned land at Darrang in September 2021. Two persons were killed, in an angry outburst of mass anger against the alleged 'encroachers'.

Later according to reports, some of the evicted people showed state-based media persons documents suggesting they were not 'illegal encroachers'.

Before dealing with the complex socio-economic dimensions of the issues relating to the evolution of the Miya culture, the timing and background to the continuous official drive against Bengali-speaking Muslims needs explaining.

Some time ago, Mr Badruddin Ajmal, leader of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and MP from Dhubri in lower Assam, commented on the demolition of a few Madrasas ordered by the Government. Local police and other authorities alleged that the action had been taken against specific institutions after complaints of indoctrination among pupils and anti-national activities had been received.

Along with leaders of other opposition parties like Congress, Mr Ajmal had said that the Government was within its rights to punish wrongdoers established as criminals in the eyes of law. However, the rights of the government did not extend to demolishing entire Madrasa buildings, set up and financed by many people for specific social purposes. Through the actions of a Government seeking to punishing a few, much larger groups of people including many innocents were also being made to suffer unnecessarily.

He spoke of pursuing matters at a legal level, but the demolition drive was not continued.

At that time, Mr Ajmal who is regarded as the unofficial spokesman for the targeted Bengali speaking Muslims in the state, had accused the BJP-ruled state government of terrorising the minorities on purpose, long before the Lok Sabha polls scheduled for 2024.

Incidentally, Mr. Sarma admits that he regarded Mr. Ajmal as a major threat to Assam's identity. However, Mr Ajmal saw in the official moves against Muslims by the state as a larger political warning: the minorities could hope to survive only if they surrendered to the ruling BJP party. Such a deep-rooted fear complex could well nudge the Muslim flock into voting en masse for the BJP, to 'buy' their personal/collective security and safety.

Politically, such a development would naturally put an end to the long term prospects of the Congress or the AIUDF as effectively functioning parties in the state. Both have been in the opposition for some time, with the AIUDF managing across the support base of the Congress, which also helped the BJP's cause, but suffering a decline

subsequently in later elections.

Meanwhile, leading intellectuals and cultural figures have commented on the emergence of the Miya phenomenon in the state. The first stirrings were noticed a few years ago when a collection of Miya poetry, the melancholy outpourings of mostly rural poor Bengali-speaking Muslim peasants, came to be published.

There arose an immediate controversy. A section of Assamese academicians protested as they felt that the effects of such publications would be socially divisive, as their overall tone and tenor would be discordant with the cadence of mainstream literary culture.

This was contested by left wing thinkers and others who saw such writings as a new kind self expression of a traditionally oppressed group. They reasoned that more than a literary experiment, it represented an ethnic assertion. As for the word Miya, it was nothing but a abbreviated back formation from the word 'Assamiya', the word the Muslims used to describe themselves to visiting Census authorities. Therefore, there was no question of any group trying to be divisive.

On the contrary, the suppression of such efforts would amount to an interference of freedom of speech, a fundamental right for a fairly sizable community.

The idea to set up a Miya museum arose from the community itself first voiced by Congress leader Sherman Ali in 2020. It was explained that home grown items and knick-knacks traditionally produced by Bengali Muslim settlers, including agricultural implements, various garments, utensils or other products would be stored there. But the chief minister rejected the idea strongly. Items as agricultural implements on display, he insisted claiming the support of local experts and cultural authorities, were neither unique nor markedly different from similar implements used by numerous settled tribes in the state. Only the lungi was an exception, he added. For the targeted community, not many have spoken up yet either for or against the Assam Government. The strongest argument, that beleaguered community leaders could advance was that India itself was a highly complex heterogeneous land of many cultures. So was the state of Assam. However, except for eminent regional thinker Mr Hiren Gohain, not many have so far spoken out for the troubled community. Dr Gohain, speaking some time ago to the media about the Miya culture phenomenon, had expressed his conviction that the ruling BJP was targeting the Muslims generally to fulfill its political agenda. But he strongly felt that if they protested too strongly, there could very well be another outburst of mass violence which would hurt everyone and the Muslims had already suffered enough! The question of timing was critically important for the people who regarded themselves as the victims in the present situation.

It remains to be seen how the major political parties, HR groups and cultural bodies in Assam react to present developments. Among the poorest of the myriad ethnic groups in Assam, the Miya Muslims as they call themselves, while others use the word pejoratively, have mostly settled on the char-lands and unclaimed, inhospitable territories in the Brahmaputra valley and elsewhere. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Everyone's common problem is no one's problem

Editor,

Covid has gone. It is no longer a threat or a danger to us all. Shillong however, soon to be followed by Jowai, Tura, Nongstoin and other semi urban habitations of Meghalaya, are already struck or will soon be struck with another common predicament and that is, how to move from point A to point B. The dilemma shall be traffic. Traffic as defined by Wikipedia is the movement of vehicles, pedestrians, cars, horses, donkeys or what have you, along a designated road, from one place to another. The defining word here is Movement! Movement on Meghalaya urban roads is becoming impossible and forget vehicles even pedestrian movement along Shillong roads have already become a death trap.

As a matter of conjecture, based on existing ground realities, five years hence, driving from Laikrot to Mawlong might take not less than 12 hours or more. VIPs (and they all, every single one of them, lack complete

road sense) will then have to leg it like the rest of us, gun-toting security wallas not withstanding. Tra-la-la-la-la ; Hoi kiw; What joy; uncared for traffic would then bring everyone back to the same level of egalitarianism. Hundreds of concerned citizens have written on the subject the latest being "Shillong traffic jams defy solutions" by Delizia Sohtun and the article "Shillong Governing Authority, is a must!" By Rudi Warjri, both in the S.T Oct 27th 2022. Everyone has shown concern. Individuals in articles and Letters to the Editor, groups, organizations and institutions, all have expressed their anxiety over the matter. The only things (I use the word "thing" purposely for a thing is usually an inanimate, lifeless, lacking qualities expressive of life and vigour, insipid object) are the Government, the ADCs and our revered Dorbars. Yes, I too, entirely agree with observations made from time to time that what we lack most to improve our traffic system is "Political Will" which seems as far away as distant Venus!

But humans survive because of that quality known as optimism. So let's be optimistic a bit and imagine that we have discovered a Viagra that will rouse that

limp, drooping political will. Let's imagine we have the three lethargic languid organs of governance mentioned above ready, keen and raring to give traffic a good workout. So what is it that needs to be done? First I fully endorse Bah Rudi Warjri's proposal for a Shillong Governing Authority. But this authority will require funds for repair of neglected civic infrastructure. So the first move will be to have the will for an elected Body/ Municipal Corporation/ Authority / whatever if we are to attract the attention of the Ministry of Urban Affairs and its funding. Otherwise, zip up and forget the whole thing. If such a Body can materialise then we need to arm it with strict enforcement regulations, insofar as vehicular traffic and roads are concerned. (a) No vehicle above 10 years be allowed on the streets. Be strict, no VIP exception and set up electronic monitors at all major roads for digitized data on this score (b) no household be allowed more than 2 cars max. (c) No overnight parking on roads. No registration for vehicles whose owners cannot provide proof of owning parking space. (d) Get the authority to spend money for parking areas inside the city. Whoever proposed shopping malls in the Barik PWD

compound and at the old MTC building at Khyndailad is an idiot and he should be told so. (e) let the authority identify and construct embarking and disembarking points for buses and cabs. (f) Last but not least get a set of firm regulations on how to regulate two wheelers. They have become a menace and a source of danger for both motorists and pedestrians. In conclusion everyone has come to the conclusion that Shillong roads cannot be expanded and this is a practical view. However one comes across hilarious suggestions (mostly from Govt) for cable cars, gondola lifts etc. With the power situation as it is, I would be the last person who has the wish to be dangling somewhere over downtown. Some have suggested flyovers, provided private land owners are willing to give their land or part of it for the foundation. Otherwise forget it. An underground subway is something no one has thought of. Other mountainous cities have used it; the technology is there; no one's permission will be required if we drill underground and if we have an elected body, funding would be no problem. The only fear perhaps is of it falling in a highly seismic zone. However other endemically seismic places like Japan

have developed a safe and dependable technology for this. I strongly recommend that it should be tried as one of the JICCA funding projects for the urgent regulation of traffic in Shillong.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

A big boost for sportspersons

Editor,

It was heartening to read of the successful sports persons who brought laurels for the State and country in different disciplines. It is also encouraging to learn that the cash award for gold medal winners has been raised from Rs 7500 to Rs 2.5 lakhs. That's a quantum jump and a huge incentive for sports aficionados. Meghalaya has no dearth of sporting talent but in the past these talents were not spotted or did not receive adequate government support. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said the annual budget allocation for Sports was to the tune of Rs 500 crore which is a quantum jump from the pittance that used to be allocated by previous governments. It is not that Meghalaya has not produced sportspersons of repute in the past but they

received scant recognition and the cash awards were not significant enough to push them to try harder.

I was watching the women archers the other day practicing for the North East Olympics and my heart swelled with pride. There is no sport on this earth where women cannot take part on an equal footing with men and with due encouragement and better facilities both men and women can bring Meghalaya to the limelight in the national and international sporting events. Meghalaya may not have won any medals in the National Games in Gujarat held in September this year but we can only hope that our sportspersons across disciplines will bring out their inherent talents under the best coaches. We wish them all the best and hope that the State Sports Department will do its part too in making the North East Olympics a memorable event.

Yours etc.,
B. Mawlong,
Via email

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

"Those who lack the courage will always find a philosophy to justify it."

—Albert Camus

The Shillong Times

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Unprovoked violence: history repeated

THE October 28, rally against unemployment taken out by the Federation of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo People (FKJGP) a pressure group that has been around for at least two decades – turned violent as rallyists went berserk and assaulted non-tribal passers-by physically with flag poles. Many had to run for cover. To hold a peaceful rally is a democratic right. To ensure that the rally is indeed 'peaceful' is the onus of the FKJGP leadership. But as seen in the past once a rally is called all manner of youth join in and the organisers also allow the numbers to swell if only to demonstrate their strength. This is where things go wrong. In any society, there are enough trouble makers and hangers-on looking for an opportunity to vent their frustration. Rallies allow anonymity since no pressure group would take the trouble to do a roll call of its members.

Judging by the looks of the youth that joined the rally with their faces masked up, it was clearly evident that they were up to no good. A clinical anti-Covid mask is different from the mask worn by rogues who wish to hide their identities. And a good number of those who hit passers-by at random wore masks that covered most of their faces except their eyes. Clearly the violence unleashed by the rallyists was pre-planned. What is surprising is the response of the law enforcing authorities. Not only were they missing in action but even the cops who were posted at vantage points did not do the basic crowd control exercise. Either they were unprepared for the situation that went out of control or there was a communication gap and delayed reaction. Unprovoked violence in the streets of Shillong is nothing new and when pressure groups take to the street, the police should have learnt to anticipate a break-down of law and order. The Home Department seems to trip up every time. The police are accused of coming down hard on agitating teachers but not on an agitating pressure group.

No one knows better than the average Shillongite of the fragile peace in this city. The undercurrent of hate and suspicion have always defined the milieu of this city. Frustrated youth today and in the past have refused to introspect because they are afraid of discovering the ugly truth about themselves. Its easier to indulge in extrospection and blamed the 'other' the 'outsider' who is of a different ethnic stock, no matter if they are Indian citizens living in Meghalaya for several generations. Employment or the lack of it is largely a psycho-social problem. The youth think of 'employment' only as a job in the government. Large swathes are untrained for hard work in the private sector and are unwilling to leave the state to seek their fortunes outside. Unemployment is a national problem too but it cannot be solved through violence. Nay, violence will have adverse impacts on the State's ability to generate employment. It's a vicious cycle!

Scrub typhus- A common yet neglected disease in Meghalaya

By Dr Barilin Dkhar and Dr Meban Aibor Kharkongor

Common ailments such as cold, cough, diarrhea, and fever are frequently brought up in general discussions about health and disease. Known to be generally harmless, these symptoms and illnesses are generally attributed to seasonal change, dietary changes or allergies prompting us to either wait till the illness resolves on its own or turn to self-medication. However, if such illnesses are due to serious infections, the prolonged period of waiting and self-treatment can be dangerous and deplete our resources in terms of time, money and energy.

In this context, let's focus on one of these diseases which has become very common in Meghalaya but has received less attention due to lack of surveillance and limited knowledge among the tribal community. Scrub typhus (ST), also known as Nang-soh-ot or Nang-soh-stap in different areas of the State, is very common in Meghalaya and other parts of the world such as the Asia-Pacific region, known as the 'tsutsugamushi triangle' which covers South and Southeast Asia, Northern Australia, and the islands of the Indian and Pacific Ocean. It is one of the commonest cause of "fever of unknown origin (FUO)" globally, with an estimated one million new cases annually and more than a billion people at risk of infection. Reports show that around 6% of ST cases may die if left untreated. In India, about one-in-four patients with FUO has ST, although the disease is grossly underdiagnosed due to its non-specific clinical presentations, low index of suspicion amongst clinicians, limited awareness and limited diagnostic facilities. It is common in young adults, more among males, occurring year-round, but peaking during August-November.

The disease is caused by the bacterium called *Orientia tsutsugamushi* and is transmitted by the bite of the larval mites (close cousins of spiders and ticks). The female mites lay fertilised eggs in the soil, from which 5-7 days later, the 6-legged larvae or chiggers hatch. These chiggers usually form clusters on leaves, grasses and twigs above soil surface, and can survive in outdoor environments for weeks to months waiting to attach to small animals such as rodents or to humans. The bite of the chiggers is usually painless and goes unnoticed by the person. Subsequently, non-specific symptoms such as chills, headache, coughing, nausea, diarrhoea, and vom-

iting may be experienced by the infected person. In many cases, an Eschar, which is a dark lesion resembling a cigarette burn develops at the bite site which often helps the physician in identifying the disease. In severe cases, the disease can progress to multi-organ failure involving lungs, kidneys, liver, and brain.

Chiggers commonly feed on small animals such as rodents (rats and mice) and shrews (mole-like animals) whereas humans are accidentally infected when they encroach into the habitats where chiggers are found such as agricultural land, scrubland, forests, riverbanks and deforested areas. Vegetation type, humidity, temperature and rainfall affect the survival and multiplication of both rodents and mites, and ultimately the risk of infection.

North-east India is geographically and ecologically distinct from rest of the country. The dense forests, mountains and valleys, and high biodiversity in the region is correlated with high incidence of zoonotic diseases. In this context, existing literature also suggests the recent re-emergence of ST in north-eastern states such as Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland and Sikkim. Meghalaya in particular, has witnessed reports of ST cases from both urban and rural areas in recent years. The disease is commonly associated with ripening of the chestnut and hence the name Nangsohot among the Khasi community.

Scientific evidence has also identified various occupational and behavioral risk factors associated with ST acquisition. These include being a farmer, working in vegetable fields, orchards and shrub areas and living at the edge of a village. Factors such as household with poor sanitation/conditions, always observing rodents around home, presence of scrub vegetation, wood piles and cattle around the house have been also shown to be prominent factors for the acquisition of ST. Although the disease has traditionally been considered as a problem limited to rural areas, changes in the behaviour of urban residents have made their contact with chiggers more likely. For example, in Meghalaya urban dwellers are often fond of making time for recreational activities such as trekking, camping and fishing which often pose them at the risk of infection. During

such adventures, one is likely to either rest on the grass which could lead to contact with chiggers and subsequent infection, particularly if one does not change their clothes once they return home.

The lack of awareness regarding ST among people in general and medical personnel in particular is the sole reason for the high mortality associated with this disease, which in reality is easily treatable, provided diagnosis is done before the onset of multi-organ failure, which is approximately within the first 5 days of symptoms.

A preliminary hospital-based study conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong (IIPHS) in collaboration with Dr. H. Gordon Roberts Hospital documented 408 ST cases in Meghalaya, with 5% mortality during 2017-2020. Such cases were more common in rural areas, among those involved in farming and agricultural activities. These findings, however, represent only the "tip of the iceberg" for ST burden in Meghalaya and more research work is necessary to understand the true burden and the context-specific key drivers of ST transmission in Meghalaya.

The main preventive steps that can be taken are:

(i) Taking a bath, changing and washing all clothes after outdoor activities in areas with lots of vegetation and bushes.

(ii) Areas in and around the houses should also be kept clean and free from bushes to avoid rodents.

(iii) Avoid sleeping on ground in mite infested areas such as forest clearings, riverbanks, grassy and bushy regions which provide optimal conditions for infected mites to thrive

(iv) Wearing protective clothing (with long sleeves) and boots while venturing into the mite infested areas.

(v) Applying a miticide (e.g. benzyl benzoate) on clothing and bedding and a mite repellent (diethyltoluamide) to exposed skin while visiting or working outdoors.

(vi) Avoiding the drying of clothes on bushes and scrubs - especially when clothes are washed in rivers and streams as is the common practice across the state.

Moreover, active search for the eschar should be done on all patients with fever. The fact that this eschar is often found in areas like under the folds of breasts, axilla, scrotum, groin etc., makes discovery of the lesion even

more difficult. Rapid serology test kits available are also not adequately sensitive especially during the first few days of fever. Despite these difficulties in diagnosis, widespread public education regarding this important disease will help prevent deaths to a great extent by early reporting to a healthcare facility.

Globally, there has been growing reports of several zoonotic diseases such as scrub typhus, which are infections that normally circulate in animals, but "spill-over" to humans. Zoonoses have also been linked to recent outbreaks that have threatened global health and economies, including Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and more recently Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus causing COVID-19. Some of these zoonoses usually involve a vector (mosquitoes, ticks, mites etc.) in the transmission and are called vector-borne diseases. According to scientific evidence, an estimated 60% of all infectious diseases and about 75% of the emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic in nature. The spread of zoonotic and vector-borne diseases (ZVBD), is associated with environmental factors, climate change, animal health as well as other human activities including urbanization, globalization and associated travel.

The Indian Institute of Public Health (IIPH) Shillong in collaboration with the Indian Council for Agricultural Research - NEH Research Complex, Umiam, Christian Medical College, Vellore and Grassroots NGO through the DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance funded Zoonotic and Vector-Borne Disease (ZVBD) Research and Training Centre is currently involved in conducting collaborative, trans-disciplinary research to improve our understanding of the transmission of ZVBDs in Meghalaya. Additionally, the centre will enhance ZVBD research capacity in the region by training an interdisciplinary group of clinical, public health, veterinary and social-science researchers. As part of the study, stakeholder and public engagement plan for ZVBDs will also be prepared to generate awareness among local communities about the risks and prevention of ZVBDs.

(Dr Barilin Dkhar is the Laboratory Research Scientist at the IIPH Shillong and Dr Meban Aibor Kharkongor is a medical consultant at the Dr H. Gordon Roberts Hospital, Shillong)

Where does the Congress go from here?

By Chiranjib Haldar

The dust has settled. The Congress party, the grand dame of Indian polity, after decades, has a non-Gandhi at the helm of affairs. Not a dynast but one who has been with the organisation from its grassroots cadre and has seen the party wade through both sycophancy and morbidity. The moot question that crops up now is where does the Congress party go from here? It is at a crucial crossroad. Either live up to the adage that the more things change, the more they remain the same. Which means Mallikarjun Kharge, the new Congress President acts as a cipher of the Nehru-Gandhi family with the real baton being wielded by Sonia Gandhi and siblings Rahul-Priyanka in guise. Or inclusively rejuvenate the moribund party from within, taking both diehard loyalists and dissenters in its stride.

It is a mammoth task to revive a beleaguered political party and steer it in the face of adversity. For the first non-Gandhi President in over two decades, there are challenges galore and Kharge would be hard pressed to deliver even before the 2024 general elections. Rebuilding confidence amongst disgruntled party workers, discussing threadbare their grievances

where the party shuns soft majoritarianism and revitalises its solidarity with the masses by focusing on issues relevant to public welfare and rebuilding its network at the grassroots. The Congress ship, as recent meltdowns show, is full of proverbial deserters who all want to be the captain and have put the onus of ineptitude on the party's central leadership: Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, umpteenth spokespersons, the list goes on. If under Kharge's Presidency, Congress can win some of them back it will no longer be a rudderless ship in shambles.

Politics unlike debating societies or open fora, is not only about oratory and rhetoric or even stating the truth in tandem. In today's India where Rahul Gandhi is taking on a leader whose chutzpah is his ability to strike an emotional connect with masses. In such a scenario when voters are swayed by emotions, trying to be a statistical enumerator highlighting GDP, growth and human development data is not enough. Congress might be harping on facts but will that sufficiently counter the economic pitching of the BJP? There is no standard template for tackling verbal



and mollifying different factions within the Congress is easier said than done. Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra despite the goodwill and camaraderie it has created cannot be a panacea for a robust poll-winning machinery where even a two percent swing often changes metrics. The upcoming assembly polls in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh would be a kind of baptism by fire for Kharge and his cohorts.

The party must realise that it will be battling pro-incumbency of the ruling NDA dispensation in 2024 despite BJP aiming for its third successive stint. A tacit organisational reform and overhaul coupled with narrowing the generational gap could be real eye-openers for the party. Deserters can be wooed back if they are placated with genuine responsibilities and this is where the new Congress President has to do a tightrope walk. Balancing a defiant Ashok Gehlot's dogma with Sachin Pilot's cherubic ambitions will test his political acumen. Similarly, roping in new allies into the UPA fold while retaining existing alliance partners is another tough task. Congress has to reinforce the notion that any alliance will be a level playing field and not an arena for the grand old party's arrogance.

One thing is for certain. Whether or not Mallikarjun Kharge toes Rahul Gandhi's line or functions as an acolyte of the Gandhi family, Congress has its task cut out. First, to unify a nation that deeply values peace, coexistence and tranquillity and rediscover its ethos overriding sordid tales of chicanery. A firm conviction in political ideology that shuns whataboutery, polarisation and puts the focus on the party and not the Nehru-Gandhi lineage. Second to reinforce Rahul Gandhi's leadership not as President but as a dyed-in-the-wool, inveterate politician who can guide a party desperately in need of a makeover. And this has more to do with projecting Rahul Gandhi as the only credible, acceptable challenger to the current NDA regime with all its witherwithal.

The existential angst of the once powerful Congress party and its malaise has more to do with the erosion of centrist philosophy. An alternate political narrative

jugglery though erasing fake news with a fact check has yielded results.

A common refrain still prevalent in Congress circles is that only the Congress represents the nationalist, secular, multicultural, inclusive idea of India and that space could not be snatched away albeit by any coalition leave alone regional satraps. Rahul Gandhi's diatribes at the BJP move in a clear loop like shots on news channels. He raises critical issues like federalism, widespread unemployment, inequality, crony capitalism and unfulfilled development promises. He also talks about how the Congress' idea of the nation is being throttled by atavistic forces. After the party's Lok Sabha debacle in 2019, Rahul Gandhi had stated "... we will not defeat our opponents without sacrificing the desire for power and fighting a deeper ideological battle." Congress has an 'elected' President, that too a veteran party loyalist, after decades. Moving forward to 2024, the party needs to churn.

The sceptre has passed on to a non-family aficionado. But unlike in history, sceptre and crown must not tumble down. Even if Rahul Gandhi and the first family of the Congress family actually wield the baton, the elected President has to assimilate himself to deliver the best.

The ideological shifts in the last decade echo not merely a political transformation ongoing in India but the ideological consolidation of the right in India, an experience that can only be fought by the grand dame of Indian polity, the Congress. One needs to witness the roleplays on display. There must be an antidote to the societal gobbling of the centrist space on lines of caste and religion and incessant polarisation. Despite all the hoopla by a section of commentators, even a fractured opposition with the Congress at the helm can challenge the NDA threadbare on the road to the 2024 hustings. Multiple aspirants for the coveted top slot often at loggerheads, can never be a deterrent.

Chiranjib Haldar (9831143930) (The writer is a commentator on politics and society.)

Letters to the Editor

Rally where bystanders are bashed up!

Editor,

The rally against unemployment called by the FKJGP turned violent, where innocent civilians and passers-by were attacked and vehicles were damaged. Why did it turn violent? What led the so-called "peaceful protest" or "silent protest" to turn violent? As concerned citizens of the state, we are enraged beyond words. Footage and video clips of sporadic cases of attacks on innocent civilians have been flooding social media platforms, and we are not pleased.

Why did the organisation call for a rally? They made reference to "unemployment." We wonder if they actually meant it. Do they even know the definition of "unemployment"? From the crowd, there's hardly 5% of them who are genuinely unemployed. Others are busy running small businesses or working in other small organisations or businesses. Just because they don't have a government job, they consider themselves "UNEMPLOYED."

If the rally was about "unemployment," why were the women and lady participants outnumbered by men? Does this mean that the majority of women and ladies are employed? We refuse to believe so. If there were hundreds of

men and few women, it indicates that assaulting bystanders or other forms of violence was already planned. If the organisation is so concerned about "unemployment," why does it act like a fence when companies propose to set up businesses in the city? Their actions spoke volumes about those people being unemployed. Such people would never be hired by Tom, Dick, or Harry.

On another note, why were so few police personnel on duty? In Malki, Dhankeheti, and GS Road, very few police personnel were seen. In another case, there were personnel present, but they were mere spectators and did nothing. This is a disgrace to the police department. We have lost hope on them. During the protests of the contractual teachers, SOT were seen but not today.

The District Administrator, henceforth, should be very strict when allowing NGOs or pressure groups to go on a protest. Our respected DC should only give permission to the ones seeking permission if they give them a list of all rallyists. The DC should have the names of all the participants. The District administration should also get into action and try to trace and summon the leaders of the FKJGP. They are to be questioned about whatever happened today.

Everyone is scared and scared of whom? Scared of these barbaric people. They are such an embarrassment. Yours etc.,

Emidao Shylla
Operation Executive
1917ITEAMS,
Via email

Sham of a rally!

Editor

I write to strongly condemn the senseless acts of violence by members of the FKJGP during their Rally to protest unemployment. What the rally clearly reveals is precisely why some of our youth will remain unemployed, because who in their right mind and senses would hire volatile, irate individuals who are more likened to loose cannons, ready to erupt without any rhyme or reason or provocation. The "Seng" should take complete responsibility for what has unfolded as their reputation and credibility is at stake. The incident that occurred on the October 28, 2022, reflects badly on the overall youth of Ka Bri Hynniew trep Hynniew skum. The chanting of "Ha Ri Lajong Katha Mon" is so misused and has taken on a militant meaning it seems. The icing on the cake is alas that the Rally began with a prayer because that is what us good Christians do. What a mockery, what a sham! My head hangs in shame.

Yours etc.,
B.T Lyngdoh
Shillong-14

Yours etc.,
B.T Lyngdoh
Shillong-14

Hear us out MBMA!

Editor,

It is a well-known fact that in today's age of technology, almost all government offices, societies, companies, etc use the internet to communicate important messages with other branches or departments or to publish advertisements or notifications for the public view. One recent example of this is the advertisement made public by the Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA) on its website inviting applications for the position of Programme Associate (Administration) vide Advertisement No. MBMA/CLLMP/280/2020/583, is dated October 13, 2022. According to this, there was to be a "Walk-in-interview" on October 25, 2022 and its offline registration is to be from 09:00 AM to 11:00 AM on the same day at the address mentioned in the advertisement.

The number of vacancies available was 2 but not less than 100 candidates came, some of whom took leave of absence from their work and some even came all the way from Nongpoh (working people too) just to submit a few papers like their resume, identity documents, etc.. However, what was frustrating was that there was never an "official notification" by the management as to when the list of names that were shortlisted for the interview would be announced. Apart from asking the staff who were present nearby, who initially said that the list would come out at 1:00 PM, this 1:00 PM was corrected to be 1:30 PM which later on

became 2:00 PM and so on. This made the already anxious applicants more anxious than ever and all of this could have been prevented.

Finally, the list of names came out at 2:15 PM and only 24 applicants were shortlisted for the interview. The rest were sent off feeling discouraged, extremely hungry, tired and most importantly, they felt that their time was wasted because they all had waited for several hours (6 hours at the LEAST) for a list that didn't have their names on it.

All of this could have been prevented by simply making the whole procedure online viz submission of applications and publishing the shortlisted names through their website. This could have helped working people attend to their duties on time, applicants coming from far areas could have saved their time and money on transportation and a plethora of other benefits!

In conclusion, online submission of applications should be encouraged amongst societies, companies, etc. to avoid such inconveniences caused to the applicants. This will greatly benefit future applicants and will make the process of submission of application a little less hectic too!

Yours etc.,
Damebiang Lyngdoh,
Via email

Broad daylight hooliganism

Editor,
The protest procession

by FKJGP with support from other organizations on October 28 against unemployment led to the assault and abuse of innocent passers-by by the protesting hooligans. This is condemnable. First of all, who are these organizations to beat up people on the road? The permission to allow this protest march by the DC of EKH is ill-timed, unprofessional and should not have been given. The DC should be immediately suspended and transferred for permitting the protest march to happen on a busy weekday and at a time when the traffic is at its peak with all the offices, markets and educational institutions running. Will the DC take responsibility for the assault perpetrated by the FKJGP? The police were also mute spectators to the assault. Hence the City and the District SP should be taken to task for failure to protect the innocents from the hooligans. Unemployment in this state is chronic because almost all educated people are unwilling to venture out of the state for employment as they feel safe and secure in their own state. People from almost all other states seek employment outside as the states are unable to provide jobs. Assaulting people to vent your anger and frustration will not lessen the unemployment scenario here.

Yours etc.,
Dr HS Ranhotra,
Shillong

Boston Red Sox catcher Carlton Fisk desperately waving at his home run to stay in play. Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Kirk Gibson pumping his arms as he hobbles around second base after muscling a home run off Dennis Eckersley, the Oakland A's dominant closer. The ground ball hit by New York Mets outfielder Mookie Wilson skipping through the legs of Red Sox first baseman Bill Buckner.

Some of the most dramatic images in World Series history are ingrained in the minds of baseball fans thanks to television coverage. This year's World Series between the Philadelphia Phillies and Houston Astros will surely bring another timeless highlight to the 12 million or so viewers expected to watch.

Yet the first 43 World Series weren't televised at all. It wasn't until the 1947 series between the New York Yankees and Brooklyn Dodgers – 75 years ago – that fans could watch their favorite players duke it out on screen.

As detail in James Walker's book *Center Field Shot: A History of Baseball on Television*, which he co-authored with Robert Bellamy, the telecasts became a sensation. They drew millions of Americans to a new medium at a time when there were no national networks, only a handful of stations and somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000 TVs in the entire country.

Negotiations go down to the wire

In August 1947, the television industry anticipated a possible all-New York World Series: The Yankees had a huge lead in the American League, while the Dodgers also held a substantial one in the National League.

If the two teams met in October, New York's three television stations – run by *NBC ABC*, and the now-extinct *DuMont* – decided they wanted to cover the games.

But the rights to televise the games were held by the Mutual Broadcasting System, a radio network that had no television division. Thus, Mutual would need to farm out the coverage to one or more New York stations.

Although no national television network existed at the time, NBC,

First televised World Series spurred television boom in America



In 1947, the World Series was broadcast on television for the first time; the New York Yankees defeated the Brooklyn Dodgers 5-3 in Game 1 (the Yankees went on to win the Series four games to three). (Twitter)

DuMont and CBS did have the means to link stations on the Eastern Seaboard through a combination of coaxial cable, microwave and over-the-air broadcast transmissions, expanding the potential audience for the World Series. The Series would air on eight stations in four markets: New York City, Philadelphia, Washington and Schenectady, New York.

While the Yankees-Dodgers series materialized, the televising of the Series almost didn't.

The predictable stumbling block was money. Baseball commissioner Albert B. "Happy" Chandler wanted \$100,000 for the television rights to the Series. Gillette, the sponsor of the radio coverage on the Mutual Broadcasting System, balked at the steep price given television's limited penetration – only 50,000 to 60,000 US households owned TVs at the time. The radio rights to reach the nation's 29 million homes with radios had cost Mutual only \$175,000.

Initial negotiations produced an

offer of \$60,000 from two sponsors: Gillette and the Ford Motor Company. New York's Liebmann Breweries offered to meet Chandler's \$100,000 demand, but the commissioner refused because he did not want beer ads when youngsters would be prominent members of the audience.

Even before a coverage deal had been finalized, bars, restaurants, television dealers, department stores, automobile dealerships and movie theaters started advertising the event, urging customers to come by to watch the World Series on television. And in the days and weeks leading up to the Fall Classic, the demand for television sets spiked.

The excitement pressured Chandler and the sponsors to reach a compromise.

Finally, on September 26, just four days before Game 1 at Yankee Stadium, Chandler, Gillette and Ford agreed to \$65,000 for the rights to televise the World Series. Production costs added another \$35,000 to the sponsors' bill. Mutual, Gillette

and Ford also agreed to allow all three New York TV stations and those connected to them to broadcast the game, providing the widest possible exposure.

An unexpectedly strong response

Initial industry estimates had the Series reaching between 600,000 and 700,000 viewers, many of them located in the bars and restaurants where a substantial number of the nation's first television receivers were located.

But that forecast ended up being conservative. Although home viewing for the seven games was substantial – 450,000 in a Hooper rating survey commissioned by *Billboard* – the out-of-home viewing numbers were extraordinary: Another 3.5 million were estimated to have viewed the World Series in public locales.

Hooper's survey found that an average of 82 customers showed up at each of these public locations to watch at least some of the World Series. Variety reported that

bar owners saw a 500% increase in patrons during the Series, with some offering reservations to their regulars for a choice location near the TV set.

What viewers from those choice seats saw was primitive by today's standards. The screen was usually small – 12 diagonal inches or less. The low-definition images were black and white and came from just a few cameras. No extreme close-ups were possible. There was no instant replay, so fans had to pay attention or the moment was lost.

But for the first time, they were seeing the World Series live, and for free.

The TV industry's World Series bump

The audience liked what they saw. *Billboard*, quoting *The New York Evening News*, reported that TV "audiences hung on every turn of the video cameras and the 'oohs and aahs' at a slide or strikeout were something radio broadcasters would give their eye teeth to hear."

It didn't hurt that the 1947 World Series ended up being so dramatic. The Yankees prevailed in seven games, but Brooklyn owned the two greatest moments.

In the bottom of the ninth inning of Game 4, Dodgers pitcher Cookie Lavagetto ended Yankee starter Bill Biven's no-hit bid with a two-out hit, driving in two runs and sending the Dodgers to a 3-2 win. Then, in Game 6, Al Gionfriddo's deep drive to left field helped preserve an 8-6 Dodgers victory, leading legendary Dodgers broadcaster Red Barber to exclaim, "Oh, Doctor!"

The Washington broadcasts even reached the White House, where President Harry S. Truman, his staff and the D.C. press corps watched some of the contests. The industry magazine *Televiser* reported an enthusiastic response from the White House viewers: "If TV can do as good a job as that on perhaps the most difficult of all subjects to televise, then it really has arrived."

The public's embrace of the World Series on television, along with the generous coverage of the telecasts by the press, provided an important boost to the nascent television industry. The *Sporting News* reported that the first televised World Series increased sales for new receivers in New York to levels not seen since the early days of radio. Similar reports came from dealers in Washington and Philadelphia.

David Sarnoff, chairman of RCA – which owed NBC and was a leading manufacturer of receivers – regarded television's coverage of baseball and its crowning event, the World Series, as one of the most important factors in triggering the growth of the new medium.

Television makers, he concluded, "had to have baseball games and if [baseball owners] had demanded millions for the rights, we would have had to give it to them."

The television industry eventually did pay millions and then billions for those rights. Fox's latest seven-year contract, including rights to the World Series, pays Major League Baseball \$5.1 billion.

Happy Chandler's 1947 demand for a \$100,000 seems like quite a bargain today. (*The Conversation*)

Ezra Pound: Epicentre of Cerebral Controversy

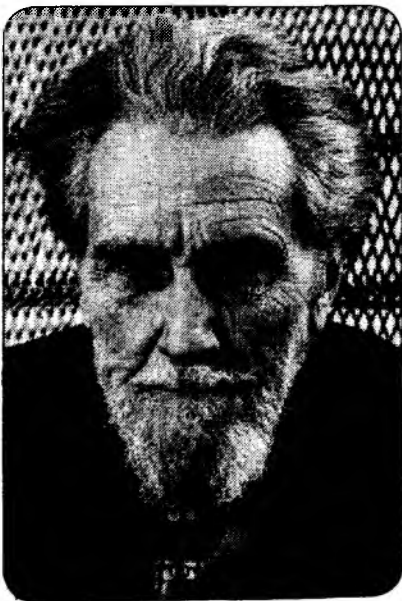
Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

Ezra Pound, whom Europe regarded as the 'poet of the poets' was an early champion of a number of avant-garde and modernist poets; developed important channels of intellectual and aesthetic exchange between the United States and Europe; and contributed to important literary movements such as Imagism and Vorticism.

Incredible but true that it was he who had the guts to change the draft of TS Eliot's epoch-making poem *The Waste Land* (published in 1922). The poem was revised and made shorter with extensive marginal comments chiefly after his unsavoury encounter with Eliot. Pound played a major role in compressing and revising the poem in his search for 'echt' or what Pound meant 'the real thing' until it achieved its final form.

Pound tightened Eliot's phrasing in many sections of the poem. Early in his career, Pound aroused controversy because of his aesthetic views and later, because of his political views, including his support for the Fascist government in Italy. He was a critic of the early modernist movement in American poetry, which was partially responsible for his desire to leave the country and settle in Europe. Generally considered as the poet most responsible for defining and promoting a modernist aesthetic in poetry, Pound carved a secure niche as the most important literary figure globally. Pound's contribution to poetry began in the early 20th century with his role in developing Imagism, a movement stressing precision and economy of language.

Pound was an American expatriate poet who spent the majority of his adult life in London, Paris, and Italy. In an introduction to the *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* written in 1954, TS Eliot declared that Pound "is more responsible for the 20th-century revolution in poetry than is any other individual." Four decades



later, Donald Hall reaffirmed in his remarks collected in *Remembering Poets* that "Ezra Pound is the poet who, a thousand times more than any other man, has made modern poetry possible in English." For the greater part of the 20th century, however, Pound devoted his energies to advancing the art of poetry.

Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho on October 30, 1885 and grew up near Philadelphia. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Pennsylvania and earned his BA from Hamilton College, but he lived much of his adult life overseas. In his article *How I Began*, collected in *Literary Essays* (1954), Pound claimed that as a youth he had resolved to "know more about poetry than any man living." In pursuit of this goal, he settled in London from 1908 to 1920, where he carved out a reputation for himself as a member of the literary avant-garde and a tenacious advocate of contemporary work in the arts. *The Cantos* by Ezra Pound is a long, incomplete poem in 116 sections, each of which is a canto. Most of it was written between 1915 and 1962, although much of the early work was abandoned and the early cantos, as finally published, date from 1922 onwards. It is a book-length work,

widely considered to be an intense and challenging read. Through his criticism and translations, as well as in his own poetry, particularly in his *Cantos*, Pound explored poetic traditions from different cultures ranging from ancient Greece, China, and the continent, to current-day England and America.

Ezra Pound's contributions to modernist poetry chiefly veer round *The Cantos*, which remains a signal modernist epic – its mix of history, politics, and what Pound called "the periplum," an advocacy for developing a range of poetic techniques that capture life in the midst of experience. In his efforts to develop new directions in the arts, Pound besides guiding Eliot, also promoted and supported writers such as James Joyce and Robert Frost. In a 1915 letter to Harriet Monroe, Pound himself described his activities as an effort "to keep alive a certain group of advancing poets, to set the arts in their rightful place as the acknowledged guide and lamp of civilization."

His first book of poems, *A Lume Spento*, printed in June 1908, in an edition of 100 copies contains French phrases and scraps of Latin and Greek. He seemed to have affected obscurity and appreciated the abstruse. Pound, who loved the theory of impersonal tone of literature, was of the opinion that his poems were dramatic presentations, not personal expressions.

Pound's *Pisan Cantos*, that Paul L. Montgomery of the *New York Times* called "among the masterpieces of this century" won him the Bollingen Prize in 1949.

Pound died in November of 1972; he was buried in his beloved Italy, on the cemetery island Isola di San Michele. In the years since his death, scholarly examination of his work continues unabated. Ezra Pound once said in *ABC of Reading*, "Literature is news that stays news" and he himself stayed in news through his lifetime.

The author is a contributor at *The Shillong Times*

The right way to adapt to organic farming

We have come a long way from the fundamentals of farming, and specifically organic farming, is a new development in this space.

What is Organic Farming?

Originally in India, organic farming was defined as the growing of crops through natural means without the use of chemicals produced industrially, but this has changed recently. Today, organic farming is characterised as using unaltered plant, animal, or earth-based inputs in the soil. Utilising natural ingredients for organic growth has several levels incorporated in the modern day. Crop rotation, green manures and compost, biological pest management, and mechanical cultivation are the main techniques used in organic farming.

Organic farming is like dealing with a newborn. It requires hard work but is definitely worth it. Here are a few important pointers to keep in mind are:

Organic Farming Demands Attention

It is a labour-intensive and time-bound activity that has more stringent rules than traditional farming. But better returns and healthier soil are assured if everything goes right. All one has to do is pay close attention to the crop when it comes to immunising the crop against diseases and deficiencies. Like an infant requires the love of parents, so does Organic Farming. Although the investments in an Organic Crop double in terms of labour, money and time but the returns do too!

Don't rush, take one step at a time

If your land has seen complete use of chemicals over time, it won't be wise to just switch to organic farming in one go. Systematic planning and integrated management are important for a step-by-step transition. If you are an obese person who's planning to lose fat, you can't change your diet in one go. You have to let your body adapt to the change in mindset, diet, exercise and circumstances. You have to make your body resistant and stronger to be able to adapt. Similarly, you have to start by using organic products in small proportions for your land to be able to adapt to changes and then depending on factors like Geography, Temperature, Crop, Soil and many more you have to keep increasing the intensity and proportion for a healthy crop. It is about adapting to the 'Lifestyle' of the land so a systematic long-term plan will be beneficial.

Make it Cyclical

Organic farming practices need to be repeated over

and over again for the land to be adapted to the process. The cyclical process of creating compost from manure then using manure to farm and finally using it in the crop ensures your crop gets all the necessary nutrients to grow. And the process ensures that the crop is adjusted to the process.

Making the process full-proof

Even after such hard work and planning, there are chances of occurring unforeseen challenges. But there are steps one can take to avoid the pitfalls and succeed in growing Organic Crops. These are as follows:

- Minimise the risk of disease or deficiency with a constant watch and going by the book
- Employee-trained professionals who can guide you

step-by-step

Adopt Community Farming because if one person decides to grow Organic Crops in the neighbourhood, it can fail due to water spillage or chemical spillage from neighbours. If a community adopts it as a whole they can help harvest healthy and prosperous produce together. It also has sub-advantages:

- Seeds become cheaper when a community demands for them together.
- Organic fertilizers become more affordable and approachable.
- Pooling means constant guidance as well as more eyes on the crops so shared labour and time.

Another cheat-code one can utilise to be able to grow a good quality crop is to consider 'No Chemical Residue' farming.

By definition, it is not just organic but a mix of both the practices to be able to produce the right crop. You get the flexibility to use chemicals on your crop but in a systematic way and with measured quantities such that the end product has no chemical residue left.

For this, the farmer has to be understanding of the crop, the timing and the quantity. For instance, if a crop takes 150 days to harvest, there should be a 21-week schedule that should be maintained by the farmer that defines the systematic steps for its life cycle.

Chemicals should be administered within the 6-8 weeks period within its Maximum Residual Limit (MRL) in order for it to be off by the 21st week of harvest.

This planning is necessary for modern-day farming and can be utilized for better results by those who plan to implement it. (*IANSlife*)



Green industrial revolution behind dead crustaceans on English shore?

By Gary Caldwell

Thousands of dead and dying crabs and lobsters washed up along a 50km stretch of England's north-east coast last autumn. Observers reported seeing the animals experience peculiar behaviours including convulsions, before suffering paralysis and death.

An initial investigation conducted by the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, concluded that a harmful algal bloom was most likely responsible for the deaths. Autumnal phytoplankton blooms are a normal part of temperate marine ecosystems and can produce potent toxins that attack an animal's central nervous system. But such blooms typically don't lead to deaths on the scale seen.

The government's explanation has been contested by local fishermen. They believe recent intensive dredging has released industrial toxins, including pyridine, from the sediment of the River Tees.

As an industrial solvent, pyridine is used in a wide range of manufacturing processes. It is also a by-product of coking coal, a crucial input for steel production.

The Tees area was home to both steel and chemical industries and the discharge of contaminated effluent into the river and surrounding wetlands has been common practice, often with minimal or no treatment. Attempts to understand what caused these deaths has set traditional coastal industries on a collision course with the region's green growth aspirations. I took part in efforts to determine what actually happened and whether pyridine could have caused the death of these crabs and lobsters. Using standard ecotoxicology methods, my research involved monitoring the behaviour, physiology and survival of the crustaceans in carefully controlled pyridine solutions. It became clear



to me that pyridine may have played a major role in the death of these animals.

The redevelopment of Teesside

As one of the UK's industrial heartlands, Teesside has been designated as a special economic zone, or freeport. The region will play a key role in the government's Levelling Up programme and Clean Growth Strategy, including hosting the UK's first hydrogen transport hub.

To facilitate this, the region's major sea port is undergoing redevelopment. Teesport's shipping canal has been widened and deepened and the South Bank quay is being reconstructed. This required dredging. Taking place last autumn, almost 150,000 tonnes of sediment has been displaced from the Tees estuary as part of the project.

The onset of the marine deaths

coincided with this dredging campaign. This prompted the Environment Agency to undertake chemical analysis of the dead crabs. Pyridine levels recorded in the dead crabs were substantially higher than in those from outside the impacted area. But there was no existing toxicological data on the impact of pyridine on crabs and other large crustaceans.

My research concluded that pyridine is acutely toxic to crabs at concentrations well below those measured in the dead crabs. Even surviving crabs with very low pyridine doses behaved as if they were partially anaesthetised. A single droplet of pyridine per litre of seawater would be sufficient to kill half of the crab population exposed to it.

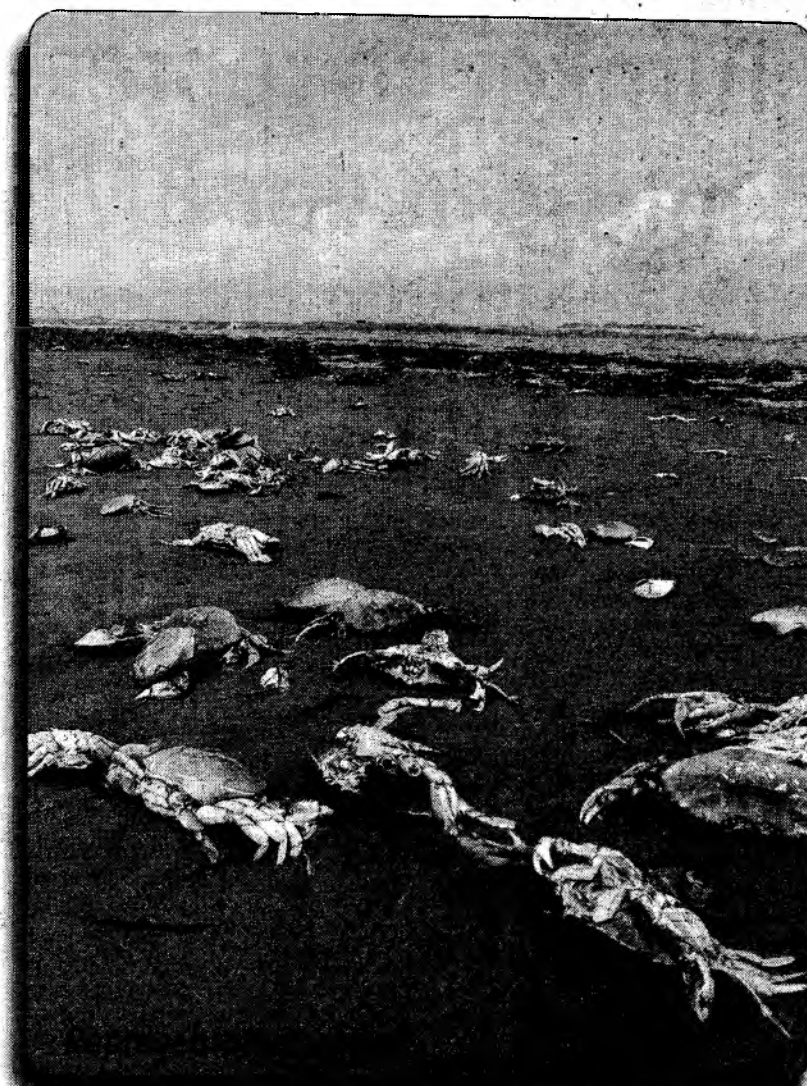
Further analysis of biochemical markers showed major spikes in

the production of reactive oxygen species in the muscle tissue. This means that the animal's muscle cells have experienced major stress, with the potential for damage to DNA, proteins and cell membranes, which could lead to cell death.

However, although pyridine was detected in the crabs examined by the government investigation, it was not detected in water samples. As a result, pyridine's involvement in the deaths has been dismissed by the Environment Agency.

Why has pyridine gone undetected?

Pyridine is highly water soluble, very volatile and vulnerable to attack and destruction by oxygen. By the time water samples are taken, any pyridine could have been heavily diluted, lost to the atmosphere or destroyed.



Despite this, earlier this year researchers at the University of York still measured trace levels of pyridine in surface sediments both along the River Tees estuary and in the spoil grounds – the areas of the sea where dredged material is deposited. Given the volatility and instability of pyridine in the presence of oxygen, this implies a large pyridine reservoir deep in the sediment of the Tees that is percolating steadily up to the surface.

My colleague at Newcastle University has also undertaken a range of computer simulations. They show that this reservoir, once disturbed by dredging, could have released enough pyridine (among many other chemical contaminants) to account for mortalities on the scale and range of those recorded last autumn. The size of the pyridine reservoir still needs to be verified to ground the

models in real-world data.

Research has so far not prevented additional dredging work for the new South Bank quay. But the sediment there contains high levels of long-lasting pollutants, including heavy metals and various industrial chemicals. Should these sediments be dumped at sea, it could render England's northeast coastline toxic for generations.

Teesside is undergoing rapid redevelopment to hasten the green industrial revolution. But in so doing we have been forced to reconcile with the region's industrial legacy. It will take a change in current working practises and in the disposal of dredged sediment to ensure this redevelopment can continue without causing more damage to the marine ecosystem. (Gary Caldwell is a Senior Lecturer in Applied Biology at Newcastle University.)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCTOBER 30, 2022

Moon sextile sun on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results. You will show a wise head and tackle problems coming your way with a maturity. Your bosses will extend all the help in your work when it is needed the most. You will also find that your entire family is standing with you. Your friends will keep supporting you. You will make good progress in your job/business. Your business will prosper and flourish. Your monetary condition is also going to be good. You will get work orders from abroad. A very special person will come in your life all of a sudden leading to a warm and fulfilling relationship. You will get marital happiness. Students will get success in exams/interview. Your siblings will keep supporting you. And you will remain a role model for others to follow. Business trips will keep you busy.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It will be a nice week for you. Your travels will be pleasant. You will plan to go out with your family. You can also attend some marriage function. It will be after a long time that you will see your loved ones. You will fully enjoy the moments too. You will also experience positive changes in your job and business. You will have gains and profits. Your income will be good. You will also learn a hard lesson in your life. Time will prove to be good. You will pass the litmus test. A burden that was there in your heart will get removed. You will also share some of your secrets with a friend of yours. You will also meet influential persons. Your luck star will be shining. You will have everything in your life by grace.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You will remain cheerful. You will also get a good news from somewhere. You will have sudden money profits. Business and job will prosper and flourish. Your benefits will be taken care of in the matters of property related issues. You will also turn a situation in your favor. You will win some competition or contest. A big sum of money will come to you by god's grace. There are chances of success in love affairs and your friend circle will also expand. You will also get support of your family and friends. You will also be able to win over your enemies. Your health will improve. Financial condition will be normal. You will get full credit for your work.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

The time will be spent fabulously. You will feel self satisfaction in your job. Your worries will get resolved. You will get new job/business offers. Your income will be good. Your faith in God will also increase. You will please your bosses and colleagues. Even your family members will be happy with you. Husband and wife will have amazing bonding and understanding. Lovebirds will come closer to each other. You will also invest in multiple sources. You will get a pleasant news from somewhere. Working with experienced person will make your work shine. Be aware of taking any kind of risk. New contacts will help you to rise in your career. Health will be good.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You will get mental peace and joy. Students will be little tensed about their future but there is no need to do so. If you study hard and plan well then there is no need to panic and losing your sleep over it. Time is favorable and fortune also favors the brave. Your hard work will pay good results. You will be fully aware about your potentials. You will be confident about yourselves and that holds the key. You will have the support of your family and friends. Husband and wife will also support each other. Your unfinished work will start getting completed. You will get success in exams/interview. You have to spend money on house repair and renovation. You will also let your opinion be known to your bosses about a vital matter.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You will be in a relaxed mood. A journey to an exciting place will be planned with your family for fun and relaxation. You will feel peaceful and happy. The quality time spend in the company of your family members will please you. You will also pay attention to your needs and interests. You will also be aware of expectations your family has from you. You will also complete your work in time. You will have monetary gains. A chance meeting with an influential person will open the doors of destiny for you. In the desire to be good to everyone, you may suffer some losses. Hence, keep your priorities clear. You will like to live life on your own terms. You will be emotional about someone close. You will remember good old days.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

It will be mentally satisfying week for you. It is just the time you have been thinking about. You will receive some good news. Your health will be perfect. Your financial position will also remain strong. You will have no complaints about your spouse/partner and will have nice relations with him/her. You will enjoy marital bliss. Love mates will also have a wonderful time. You will receive support from family. You will remain dominant in your office matters and will have the final say. You might have to go out station in connection with work or business. You will also enter into some association or partnership in business. You need to curb your expenses. Some guests will arrive at your home. You will make a

separate identity for yourself on the basis of your talent.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

It will be a wonderful week for you which is well spent as a whole. You will taste success in your work. Your income will grow. You will feel blessed in the company of your parents. You will also expand your professional circle. You will understand the importance of widening your contacts and making best use of your communication skills to get your work done. You will also make plans to travel for business and work. You will also put new plans into action. The time will be spent in a grand manner. You will feel satisfied that your efforts are finally paying off well. You will have a kind and helpful attitude towards people in distress. You will want to enjoy life to the fullest. Auspicious functions will take place in the family.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It will be a significant week for you. You will be happy in the company of your family members. Bachelors will get marriage proposals. You will be interested in social activities. You will also trust your partner/spouse in family matters and will take all decisions collectively. You will meet enterprising and dynamic personalities which will have a positive impact on you. You will be clear about your goals. You will get much more closer to your partner and will be more caring and affectionate. These are money gain days. You can go on business travels. Due to your planetary position your influence, effect and dominance will grow in every aspect of your life. You will share your thoughts and ideas with people close to you. Your health will remain perfect. A family function may take place.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It is time to take full advantage of good times. Your relations with bosses will be cordial. You will be full of energy and zeal. You will complete your work with lot of confidence. You will also not let any opportunity pass. Students will do well. You will get the chance to move ahead in your life. You will have fabulous time with your family and friends. You will get success in job/interview. Your meeting with an influential person will prove to be a turning point in your career. You will understand the needs, auspicious and expectations of your spouse/partner. These days you will get responses for the works done earlier. You will get back money that was given to someone else. There will be happiness and bliss in life. Peace and harmony will prevail in family relations. New opportunities will be there for your progress.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The week will prove favorable for you. You will gain money with your efforts. Those who are unemployed will get job proposals. You need not be in two opinions about it. Struck and delayed projects will be completed with cooperation of your colleagues. You will outshine your competitors and rivals in business. You will be risk taking in business and will get success also. You will go to a distant place for some sudden official work or business. It will prove profitable for you. You will take the lead in your work and take people along with you. You will be full of energy and enthusiasm. Students will get success in exams/interview. You will also plan to go abroad for higher studies or job. There will be some work related to children that will get completed. Your self confidence will be strong.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

This week is indicating at a period of great prosperity for you. You will be preparing for festivals or special functions. You will enjoy support of your bosses. You will also love to be with spouse/partner and enjoy some wonderful moments together. You will also meet an important personality. You will be very ethical and principled in your life and will work with honesty. You will share your feelings with someone close. You will be fulfilling domestic responsibility very sincerely. The projects which were pending for a while will get completed. You will have full support of your business partner and workers. Life will move at a fast pace. You will also get connected to people with ease. You will also be dedicated to your parents and family. You will mould yourself according to the changing atmosphere to a large extent. There will be some charity work done by you at a large scale.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

The whole week will turn out to be fabulous for you. You will feel yourself full of self confidence and energy. You will get success after lot of hard work. You will have good inflow of money. Your income will also rise. You will impress your boss and your image will improve. It will be time to relax and enjoy with your family. Family atmosphere will be pleasant. You will make plans about your business with a new approach. Your dreams and aspirations will be fulfilled. You need to choose your target right way. You will be working hard and getting its results also. You will have closeness and bonding with your spouse/partner. Marriage of a family member can get fixed. Money will flow in but expenses will also be quite high. You will plan to go on a trip with family.

Phone Bhoot to be a part of Chacha Chaudhary comics universe



The upcoming film *Phone Bhoot* is moving over to the comic world to serve horror-comedy in 2D. The makers of the film, which stars Katrina Kaif, Siddhant Chaturvedi, Ishaan Khatter and Jackie Shroff, have partnered with India's premier comic studio Diamond Toons, the iconic book publishers behind the classic comics *Chacha Chaudhary* and *Sabu*.

With this partnership, *Phone Bhoot* will now feature in the *Chacha Chaudhary* comic series created by Pran along with the horror-comedy's three key characters.

The story takes the audience on a hilarious ride as two clueless ghostbusters team up with a ghost on an elaborate plan to take down an equally hilarious bad guy.

Speaking on the launch of the comic, Manish Verma, Director, Diamond Toons said in a statement: "We are delighted to partner with Excel Entertainment for this exclu-

sive edition of *Chacha Chaudhary* and *Phone Bhoot*."

The makers of the film, Excel Entertainment had first collaborated with Diamond Toons during *Fukrey Returns* whose characters also featured in a previous *Chacha Chaudhary* comic.

With this association, Diamond Toons will now launch a comic in collaboration with *Phone Bhoot* where the characters will now be part of the *Chacha Chaudhary* plot-line as he sets off on a new adventure with his sidekick Sabu.

While details of the story remain unknown at this juncture, the series promises to be fun-filled and entertaining with equal doses of spook and laughter.

Directed by Gurmmeet Singh and written by Ravi Shankaran and Jasvinder Singh Bath, *Phone Bhoot* is produced by Excel Entertainment, and is set to hit theatres around the country on November 4, 2022. (IANS)

Rethinking social practice as art

A new exhibition from Khoj – 'Threading the Horizon: Propositions on Worldmaking through Socially Engaged Art Practice,' – brings together socially engaged creative practitioners to reflect on quotidian experiences of gender-based violence and thread together propositions on and imaginings of equitable futures across social and cultural horizons.

The show, which is a collaboration of fourteen community-based projects from around India, highlights acts of resilience that develop through artistic techniques of place-making, creating voice, bearing witness, negotiating visibility and leisure, healing, and catharsis.

The practices suggest worldmaking inside itself, where encounters, engagements, acts, and actions build new cosmologies.

Restitution, tranquility, and the vigor of collective effort all point to a brighter future.

Featuring works by Aravani Art Project, Aryakrishnan R, Baaraan Ijlal, Divya Chopra and Rwrite Mandal, Jasmeen Patheja, Padmini Ray Murray, Princess Pea, Saleha Sapra and Riddhi Batra, Sanyukta Saha, Shweta Bhattad, Sumedha Garg and Nitin Bathla, Sumona Chakravarty and Nilanjan Das, Swati Janu and Stuti Pradhan – the projects pry open the everydayness of gender-based violence to make way for an alternate framing of this experience through an artist's lens in the public realm.

The opening event will include a performance by the 'Gram Art Project' from 6.30 pm onwards.

The women of Gram Art Project will be showcasing a collection of clothes made from organic cotton, sourced in part from their own fields.

The individual iterations of clothing will unpack the stories of violence and unjust practices faced by the women.

Threading the Horizon exhibition opens on November 5, 2022 (6 pm onwards) and will be on view until December 30 from 11 am to 7 pm | Monday to Saturday at Khoj Studios, S-17 Khirkee Extension, New Delhi. (IANS/Life)

"Success isn't about the end result, it's about what you learn along the way."

—Vera Wang

The Shillong Times

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Inside Himachal, Gujarat

TWO BJP-ruled states are set for assembly polls and the campaign is currently on. Voting is on November 12 in Himachal Pradesh while the Gujarat schedule could be released this week. Hints are that the results will be out together on December 8. Nothing goes to show the BJP can be trounced in Gujarat as long as Prime Minister Modi holds the reins in Delhi. Gujaratis are a community for whom politics, social activism and education are low-priority areas. Their minds are occupied by merchandise, business and money-making, evident also in that the nation's top two business honchos, the Ambanis and the Adanis, are Gujaratis. Yet, despite PM Modi's record as chief minister, a largely ignored lot by politicians in Gujarat is the "aam admi," the poor, illiterate multitudes. It is here that AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal is anchoring his party's electoral hopes on. On Modi's part, he has taken the politically right steps forward in Gujarat all along. Industrialization is massive; and several high-profile institutions and businesses are being led to Gujarat at the cost mainly of Maharashtra since 2014. He has also pleased the Patels, the most-powerful community, while the poor are fed with a diet of 'big talks' from the podium.

As for Himachal Pradesh, the BJP has double the strength of the Congress in the present assembly, around 40 and 20, and the other parties are namesakes. The CPI-M, which got one seat and no more than 1.50 per cent of the polled votes in the last polls, has been working hard to win the support of farmers, meaning mainly the apple-growing community, by seeking abolition of the GST on cartons etc. Rootless parties have never been short of making big "demands" and promises. The AAP is not a force there. By present reckoning, the BJP is unassailable and party chief JP Nadda with his family roots there should know the way forward. Fact, however, is the "double-engine" government of the party has not been able to work wonders on the economic front. The scenic hill state's economy, majorly driven by tourism, was hit by the Covid-related curbs. Overall development was at a slow pace, unlike in Gujarat. If the BJP wins the two states, the next round of polls involving Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh etc., could see the BJP gaining more moral courage from this victory. What difference the new leadership of the Congress party, still in the formation stage, could make to this scenario is worth a close watch.

Midas was a king in ancient Greek mythology. The story has it that the king was offered a special gift by the god Dionysus. Midas wished for power so that anything that he touched would turn to gold. And so it happened! If Midas touched a stone or a flower, it became gold. But the tragedy is when Midas tried to eat food or drink water that turned to gold too. Midas did not only starve to death but he inadvertently turned his daughter to gold too. So he pleaded with Dionysus that he be released from the charm. Dionysus was amused but he did tell Midas to go to the source of the river Pactolus, near Mount Tmolus, and wash himself there. Midas did and was cured.

Midas's story has however no similarity with the story of Conrad K. Sangma the Chief Minister of Meghalaya. The stories of the two men are diametrically opposite to each other. The only uncanny resemblance that the stories of the two men have are that the underlining theme in both stories is greed. While Midas was blessed with the power to turn everything he touches to gold; everything that Conrad Sangma touches turns into garbage.

The Assembly Dome
Perhaps the incident which has indicated that Conrad K. Sangma is the opposite of king Midas was when the dome of the assembly building collapsed. The reason for the dome collapse is not clear to the people of Meghalaya till date. Similarly, the substandard construction of the interstate bus terminal has become the classic case of whatever Conrad does is the opposite of the Midas touch.

Education goes south
The state has failed miserably in every yardstick that is used to gauge the progress and development in the sector. The condition of many of the government school buildings in the entire state and LP schools in particular is just a wee bit better than cowsheds. With every section of the teaching fraternity having to hit the streets now and again, it is obvious the government has neglected the most important sector. If the teachers have to spend most of their time on the streets to demand what is rightfully theirs, then it only shows the

not resort to violence but quietly went about their work. So let us not blame others for our predicament. Let us have a change of attitude; let us compete and not beat others. If anyone deserves our beating then they are our own elected representatives. And let us not repeat the mistakes of the last 50 years but let us start afresh by electing able representatives with a vision and men and women who really care for the welfare of our state.

Yours etc.,
Khamniardor Thangkiew
Shillong-1

On the FKJGP rally

Editor,
Cambridge defines the word Rally as, "a public meeting of a large group of people, especially supporters of a particular opinion". The most significant word in this definition is the word "opinion". Oxford defines opinion as, "a view or judgment formed about something, not necessarily based on fact or knowledge." The reason why all these definitions are being stated is to highlight the fact that the word "violence" is not mentioned nor uttered in any form. What the people of Shillong witnessed on October 28, was barbaric. The idea of a rally was not only disrespected on every ground, but it has also left a stigma against all Khasis which will scar them for a lifetime.

What has the FKJGP rally group done today? Let's break that down briefly. Firstly, the idea of a rally will always be attached to the idea of violence. Imagine

kind of respect the government gives to this section of society. This also makes us question how much have the students learned during the last few years of the MDA rule. For almost two years students' learning was affected by the lockdown due to COVID-19 and now because of the government's failure the students are suffering yet again because their teachers have to protest for their rights.

Health of the Health Sector

The development in the health sector is interesting to watch because while the state government is in the process of privatizing the PHCs and the health Sub Centers in the state, the process of fooling the public continues. Now and then we see the different ministers and MLAs of the ruling dispensation laying the foundation stone for the upgradation of the different PHCs in their constituencies to CHCs. This is not to mention that no improvement has happened as such even to those PHCs and CHCs that the government has upgraded earlier. The Ummulung PHC which was upgraded as a CHC has not seen any improvement either in the infrastructure or manpower. Similarly, the Khliehriat CHC which the government has upgraded to Civil Hospital has not seen any change at all.

Roads have literally fallen apart

The less we speak about roads the better because everything that the current government touches falls apart. The condition of the Jowai-Shillong road which was repaired by the PWD almost every three months is in deplorable condition. The Jowai bypass which was constructed by a company owned by a member of the NPP is in a terrible condition. Not only was the road badly designed but the engineers who designed the road had no aesthetic sense. Unlike the Shillong bypass, the road is not pleasant to drive on and the junctions which are entry points to the bypass are badly designed. Many accidents have occurred at both the Thadlaskeit and Mihmyntdu junctions.

One cannot help but com-

pare the two bypasses, the Shillong and the Jowai bypass on the national highway which connects Guwahati with Silchar and Agartala. The two roads also carry the same amount of traffic. The Shillong bypass which has been in operation for more than five years now has not seen any major repairs done on the road since it became operational, but the Jowai bypass which is now in a pitiable condition is only a few years old and has been frequently repaired.

Immature decision of a man in a hurry

Not only that everything the MDA government touches turns futile but it has also shown how immature it is in its decision. That the government had to revoke the bill on gambling which was passed in the earlier sitting of the house is a case in point. This government in its attempt to prove that it has done something during its tenure has hurriedly agreed with Assam to solve the interstate border issue. And the Chief Minister in the inauguration spree decided to open the incomplete hotel and now many of the projects which were initiated by the previous government are waiting for the Chief Minister's Midas touch. Conrad Sangma is a man in hurry and unfortunately time is running out on him.

Law and order situation

Law and order situation in the state in the last few years has been in shambles. The unnecessary murder of the retired HNLC leader and its aftermath is another case in point when the MDA government has failed the people of the state. The tear-gassing of agitating teachers, obviously without the knowledge of the Home Minister proves beyond doubt that law and order in the state is not in his hands. During many interviews with the media, the Home Minister was caught unawares. It is clear that he is clueless and that he is not in charge of things as he is not aware of what has happened.

The major failure of law and order during the MDA government was the Them Meteor (Harijan Colony) incident which not surprisingly has slipped public memory. Now the term of the MDA

government is almost over but the question that begs the answer is what is the outcome of the unfortunate incident? Now that the Government has not been able to come up with a solution to the problem isn't it true that the issue continues to hang fire and could spark another communal flare-up in the state anytime?

But the incident which proves that the law and order machinery has failed the state and its people was the recent protest march organized by the FKJGP. Of course, the district administration in good faith granted permission to the organization to have the rally but the truth as seen from media reports is that there were not enough security personnel accompanying the protestors as they marched.

Shape of things to come

The violent incident during the FKJGP organized procession needs to be condemned in the strongest term and the culprits who had attacked the passers-by should be punished. But again the blame lies squarely on the shoulders of the MDA government. If Conrad K. Sangma and his ilk still pretend that unemployment is not a major issue in the state then one can only say that the incident is just the tip of the iceberg and that the worst is yet to come. The incident should also be an eye-opener for the government that all its efforts to promote MSMEs through its PRIME mission have not had any impact on the ground. The approach of creating employment by providing funds for MSMEs startups is alleged to be addressing the elitist section of society only.

What Conrad Sangma should realize is that generally there is at least one unemployed youth in almost every household in the state and the government should come up with a scheme that will reach the grass roots. The MDA government's failure to address the issue is like putting a bandage on a bleeding wound. The unemployment issue is a ticking time bomb if the government does not address the issue as soon as possible.

The MDA chief Conrad K. Sangma has an uncanny resemblance with Midas, but the difference is Midas' touch turns to gold, while Conrad's touch is a Sadim's touch – the opposite of the Midas touch which turns everything awry.

able and voiceless. It's the last opportunity for this Government to set an example by taking real action against the perpetrators which could become the perfect deterrent for the anti-social elements in our state from repeating such acts in future.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Shillong.

Unexpected fallout of the mayhem

Editor,
The IX International Conference on Sustainability (SUSCON) is scheduled to be held from November 3-5, 2022 at IIM Shillong. Researchers and delegates from all over were expected to join us for this important event. Unfortunately, the violence and mayhem in the streets of Shillong has spread the word that there are riots in Shillong. A number of delegates have reached out to us seeking to cancel their registration while others have sought to be exempted from physical presentations, because of safety concerns. The images that are circulating on the internet have ensured that our assurances of Shillong being safe, is taken with a large pinch of salt.

A few hours of mayhem and the word has spread all across the world! Shillong has suffered a grievous blow to its reputation, something that will take a long time to erase.

Yours etc.,
Prof Sanjeeb Kakoty,
Shillong -14

Class struggle in Meghalaya

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

The violence that took place during the FKJGP (Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo People) rally on unemployment was highly reprehensible. Violent acts must be condemned and all those who assaulted innocent bystanders should be brought to justice. The fiasco that took place, however, raises important questions about the rally, the organizers and the ongoing class struggle in Meghalaya.

The first and most important question is whether the FKJGP wanted the violence to take place as a tactic to put pressure on the Government to meet their demands. KSU (Khasi Students' Union) president Lambok Mangar, who also took part in the rally, stated that he feared that "many of the youths will take up arms if they see a bleak future ahead". Was this a prelude to that future? Personally I think such a strategy is going to backfire badly. Once the cycle of violence starts the damage is going to be collateral. Let me give a relevant example.

The 2017 anti-railway agitation was marred with many cases of violence in Meghalaya. Among them was a case of arson in which a petrol bomb was hurled at a house in Pynthorab. The agitation against railways was (and still is) about the fear of influx. Most probably the people who threw the bomb must have thought that the house belonged to an immigrant. But the family that got injured in the attack was that of a Khasi lady. One child was seriously wounded and received burn injuries on both the hands and face. Once violence starts, such collateral damage will become common. Do the pressure groups like FKJGP and KSU want their own jaidbyruiw to be victims of such violence? If not, they have to understand the path to violence is not going to be the solution. It will, instead, lead to the downfall of the movement.

The second question - assuming that FKJGP did not want the violence to happen and it was done without their approval, does the group have the mandate to lead the movement? Unity and discipline are very important attributes of an organization projecting strength and confidence in its ability to be taken seriously as a credible stakeholder to any negotiations. Time and again Shillong has been a witness of such rallies turning violent. Knowing this, what steps did FKJGP take to prevent it from happening again? Did it instruct its members to maintain discipline and to ensure that its directive was implemented; interspersed senior members in the crowd to supervise it? In short do the members respect the authority of the leaders? Assuming they took all the steps to ensure that the rally was peaceful but were still unable to prevent the violence, can they in an event of a settlement with the Government get its members to abide by the agreement? Or will there be splinter groups emerging who will oppose the agreement and continue with the agitation which will start the process all over again? Why should the Government then negotiate with them since it will be a futile exercise as they are not a credible organization who can represent the interests of all?

The third important question that emerges from the debacle was whether there were elements in the rally who wanted to create trouble. These could be individuals who had ulterior motives and did not want the rally to succeed. This may sound far-fetched but it's a genuine possibility. A few years ago, I was attending a workers' union meeting where issues regarding the working conditions and pay of a certain group of workers were being discussed. These workers were working under a contractor who was not providing any basic amenities while paying them very low wages. While the discussion was going on, a lady stood up and tried defending the contractor.

The lady asked those present not to form the union. She informed everyone that she was also working under

the contractor and narrated how he had helped her during medical emergencies; He could do the same for the other workers as well but they must not go against him. She was an interruption which nobody wanted. After she had her say the meeting resumed again. The union was formed and the workers were able to negotiate with the contractor for improved working conditions. Later it was revealed that the lady was an agent of the contractor who was sent to sow seeds of dissent and break the unity among the workers. If that had succeeded the workers would still be working under horrendous conditions with very low wages. This particular lady later became a prominent member of a certain pressure group which burned brightly for a while. Did the same thing happen here as well? Were the people who committed those acts of violence instructed to do so by those who wanted to defame the movement?

The violence during the rally raised some very important questions which must be answered. The danger in not answering any of those questions is that the issue of joblessness or lack of decent job (people stuck in uncertain and low paying jobs) will now be pushed to the backburner. The narrative will be built that it's just a law and order problem which has to be dealt likewise. Post-rally has the Government promised to fill up the 7000+ vacant posts? Instead the violence will be used as an excuse to forget the issue altogether. The vacant posts will never be filled. And to add salt to injury, the number of such posts will increase in the coming years. This is not just happening in Meghalaya but throughout the country as well.

Recently the Union Government informed the Lok Sabha that as on March 1, 2021 there were around 9.79 lakh vacant posts in the various central government departments as against the total strength of 40.35 lakh. Even when such posts are filled they will be done on a contractual basis where job security will be absent and pay will be lesser than those of regular employees. In many cases the pay will be fixed with no provision for increments. If the employees decide to organize and demand for their rights, they will be threatened with termination of their jobs. In fact, contracts will be made in such a way that organizing and demanding rights will be made illegal. What happened to the contractual teachers who were pressing for reinstatement to their jobs? They were met with teargas and baton charge. Worse, some policemen even taunted the protesting teachers by challenging them to a fight. All this was done under the pretext that the protestors were trying to storm the secretariat, i.e., the State used violence to prevent violence.

This is the danger which is staring at Meghalaya right now. The issue of joblessness and decent work is a class issue which will intensify in the coming years. The State will use the excuse of violence either committed by the protestors or perpetrated on the protestors to sideline the issue. Like the policemen who taunted the teachers they will then accuse the people of being lazy and not creating jobs for themselves or "you should be ashamed to ask the government for help. Now go sit in the corner and starve." In the meantime, the inbred burum class and its kin, who were born with a silver spoon in their mouth, will capture all the institutions, public and private, to hoard the resources for themselves leaving no space for others. There is a class struggle going in the State and it is important that it is not hijacked or defamed. Only then can a truly just society emerge in Meghalaya. If not darker days await all of us!

Blame others or fix our problems?

Editor,
The violence perpetrated by some members of FKJGP during their rally against unemployment in Shillong was totally uncalled for. Whether this rally was supported by someone with vested interests or is entirely the work of the said organisation is difficult to tell. But one thing is clear - that some members of this organisation went to the rally just to get the chance to beat up some non-tribals. The question that all of us sane Khasi people should ask is, are the non-tribals responsible for unemployment or our elected representatives whom we elect every five years responsible for this? Or are we voters to blame for voting these selfish leaders who think only of accumulating wealth for themselves and do not even think about the welfare of their own people? To be honest, we as well as our representatives are responsible for this since we as voters have failed to vote for honest and able people who can lead our state. If we fail to choose wisely we will get the government we deserve.

The people who really need our beatings are these leaders whom we ourselves have chosen. We elect people who lack vision and their mission to enter politics is just to loot and increase their wealth. We have problems galore but these problems will not go away by beating non-tribals. Let us examine our problems and let us

try to fix them. We cannot blame non-tribals all the time when in our hearts we know what the real problem is. It is fifty years since have attained statehood but our state is nowhere when compared to other states of India. We don't even have a medical or an engineering college of our own. Is this because of non-tribals or lack of vision of our elected representatives? And the students organisation - have they ever organised a rally to demand these institutions? Have they protested against price rise or against corruption?

We have witnessed so much communal conflict right from 1979 to now but do they solve our problems? Have the non-tribals stopped coming here? The non-tribals come to our state for one purpose only and that is to work and if work is available they will stay because they have to feed their family. So why do we beat them? Do they take away our jobs? Or is it because we cannot compete with them? Or because they do the work we reject because the jobs are not honourable enough for us? We are too proud to learn from them since they are diligent and hard-working. So we think the only way we can compete is by threatening them and beating them. I really appreciate enterprising Khasi people who run their own businesses, albeit small but they learn from the non-tribals.

Since when have the Khasi people started selling alu muri or have their own hair cutting saloon? Twenty years perhaps and these Khasis who learned these trades are now beating the non-tribals at their own game. They did

if you wanted to start a rally for a good cause, let's say to support cancer patients for example, the psychological effects instilled on the public will immediately kick in from past experiences, and as a result, very few people are likely to participate for fear of violence. Secondly, let me remind everyone that the hideous incident occurred at around 2:30pm - the exact time where most school children are being picked up by their parents. While the goons with no remorse or sense of humanity attacked random citizens on the road demanding "employment", children are put at risk of being attacked. Imagine a 5, 6, 7 or even 10-year-old going through that experience. What if a parent got seriously injured on their way to pick up their child from school?

Yes, the list of problems goes on and on, but the bottom line is, do you think this is the right way to protest unemployment? Doesn't this explain why those people are unemployed in the first place? Should this be allowed to happen again and again? Food for thought. To quote the famous TATA Tea slogan, "JAAGO INDIA" to everyone I say "JAAGO SHILLONG".

Yours etc.,
Evaris Pala Slong
B.A. International Relations and Politics,
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Enough is enough

Editor,
Enough has been said